The Left in Europe

Political Parties and Party Alliances between Norway and Turkey
Cornelia Hildebrandt / Birgit Daiber (ed.):
The Left in Europe. Political Parties and Party Alliances between Norway and Turkey

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After thirty years the victorious march of neo-liberalism has ground to a halt at the beginning of the 21st century, having plunged the world into financial and economic crisis. For the first time a financial and economic crisis has coincided with social, environmental and climatic crises. The scale of the social deformations causing all this, the increases in social divisions, hunger and poverty, are already visible in all European countries. But no one knows yet how this crisis will end, and that goes for those on the Left as well.

In the past the European Left has identified and analysed many problems and proposed solutions. Many of these proposals, such as the control of financial markets, the Tobin tax, the closing down of tax havens, the banning of derivatives and hedge funds, the expropriation of shareholders of big corporations, putting together stimulus packages, and the introduction of a minimum wage, are being adopted under pressure of necessity by the ruling elites, who are even including some of them in their own programmes.

The crisis shows how right the demands of the Left were, though it also exposes its own crisis. The Left has so far proved incapable of social leadership. Its ability to rise above social, political and cultural differences and successfully act in concert is still in its infancy. Only now does the Party of the European Left have its first joint election platform.

On the other hand, there is plenty of common ground. All left-wing parties in Europe, of which we examine only a selection in this publication, stand for social justice, democracy, and a Europe in which people can live in dignity, social security and peace. All the parties presented here are arguing against the neo-liberal policies of the ruling elites and in so doing representing the interests of most Europeans. The European Left has sufficient experience and potential to wage joint struggles, such as those against the Iraq war, the neo-liberal slant of the proposed EU constitution, and the Bolkestein Directive. But all this has never been enough to rally people around a unifying alternative project that could mount a challenge to neo-liberalism.

This raises several very different questions: Where are the causes of this situation to be sought? Where is existing potential for development being blocked and by what? How must the Left change in order to build up an
alternative hegemonic bloc? How can it create a society in which the freedom of the individual is the condition for the freedom of all, a society which the left-wing parties of Europe can call socialist?

In order to discuss such questions with parties, trade unions and social movements on the spot the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation – supported by its offices in Brussels, Warsaw and Moscow – works closely with its partners Transform!Europe and the parliamentary group of the Left in the European Parliament. Together with the latter a long-term project on the non-social democratic Left in the European countries was launched. Within this framework the country reports collected here constitute a first snapshot, a necessary basis for the elaboration of a joint research programme.

The primary intention is to give the reader an overview of the history and current situation of left-wing parties in Europe, it being remembered that the articles express solely the views of the authors.

The Left presents a very different picture in each of the individual countries, resulting from the different traditions and political structures in the country under consideration and from differences in the sense of identity of the various organizations. Among the left-wing parties selected by way of example for the present volume are some that have evolved out of former ruling communist parties, some that have a Eurocommunist background, some that come from the non-social democratic reformist Left, some that belong to the traditionally communist Left with a feminist extension, and others.

The party-political Left as documented here is very much shaped by the economic, political and social situation in the individual countries, by its social milieu, by the strength or weakness of civil society, and by the trade unions and other social movements. It has to assert itself within the political conditions of the local party and electoral systems. It is also shaped by the local social democratic parties, whose situation is often no less complex and without whom there will be no left-wing majorities for a change of policy. But it is also a particular challenge for the radical Left if the social democrats – as in Slovakia, for example – are particularly successful.

The Left is in search of a modern pluralist identity, between tradition and the social requirements of openness and renewal. Both exist in every party – both are lived and needed in parallel by the parties’ members, like the old symbols of the working class and the new symbols of a changed world. Such complicated clarification processes inevitably lead to splits to begin with before stable new coalitions become possible in subsequent phases. In France, for example, the non-social democratic Left is split into at least four parties, and it is currently attempting to regain support through
multi-party coalitions. In the Czech Republic, the Communist Party, although relatively strong, still clings to traditional communism, which makes alliances difficult. The same goes for the communist parties in Greece, Belgium and Slovakia.

A remarkable case of reform communism is presented by the AKEL in Cyprus, which is committed to Marxism-Leninism, remains true to scientific socialism, and yet as a ruling party stands for a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus conflict, a hefty 26 percent rise in social spending, free school buses, and halving the sentences of prison inmates. It is currently preparing to build much-needed seawater desalination plants and plans to invest 245 million euros in state construction projects.

In Italy and Spain the non-social democratic Left, after a long period of being firmly anchored in the political spectrum, have had to swallow some bitter defeats. In Germany, on the other hand, a new party known as DIE LINKE (The Left) has experienced a remarkable upswing. In The Netherlands the Left is attracting a large following and has developed an exemplary strategy of participatory and campaign-oriented democracy.

Although the current crisis situation favours the Left, it finds it unprepared and in a stage of intensive search for a modern identity and for a socio-ecological profile that cannot be achieved at the national level. Readers are called upon to make up their own minds about the very complicated historical legacy and current context of left-wing politics in Europe. They are also called upon to make their own suggestions and critical comments on the formulation of a more comprehensive research project on the Left in Europe.

We thank the authors for their informative and illuminating contributions and hope that our readers find them as enlightening as the publishers do. We look forward to a stimulating discussion on the Left in Europe in which the present volume will play its part.
Politics in Belgium has been brought to international attention recently due to the difficulties between the two language groups, the Dutch-speaking Flemish and the French-speaking Walloon communities. Foreign policy observers – and often Belgians as well – have trouble understanding such a big political labyrinth in such a small country. The financial and now the economic crisis have, however, overshadowed this issue, at least in recent months. People consider the economic and social tsunami a priority, and the interference of the prime minister’s office with the justice system around the sale of the Fortis Bank has led to the resignation of the government of Yves Leterme, one of the worst prime ministers that Belgium has ever had.

A more experienced prime minister has been nominated by the Belgian king, and has launched a government of very similar, and very strange, composition: it includes the French speaking Socialists, and the Christian Democrats and Liberals from both language communities. The Flemish socialists have refused to take part in the government, not because of the fact that it is a strange alliance between opponents, but because of their defeat in the last elections, and because they wanted to regroup and position themselves for the next regional and European elections. In this new centre-right government, the French speaking social-democrats are now trying to restrict the implementation of neoliberal policies.

The opposition includes the extreme right, which accounts for thirty percent of the vote in Flanders, but is nearly non-existent in the French speaking areas; the Greens of both regions; the Flemish Socialists; and two small Flemish nationalist parties. The anti-capitalist left has no presence at all in any regional chamber, in the Belgian Parliament, or even in the European Parliament. This is very surprising for many foreigners living in Brussels, considering Belgian reality.
Continuous Struggle of the Left in Belgium

Belgian has a long tradition of social struggle, influenced by several leading intellectuals, some of them foreigners in exile – including Karl Marx. Belgium experienced a prerevolutionary period in 1848, and the creation of some large trade unions. In 1885, the Belgian Worker’s Party (POB; Dutch: BWP) was founded at the café Le Cygne, which still exists on the Grand Place in Brussels, bringing together hundreds of democratic and workers’ associations. Its Charta, adopted in 1894, defines the values of the party: the defence of oppressed people, regardless of their nationality, their sex, their religion, or their race. The party organised large general strikes between 1890 and 1893 in favour of universal suffrage, which was not obtained until 1919. After the First World War, the presence of the Socialists in the government helped win many political reforms, including the right of trade unions to organise, the eight-hour work-day, pensions, unemployment insurance, a law against alcoholism, and progressive taxation.

In 1921, Joseph Jacquemotte left the POB and founded the Belgian Communist Party (PCB), which merged with another already existing group. In 1933, the POB distanced itself from classical Marxist thinking. It preferred nationalisation to socialisation, and it began to rely more on the actions of the state and less on the direct action of the masses. Despite opposition within the base of the party, one of its leaders, Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, refused to intervene in the Spanish Civil War, which amounted to de facto support for Franco’s side. Party Chair Henri de Man collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War, while most members of the party opposed the occupation and many entered the resistance. After the War, the POB was restructured into four autonomous units: the insurance funds, the cooperatives, the trade unions, and the party itself, which adopted the name Belgian Socialist Party (BSP) in Dutch.

After the Second World War, the participation of progressive parties in the government led to the installation of the welfare state system. At the beginning of the 60s, socialists and communists organised large strikes for social rights and for the reestablishment of a public school system in a country that, after two terms of Christian-Democratic governments, had a Catholic-dominated educational system. Since then, the Socialist Party rapidly became hegemonic in the French-speaking south of the country, and in the trade union bureaucracy. In 1978, the POB/BSP split into two regional parties. The Belgian Socialist Party (recently renamed “Social, Progressive – Different/ SP.a in Flanders), and especially the French-speaking party (now called the “Belgian Socialist Party”/ PSB), are today among the most
progressive parties in Europe. They continue to defend, with limited energy, some of their social achievements, such as the welfare state system, the indexation of salaries to inflation (excluding energy costs), the progressive taxation system (although capital gains are largely untaxed), and the solidarity between the two main regions of the country.

The Rapid Growth of the Communist Party in Belgium

After its creation in 1921, the Belgian Communist Party (French: PC; Dutch: KP) grew very fast in the southern part of the country, especially in the regions around Charleroi and Liège, the heart of the steel industry. In 1927, the majority of members of the party expressed solidarity with the Russian opposition leader Leon Trotsky, but they were expelled from the party, which thus reduced its strength by 50 per cent. It nevertheless grew very rapidly during the ‘30s, and many intellectuals joined. The party organised a strong solidarity campaign with the Spanish Republic, despite the major obstacles placed in its way by the Belgian government – including its Socialist ministers. In 1939, the communist parties had 7000 registered members in Wallonia, 1300 in Brussels, and 1700 in Flanders. It remained an insignificant force in the Dutch-speaking region, in spite of the fact that that area had a higher population, for there was nearly no industry there, and the region was strongly influenced by the Catholic Church.

The Hitler-Stalin Pact sparked a fierce debate within the Communist Party. However, long before the Nazis invaded the USSR, the CP defined a position that continued throughout the occupation. The Communists participated actively in the Front for Independence, and many of them were arrested, killed or sent to concentration camps, especially after 1943, when the Gestapo got hold of a card file with the names of the members. In 1944, many members of the Résistance were disarmed by the Belgian government which had returned from London. They decided to integrate into the American and British armies in order to contribute to the complete defeat of the Nazis.

After the war, many Belgians opposed the return of King Leopold III, because he had not opposed the Nazis and had tried to collaborate with them. The majority of Walloons voted in favour of a republic, but were defeated by a narrow margin at the national level. King Leopold III resigned and proposed that his son succeed to the throne. During the 1950 crowning ceremony of the new king, Baudouin I, a member of the Communist group in the Chamber shouted “Vive la République!” One week later, the head of
the Communist group in the Chamber was shot dead by a commando of royalist resistant fighters.

The Communist Party played an important role in the development of the workers’ movement, the great strike of 1960-’61, the demand for democratic federalism, and the reform of capitalist structures. But after at the end of the ‘60s, with the crushing of the Prague Spring and, later, the decline of the major industrial centres in Wallonia, the party shrank continuously.

The Belgian LCR

When the Communist Party split in 1927, the Belgian Trotskyists joined the International established by their leader, which, after 1938, was known as the “Fourth International”. During the ‘50s, its members adopted the strategy of “entrism” into the Socialist Party and the socialist trade unions. In 1956, they started a newspaper called La Gauche; in 1964, the Socialists expelled these “leftists”. Two parties were then created: The Socialist Left Union in Brussels, and the Walloon Workers’ Party. These were the roots of the Revolutionary League of Workers (French: LRT, Dutch: RAL), founded in 1971.

The LRT/RAL was very active in the coal-mining sector, especially with its youth organisation, and many spontaneous strikes took place during the ‘70s. Many students and intellectuals joined the LRT/RAL. Ernest Mandel, lecturer at the Free University of Brussels, was its main leader, with a significant influence throughout the Fourth International. In 1984, the LRT/RAL was renamed the Workers’ Socialist Party (French: POS; Dutch: SAP); it upheld the right to form tendencies. Its members are involved heavily in the social movement in Belgium, and in the alternative-globalisation movement, or the CADTM, a very large and effective international network against the indebtedness of developing countries and against the policy of the international finance institutions. In 2005, the POS renamed himself LCR, as a reference its French sister party (the Dutch name did not change); three years later however, the French party changed its name to NPA.

In Belgium, there are also a large number of other very small Trotskyites parties. In the recent elections, the LCR formed an alliance with one of them, the Socialist Struggle Party (PSL; Dutch: LSP/ “Left Socialist Party”; formerly MAS), which is internationally affiliated to the Committee for a Workers’ International.
From AMADA to PvdA/PTB

The Workers’ Party of Belgium (Dutch PvdA/ French:PTB) began as a Flemish-nationalist student movement in the university city of Louvain during the late ‘60s. It later spread throughout to the country, abandoned its nationalist ideology, and adopted Marxism-Leninism. After participation in a big coal strike, it launched a publication called AMADA, the Dutch Acronym for “All Power to the Workers” (in French: TPO). In 1979, it held its first congress, and adopted the name PvdA/PTB. Between 1974 and 1985, it opposed both American and Soviet imperialism, strong criticising Cuba and Vietnam, which were allied with the USSR. During the ‘70s, it even calling for reinforcing NATO and the creation of an anti-Soviet front. After 1985, it gradually changed its view of the USSR.

In Belgium, the PvdA/PTB has a reputation as a sectarian party, and with the justification of anti-imperialism has supported all enemies of the United States, including even such antidemocratic and criminal regimes as those of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania and Saddam Hussein in Iraq; it has also supported the Peruvian “Shining Path” movement of Abimael Guzmán (“President Gonzalo”). In their view, armed struggle was the only way to liberate countries anywhere in the world – except Belgium. Such armed groups as the FARC in Columbia, which negotiated with their governments, were considered unreliable.

This party is now adopting a more moderate international position and a more critical view of such countries as China and North Korea. The new left governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador etc. have caused it to revise its view that armed revolution is the only way to achieve change in such countries, and to consider that other ways, too, might be possible. It now has begun to support the Cuban government, too.

During its 2008 Congress, the PvdA/PTB announced an important renewal. Several new young leaders were appointed; moreover, the new Chair announced that the party would abandon its sectarianism, and build alliances with the rest of the left. It is now recruiting widely among people with less critical view or even non-critical views of capitalism, and even people with anticommunist views. Its demands include such concrete and even reformist measures as the abolition of taxes on energy and lowering the cost of rubbish bags, and which abandon the perspective of struggle against capitalism. It no longer considers itself part of the “extreme left”, but rather simply as part of the “left”, and it is now allied with the Socialist Party.
The Rise of the Belgian Greens

The Belgian Ecologist Party (ECOLO) was founded in 1976; its Dutch-speaking section was originally known as AGALEV, an acronym meaning “Go live differently”, and now calls itself Groen! (“Green!”). That year, it participated in municipal elections, followed by the federal elections in 1977 and at the European elections in 1979, achieving good showings of around 5%. In 1981, the Belgian Greens became the first ecologist party in Europe to gain significant success at the national level, electing four MPs and five senators. Internally, the Greens were very much influenced by the principles of grass-roots democracy; they then gradually shifted to a more classical party structure, but at the same time shifted from a “green-green” to a more “social-green” programme. After a good electoral showing in 1999, they entered in the national government in a strange coalition with the Socialists and Liberals, but were unable to implement the main points of their programme, and began compromising with many liberal policies. They also participated in a government which tacitly supported the Iraq War, and permitted the use of the port of Antwerp for American war materiel, despite the strong opposition of the Belgian peace movement. Strangely, they left the government neither because of the privatisations, nor because of the tacit support for the war, but over the issue of night flights at Zaventem, the Brussels airport. In 2003, the Greens lost half their votes. In 2005, when the Belgian parliament ratified the European Constitutional Treaty, their MPs voted in favour of it, with very few exceptions, along with a broad majority of the Socialist Party. At the next election, the Greens lost 10% of their votes, but recuperated them in 2007. The Greens do not propose an alternative to capitalism, but they want it greener, and more acceptable.

Other Expressions of Democratic and Left Resistance in Belgium

As one Dutch MEP recently said, it should be much easier to develop an anti-capitalist left party in Belgium than in the Netherlands. This is a country with a long history of resistance to capitalism, and of democratic leftist struggles, with trade union affiliation rate of up to 70%. Recently, such new movements as that of undocumented foreigners have appeared, with the occupation of dozens of churches, marches, occupations of administrative detention centres, and successful preventions of the take-off of planes transporting expellees. There has been a long history of resistance in favour of maintaining public services, as well as a very active movement for free
public transport in Brussels, which staged many direct actions in the Brussels area, before being brought to trial. A branch of ATTAC was created in Belgium, and has been especially active in opposition to the Bolkestein Directive and the attack on public services, as well as to the European Constitutional Treaty, together with the entire anti-capitalist left in Belgium, and even a very small number of dissidents within the Greens and the Socialist Party.

The peace movement in Belgium has traditionally been large and active. Recently, on 11 January, a large march of up to 80,000 persons protested against the Israeli attack on Gaza, a fairly large number, considering the size of the country. The network of solidarity with third world countries is important, and the Belgian NGOs and solidarity groups in general adopt quite progressive positions within their European networks.

In 1996, after the declaration of bankruptcy of a key steel industry, Les Forges de Clabecq, south of Brussels, with 1800 workers threatened with redundancy, an important movement of resistance arose. A march for jobs was organised, mobilising 70,000 people on 2 February 1996, and blockading a major Belgian highway. The Belgian Gendarmerie charged the demonstrators, who used bulldozers to clear their way and complete their action. Finally, the Forges de Clabecq were sold to Dufereco, but a part of the steel production was continued. The entire union leadership, abandoned by the Trades Union Federation hierarchy, was fired by the company, and brought to trial which was highly publicised and continued until 2002; they were acquitted. In 1999, the PvdA/PTB ran in the elections with a list headed by the leader of the Clabecq union, Roberto D’Orazio, and won 90,000 votes, the most ever obtained by any list to the left of the socialist and ecologist parties.

**Despite all the Debates over the Belgian Constitution: A Broad Left Front**

In 2008, a new political movement – not a party – was formed called “Climate and Social Justice”, *(Climat et Justice sociale/ Klimaat en Sociale Rechtvaardigheid)* responding to the need to join both ecological and social anticapitalist action. It held a successful study camp during the summer of 2008 that concluded with an imaginative march against a highly anti-ecological and energy-wasting project in the city of Maubray to create a year-round winter sports facility, similar to the one in Abu Dhabi. The march of dozens of persons on a sunny July day with skis, sweaters and ski caps, or pulling sleds, contributed to the final abandonment of this disastrous project. For the election in June 2009, a questionnaire is to be sent to
all political candidates, to force them to take a clear position on the main social and ecological issues.

Unfortunately, the left in Belgium has for some time failed to concentrate on one or two especially large or symbolic and successful struggles against capitalism. This would be necessary to form and unite a good number of militants, mobilised and motivated for that struggle.

*Intents of union of the left*

The three parties of the “small left” elected representatives to municipal councils in 2006, with the PvdA/PTB electing fifteen counsellors (ten in Flanders, one in Brussels, and four in Wallonia); the Communist Party, ten counsellors in Wallonia; and the Trotskyite LCR/SAP one counsellor in a municipality of Wallonia, and another in Flanders.

Despite their real local presence and their real roots, those three parties have been unable to elect any candidates to any of the four regional assemblies in Belgium, the national Chamber or Senate, or the European Parliament. The main reason is that they always stand divided for elections, competing against one another. The PvdA/PTB always stands alone, and the other two sometimes do so, and, sometimes join together. As a result, many people who would vote for them if they were united, consider their divided political campaigns a waste of time and resources, which only creates new frustration for possible anti-capitalist voters.

The anti-capitalist left has very good opportunities for unity and growth in coming years. From the Global Plan of the early ‘90s to the Generational Contract recently, the various multicolour centre-right government have, often with the participation of the social-democrats, passed plans of austerity hitting poor people, while favouring stockholders. One important for left to unity was the movement *Gauche-Unies* (united Left), a coalition of all the left parties and movement, create in 1993. Unfortunately the PvdA/PTB participated to the first meeting but the day after, criticised the new initiative even before it could define its political line. The GU stood for the European election in 1994, and won an interesting result, with 1.6% of the vote, while the PTB obtained 0.8% and the Lambertist Trotskyites 0.4%. This failure is not only to attribute to the PTB. The Socialists and the Greens divided progressive people in this election by adopting the most leftwing programmes they had ever issued, in order to counter this new party, but neither ever really fought for the implementation of those progressive programmes once they were in government.
In 2006, after an appeal in the main newspaper of the country by three major traditional leftist leaders Jef Sleeckx, Lode Van Outrive and Georges Debuine, a new coalition called Committee for a Different Politics (CAP in both languages), and also “Une Autre Gauche” (“A different left”/UAG in the French areas) was formed by critical trade unionists and independent leftists, and with the participation of the PC, the LCR, and the Humanist party. The small Trotskyite PSL/LSP joined, but did not accept some democratic rules that the movement adopted in order to remain plural, and not to permit the artificial supremacy of any tendency on its boards. All other organisations accepted those rules. In Wallonia, the majority of the members of UAG resisted this attempt to dominate the UAG, and the PSL announced it would withdraw from the movement. In Flanders, in the UAG counterpart CAP, this resistance was unsuccessful, so that the LSP quickly dominated that group; thereafter, the PSL organised CAP committees in Wallonia. Traditionally very popular persons like Lode van Outrive and Jef Sleeckx decided to keep their distance from the CAP and the PSL/LSP. In the federal elections in 2007, the UAG decided not to stand candidates. The CAP decided to stand in both parts of the country – with very disappointing results in both.

On Sunday 7 June 2009, the Belgians will elect their representatives for both the regional parliaments and for the European Parliament. As the PTB had announced that it would change its behaviour, and with the formation of the UAG in 2006 and with observer status in the European Left Party as of 2007, there was some hope that the anti-capitalist list would enter this election united. The UAG serves as an important platform for building the unity of the entire anti-capitalist left in Belgium, especially in the French-speaking part of the country.

But despite the fact that the anti-capitalist left has no chance divided, the same old behaviour has since re-emerged. The PTB, its promise of a new political culture notwithstanding, was the first party to decide to stand alone, both for the regional representatives and for the European election of June 2009. Despite multiple initiatives, pronouncement and meetings organised by the UAG, and despite the fact that its efforts to obtain the necessary unity in order to face the economical crisis in a meaningful manner attracted widespread support from numerous and diverse sectors, including many trade unionists disappointed by the policy of the Socialist Party and well-known leftist intellectuals (François Houtart, Jean Bricmont, Vincent Decroly and others), the Trotskyite LCR, which had been involved in the
UAG for more than two years, also decided to present a separate list for the European elections. During the debate, possible disagreements on views over Europe, or of cooperation with the Socialist Party were not the obstacles to creation of a united list. The ultimate argument by the LCR/SAP was over a question of the agenda, which made it clear that their real reason was the possibility to capitalise from the popular image in the media of the French Trotskyite Olivier Besancenot and the votes that this popularity could bring to the LCR in Belgium. To obtain the 5000 signatures necessary to present a list, the LCR decided to ally with the sectarian Trotskyist PSL/LSP. The LCR/SAP refused an alliance with the Belgian CP, despite the fact that this party, in order to open the way for a broader alliance, accepted that the reference to the programme of the European Left Party would be only one reference among other possible European references.

Adequate evaluation after the election will be necessary to make political leaders face their responsibility. The effort of UAG to work for the unity of the anti-capitalist left in Belgium is a long-term project. The movement will continue to work to jointly face the economic crisis that is now beginning, the cost of which the governments and the business sector want to lay on the shoulders of the poorest. The anti-capitalist left will most probably face new situations and crises, particularly attacks against the popular sectors. If it is united, it will be able to do so adequately. United it will be able to mobilise, and to win victories which will empower it for the next challenges.
France’s eight largest trade unions called a nationwide general strike for 29 January 2009. Other trade unions followed suit until a million workers were out. Their demands ranged from job guarantees to subsidies for endangered sectors of the economy. They protested against the planned privatization of the state-owned energy company EDF and against Sarkozy’s whole political approach in making 26 billion euros available to eight large corporations without attaching any conditions on how the money was to be used, and only 2.5 billion in social benefits to those most affected by the crisis. The contradiction between his announced course of “refounding capitalism” and what he actually does, between interventionist and free-market policies without a real change of course, is becoming increasingly clear. People are no longer just concerned about their own personal interests or sector. Teachers, for example, are concerned about the disorganized state of the justice system, wage-earners in the car industry are annoyed about the state of the hospital emergency services, while the dentists and lawyers who voted for Sarkozy realize that he is not rewarding their efforts. Above all, people are not prepared to pay for a crisis for which they bear no responsibility. It was against all that the fury of over a million demonstrators, imbued with a deep sense of injustice, was directed. “Grève générale” et “Rêve générale”.

Recent weeks have seen a clear drop in Sarkozy’s approval ratings; only 36 percent of the French are satisfied with his policies. In the opinion polls for the European elections Sarkozy’s party, the UMP, scored only 26 percent, as compared to 23 percent for the Socialist Party and about 14.5 percent for the Centre Party. Nevertheless there are clear majorities for a Centre-Right alliance. So what is the Left doing and what chances does it have of opposing this majority with a left-wing or, as some would say, a left-liberal alliance?

The whole of France’s political Left is on the move: the moderate, the radical and the extreme party-political Left. In December 2008 the congress of the French Communist Party (PCF) voted for an opening-up and renewal

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1 A play on words in French: “grève” = strike, “rêve” = dream
of the party, in November the congress of the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste, PS) led to the group around Jean-Luc Mélenchon splitting away, and in late January came the formation of “The Left” party – (Parti de Gauche, PdG). A week later the party congress of the League of Revolutionary Communists (LCR) led by Olivier Besancenot passed a motion dissolving itself and founding a new anti-capitalist party – the “Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste” (NPA). Parallel to this the “Fédération” was founded as a loose association of political groupings: Les Alternatifs, Association des communistes unitaires (ACU), Alternative Démocratie et Socialisme (ADS), AlterÉkolo, Écologie Solidaire, Mai and Utopia. All these processes are taking place with incredible speed against the background of the crisis and ahead of the elections to the European Parliament. Let us now take a closer look at the situation.

The Socialist Party – still in crisis

The Socialist Party is in crisis – in terms of both personnel and programme. By voting on the programmes of the six various tendencies the party congress of November 2008 was supposed to create clarity within the PS and propose an appropriate candidate for the party chairmanship. A picture of inner strife was revealed. The greatest support (29 percent) went to the politically open if rightward-tending programme of Segolène Royal, which focused on the issue of direct participatory democracy, while 25 percent each of the votes went to the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, for his reformist-social democratic course with an open door to the bourgeois Centre, and to Martine Aubry, who takes a traditionally social democratic view of organizational and political issues, with a strong emphasis on social welfare. A surprising 19 percent of the votes went to the representative of the left wing, Benoît Hamon, who stands for a thoroughgoing generational change in all leading bodies of the PS and for a broad defensive front against Sarkozy. The ecologistic tendency received just two, and the “Utopia” grouping less than two percent.

This result showed that it was impossible to reach agreement on substantive and personnel issues at the party congress itself. It was only after direct elections by the members were held that a coalition representing the various tendencies emerged, with Martine Aubry achieving a bare majority. Whether she will impose on the SP a line more focused on social issues remains to be seen. In its European policy the SP will have to strike a delicate balance between distancing itself from Sarkozy on the one hand and drumming up support for the Lisbon Treaty on the other. Thus on European
issues the party shares the social-liberal platform of the European Socialist Party.

The Left Party

Even before the last phase of the SP party congress in November 2008 Senators Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marc Dolez decided to take their group out of the PS and found a new autonomous Left Party, the “Parti de Gauche”. In 2005 Mélenchon had been one of the key actors within the SP to reject the Constitution Treaty.

In view of the crisis of capitalism and the failure of social democracy in Europe they saw the need for a new party that would be “firmly anchored in the left-wing camp” and represent “democratic and republican values without concessions to the Right”.

Their first public meeting, at which Oskar Lafontaine spoke, was attended by 3,000 people. By early 2009 the Parti de Gauche had about 7,000 members and sympathizers, including many former adherents of the PS who felt let down by the course adopted by that party. The PdG also contains representatives of civil rights groups and communists. The party’s strategy is described by Mélenchon as “revolution through elections”. The creation of a new political Left front made up of various parties is intended to facilitate left-wing majorities for a change of policy. It is clear that no political force in France in favour of such a project could accept its own dissolution, i.e. the parties that see themselves as part of this front against Sarkozy’s neo-liberal policy are to retain their party-political identity. This includes the PCF, which is ready to play the role of a privileged partner in setting up such a political front in preparation for European elections. Together with Besancenot’s New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) this front could at present corral about 15 percent of the votes, although this is currently rejected by the NPA.

What is remarkable is that this new party-political project draws directly on the experience of the emergence of the DIE LINKE (The Left) party in Germany, which it is trying to re-enact innovatively in a French context. That is to say, it is a question of perceiving possibilities and windows of opportunity for change, of breaking up old structures, and creating a left-wing “holding party” in order to build up a new party-political project similar to the former WASG in Germany. In the long term the idea is to develop a further-reaching left alliance to achieve left-wing majorities for political change, which – according to Mélenchon – are not possible in France without the Socialist Party. So far, however, the SP has been bringing its poli-
cies and government programme into line with those of other European social democratic parties, which are “all based on the acceptance of the Lisbon Treaty”.

The Greens in France

The history of the French Greens began long before their founding in 1984. It began with the candidacy of the agronomist and Third World champion, René Dumont, in the presidential elections of 1974, who called on his supporters to vote for François Mitterrand in the second round. After that the Ecological Movement was founded and immediately began to warn against climate change and criticize the plundering of the Third World and the oppression of women and migrants. Against the background of the protest meetings of the 1970s and the movement against the building of nuclear power stations it received in the cities up to 10 percent of the votes in the local elections of 1977. It stood for a different kind of politics – for a left-ecological alliance of ecologists with non-violent (!) – and anti-nuclear activists, Left Radical sympathizers, Friends of Nature, and consumer associations. Their electoral successes confronted the Greens with the question of forming a political party, which was eventually founded in January 1984. In 1989 they won 3.8% of the votes in the presidential elections and 10.6% in the local elections, the best result in their history. They were among the demonstrators against the Gulf War in 1989. Differences of opinion arose in relation to the Maastricht Treaty, as they were to later on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. In 1993 the French Greens adopted a change of strategy – in future they would enter into electoral alliances with left-wing parties. The victory of the Socialists under Jospin brought Greens into the government, with Dominique Voynet becoming a minister. In 1999 Dany Cohn-Bendit led the European election campaign as a result of which the Greens gained nine seats in the European Parliament. After the parliamentary elections of 2007 the Greens and the PCF formed a joint parliamentary group.

The Greens take part in all social struggles, the peace movement and international solidarity and work actively at the national level for a just and lasting peace between the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

They are going to contest the 2009 European elections as part of the “Europe Ecology” list together with “alterglobalists” associated with José Bové and Nicolas Hulot’s environmental protectionists. Daniel Cohn-Bendit heads the list in Île de France and will also run the election cam-
campaign at the national and European levels. A key point of their programme is participatory democracy. Their aim is to vote Barroso out of office as Chairman of the EU Commission and ensure that the responses to the present crisis also take account of ecological and social questions. They denounce the policies of such corporations as Total, Elf Aquitaine, etc. Other key elements of the election campaign are European housing policy, ecology, democracy issues, migrant rights, etc.

**Founding of a new anti-capitalist party**

The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) was founded on 7 February 2009 as the successor to the Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, LCR). The NPA has 9,000 members and sympathizers, including representatives of Lutte Ouvrière (LO), the Friends of Jean-Marc Roullian, the founder of “Action directe” (a civil disobedience organization), activists of the José Bové Committee, ecologists, anti-growth activists and anti-globalists. Most are political novices united only by their joint struggle against Sarkozy’s policies. The NPA’s key political demands include a break with capitalism and complete independence vis-à-vis the SP.

The NPA no longer sees itself as a Trotskyite party, nor as a continuation of the LCR, and will not remain in the Fourth International. Whether it can really separate itself from it ideologically and organizationally remains to be seen, especially as half of the new leadership comes from the old LCR. In view of the current crisis, which is seen as a “generalization of capitalist globalization”, its founding principles point to the necessity of a break with the capitalist system through the revolutionary transformation of society.

The goal of the New Anti-capitalist Party is a system of collective organization or association in which the free development of each individual is the condition of the free development of all. It draws upon the class struggles of the socialist, communist, libertarian and revolutionary traditions, and its founding principles speak of a socialism for the 21st century that will be free from exploitation and oppression, racism and any form of discrimination, not least that of women.

Although socialism questions the very idea of private ownership of the means of production, profits first have to be redistributed in the form of pay rises, increased pensions and minimum social standards as an urgent response to the immediate needs of those hardest hit by the crisis. The necessary revolutionary break has to take place as part of a mobilization for a different Europe. The resolution on the 2009 European elections speaks of
Europe’s inability to react to the crisis and calls for a democratic Europe of workers and peoples, proposing a European “Emergency Plan”. This includes a ban on layoffs, the distribution of work among all, a European minimum wage with a purchasing power equivalent to 1,500 euros net, and the harmonizing of industrial law. It also proposes public authorities at European level to control aviation, railways, water transport, energy and pharmaceutical concerns. Capital flows must be controlled and all tax havens closed down. It calls for an ecological Europe based on a healthy diet, water as a resource held in common, and the abandonment of nuclear power. Europe is to be a Europe of equality, of solidarity with the peoples of the southern hemisphere, and of peace. This requires the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, a stop to support for dictatorships in Africa, and leaving NATO. The NPA rejects the current policy of the European Union as imperial, socially unjust and undemocratic. It appeals for a social, ecological and truly democratic Europe. It distances itself from nationalist forces that give absolute priority to the sovereignty of the nation state.

The peoples themselves must call a founding conference to decide on the form of their cooperation. The NPA stands for a free federation of the united socialist states of Europe. For this it considers an association of anti-capitalists to be necessary at European level.

The NPA rejects cooperation with both the PS and the PCF. It has also refused so far to accept an offer from the PCF and the Parti de Gauche to form a “Front of the Left to Change Europe”. While intending to struggle to improve the situation of the workers and uphold their democratic rights, it will not join any coalition that stands in contradiction to its revolutionary struggle. It refuses to take part in the system by having its members stand for public office, its aim being to develop new forms of political power and ultimately help create a new International.

*The PCF – between tradition and Innovation*

The French Communist Party is one of the oldest left-wing parties in Europe. It was founded in 1920, and its history, which cannot be gone into in detail here, is the turbulent history of a West European communist party with all the successes, mistakes, aberrations and phases of renewal that implies.

At present (2006) the PCF has about 135,000 members, making it one of Europe’s largest left-wing parties. Its strongholds are still to be found in the old areas of heavy industry in the north-west and the eastern suburbs of
Paris, at the edges of the massif central and on the Mediterranean coast. Its voters are typically men aged over 45 and members of the highest age groups. It is markedly underrepresented among voters aged between 18 and 29. Its social composition is indicative of a traditional working-class party. Its voters tend to have low or intermediate educational qualifications. They are often in work, such as manual workers, while members of the technical intelligentsia are less well represented. In relation to the general population a larger proportion of members of the socio-cultural professions vote PCF. The party is noticeably underrepresented among the unemployed, who are more likely to support the parties of the extreme Left.

Within the left-wing camp the PCF has been a rival of the PS on the one hand and the parties and groupings of the extreme Left on the other. The latter include the above-mentioned LCR, the Lutte Ouvrière and the Parti des Travailleurs, who entered the European Parliament in 1999 on a common list and in the 2002 presidential elections managed to win 11 percent of the votes (the PCF under Robert Hue got 3.37 percent). In the 2007 presidential elections the PCF under Marie-George Buffet received 1.9 percent, and in the parliamentary elections that same year 4.3 percent, i.e. 15 seats as “Gauche démocrate et républicaine”, to which the Greens also belong. These results call for close analysis and open discussions on the party’s sense of identity, its strategy, its programme, and its organizational structures.

This was the task facing the extraordinary party congress of the PCF in December 2008. What were the results? Alongside Marie George Buffet, the former editor-in-chief of L’Humanité, Pierre Laurent, was elected head of a new collective leadership, set up at the demand of members in the interests of greater efficiency. The political resolution of the party congress attempted to define the political strategy in the light of the new realities of capitalism and the calls for radical social change aggravated by the crisis. The search for alternative paths took account of the PCF’s concrete strategic experience of participation in government, the successful collective movement at the time of the 2005 referendum, the failed attempt to rally the anti-neo-liberal forces around a single presidential candidate, the poor election results at the national level and the occasional good results in local elections. Eighty percent of the delegates voted in favour of a broad left-wing front for the European elections of June 2009 with as many political

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I.e. parties and tendencies to the left of the and
and social forces as possible having convergent views on European issues. Whether this strategy applies only to the 2009 European election campaign, or whether it should be seen as a completely new approach, is an open question, as is that of the character of this front. Is it to be a new Popular Front adapted to today’s conditions, or is it intended to set up fronts with different partners? Behind this is the unresolved question of the relationship with the SP on the one hand, and the question of the identity of the PCF as part of a social alliance of the Centre from below and a politically redefined Centre-Left alliance on the other.

The party congress resolution refers repeatedly to the party’s roots, to the role of local politics and participatory democracy at all levels so as to reactivate citizen involvement. It proposes a framework for discussion for the development of new policies to deal with the problems of neglected neighbourhoods and jobs.

Meeting places – open spaces – are to be created where political and social forces, artists, intellectuals, and representatives of social movements can meet and pool information. The progressive front aspired to should also be citizen-oriented and the neglected emphasis on the “movement from below” must be reactivated. With this in mind the party’s previous experience of social and political alliances must be analysed. The resolution explicitly addresses mistakes on the alliance issue, pointing out that analyses are called for but not carried out. It notes that it proved impossible to find a framework or a method of maintaining the momentum of the committees of 2005. The description of the causes of this remains unclear, but they are inseparable from the questions concerning the opening and renewal of the party, including its organizational structures, and ultimately from its sense of identity. The motion tentatively addresses these concerns. The PCF must see itself primarily as a political participation project for the people, as a party of action with roots in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and increasingly concerned once more with jobs. To this end the mode of functioning of all structures (cells, sections, regional mergers, collectives) is to be changed. They are to become more porous and offer space for creativity and diversity in the light of previous experience. Renewal of the party also means attaching more weight to its feminist commitment, that is to be treated on a par with the anti-capitalist struggle and not subordinated to it. It intends to create conditions to ensure that the political representation of the elected public and party officials once again reflects the diversity of society.

It is a beginning that will have to be more sustainable than the attempts at renewal on the part of the “renovateurs” of 1984, the “reconstructeurs”
(rebuilders) of 1987 and the more recent “refondateurs” (refounders) have been. Intentions and resolutions are not enough. This has been shown by the party’s own experience, as in the case of the 2002 resolution to refound the PCF, which was adopted at the PCF party congress in Martigue and proved in the end to be impossible to impose on the party. A glance at the different tendencies within the PCF makes clear the difficulty that has stood in the way of previous inadequate openings and party reforms.

Although the party structure envisages no formally organized platforms or tendencies, they exist on an informal basis. They will only be briefly outlined here in relation to certain issues and inner-party controversies. The earlier distinction between traditionalists, renewers, Hueists (adherents of the former general secretary of the PCF) and adherents of the line of Marie-George Buffet is largely out of date. The relevant tendencies have re-emerged, differing on some questions, agreeing on others. There is no clear pattern any more.

**Relationship with the PS**

Must the PCF define its independent role as being to the left of the PS and at a distance from it, or should it develop a flexible strategy that takes account of the power relations in the regions? A concrete answer to this question will have to be found for the regional elections of 2010 at the latest, especially in the regions, where the PCF can only achieve left-wing or Centre-Left majorities with the support of the PS. The principle of alliance with the Socialist Party is mainly represented by the traditionalists in the PCF, the adherents of Robert Hue, and the bulk of the PCF’s public elected officials. If one wants to bring about real changes, they argue, one cannot exclude left-wing governing coalitions on principle. They have spoken out in the past against an excessively critical assessment of the “gauche plurielle” in power and are largely responsible for the fact that there has still been no analysis of the PCF’s second period in office as part of the “gauche plurielle”, although Marie-George Buffet and her adherents are well aware of the necessity of such a critical analysis. A repetition of the left-wing governing coalition with the SP without any analysis of the previous experience would be a catastrophe.

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4 Roger Martelli, p. 6
Role of the PCF in social and political alliances

For those who support the line of Marie-George Buffet the campaigns and alliances of 29 May 2005 – the vote against the Constitution Treaty – were an expression of a new unity on the Left – an “union populaire” that ultimately however could not be translated into a new political unity. These alliances of 29 May 2005 were supported by all tendencies and groupings in the PCF. There are differences of opinion, however, as to whether the PCF played a leading or a contributory role. This ultimately determined the specific method chosen, i.e. of having one anti-neo-liberal candidate who was to be a communist.

There are also differences of opinion with regard to cooperation with social movements like Attac and participation in the World Social Forum and the European Social Forums. While Espace Marx and associated groups take an active and dedicated part in these forums, and the adherents of Marie-George Buffet and the renewers support them, the traditionally-minded party members attach little importance to them, being sceptical of social movements, which they see as wishy-washy and in some cases infiltrated by the extreme Left.

Opening and extending the party

The attempts at an opening and renewal of the party in the 1980s were initially directed at leading the party out of the crisis created by the collapse of the Left Alliance. The first group to emerge, in 1984, was that of the “renovateurs”, which was followed by the “reconstructeurs” (rebuilders) and, in 1987, the “refondateurs” (renewers), who rebelled against the decisions of the then General Secretary, Georges Marchais. The so-called renewers’ tendency was the first opposition tendency in the PCF to remain in the party. It drew many of its strategic and political ideas from Eurocommunism, questioned the leading role of the working class and the PCF, and criticized a political strategy fixated on the state. At the same time the renewers opposed the privatization of public enterprises when the PCF was in office.

Attitudes to history and identity

The PCF is a communist working-class party and should remain so. This clear traditional sense of party identity is mainly to be found where the party has social roots among the industrial workers, for example in the regions of “Nord” and “Pas de Calais”, in the department of “Marne”, and in
the “red belt” around Paris. These traditional constituencies tend to reject the idea of a “modernization” of the party, representing the communist and “ouvriériste” legacy of the PCF. They reject a too critical interpretation of communist history and are impatient with denunciations of Stalinism. For them the calls to renew and open up the party always amount to a questioning of the communist identity that has to be preserved. They consider any discussion about renaming the party to be obsolete. Attempts to point out that collective identities – given the concrete changes in the nature of work and modern living, in the social, cultural and political divisions and polarization of society – have assumed different form nowadays, and that this influences the perception of communist identity in today’s world, a fact reflected in discussions within the party itself, are denounced as harmful to the party. There is a failure to understand that if the PCF is barely able to reach such important constituencies as young people, women, those with precarious jobs, and the unemployed, this is due to the party’s outdated sense of identity and its public perception.

*The European elections as a key to further development*

The PCF at present has two deputies in the European Parliament. To be successful in the European election campaign it must attempt – based on the experience of the referendum against the EU Constitution Treaty in 2005 – to get those left-wing elements who voted “No” on that occasion to join in a broad new social and political alliance. The projected “Left Front to Change Europe” rallying the PCF, PdG and other political and social forces could be the motor for a new dynamism and social opening. It is not clear what this “front” would look like in practice. The NPA is currently refusing to join in such a front. The various movements are asking that the alliance should not just be an axis of parties, but also include differently constituted groups, such as Attac and the spontaneously formed youth groups from the banlieues with networks beyond the local level, who have announced an interest in joining.

How far the leading personalities who signed the appeal published by the periodical “Politis” in summer 2008 for the founding of a new left-wing force will really succeed in uniting in a new “Fédération”, thus creating a new pole with a real social base, remains to be seen.

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5 The text shows an increasing imbalance in tending to marginalize the NPA, etc. This makes it very PCF-centred and furthermore focused on a single project. The Left Party too is only mentioned in passing. This is no doubt due to the sources, but a more balanced view is required.
Europe is an opportunity – for neither the argument that a vote for the PS will be “useful” in blocking the Right, nor the delicate questions of the relationship between PCF and PS are going to have any influence on this election.

The Left has an opportunity of being successful in the European election campaign, if it can bring together all its experience, potential and resources to reform itself: the experience of 2005, the failure of the anti-liberal alliance in 2007, the awareness of French society’s potential for mobilization, the power of the trade unions to organize effective general strikes, and the impressions left by 29 January 2009.
The Left in Luxembourg

Sascha Wagener

The country’s economic and social situation

If in the past Luxembourg’s economy depended on the steel industry, today it depends on globalization and banking. To these vagaries of history Luxembourg owes not only its tremendous prosperity, but also its comparatively strong working-class movement and multicultural population. Of Luxembourg’s 483,800 inhabitants those gainfully employed number 361,089, of whom 150,909 live across the border and drive in to work every day. A large proportion of those who live in Luxembourg are foreigners. Apart from the 63.1% native Luxembourgers, 13.3% have Portuguese, 4.5% French, 4.3% Italian and 2.3% German passports.

For a long time those who lived between the Moselle and the Ardennes eked out a meagre existence from agriculture. It was not until the discovery of large reserves of iron ore in the second half of the 19th century that things began to change. The steel industry became the most important branch of Luxembourg’s economy, employing up to thirty thousand people in the 1960s and 1970s. Even today the world’s largest steel corporation *Arcelor-Mittal* is based in Luxembourg. When the mining and processing of iron ore became unproductive, Luxembourg’s government adapted the country’s economy to fill a niche in the international finance system. The European Union granted the country important economic and political functions. Luxembourg became a tax haven, luring foreign capital into the country with low minimum reserves and numbered bank accounts.

The budget expenditure scheduled for 2008 came to 8.5 billion euros. At the same time the national debt comes to just under ten percent of the Gross Domestic Product, which rose from 33.9 billion euros in 2006 to 36.3 in 2007. Since 1993 inflation has been constant between 2.3 and 3.4 percent. In 2007 the country’s foreign trade balance has shown a surplus of 3.6 billion euros. Luxembourg supplies 56 percent of its exports to its three neighbours, Germany, France and Belgium and another 30 percent to the remaining EU member states. Its exports have more than doubled since 1993.

The Luxembourg social model is based on the institutionalization of a social compromise and a strong trade union movement. Representatives of
government, employers’ associations and trade unions meet in a body known as the *Tripartite* to negotiate laws and measures suited to the economic and social situation with a view to reaching a consensus. In this way the cutting of four fifths of the jobs in the steel industry was achieved without lay-offs. The “Index” whereby pay rates are automatically pegged to the price trends of representative goods in a shopping basket, a minimum wage of over ten euros an hour, and binding collective bargaining agreements for about two thirds of the work force make for comparatively high standards of living. Nevertheless, even the Luxembourg social model is beginning to show cracks. The “Index” has come under attack in the course of a discussion of the composition of the shopping basket and the fact that it is set aside in special situations, and the unemployment rate of 5 percent is very high by Luxembourg standards. Although in the years 2006 and 2007 14,800 additional jobs were created, in December 2008 there were 11,511 registered unemployed.6

*The “Communist Party of Luxembourg”*

The “Communist Party of Luxembourg” (KPL) was founded on 2 January 1921 in Niederkorn by representatives of the left wing of the “Luxembourg Socialist Workers’ Party” (LSAP), but it was not until the parliamentary elections of 1934 that a Communist, Zénon Bernard, was elected to parliament. But just a few months later he was excluded from the Chamber of Deputies by majority decision. An attempt by the bourgeois parties to have the Communist Party banned was narrowly rejected in a referendum. It was only after the Wehrmacht marched into the country in May 1940 that the party was banned. In the underground movement it was one of the most active centres of resistance to the German occupation. This struggle gave it a certain prestige among the population.

In the first free elections on 21 October 1945 the KPL scored a big electoral success in the southern industrial areas. One of its members, Charles Marx, assumed the post of health minister in the government of national unity and another became mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg’s second largest city, before the party was forced into isolation as the Cold War got under way. But despite its exclusion at the national level, its solid base of support among the steel workers enabled it to gain votes as the “party of

the little man”. It scored its best election result in the parliamentary elections of 15 December 1968, winning 13.8 percent of the valid votes. By this time, however, the party had lost its structural influence. The Communist trade union FLA (Freier Luxemburger Arbeiterverband) merged with the Social Democratic trade union. On welfare policy the party loudly denounces the government’s policy of social compromise, while its trade-union representatives have to share responsibility for it. In local politics the actions of the Communists are scarcely distinguishable from that of their Social Democratic rivals. The decline of the steel industry caused the communist milieus in the south of the country gradually to disintegrate. It was a measure of the esteem in which the older Communist Party leaders, such as Dominique Urbany, Jos Grandgenet and Arthur Useldinger, were held that the party’s structural difficulties and its inability to win over new voter strata took so long to be reflected in the election results.7

The democratic revolution in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet empire hit the Communist Party of Luxembourg very hard. The KPL had approved the crushing of the Prague Spring, had remained aloof from the Eurocommunist ideas of the 1970s, and welcomed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Internally there was a long-lasting failure to abandon democratic centralism. The faith in the Soviet Union or at least in the possibility of an alternative to Western capitalism were identifying features, and so for trade union-oriented CP members important criteria distinguishing them from the Social Democrats. The intellectuals in the party were convinced of the necessity of real socialism for the international balance of power. For them their proximity to Moscow also kept them distinct from the emerging Green movement.8

1993: The first split

In the course of the year 1990 it briefly seemed that the party might succeed in launching a process of renewal. At the Rümeling Conference in March and the Bettemburg Congress in December 1990 the Central Committee was elected by secret ballot for the first time, and guidelines for a renewal of the party were adopted by a sizable majority for the first time. However, it proved impossible to continue this process, as it led to a hard-

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ening of the fronts between those who, in the light of the collapse of the old model, wanted to found a new party, and those who wanted to preserve the old party. More and more people resigned their membership. In 1993 it came to a split, as a result of which the last Communist deputy in parliament, André Hoffmann, joined the initiators of a new party to be called “New Left” (NL). In the subsequent parliamentary elections on 12 June 1994 both left-wing parties lost heavily.  

The emergence of “The Left as a new collective movement”

In autumn 1998, at the initiative of non-party leftists, members of the KPL and NL, Trotskyites and individual Young Socialists, a meeting was held with the clear aim of contesting the national and European elections scheduled for the following year on the basis of joint lists. What brought them together was dissatisfaction with their own weakness and dislike of Social Democratic government policy, especially with regard to public sector cuts. Finally the Communist Party of Luxembourg, the New Left and the Trotskyite Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) agreed to contest the elections jointly.

Statutes

On 30 January 1999 the statutes and programme of the new collective movement known as “The Left” (Déi Lénk, DL) were adopted at the founding congress in Bonneweg. The statutes reflect the various concerns of the participants. First, they attempt to define the organizational character of the collective movement as being neither that of a party nor that of a loose alliance. However they do leave members free “to be active in other left-wing political organizations”. However, this clear sign of openness towards the KPL (by this time the NL and RSP had been dissolved) was qualified by the provision that those elected to parliament and local government bodies represent “solely Déi Lénk”. Secondly, it represents a clear break with the tradition of democratic centralism which had dogged the KPL for so long, stating: “All members of Déi Lénk retain their freedom of speech both within the movement and outside it”. Practical examples of this are the free

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10 The Trotskyite RSP was founded during the 1970 student protests in Luxembourg as the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and renamed itself the Revolutionary Socialist Party in 1985.
choice of membership in a local or issue-specific section and the fact that expulsions involve a time-consuming procedure.  

Policy statement

The policy statement of “The Left” was passed on 29 March 1999 with slight modifications. The leadership of the Communist Party was involved in drafting it. With regard to the national and European elections of June 1999 it also served as an election programme.

The core thesis of the programme is in best Marxist tradition the contradiction between capital and labour. The focus is on a critique of the economy and the role of the state. Seven of the fourteen chapters deal with economic issues: redistribution of wealth, right to work, securing of jobs, democracy at the workplace, public services, social security and welfare policy. The following basic ideas are expressed:

- Expansion of social security systems by raising taxes for the rich;
- Ensuring work for all by gradual shortening of the working week to 30 hours;
- Boosting purchasing power by a state investment programme;
- Reform of labour law, more control rights for staff representation bodies and trade unions, and introduction of a uniform statute for blue- and white-collar workers;
- Retention of the link between social security and work;
- Payment of unemployment insurance by the employer (on the principle that the party that causes damage must bear the cost);
- Expansion of the public sector and public services, mainly in the fields of housing, health, transport and education.

With its demand for an “abandonment of the niche policy in the tax and finance fields as pursued for decades” and its rejection of the “policy of social partnership and ’social peace’ as a political strategy” The Left op-

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posed the social consensus in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. A role in this was played by the critique of globalization. Right in the preamble we find: “The unbridled international financial speculation, which as a result of deregulation and free circulation of capital is no longer subject to any constraints, is about to plunge the real economy into an even greater crisis.” The introduction of a tax on international financial transactions is called for.

In a separate chapter The Left defines democracy as the “greatest possible collective and individual self-determination and self-administration”. Its aim is the “participation of all members of society in shaping their own living conditions”. Democracy is seen more as a collective good or state restriction than as an individual right to opt out of the social exploitation processes, as the libertarian Left would see it. Nevertheless The Left stresses the indivisibility and universality of “individual and social human rights”, which must be extended to all sections of the population and minorities living in Luxembourg, to homosexuals, women, the disabled and asylum seekers. Here too The Left seems to rely more on the collective liberation of these groups by state action than on their own ability to liberate themselves.

Issues of social policy are subordinated to economic issues and all seem to assign a more important role to the state. Cultural policy is largely reduced to the necessity of higher state subsidies. In gender policy there is a tendency to view women as victims to be freed, instead of regarding relations between the sexes as the alienation of men and women in equal measure. In educational policy we are reminded of the need for equality of opportunity, and that all children should attend the same kind of school, but only for the first three years at secondary level. Higher education policy, science and research are not really dealt with. The section on ecology is confined to criticism of the government and employers, but the contradiction between ecological sustainability and economic growth as such is not discussed.

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12 Cf. Jean-Lou Siweck: Pensée unique, in: d’Land, 11.06.1999: “La seule véritable alternative en matière de politique économique est finalement proposée par Déi Lénk. C’est d’ailleurs le seul parti, dans la meilleure tradition du matérialisme marxien, à ouvrir son programme sur les questions économiques. […] Mais Déi Lénk préfèrent cependant se référer aux malheurs du monde qu’à la seule situation luxembourgeoise. En proposant, par exemple, de mettre fin à la politique de niche dans le secteur financier, le parti d’extrême gauche s’attaque d’ailleurs moins à une politique économique qu’à un modèle de société. Il en est de même quand il rejette le dialogue entre partenaires sociaux et la paix sociale en tant que stratégie politique.”

The joint electoral success of 1999

The national and European elections of June 1999 were successful, but sobering. With a result of 4.98 percent in the constituency South The Left won a seat in the Luxembourg parliament. A peculiar feature of Luxembourg’s electoral system is that voters can accumulate and vote for several candidates from different lists at each political level (“panachage”). André Hoffmann (NL) was elected on the basis of the number of votes he received personally. In October the same year local elections were held in which The Left won six seats in five local authorities, including the country’s three largest cities: Luxembourg, Esch-sur-Alzette, and Differdingen. When snap elections were called in Esch-sur-Alzette on 30 April 2000 The Left attained 12.8%, its best result to date, and its candidate, André Hoffmann, became deputy mayor. His place in the Luxembourg parliament was taken by KPL Chairman Aloyse Bisdorff.

The second split of 2003

After these electoral successes the conflicts hitherto concealed by the shared electoral goals erupted in all their fury. Right from the start there had been disagreement about the character of the new organization, which had been papered over but not resolved by the term “collective movement”. While the majority of the KPL wanted to hold onto their own party, the New Left and RSP activists wanted more than just joint electoral lists. In practice this meant that the CP members in The Left canvassed for their own party and issued press releases in the name of the KPL, while the other members did the same for The Left. Fuel was added to the flames by the rotational principle, which in practice led to a lessening of Communist influence in parliament and the local authorities. These differences came to a head at the Second Congress of The Left in October 2001, when for the first time as part of The Left the CP members appeared as a self-contained group. Finally the KPL made an offer to The Left not to contest the 2004 elections within the framework of the joint collective movement, but separately and on equal terms between Left and KPL. For most members of The

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14 This means that citizens can vote for more than one candidate on their selected list and “delete” unwanted candidates. They can also vote for candidates from different lists.
Left this amounted to an abandonment of their joint project. Finally both contested the national and European elections of June 2004 separately and lost all their parliamentary seats. According to Romain Hilgert, the KPL, with its “old-fashioned and hidebound” image, appealed more to “active and retired workers”, and The Left more to “middle-class intellectuals”.

Fig. 1: Results of left-wing parties in national elections (in %):

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European success and local defeat

On 10 July 2005 the Luxembourgers voted in a referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. As in France and The Netherlands, the degree of rejection was highest in the geographical and socio-cultural strongholds of The Left. For The Left and the KPL this was the moment to put the 2004 election defeat behind them and canvas for a No to the draft constitution. They did this with such success that a parliamentary report of the “Left of The Left” later stated that for long stretches they had set the agenda of the campaign. Even if the influence of The Left should not be overestimated, it is significant that in all the southern towns where the Left gained seats in the 1999 local elections and which had a traditional working-class character, there was a majority against the Constitution.
Die Linke in Europa

Treaty, while at national level the Yes votes prevailed. This success and what was seen as a pioneering function on other political issues and social movements made The Left feel stronger so that it no longer tried to join forces with the Communist Party. It joined the Party of the European Left, which widened the breach.

For its part the KPL embarked on a course of ideological separation and retention of cultural identity. After the reform-oriented forces who had stayed in the KP in 1993 had decided in favour of The Left in the run-up to the 2004 elections, the conservative wing around Party Chairman Ali Ruckert was able to enforce its line without meeting any resistance. At the European level the party attended the Athens meetings, which carry on the tradition of the conferences of communist parties formerly organized under Soviet patronage. This “rediscovery of identity” is expressed in the KPL’s case in an idealization of the former regimes in Eastern Europe and a strengthened conviction of playing an avant garde role. The KPL Chairman is convinced that: “As in the past, the Communists are the only ones to offer an alternative to existing conditions, the only ones who have a revolutionary programme for a different society.”

There was no longer any question of joining forces. Because of the rival lists the next local elections on 9 October 2005 brought the loss of five of the six municipal seats. Although The Left was stronger, the candidacy of the KPL had fatal results. In Luxembourg City (31,873 voters) The Left scored 3.1 percent of the vote as against 3.6 percent six years earlier. The CP managed 1.14 percent. In Sanem (8412 voters) The Left’s share of the vote dropped from 8.22 to 5.02 percent, while the KP managed 2.69 percent. The Left lost both its seats. Even in the former Communist strongholds of Rümelingen and Differdingen the CP was unable to hold on to its remaining seats. Only in Esch-sur-Alzette (13,729 voters), where The Left belonged to the ruling coalition, was it able to hang on to one of its two seats despite a plunge from 12.8 to 8 percent. The CP was left empty-handed with 4 percent.

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Perspectives

Since their defeat in the local elections of 2005 the relationship between the Communist Party and The Left remains unchanged. A letter from The Left suggesting that joint lists should be considered ahead of the elections in June 2009 has been left unanswered by the KPL. Instead, Ali Ruckert has told the press that his party will take part with open lists. In view of what had happened in the past he was not interested in cooperating with The Left. In adopting this strategy the KPL is taking advantage of a few basic attitudes among Luxembourgers, which may seem strange to outsiders. Of all the countries in Europe Luxembourg has the highest proportion of people (59%) who regard the fall of the Berlin Wall (“rideau de fer”) as rather disadvantageous for the development of their own country. The memory of the Communist Party as it was in the 1960s and 1970s and its socio-political efforts in the service of the workers are also very much alive in the southern regions of the country.

For its part The Left is trying to appeal to both Social Democratic and Green voters by paying more attention to welfare and ecological issues and taking a stronger stand on issues of social policy. Particular importance is attached to its work in the Party of the European Left. In June 2008 members of The Left took part in the founding of “Transform! Luxembourg”, a branch of the European left-wing Transform! Network in which questions of distribution and the connection between ecological and social issues are discussed in working groups.

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22 Tageblatt, Zeitung fir Lëtzebuerg, 23.01.2009.

Context

Since 2002 The Netherlands have been going through a dual crisis, whose socio-economic dimension is pushing down economic growth, exports and demand while causing the proportion of those in precarious employment to increase by leaps and bounds. The political and cultural dimensions of this dual crisis have received their due share of attention in the German media, most recently in connection with the anti-Islam film of the director Theo van Gogh and his brutal murder. The “long year of 2002” had been preceded by a major shock to the party system with long-term implications. The newly founded post-modern, anti-establishment *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), a party which took a right-wing stand on questions of migration and multiculturalism, emerged from the parliamentary elections as the second strongest force.

After thirteen years of sharing power the Social Democracy lost approximately half its share of the vote, plunging to a historic low of 15 percent. Seven years of a “purple coalition” between it and the two liberal parties – the Dutch attempt at a “Third Way” – had ended in failure. For the first time the “landslide elections” signalled a deep gulf between the political class and the electorate, which perceived the basic social corporate consensus typical of the Polder Model more in terms of the substantially uniform manifestoes of all the established parties. The LPF may have imploded as a political force, but the increasing isolation of the political class in the eyes of the electorate continues.

In addition, a shift of discourse took place in all parties on the issues of migration, Islam and integration. The opinion polls show that since January 2009, after numerous splits, the group led by the former Liberal politician Wilders (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV), which has 23 out of 150 seats, is ahead of the Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP), which lost in mid-September 2008 and is now oscillating again around the 15-seat mark.

In 2004 300,000 people gathered in Amsterdam to hold the largest demonstration the country had ever seen. Numerous SP functionaries and voters had heeded the call of an alliance of trade unions and social movements,
who themselves were surprised at their success in mobilizing such numbers. The occasion was the aggravated dispute between government and trade unions on the future shaping of welfare policy: The government was trying to force the trade unions to accept its course (billed as “consensus”) by threatening to discontinue the practice of declaring collective-bargaining agreements to be universally applicable. This dispute was a product of the socio-economic crisis in The Netherlands, which confronted large sections of the middle classes with “fear of the abyss”.

Another phenomenon of the dual crisis in The Netherlands that attracted world attention was the Dutch “Nee” in the referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. The developments in The Netherlands are all the more remarkable as even in the second half of the 1990s the country was often held up as a success model: In all the rest of Western Europe mass unemployment, the crisis of the welfare state and the disorientation of its agents – social democratic parties, trade unions, charities – were on the rise at a time when The Netherlands were considered to be an exemplary market-oriented and yet consensus-based society, as reflected in the talk of a “Dutch Miracle”.

The disputes on social, cultural and integration policy and the EU constitution on the one hand and the crisis of the political system on the other clearly indicate that such assessments were all too premature. The campaign against the EU constitution had (unlike in France, where the role of the anti-globalization network Attac was crucial) been conducted by a party, namely the Socialist Party. For just over a decade this party-political formation, which at national level had long been reduced to irrelevance, has gone from one success to another, doubling its share of the vote in every election except that of 2002.

On the history of the SP we may note that in 1994 – after five failed attempts to enter parliament – it scored a major victory in the elections of November 2006, winning 16.6 percent of the votes, which made it the third-strongest force both in terms of its seats in the second chamber of parliament and in terms of its members. Only 4.6 percent separated them from one of the losers of the elections, the Dutch Social Democrats (PvdA), who received just 21.2 percent of the votes.

In the run-up to the last elections the media-savvy and extremely popular Chairman of the SP, Jan Marijnissen, appealed for a cooperation between GroenLinks, Social Democracy and SP. The other two parties rejected this, and the balance of power that emerged from the elections did not permit a Centre-Left cabinet. For the third time as prime minister Jan
Peter Balkenende heads a coalition of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and the small fundamentalist Christian Union.

The success of the SP is of interest to left-wing parties for several reasons. The most important of these is that it is taking place at a time in which the European Left is struggling to find new perspectives, after traditional orientations had had to be jettisoned with the end of the socialist states in 1989 – the end of an era that had begun in 1917. What the British historian Eric Hobsbawm calls the “landslide” (cf. Hobsbawm 1999) hit the Left particularly hard – former class compromises have been abandoned, and the question of who actually belongs to the “working class” to be represented seems after the dissolution of the “typical” working-class milieus almost unanswerable. These problems affect social democratic and socialist parties as well as trade unions.

**Electorate and members**

Exit polls revealed that a third of the votes or six of the seats which the SP managed to win were at the expense of the Social Democracy. Given a total increase of 16 seats this is a considerable proportion (Voerman 2007 a: 139 f.). Only ten percent of SP voters came from the LPF. A large number of those voters who had remained undecided until shortly before the election voted for the SP or the right-wing populist Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) of Wilders. It is worth noting that the SP was able to win over ten percent of those voters who consider themselves to be part of the political centre. In the perception of the electorate the SP’s Maoist past evidently no longer has a deterrent effect, which may be concluded from the roughly equal quota of over 55-year olds with the VVD and the SP. The core voters on the other hand were aged between 30 and 60. Nevertheless it has expanded its electorate, with young voters under 25 being slightly over-represented in relation to the electorate as a whole. The image of the traditional male SP voter is no longer sustainable – two thirds of the party’s votes came from women. Not least for this reason it is estimated to be the party with the greatest vote-winning potential (NRC Handelsblad, 23.11.2007).

The SP became the strongest party among its electoral base in the lower income tax brackets, among which precarious employment and living conditions, transfer incomes, and part-time employment are widespread. Of all the parties the SP is the one best able to convince people that they are paid less than the Dutch average. Its electorate can also be defined by level of
education: most SP voters are people with lower secondary education (Spier 2008: 112).

Members

Exact data on membership structure, on the other hand, are hard to come by, since no academic studies have yet been carried out, and inner-party information is not made freely available to outsiders. Since the second legislative period, however, the membership structure has changed to the extent that the proportion of university graduates has increased. This development mainly concerns the office-holders in Parliament, Senate and National Executive. (Kagie 2006: 143, 136) Once the party had a larger number of seats in both chambers the number of those who did not have to work their way up through the entire party organization from the local to the parliamentary level naturally grew.

The SP includes in its ranks Trotskyites, social-reformer Christians, creative artists and former members of the CPN, GroenLinks and PvdA (cf. Zonneveld 2007) as well as activists from social movements, such as the peace, antimilitarist, anti-nuclear, environmental and anti-globalization movements. Its social-ethical humanism has found a programmatic and practical expression in the person of the theological maverick and SP member Huub Oosterhuis, a prominent intellectual pioneer of Christian socialism in The Netherlands: The introduction to the book “Socialisme – What’s left?” (2004), which contains fragments of the Communist Manifesto and other economic and philosophical works, was written by Oosterhuis under the heading: “The Revolution of the Bible” (cf. Oosterhuis 2004: 9 ff.).

Key theses

Since the “landslide” the parties to the left of the Social Democracy face the challenge of a new party being founded. In view of the German experience it might be worth while to take a closer look at the SP, as both Germany and The Netherlands have in common the fact that for a long time no such left-wing party was able to establish itself in either country. In the Federal Republic the PDS merged in June 2007 with Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative (WASG) to form the DIE LINKE (THE LEFT) party, and this combination of East German “mass party” and West German ex-Social Democrats and left-wing trade unionists has managed to get elected to the regional parliaments in four West German federal
states. This raises the question of whether we can learn from the SP for this process. Can the SP make a contribution to the dialogue on the creation of a new Left in Europe? We will deal with this question first.

Thesis 1: To confine the issue to Gerrit Voerman’s thesis of social-democratization (cf. Voerman 2007b) is to fail to recognize what is specifically new about the SP as regards both structure and policies.

First, there is a general doubt as to the analytical viability of a recourse to traditional social democracy. Since the end of Fordism and the disappearance of the traditional working-class heartlands and employment histories the social democratic core electorate has been fragmented and segmented. A political appeal to the interests of the traditional working class would have brought the SP less than about 17 percent of the vote. The trend towards precarious terms of employment extends into the upper reaches of the intermediate strata and is certainly affecting traditional skilled workers, eroding their normal careers.

An analysis of the election manifestos and the adoption of a Keynesian, welfare-state approach by the governing coalition supports the current thesis of a social-democratization of the former Maoist splinter group both with regard to its “moderate” approach to the issues and the broadening of its voter potential. But it cannot be accepted unequivocally: The party’s structure and mode of operating contain elements which distinguish the SP from typically Fordist social democratic parties. The social-democratization thesis also underestimates what is specifically new about the political programme and tactics, which combine tendencies towards a re-regulation of national capitalism with communitarian elements, a Christian-social ethic, the use of new media, and specifically member-oriented organizing principles. The essential point is that cultural conservative and regulative responses exist in parallel to downright extra-parliamentary and participative responses to the manifestations of both the socio-economic and the political-cultural crisis.

At the same time the SP is able to bridge the underlying causes of voter alienation from the political class, from those engaged in competitive corporatism, and from the process of European integration as one of the dynamics driving the legitimacy crisis of the Dutch political system.

Thesis 2: The SP is pursuing an organizing and participation strategy for left-wing parties

Although the SP underwent “de-Maoization” back in the 1970s, the Maoist “mass line” still determines the party to this day. This goes in particular for its relatively authentic concern for the interests of the “little people”. These interests do not just function in the party discourse as a mere...
sounding board for its own efforts; instead the party attaches great impor-
tance to maintaining direct contact with the grass roots and its electoral
base and is an essential part of its sense of identity.

A key role is played by the constituency branches, which enjoy far-
reaching autonomy in running local campaigns. To this end regional issues
are identified by examining the results of the party’s own surveys. The aim
is to put the constituency branches into a position to launch a campaign, i.e.
all elements of its implementation are decided and executed at this level.
The participatory approach gives the party activists and their followers an
opportunity to make an active substantive and organizational contribution.
This can also be commitment to a few specific issues; without having to
work on all the usual formal institutionalized party routines in the constitu-
ency branches. It is important to realize here that participation is not to be
understood in the sense of grass-roots democracy, for the local leaderships
are in charge, and town and municipal council posts are assigned on the
basis of lists.

This change in the role of the constituency branch developed during the
years in which the SP engaged exclusively and very successfully in local
politics. The branches did not have it forced on them as part of a moderni-
ization strategy. Today it is still the most important pillar of the SP, not least
because the constituency branch remains the first port of call for all inter-
ested parties and still continues to recruit new talent in the course of cam-
paign work. At the same time the SP sanctions constituency branches that
fail to live up to the standards of decentralized local-issue campaign leader-
ship by not allowing it to fight municipal elections (cf. Bredewold, Martine
et al. 2008).

For party functionaries taking part in direct “street agitation” is a matter
of course. In their election campaign strategies the party attaches great im-
portance to getting its message across in a comprehensible manner. It also
engages in many extra-parliamentary forms of action, such as collecting
signatures, holding demonstrations and organizing opinion surveys on such
issues as the granting of citizenship, or psychiatric treatment. The provision
of individual care and assistance, developed out of the strategy of the mass
organizations at an early stage and implemented at the local level, has also
been retained. Thus the SP offers such things as telephone hotlines and con-
sulting hours for those who have problems with landlords or need advice

24 There has not yet been any research into the possible problems and conflicts within the lower and
intermediate levels which might arise out of having such formal and informal party structures in paral-
lel.
and support on health care. The party also strives to create structures which facilitate the most direct criticism of its policies by its own grass roots, the voters, and the interested public. After the 1994 elections, which brought it two seats in the Second Chamber, the SP installed an “Alarmlijn” via which questions on policy issues could be put to the parliamentary deputies (Hippe 1995: 75 f.). This has proved so successful that it now has a staff of 20 to deal with callers; at one time or another all well-known figures in the SP talk on the telephone with interested parties via a hot line.

Members and interested parties are constantly asked direct questions, whether about the current transport situation in their region or about how they manage on their money. These low-threshold offers of participation can be taken advantage of online via Internet or offline by the normal post. The party profits from the systematic analysis of its feedback and campaigns, as it can generate new issues that remain hidden from representative opinion polls.

**Contribution to the critical dialogue between left-wing parties**

The identification between grass roots and party cadres, especially as regards their sense of identity, is crucial to success and accounts for the immense importance attached to the principle (not to be equated with grass-roots democracy) of participation by unpaid organizers and volunteers in single-issue campaigns, actions and elections. This principle binds people to the party, thus making them an important factor of its functioning. Although the principle of the participatory party with largely autonomous constituency branches would seem to be transferable, it is not just a marketing instrument or service concept, but a way of accessing issues that supplements the opinion research institutes.\(^{25}\)

The “interactive” possibilities of the widely ramified Internet platform with user feedback should also be seen in this context. They do not replace the participation principle. In addition to the new “online possibilities” the

\(^{25}\) A major voter survey (Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2002/2003) found no evidence of either an interest in the policies of the European Union or a sceptical attitude to the integration project (Treaty Establishing a Constitution). The latter nevertheless turned out to be the key to electoral success. Health policy also ranked relatively low on the list of relevant issues in this representative survey. The campaign against total privatization and massive cuts in spending on home nursing and care for the elderly would never have been launched by the traditional parties, but the SP had great success with it. After the last elections 76 percent of those who voted for the SP gave health policy as the reason for their choice, while 55 percent of all voters considered health policy to be the most important issue (NRC Handelsblad 23.11.2007).
party is trying to create structures that facilitate “offline” criticism (e.g. by post) of its policies by the grass roots, the voters and the interested public. All in all the application of the participation principle at all levels has made the SP extremely successful and flexible in identifying and taking up new issues and serves as a counter to the “expert-centred” Polder Model.

The members tend to perform the classical or ideal-typical function of a connecting link between electorate and party, representing the electorate to a greater extent than is the case with the other Dutch parties. In the latter the members’ function has so atrophied that the opinion research institutes are supposed to identify voters outside the core electorate so that policies can be adapted accordingly (one need only think of the German SPD’s encroachments on new voter strata in the course of the Neo-Social Democratic renewal.)

The SP differs from other parties by virtue of its new overall structure. Even if the inner party circles at the head of the SP have moved in the direction of professionalization by acquiring an extended circle of consultants (in such fields as design, coaching, election campaigns), there is no switching of roles between SP politicians and lobbyists or consultants from the world of business. So far, however, its action and organizing model has enabled it to avoid the typical processes whereby members and activists become alienated from the full-time party functionaries on the one hand and the electorate on the other, since direct action brings the leaders and mid-level functionaries into contact with the grass roots and interest groups, while the inner-party process of political opinion- and will-formation increasingly takes place with the participation of the entire electoral base. This is only possible thanks to the high number of participating members.26

The special feature of the SP, therefore, is the relationship between the party as a whole and its electoral base.

The SP has never been either a manifesto nor a movement party. It is geared vaguely to the “common man”, who is not progressive per se. To identify it with the typically well-educated adherents of the anti-globalization movement would, however, be to limit it. The fixation on widening its electoral success means that it cannot be linked too closely to left-wing sections of the trade unions. Such a link would deny it access to the culturally more conservative Christian social centre in The Netherlands.

26 Unlike other parties – especially the PvdA which, despite a partial comeback in 2006, lost more than 50,000 members between 1980 and 2007 – the SP has tripled its membership since its parliamentary debut in 1994 (cf. Voerman 2007b). In January 2009 – for the first time – the SP lost about 500 members in comparison to the previous year. (cf. www.dnpp.nl).
Despite not being associated with a movement its relationship with the new (and old) social movements is not necessarily an easy one. Basically the SP has a utilitarian relationship with the social movements: As long as prominence can be given to party policies, and the commitment promises a certain gain in terms of votes, the Socialist Party will engage (e.g. in the European Social Forums), otherwise it is reticent (as in the case of the G8 protests from Evian onwards).

The campaign against the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe produced for the first time a concrete form of action by means of which the alienation of the population from both European and national elites could be made more palpable. The “Nee” in the referendum was the key to the electoral success that nearly tripled the SP’s share of the vote to almost 17 percent. It succeeded in making left-wing issues its own and came out strongly in favour of progressive demands. This was admittedly paired in some cases with openly cultural conservative elements, especially on European integration policy, but also in other fields, which traditionally are considered liberal issues in The Netherlands, such as assisted suicide, stem cell research, or the promotion of Dutch pop music.

For example the present – electorally very successful – policy of strengthening the national parliaments in the European integration process seems at best to perpetuate the institutionalized rivalry between European governments. To what extent the party can regulate the contradiction between integration – through its aspiration to join a government coalition – in a possible national “power-holding bloc” based on institutionalized rivalry and its strict grass-roots orientation (especially after the end of the Marjinissen era), is a hypothetical question.

An important aspect of the antipathy to theorizing is that little effort is expended on precise societal analysis and critique. This, however, is the basis of any strategic option for a left-wing party, especially in times of neo-liberal hegemony if it wants to look beyond the existing power structures. Tensions between theory and practice have repeatedly cropped up and always been resolved in favour of the latter. The continuing hostility to strategic analyses and the conceptualizing of intellectuals could entice the party into coming up with insufficiently complex answers to prevailing states of affairs and hence in the long run bears within it a potential weakness. What remains is the remarkable success of the SP in “tracking down” genuinely new problems and giving them lasting political and institutional expression. Nevertheless doubts are in order as to whether the skills of a

27 Suffice it to say that the SP is not a member of the Party of the European Left.
political “bloodhound” are sufficient to bring about political change in The Netherlands.

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Denmark - The Social and Political Left

Inger V. Johansen

Background

The Danish left – like the social and political movements in the country – has declined since the 1980s. When such movements have arisen, they have generally been short-lived. Although the Danish trade union movement is considerably stronger with regards to membership than trade unions in other countries outside Scandinavia, it has been inactive during the past two decades, and has lost members. Its hesitant and reformist leadership is largely to blame for this development. The fact that the bourgeois rightwing government of Anders Fogh Rasmussen has been able to stay in power since 2001 is both a reflection and a result of the weakness of the social movements. They have not been able to impede a general trend to the right of public opinion.

During the past two years, there has been a new development that has led to turmoil particular among public sector workers, most of them women. This development has been caused mainly by government policies that restrict public spending and speed up privatisation. There have been widespread strikes and protests, with demands for pay raises and for equal pay, as well as for improved working conditions. In the spring of last year, the most recent strikes won vast popular support. But since the strike ended before the summer holidays in 2008, there has since been a lull in trade union activity. This can be explained both by the exhaustion of the trade union members involved in the strikes and by the efforts of reformist trade union leaders to dampen militancy. Last autumn saw huge government cuts in local public expenditure, which sparked hardly any trade union and/or popular protest.

In 2001, the Social Democratic government was replaced by a bourgeois right government supported by the extreme right Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti). This change in government was partly due to disaffec-

28 The article has been compiled with the help of various contributors. Information concerning individual political parties and organisations has been obtained from various Danish-language websites.
tion with Social Democratic Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, who had broken his election promise not to change or raise the age for early retirement. Moreover, many voters could no longer see any difference between Social Democratic welfare policies and those being pushed by the bourgeois parties. Privatisation policies were part of an effort to adapt to the monetarist criteria of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) prior to 2001. Nevertheless the bourgeois government increased privatisation, which for example led to lower standards in Danish public hospitals.

The unrest in the public sector is continuing, and among the four parliamentary opposition parties, the Social Democrats and the Socialist People’s Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti) are now cooperating closely to form a strong alternative to the present government. Nonetheless, the opinion polls still show no consistent popular support of an alternative government. It was easy for the right government to win the elections in 2005 and again in November 2007. The parliamentary opposition to the government has seemed to lack any clear or convincing alternatives. The existing political parties of the left and social and political organisations should be assessed in view of this context.

We have chosen in this article to view the “emancipative left” somewhat more broadly than the term usually permits, as it is not only the “emancipative left” in the strict sense which contributes to social and political movement and action in Denmark. We have also restricted the overview to political parties and groups, youth organisations and EU-critical organisations. In addition to these, Denmark has a large number of environmental, international solidarity, women’s and peace organisations and groups. In spite of their obvious importance for the Danish left, these organisations will not be covered in this article.

Left political parties represented in the Folketing

The Socialist People’s Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti/ SF)

A leftist party founded in 1959 after a split in the Danish Communist Party. A split in SF led in 1967 to the formation of a more radical party, the Left Socialist Party (VS; see below). SF has enjoyed a sharp increase in membership over the past two to three years, reaching over 15,000 in 2008, with a percentage of women of 51.3 percent. In the last general elections in November 2007 SF achieved 13 percent and twenty-three seats out of the total of 179, which meant it doubled its strength. The party has elected 160 members to regional and local councils, and two mayors. It has one MEP, who is an observer of the group The Greens / European Free Alliance in the
European Parliament.

SF was originally based on a socialist ideology – termed “popular socialism”. In the past ten years, the party has developed from the position of an EU-critical party to being pro EU, but remaining critical of some EU policies. This move is comparable to the party’s acceptance of the market economy, with the demand that more economic redistribution take place. It has opened up opportunities for close cooperation with the Social Democrats, in particular that of an alternative to the present government. The members do not fully agree with the party position on the market economy, and many prefer more socialist oriented policies. The party has a youth organisation, Socialist People’s Party Youth (SFU, Socialistisk Ungdoms-Front), which is described below.

Party Chairman Villy Søvndal is a media asset to the party. After he took office in 2006, the SF experienced a sharp rise in party membership and electoral support. He has also placed a strong focus on professionalisation and a long-term change in the party’s electoral strategy.29

The Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten – De Rød-Grønne/RGA)
This party is a socialist alliance formed in 1989 by three left parties, the Danish Communist Party DKP, the Left Socialist Party (Venstresocialisterne/ VS), and the Socialist Workers’ Party (Trotskyite/ 4th International/ SAP), and later on joined by ex-Maoists. After two years, it became an organisation with its own membership. New members soon exceeded those from the old founding parties.

The Red-Green Alliance has experienced a doubling of its membership in recent years. In 2008, it had around 4300 members, half of them in Copenhagen; 45 percent of the members are women. The party has adopted a gender-based quota system for the National Executive Board. It has been represented in the Danish Parliament since 1994, when it gained six seats. In the 2007 general elections, it achieved 2.2 percents of the votes and four seats. The party has also elected 34 members to regional and local councils and one deputy mayor in Copenhagen. It has never stood in the European elections, but chose to support the two Danish EU-critical movements, nominating a number of prominent RGA members to their electoral lists. Having no youth organisation of its own, it cooperates closely with the SFU. The Red-Green Alliance sees itself as a party of the grassroots, and is work-

29 For further information on the SF see www.sf.dk.
ing for a society based on democratic socialism and ecology. It is based on a Marxist analysis and opposes capitalism and neoliberal globalisation. The party has been an opponent of the EU since it was formed, yet it also sees an international perspective for working for a democratic red and green alternative to the EU. It is the most leftist party in the Danish Parliament, and also the only party there with no party chairman, but a collective leadership.\footnote{For further information on the Red-Green Alliance see www.enhedlisten.dk.}

\textit{Left Parties with few Members and no parliamentary Representation}

\textbf{Communist parties}

\textit{Communist Party of Denmark (Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti/ DKP)}

Founded in 1919, the party helped found the RGA in 1989. It is based on Marxism-Leninism.\footnote{For further information on the DKP see www.dkp.dk.}

\textit{Communist Party in Denmark (Kommunistisk Parti i Danmark KpiD)}

Set up in 1990 by a split-off from the DKP, in opposition to the DKP’s co-operation with other left parties to form the Red-Green Alliance. Based on Marxism-Leninism.\footnote{For further information on the KpiD see www.kommunisterne.dk.}

\textit{Communist Party (Kommunistisk Parti/ KP)}

Founded in 2006 by members of a former Maoist party (DKP/ML) and of the Communist Party in Denmark (KPiD). Based on the ideology of revolutionary Marxism and Leninism. Publishes a daily newspaper \textit{Arbejderen} (www.arbejderen.dk), with a print run of 1500 copies.\footnote{For further information on the KP see www.kommunister.dk.}

\textbf{Trotskyite parties}

\textit{Socialist Workers’ Party (Socialistisk Arbejderparti/ SAP)}

A section of the Fourth International. Founded as a party in 1980, it participated in the formation of the RGA in 1989. The majority of its members are also RGA members.\footnote{For further information on the SAP see www.sap-fi.dk.}
International Socialists (Internationale Socialister IS)
Part of the International Socialist tendency that includes for instance the British Socialist Workers’ Party. Its members joined the RGA in 2006.\(^{35}\)

Green Party

*De Grønne* (The Greens)
Established as a party in the 1980s, but of no importance today.\(^{36}\)

**EU-Critical Movements and Organisations**

Folkebevægelsen mod EU (The People’s Movement against the EU)
A broad movement working to free Denmark from EU membership. It was formed in 1972 and split in 1992, when the June Movement (see below) was formed. The People’s Movement has been represented in the European Parliament since 1979 when it gained 4 seats. Two MEPs were elected in 1994, and one in 1999 and in 2004. The movement has been affiliated with different groups in the EP. Since 2002, its MEPs Ole Krarup and later Søren Søndergaard have been Associate Members of the GUE/NGL (The United European Left/Nordic Green Left) Group in the EP. The party has a youth organisation that calls itself “Youth Against the EU”.\(^{37}\) Website: www.folkebevaegelsen.dk.

JuniBevægelsen mod Union (The June Movement against Union)
A movement founded in 1992 that wishes to promote a reform and the modernisation of the EU, but is not opposed to EU membership. According to the June Movement the EU should be less centralised and more transparent. The movement recommended a “no” in the referenda on the Maastricht Treaty and the Edinburgh Agreement in 1993, the Amsterdam Agreement in 1998 and the accession to the euro in 2000. It was also opposed to the EU Constitution. The party has a gender-based quota system. It had three MEPs elected in 1994, three in 1999, and one in 2004. Its MEP until last year was Jens Peter Bonde (prior to 2002, he was a representative of the People’s Movement), who has been working in the European Parliament since 1979. The June Movement is a member of the Independence/Democracy Group.

\(^{35}\) For further information on the IS see www.socialister.dk.
\(^{36}\) For further information on De Grønne see www.groemme.dk.
\(^{37}\) For further information on Folkebevægelsen mod EU see www.folkebevaegelsen.dk.
in the EP.  

**Udfordring Europa (Challenge Europe)**
An EU-critical centre-left organisation that was set up in 2005 to promote the debate on European issues. Challenge Europe is opposed to market-based policies and seeks to connect a left vision with a criticism of the lack of democracy and openness of the EU. It fights poverty, militarism, racism and discrimination and seeks to promote an improvement of the environment and social equality. Founders and members come from several left parties (plus a few Social Democrats) and the left in general.

**Ny Agenda (New Agenda)**
A think tank set up in 2005 to initiate investigations and debates on the development of the EU from a critical democratic and citizens’ perspective. Of special concern is the role of the European Union in the world, and especially in relation to the global south. Through in-depth analysis, New Agenda encourages public debate and challenges established ways of thinking from a centre-left perspective.

**Left Youth Organisations**

**Socialistisk UngdomsFront – SUF (Socialist Youth Front)**
A revolutionary socialist youth organisation founded in 2001 that cooperates closely with RGA. They are separate organisations – the Red-Green Alliance does not “control” the SUF, but many SUF members are also members of the RGA, and the two organisations have an agreement on cooperation. Occasionally, they run campaigns together, primarily election campaigns. SUF works for a fundamentally democratic socialist society; its ideology is influenced by revolutionary socialism, anarchism and communism.

SUF is involved in many political campaigns: Against cuts in education, against neo-liberalism, for an improvement of public transport, for integration, and against the EU and capitalist globalisation. Moreover, the organisation was very active in protests against the G8 summit in Germany in June 2007. In 2005 SUF had 341 members, in 2008 over 1000 members. Young people can be members until the age of thirty, and according to a

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38 For further information on JuniBevægelsen mod Union see www.j.dk.
39 For further information on Udfordring Europa see udfordringeuropa.dk.
40 For further information on Ny Agenda see www.nyagenda.dk.
Die Linke in Europa

survey in 2007, the bulk of the membership is between fifteen and twenty-three, with nearly 30 percent are between fifteen and seventeen; around 45 percent are women. SUF has 39 local groups throughout the country, with half of its members in Copenhagen. Two of its former members have become MPs of the Red-Green Alliance, including Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen who currently has a seat in parliament.  

Socialistisk Folkeparties Ungdom – SFU (Socialist People’s Party Youth)
Founded in 1969 SFU is today the largest Danish party political youth organisation (data from 2007), with 1955 members under the age of 30. It is a separate organisation, but has close ties to the SF (Socialist People’s Party) and is represented at the National Executive Board meetings of SF. Its ideology is the same as that of the SF, a kind of “popular socialism”. Fundamental values are democracy, solidarity and sustainability. The political focus of recent years has been welfare, integration, educational policies, and feminism. Originally the SFU – like the SF – was opposed to the EU, but since the beginning of the 1990s, it has supported Danish EU membership while at the same time criticising the lack of democracy and transparency there, and the promotion of neo-liberal economic policies such as the EMU. It differs from the SF in its policy on the EU. The organisation stresses both parliamentary activity in support of the SF, and extra-parliamentary activity, participating in movements and demonstrations. It has 107 local branches.

Rød Ungdom – RU (Red Youth)
A Danish revolutionary, socialist youth organisation that was founded in 1993 and is not affiliated to any political party. Its main political focus has been on opposition to the EU, opposition to racism (it has formed an anti-racist network), opposition to war (the war in Iraq in particular), better conditions for students, and support of trade union action.

The Positions of Left Parties and Relations between Them

At the parliamentary level, the Social Democrats and the SF are now cooperating closely to build a strong alternative to the bourgeois government.

41 For further information on SUF in socialistiskungdomsfront.dk
42 For further information on SFU see www.sfu.dk.
43 For further information on RU see www.ru.dk.
The opposition would presumably include the Liberals (the Radikale Venstre, “radical left”), although this party has voiced some uncertainty regarding its position after the next elections.

This close cooperation between the SF and the Social Democrats has meant that SF has adapted to Social Democratic and centrist positions in Danish politics. Whereas previously in the Danish Parliament SF would often present questions to the ministers and propose debates together with the RGA, this is no longer the case. Although there are still issues that only these two parties agree on, there are others, too, where all opposition parties unite. When common action occurs, it usually involves the SF acting in unison with the Social Democrats. In fact, on issues relating to immigrants and refugees, the RGA is closer to the Liberals’ positions than to those of the Social Democrats and the SF.

The Red-Green Alliance would usually support a Social Democratic government, and the party’s seats would consequently be included when a government is formed. But the party rejects participation in government, as the policies would not be sufficiently alternative to those of the bourgeois government. The policies of the RGA are substantially more radical on a number of crucial issues than those of the Social Democrats and the SF – firmly opposition to neo-liberalism and privatisation, a strong anti-militarist and anti-NATO position, and rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, for example. On these issues, compromises would be necessary to cooperate with the Social Democrats and the SF. The RGA has been the only party in parliament that has refused to support the government’s crisis support packages for the Danish banks.

The RGA is usually supported in general elections by small communist and left parties with no parliamentary representation – either officially or by choice of their members. Since the extreme right Danish People’s Party has attracted many previously Social Democratic voters, the Social Democrats and the SF have tried to meet this challenge by adapting their policies with regard to immigrants and refugees to that party’s to some extent, or to the policies of the bourgeois government.

As early as 2006, SF Party Chairman of the Villy Søvndal issued some sharply worded criticism of fundamentalist Muslim groups in Denmark, which was applauded by the political right wing and their voters. Not without internal criticism, the party later also chose to support the so-called twenty-four-year rule – a minimum immigration age for family reunions, officially implemented to avoid arranged marriages, so as to adapt to the Social Democratic position. Opinion polls after the last elections in 2007 have shown a steady increase in electoral support for the SF – at the same
time as the support for the Social Democrats has dwindled. Until very recently, there seemed to be hardly any movement of voters between the two main political blocs in the Danish Parliament. Only very recently – in January 2009 – did some movement within the left appear, especially due to the current financial and economic crisis.

Cooperation: Concrete Projects
The Red-Green Alliance supports – and some of its members are members of – The People’s Movement against the EU and the June Movement. The small communist and left parties, including the Greens, primarily support and are members of The People’s Movement which is also supported by some active members of the Liberals and a few from the right-wing parties. But in general, both the EU-critical movements attract voters and support from the centre-left of the political spectrum. This is also reflected in the electoral lists presented to the European elections in June 2009. There are a number of prominent RGA members on the People’s Movement list, as well as members of the Liberal Party. The small left parties mainly have candidates on the electoral list of the People’s Movement.

Due to the existence of these EU-critical movements, the RGA has decided not to stand for the European elections itself, but to support and cooperate with these movements. At the same time, the party seeks to present itself in the campaign as a left party with its own left criticism of EU neoliberalism and militarism. It thus cooperates with left parties in Europe, but as an EU opponent calling for a European left and green alternative to the EU. On the other hand, some members of the SF are members of pro-EU organisations such as Nyt Europa (New Europe) which is a Centre-Social Democratic-SF cooperative project.

Other than the EU-related issues, there are a number of other topics in which there is regular cooperation between left parties, movements and organisations. The members of left parties are also members of organisations in the environmental and peace movements, and in solidarity, women’s and other organisations. One recent important topic was the war in Gaza, where members of both the SF and the RGA, as well as of the small communist and left parties supported or cooperated with solidarity organisations. At the biggest demonstration during the war, all four parliamentary opposition parties, including the Liberals, had speakers.

During the strikes of public sector workers in the spring of 2008, the left parties and their members were very supportive; however, they had no significant influence on the final outcome of the strikes. From 2007 to 2008, there was a vigorous (sometimes violent) youth movement fighting for a
new Ungdomshus (youth house) after the forcible evacuation by the police of the original youth house. After weekly peaceful demonstrations lasting over a year, the movement achieved its goal of a new house in November 2008.

Danish Left Contribution to European Cooperation and Dialogue
The Danish left political parties usually cooperate with other left and communist parties at the European level. They also build bilateral relations. They are members or observers in various European left cooperative forums, according to the respective ideological and political views. These forums are:

- The European Left (EL): the Red-Green Alliance is an observer
- NELF (New European Left Forum), a loose cooperation of left parties left of Social Democracy; the SF and the Red-Green Alliance are members
- EACL (European Anti-Capitalist Left), a loose cooperation of radical left parties – the Red-Green Alliance participates
- Traditional international networks of communist and Trotskyite parties

The Nordic left parties (including the left parties of Greenland and the Faroe Islands) have formed a “left socialist group” within the Nordic Council, where the Nordic countries cooperate at the state and parliamentary level. The left parties cooperate to advance their common political priorities. At the Nordic level, there is also a Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA), a forum of cooperation between some Nordic left parties.

Besides, the youth organisations cooperate with other youth organisations in various cooperative forums, some of them in the European Network of Democratic Young Left (ENDYL), others in the Socialist Youth in the North (Socialistisk Ungdom i Norden/ SUN). In some cases, the women’s committees are involved in European networks; for instance, the women’s committee of the Red-Green Alliance participates in the EL-fem network of the European Left.

Many Danish political and social movements and organisations cooperate with others at a European level; some are affiliated to or part of international organisations and develop their policies in close cooperation with them: ATTAC, NOAH – Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, ActionAid International, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Women in Black. Others cooperate in loose networks with
other likeminded organisations in order to advance their policies together at European level. Examples of this are the involvement of the People’s Movement against the EU and the June Movement in the European Alliance of EU-Critical Movements (TEAM), where the RGA is an observer. This is a network with a democratic and anti-racist outlook, but which has formed a very broad alliance of movements and organisations (centre-left as well as right), many of which stand in European elections.

Danish left parties and organisations are involved in European and international events such as the European Social Forums, and to a lesser extent in the World Social Forums and G8 protests. Their activists will take part in the anti-NATO activities in Kehl and Strasbourg in the beginning of April 2009, just as Danish left parties and environmental organisations are preparing alternative activities during the climate summit meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Danish political parties and organisations have made specific contributions. There is no doubt that the EU-critical analyses levied by Danish left parties and EU-critical movements against the policies and manner of functioning of the EU have been a useful contribution to left parties and EU-critical organisations at the European level, which were increasingly frustrated with the strengthening of neoliberal policies and the undermining of democracy within the EU. Similarly the necessary radicalism of the environmental policies of Danish left political parties and the environmental movement will increasingly be an inspiration. Lastly, the experience and analyses of the undermining of the Nordic welfare state and trade unions by the EU and national neoliberal policies are issues already being discussed by the left and trade unions in Europe. We hope that workers, trade unionists and ordinary people will learn that the “flexicurity” model being promoted by the EU leadership is just a trap for more flexibility in the labour market and more social insecurity.
The Finnish trend to shifting, broad-based coalitions

From a European perspective government coalitions in Finland have always had an amorphous quality. There is seldom a stark choice between right and left. Given the memory of the bloody civil war between White and Red Guards in the spring of 1918 there is naturally a persistent desire to seek for broad coalitions. Another model for today’s system of government is the so-called Red-Earth Coalition between Social Democrats and Agrarians, which stabilized Finnish democracy against the danger from the Right in 1937.

The Red-Earth Coalition was able to return to power after the Second World War, with the addition of the “People’s Democratic League of Finland” (Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto – SKDL), consisting of communists and left-wing Social Democrats. The resulting Popular Front, as it was called, lasted till the summer 1948. The Red-Earth Coalition was revived in spring 1966, when the Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue (SDP) admitted communists to the government, being the first social democratic party in Europe to do so. This cooperation was viewed as a special experiment in a country in which relations with the Soviet Union traditionally played an important role. But within Finnish communism the debates over government policy and the denunciation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by a majority of the party triggered a series of splits that went on for years.

By the 1990s it was clear that the cooperation between the SDP and Suomen Keskusta (Centre Party, or KESK, formerly Agrarians) was becoming increasingly difficult. The SDP and the Centre Party took turns in forming coalitions with the right-wing Kansallinen Kokoomus (National Coalition Party, or KOK). The first Blue-Red period – a government made up of KOK and SDP – began in 1987. This worked out so badly in practice, however, especially during the crisis years 1991-95, that a broad rainbow coalition led by Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen (SDP) was formed in 1995. The Centre had to go into opposition. In contrast to Germany, where
a coalition extending from the CDU to The Left party would probably be regarded as a nightmare, Finland’s KOK and Left Alliance (formerly SKDL) worked together in the same government until 2003.

How did it happen that the Left managed to cooperate with the very party with which it had the greatest ideological differences? One reason might be that the reactionary elements in the KOK had gone over to the Centre by that time. On moral issues such as sexuality and the relationship between church and state the KOK was more modern than the Centre. At the same time the role of the urban post-materialist middle class became increasingly important in the party.

_Return to the Red-Earth Coalition_

Despite the lack of ideological inhibitions in forming governments the old identities retain their importance. Terms like “working-class movement” and “cooperation of the Left” still mean something in Finland, and the Finnish social democracy cannot do without them. Even the term “left” continues to have a positive echo in society.

Since the early 1990s the SDP had believed that it would always retain its role as the largest party and could freely choose one of the other parties for a coalition. This changed with the parliamentary elections of 16 March 2003, which were won by the opposition Centre Party (KESK). The Communist Party (SKP) received only 0.8 percent of the vote, thus gaining not a single seat in parliament. There was a return to the old _Red-Earth Coalition_ between workers and farmers, which had been a feature of Finnish history since 1937.

In the election campaign the KESK had on many issues positioned itself to the left of the SPD. By promising everything to all sections of society, the KESK created the impression of being to the left of the Left Alliance. It also asserted that the Lipponen government had “pursued a more right-wing policy than any other government could have hoped to”.

The SDP and KESK quickly reached a meeting of minds. After a brief hesitation the SDP accepted the KESK chairperson Anneli Jäätteenmäki as prime minister. At first it was assumed in political circles that a traditionally broad coalition would be formed. The trade-union wing of the SDP spoke out in favour of joining a government of the Left Alliance, which the KESK balked at. On the other hand the SDP did not want to enter a coalition with the Greens. After no agreement had been reached as to whether to include the Greens or the Left Alliance, the Centre and SDP opted for a coalition with the loser of the election, SFP, the party of the Swedish-speaking mi-
nority. As a result the parties from the opposite ends of the political spectrum – the KOK and the Left Alliance – found themselves in a “rainbow opposition” with the Christian Democratic KD, the Greens and the populist True Finns (Perussuomalaiset, PS).

In the Left Alliance, on the other hand, there was defiant talk of a “defensive victory” in the wake of the elections. The parties who had formed the coalition, it was said, had gone on the defensive against the legitimate and loud demands of the Left Alliance which, for example, had not joined in the populist campaign waged by all the other parties for tax cuts and instead championed the cause of those who had to live on the lowest incomes. It had made an issue of the system of redistributing social wealth, widely held to be opaque, and thus influenced the debate within the SDP.

The chairperson of the Left Alliance, Suvi-Anne Siimes, had by the figure she cut in the election campaign developed a modern identity for the party. As Minister of Finance she had also defended the Finnish welfare model. Nevertheless a fierce debate broke out in the Left Alliance after the elections. During the Alliance’s years in office (1995-2003) some of its deputies had criticized many of the measures taken by the government and took the party leadership to task for changing the Left Alliance into a mere handmaiden of the SDP, thus making defeat inevitable. Suvi-Anne Siimes and the trade-union wing responded to their critics by saying that the government had foundered on the disunity and resistance within its own ranks.

Figure 1: Results at the parlamentary elections in 2007 and 2003 in percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre (KESK)</td>
<td>23,1</td>
<td>24,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOK</td>
<td>22,3</td>
<td>18,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>21,4</td>
<td>24,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Alliance</td>
<td>8,8</td>
<td>9,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>8,5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>4,9</td>
<td>5,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2003 the Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises had publicly called for a government composed of KOK and Centre, while in prominent business circles it was stressed how necessary the role of the SDP was. But as the 2007 elections approached it became clear that this time the business elites were working towards a government without the SDP. The aim of their campaign was to assert moneyed interests, cut taxes and abolish the inheritance tax. A discussion arose as to whether engaging the trade unions was dangerous for the economy. Other neo-liberal arguments and methods also played a key role in the 2007 election campaign. The demands of the SDP in this campaign were a good deal farther left than its own policies when in power between 2003 and 2007. There was a particularly detailed discussion of the abolition of inheritance tax in autumn 2005. The employers demanded that a decision on this be taken within the framework of collective bargaining negotiations with the trade unions.

The elections of March 2007 brought the Finns another coalition of the conservative parties KOK and KESK, and the spectre of a “bourgeois government” again became a reality. The junior partners in the present government are the Swedish minority’s SFP party and the Greens. Although the Greens are against new nuclear power stations, they will probably not leave the government on that account as they did in summer 2002. They are an
important fig leaf when it comes to environmental and minority issues, as well as on immigration policy.

The two left-wing parties – Left Alliance and SKP – the Christian KD and the populist PS remained in opposition. Finding itself in opposition was a severe shock for the SDP. An even greater shock, however, was the fact that after the elections there was no upward trend from which it could have profited from as there had been for the SAP in Sweden after the elections of autumn 2006. One cause of the defeat of the left-wing parties in the 2007 elections was seen in the poor voter turnout of only 67.8 percent (1999: 68.3 percent; 2003: 69.6 percent). Like the SDP, the Left Alliance had also lost, although it had presented itself as a left-wing alternative to the SDP. Unlike the defeat of the SDP, which had been expected, the poor showing of the Left Alliance came as a surprise. And although the Communist Party (SKP) maintained it was the only “genuine” left-wing alternative, it lost just as much as the Communist Workers’ Party (KTP).

This gloomy trend continued in the local elections of October 2008: The clear winner was the KOK, while the SDP was only able to retain second place because the Centre Party had lost many voters to the right-wing populist Perussuomalaiset (True Finns). The Left Alliance also lost voters to the PS. The latest opinion polls give cause for panic not only in the ranks of the KESK, but also in the left-wing parties. The Left Alliance has been ousted from fourth place by the ruling Greens, while the SDP is just above the symbolic 20 percent line.

The “New SDP” and three other left-wing orientations

Might one venture the thesis that the cooperation between SDP and KOK, especially after the 1999 elections, was a substitute for the Third Way in other European countries? Was this government coalition fulfilling the political demands formulated in the Anglo-German Schroeder-Blair paper? To this must be countered that Lipponen’s can-do image left no room for theoretical debates about things like New Centre or Third Way, so that the SDP’s and Left Alliance’s old sense of identification with the working-class movement was preserved. Nevertheless after the Lipponen era this issue began to be discussed, and to this day there are different opinions within the SDP as to whether one should preserve the legacy of the Scandinavian welfare state model or seek a Third Way. Thus at the Party Congress in June 2008 the former minister Erkki Tuomioja lost narrowly to his rival Jutta Urpilairen. Tuomioja had always been critical of the Anglo-German paper and had had up to that
moment about 40 percent of the party behind him. The new chairperson, Jutta Urpilainen, however, promised the congress a “new social democracy” oriented towards the Centre, arguing that the Centre had shifted far to the Right, and that the SDP should therefore seek its place there in future. In her opinion the SDP in the Lipponen era had been part of the neo-liberal \textit{Zeitgeist}.

At the risk of simplification today’s Left can be divided into four orientations or milieus:

1. About 30 to 40 percent of the SDP’s members feel they belong to the New Social Democracy, the Third Way or the Center Left.
2. The old working-class movement, together with a third of the SDP and a third of the Left Alliance, forms the organized trade-union movement. This movement is summed up by the term \textit{Ford & Keynes}.
3. One third of the Left Alliance and a majority of the SKP are considered to have post-communist tendencies. The latter aims to unite post-Soviet communism with elements of the fourth milieu.
4. One third each of the post-materialist, feminist and Red-Green milieus identify with the SDP or the Left Alliance. This milieu is the power base of President Tarja Halonen, the best known representative of Scandinavian “state” feminism.

In the SDP there is an unstable balance between the temptation of the “Third Way” and the working-class movement. Many circles in the SDP, especially those from the first and fourth milieus, want to “modernize” the party. This is a perfectly realistic aim that could at least help to create a “capitalism with a human face”. Perhaps one could even describe this tendency as “passive revolution”.

What is to be the future of the Left Alliance? In some countries – Germany, The Netherlands and Denmark – left-wing socialist parties have profited from the crisis of social democracy. But that does not seem to be the case in Finland, where the downward trend continues, and people have not yet freed themselves from the trauma of the past. When it was founded in 1990 the Left Alliance invited all former SKP members, regardless of tendency, to join it. For years the moderates in the Alliance have considered this to be a cardinal error, as former Stalinists were also accepted at the time. The latter are referred to in Finnish as \textit{Taistoiter}, after Taisto Sinisalo who was the leader of the SKP opposition up to the 1980s. Despite all criticism, this orientation is an important element in the Alliance and the parliamentary group. The Taistoiter criticize the closeness of the party leader-
ship to the SDP. With their general demand for more radicalism they make common cause with groups of the third milieu, opposing, for example, the construction of new nuclear power stations.

A prominent victim of this dispute is the former chairperson, Suvi-Anne Siimes, who in the late 1990s made the Alliance’s profile more youthful and attractive for women and was a government minister until spring 2003. In opposition she became increasingly loud in her criticism of many parliamentarians for paralysing the alliance with their obstructive policies and their No to the EU. In 2006 she left the Alliance amid angry scenes. The Left Alliance is faced with the necessity of developing its own profile so as not to be a mere adjunct to the SDP and lose its own standpoint and political independence, but it should not do this by becoming an anti-SDP party unless it is forced to. The present leadership has learned from the internal quarrels. In its present chairperson, Martti Korhonen, it has gained a calm arbiter able to mediate between the factions. At the same time the Left Alliance is edging cautiously towards the post-materialist milieu by adopting libertarian issues. In the person of the young deputy chair, Paavo Arhinmäki, the fourth orientation is now more strongly represented in the party hierarchy.

Contradictory perspectives on the defensive

Will the global economic crisis lead to the ultimate end of the social democratic era in the Nordic countries? The crucial issue for the Left is whether the cohesion of the trade unions can be preserved. And how can the trade unions influence government policy? The backbone of the Left is the good cooperation between Social Democrats and Left Alliance members in the trade unions and their central organization, the SAK. But they are mainly concerned with resisting further neo-liberal encroachments, expectations having been reduced to a minimum: It’s just a question of seeing that things don’t get worse. But although the cooperation of the Left remains on the official agenda, there is a lack of enthusiasm and shared visions. Now the SDP is hoping to become an alternative to the KOK or the Centre and in this way to get back into power. The left-wing parties are jointly demanding more assistance for local authorities, enterprises and all those in need.

In these times of crisis a danger that was previously seen as being under control is the increased support for the PS, which defines itself as being an anti-immigration, but not an openly xenophobic party. Besides populists, formerly left-wing workers in industries hit by the crisis also vote for the PS. However this cannot be regarded as a dangerous form of right-wing
Die Linke in Europa

extremism. The support for the PS in the suburbs – especially in the Helsinki region and in Turku – reflects the “normal pathology of modern industrialized societies”. The PS appeal to the instinctive defensive reactions of the common man. It may not be an out-and-out racist party, but racists are prepared to vote for it, and some of its candidates ran right-wing extremist campaigns. The party, which currently has poll ratings of 6 to 7 percent regards the Danish and Norwegian FP as its models.

An important issue for the Left is whether Finland should join NATO. At present there is a broad consensus in favour, reaching from the SFP to the PS. NATO’s current integration strategy can be seen as an offensive statement that Finland belongs to the West. The former social democratic president (1994-2000) and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Martti Ahtisaari, plays an important role in stimulating Atlanticist sentiment. However, Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen (Centre) has made it clear that there are no plans for accession in the next ten years. There are more and more advocates of NATO membership within the SDP. Centre and SDP play a key role here, for even a pro-NATO party like KOK realizes that such a decision cannot be taken without the assent of the SDP. Thus even in a conservative era there is a need for consensus in the Finnish system of government, which can enable the Left to have a say in key questions of economic, social and foreign policy. Full use must be made of this opportunity in the coming years.
Since the 1920s, a relatively strong Labour Party has been confronting a non-socialist camp that is fragmented into four to five political parties whose policies have always proved difficult to aggregate. In the middle of the crisis of the 1930s, the Norwegian Labour Party (Det norske arbeiderparti) established a minority government, following a deal with the Farmers’ Party in 1935. In the 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 national, branch and workplace level (including rules for labour conflicts) were established.

Between 1945 and 1961, the Labour Party had a majority in parliament. The Socialist Peoples’ Party was created in 1961, mainly by Labour Party members who opposed Norwegian membership in NATO and the nuclear arms race. Following the referendum on EC membership in 1975, the Socialist Left Party (SV) was established by a merger between the Socialist People’s Party, EC-critical members of the Labour party, a minority section of the Communist Party, and activists from the environmental and feminist movements. From 1961 to 2005, there were several minority Labour Party governments which governed with the tacit support of the SV parliamentary group, but with no negotiated coalition agreement between the two parties.

The Red Election Alliance was founded in the 1970s as the electoral wing of an extremely disciplined Maoist party. The alliance, which has recently been renamed Rødt (Red), pursues political objectives that, with few exceptions, hardly differ at all from those of the SV. The main assets of the party are several well-known labour representatives in big industrial plants, and a daily newspaper which, during the last fifteen years, has become the non-sectarian paper of the whole Norwegian Left, including the left wing of the Labour Party; the party no longer runs the newspaper today, but is still a minority owner. Norway’s Communist Party (NKP) is for all practical purposes defunct. In the last parliamentary elections in 2005, it received only 1070 votes.
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Norway also has a small Green Party, which got 3700 votes (0.23%) in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 12,000 votes (0.6%) in the local elections in 2007. The main reason for the absence of a green party comparable to those in the rest of Europe is that the SV, like the Socialist People’s Party in Denmark, has been spearheading environmental policies since the early 1970s. Both parties have since then presented themselves as red-and-green parties.

Table 1 Election Results in the last three parliamentary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Votes in Percent</th>
<th>Seats in the Storting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Labour Party (Norske Arbeiderparti)</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Left Party (Sosialistisk Venstreparti)</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Electoral Alliance (Rød Valgallianse)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party (Senterpartiet)</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian People’s Party (Kristelig Folkeparti)</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Left (Venstre; the liberal party)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right (Høyre, the conservative party)</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Party (Fremskrittsparti, populist right)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splinter parties:</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dimensions of Party Competition

The Norwegian party system is divided along lines that confuse not only many foreign observers, but even Norwegian voters themselves.

‣ In social questions, for instance taxes, social and health services issues, labour law etc., the usual right-wing paradigm is dominant. But here, the centre parties are often close to the parties of the left, and the Pro-gressive Party, the populist right, sometimes supports leftist positions, too.

‣ In questions concerning structural changes of the economy, such as privatisation, deregulation and EU membership, the neo-liberal pole in Norwegian politics consists of the Right (the conservatives) and the dominant part of the Labour Party.

‣ The Centre Party – which until 1959 called itself the Farmers’ Party – has since the early 1990s developed into a reliable supporter of the public sector, opposing privatisation and market orientation in the municipalities. In regard to the prevailing neo-liberal policy, it has moved clearly to the left of the Labour Party.

‣ In environmental issues and questions of international solidarity (development aid, refugee policy), the three centre parties and the SV are united in their advocacy of environmental issues and more solidarity with people in need outside Norway. At the same time, these four parties are the ones that oppose Norwegian membership in the European Union.

The Elections of 2001: A Historic Defeat for the Labour Party

The parliamentary elections in September 2001 led to a historic defeat for the governing Labour Party and a doubling of the vote of the SV. The result was a general shift to the right, since the Labour Party lost almost twice as much as the SV gained. After the elections in 2001, a weak minority centre-right government was established by The Right, the Christian People’s Party and The Left (the Liberals), with just 62 of 165 seats. Thus, the centre-right government had to rely on the support of the unpredictable and often xenophobic Progressive Party (Fremskrittsparti). This party feeds on law-and-order issues and on anti-immigrant feelings in part of the electorate. It gains most votes through its populist social profile, which includes
lavish promises of better services for all who need it, focusing especially on elderly and sick people.

_The Elections of 2005: A Narrow Centre-Left Victory_

The disastrous results of the 2001 election and pressure from various parts of the trade union movement forced the Labour Party leadership to change its electoral strategy.

During the 1990s, many branch unions, and gradually, too, the central trade union leadership, were forced to recognise the fact that they could no longer rely on the Labour Party in several of their core issues, including market orientation and privatisation of telecommunications, posts, railways and other public services. The trade unions came to the conclusion that the only way to bring the Labour Party towards a leftist policy would be to force them into a coalition with the SV. Their second insight was that they would need to articulate their demands in such a noticeable manner that a coalition government would have to listen.

The turning point was reached in the autumn of 2004, when the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (Landsorganisasjonen i Norge, LO) started what was called _the long election campaign_, with the proclaimed aim of establishing for the first time a left majority government based on a coalition between the Labour Party and the SV. In spring 2005, Labour, the SV and the Centre Party declared at their party congresses their intentions to form a common government, provided they were able to win a majority in the _Storting_ elections.

Indeed, the centre-left alliance won the elections in September 2005, but the victory of 87 seats to 82 for the other parties, was narrow. The SV lost heavily compared to the elections in 2001 – and even more compared to the polls. Most opinions polls between the elections of 2001 and August 2005 showed results for the SV of between 14 and 18 percent. The main reason for the setback was that the leading Labour Party politicians for the first time campaigned for policies close to those of the SV.

_The Centre-Left Government_

The Labour Party won 32.7%, more than twice as many votes as the two smaller parties, the SV and the Centre Party, combined (15.3 %). However, though in theory the Labour Party held a strong position, the negotiations led into an astonishingly positive coalition agreement:
1. The government platform is a voluminous document of 74 pages, surprisingly detailed and concrete on many issues – quite the opposite of the brief, general document that would have best served the interests of the dominant partner.

2. In a cabinet of nineteen ministers, ten are to be provided by the Labour Party, five by the SV (among them the Minister of Finance) and four by the Centre Party, giving the Labour Party its smallest conceivable majority in the government.

3. On many issues, the platform represents views to the left of the Labour Party’s election programme. This applies to international issues as well as to economic, regional and social policy.

4. The coalition committed itself to stopping the deregulation of public services in the state sector and to harmonising its policy regarding such international institutions as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO.

**Leftwing Parties in Norway: The Social Structure of Voters**

Today, both Labour and the 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 majority of women has developed gradually since the early 1990s, probably as a result of the fact that women predominantly find employment in the growing public sector. This sector is traditionally supported by Labour and SV against attacks from the right of the political spectrum.

**Table 2 Shares of voters won by the parties, by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Socialist Left Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In terms of age distribution, on the other hand, the electoral base of the two parties is opposite. The Labour Party is most popular among voters above the age of 50, while SV has only few supporters above the age of 60. Rather, the SV is strongly supported by voters in their twenties.

According to Table 3, the Labour Party has more support from the relatively few voters with only primary education, whereas the SV mostly attracts voters with education beyond secondary level.

Table 3: Shares of voters won by the parties, by education level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Socialist Left Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary education</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the 1960s, the two parties had almost identical social profiles with regard to the types of employment of their voters; today they differ greatly. The Labour Party is still very much a “labour” party, whereas the SV has become a party for employees in the public sector. In 2005, half the voters and 75 percent of the members of the SV were employed in the public sector, whereas the overall proportion of people employed in the public sector was 28%.

Table 4: Percentage of electoral segments supporting the left parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Socialist Left Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue collar workers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower white collar</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher white collar</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers / Fishermen</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When voters in 2005 were asked which party had the best policy on various political issues, the Labour Party led the league in the fight against unemployment (54%), health policy (39%) and care for the elderly (38%). The SV scored best on environmental policy (35%), education (22%) and care for families and children (21%).

Party Membership

Norwegian parties, like those in other European countries, have experienced a decline in membership over the past decades. While in 1995, the Labour Party had 72,600 individual members, this number dropped to 51,500 in 2007. In 1995, the option of collective membership, under which local trade unions could register parts of their memberships as members of the Labour Party, was also abolished. Partly because of this, the party had in 1950 counted more than 200,000 members.

The SV reached its maximum in 1992, with 14,000 members. The membership dropped to 7300 in 2001, but has since increased to 9500, as of 2007. Since 1990, women have constituted a majority of the SV membership. The latest comparable data for the two parties dates back to 2001. At that time, 57 percent of SV members were women, while the percentage was just 40 in the Labour Party. A women’s quota (the 40-percent rule) for all types of non-paid elected positions within the party has been part of the SV statute since the party’s formation in 1975; it was inherited from the Socialist People’s Party. The Labour Party introduced similar statutes ten years later.

In 2001, 64 percent of the members of the Labour Party were members of a trade union. For the SV, the figure was 76 percent. For membership in other organisations, there are noticeable differences: 26 percent of SV members were members of an environmental organisation, while that was true of only 3 percent of Labour Party members. Similar figures apply to memberships in internationally oriented organisations: 37 percent for SV members, but only 6 percent for members of the Labour Party. For membership in Nei til EU (the “No to the EU” campaign), the figures were 38 and 2 percent, respectively. Only 1 percent of SV members and 7 percent of Labour Party members were members of organisations in favour of EU membership. Members of SV are politically involved outside their party to a higher degree than members of the Labour Party. In 2001, only 12 percent of Labour Party members had never taken part in action groups, demonstrations or strikes, signed proclamations, or given money in support to such acts or events. In the SV, the corresponding figure was 53 percent.

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49 Cf. ibid, p. 274-75.
50 Cf. ibid, p. 284.
Proportions of Non-Western Immigrants

There is no reliable information on 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 leftwing parties than in the other Norwegian parties. This is consistent with data from the municipal council elections in 2007, when 180,000 non-western immigrants, or approximately 5 percent of the electorate, had the right to vote. The voter participation rate for the non-western electorate was 37 percent, while for the electorate as a whole, it was 62 percent. Thus, less than 3 percent of those who actually voted were non-western immigrants.

A total of 136 non-western immigrants were elected to municipal councils, which amounts to 1.3 percent of all council members, so that non-western immigrants are clearly underrepresented here. The two leftwing parties were the only ones to exceed this level, with 2.4 percent of Labour Party councillors and 4.5 percent of SV councillors being non-western immigrants.51 The most common countries of origin of the current non-western SV councillors are Iran (41), Iraq (22), Chile (19), Bosnia-Herzegovina (18) and Somalia (17).

Programmatic Positions and Political Action

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 success (5-6 percent in relation to 35-45 percent) and in their political views were considered too large.

Since then, frustration has accumulated. Several Labour minority governments sought support from the SV on social issues, and support from the right when it came to neoliberal structural projects (deregulation, privatisation etc.). The party leadership – and gradually the rank and file – realised that this situation could only be solved by drawing the Labour Party into an alliance in which forces from outside Labour could push back its neoliberal tendencies.

Since 2005, the SV and the trade unions have been able to force the Labour Party to adopt more progressive policies. For instance, the party has proclaimed a break with its previous policies of privatisation and of introducing market competition into the health and social services. In several

areas, the new government has reversed policies that had been pursued by all Norwegian governments, including the Labour Party governments that continued the neoliberal policy that the right-wing government had abruptly adopted in 1981.

In the present coalition government, the Labour Party finds itself promoting policies in crucial areas that the party leaders often do not believe in themselves. Many of them don’t believe that it is possible to avoid the Europe-wide strategy of adjusting to neoliberal coercion. In the 1990s, the Labour Party leadership used to look for cooperation in the right camp whenever it was in trouble. After the dramatic defeat in the elections of 2001, the “easy way out” was instead seen as cooperation within the left, based on a recognition that the trade unions – and the voters – had so clearly moved in that direction.

There is no doubt that there are several disagreements between the three government parties that impede the work of the common government.

1. Foreign policy issues: The parties are divided on whether Norwegian forces should participate in far-off wars.
2. Different opinions on the weight given to environmental concerns vs. economic gain, e.g. on the question of the extent of oil and gas exploration in the Norwegian Sea and the Arctic Ocean.
3. Disagreement on whether the right of reservation in the EEA agreement should be used against European laws that threaten Norwegian interests.

The foreign policy compromise for the parliamentary period lasting until 2009 is based on three pillars:

1. The Labour Party accepts that, as long as the government lasts, Norway will not join the European Union.
2. The SV accepts that the government will continue Norway’s membership in NATO and the EEA.
3. The Centre Party, a staunch supporter of NATO membership, accepts that the government will continue Norway’s membership in the EEA.

52 Although Norway is not a member of the European Union, it is tied to its economic regulations by the European Economic Area (EEA) Treaty of 1992, which integrated Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein into the Single European Market. This means that all internal market directives and regulations apply to Norway, although Norway has a right of reservation against the implementation of any specific directive or regulation – a right which it has never used to date.
This compromise is not a stable one. The fundamental principles of the European Union, the free movement of products, services, capital and labour combined with the right of establishment of businesses, limit the space within which any government can effectively “correct market failures”. Due to its membership in the EEA, Norway is in this respect in a similar situation to that of EU countries. The recent rulings of the European Court of Justice have limited labour and trade union rights to such an extent that the dream of a “social Europe” has turned into a social nightmare.

The toughest part of the coalition negotiations in 2005 was on military “out of area” operations. The crucial point was whether a clear UN mandate should be a precondition for Norwegian participation in international military operations. The Labour Party negotiators argued until the very last night for weaker preconditions, such as “in accordance with International Law” or “in accordance with the UN Charter”, but ultimately accepted proposals from the SV demanding “a clear UN mandate”.

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 in the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF. The Centre Party has to some extent shared this criticism, while the Labour Party has accepted and – when it was alone in government – led policies which have been indistinguishable from those of other European countries and the USA.
On 7 December 2008 the party chairpersons of the three Swedish opposition parties publicly announced that the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party were going to contest the 2010 elections to the diet (Riksdagen) on a joint electoral platform. Shortly before this the Party Executive of the Left Party had given the green light for the project. The aim of the present opposition’s political programme is to defeat the right-wing government alliance in the next Riksdagen elections (2010) and replace it with a Red-Green coalition government. The news hit the Swedish media and the rank and file of the Left Party like a bombshell.

One reason for this was that not long before they had been told a quite different story. On 8 October 2008 the Chairwoman of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party (SAP), Mona Sahlin, and the two spokespersons of the Greens (Miljöpartiet), Maria Wetterstrand and Peter Eriksson, had informed the public that SAP and Greens had agreed on a long-term cooperation arrangement with the aim of gaining power in 2010. The Left Party was ignored, and Mona Sahlin issued a very clear No to any cooperation with the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), citing the Left’s “fundamentalist attitude” to financial discipline. Shortly afterwards Sahlin, Eriksson and Wetterstrand demonstratively set off on a political tour of Sweden, while Lars Ohly, the chairman of the Left Party, for all his stated willingness to take a “constructive” part in future discussions among the opposition parties, had to stay at home.

However some members of the Social Democratic Party Executive protested against Sahlin’s categorical No to left-wing cooperation, and, faced with growing pressure from the ranks of her own party and from trade-union circles, she found herself reluctantly forced to resume talks with Lars Ohly and the Left Party. Soon the political sensation was complete and the Left Party the winner of the race.

But the whole incident was a sensation for deeper reasons. An election victory for the new Red-Green “Alliance for Full Employment, More Justice and a Better Environment” would be Sweden’s first left-wing coalition government. For the first time ever it had proved possible to wrest a coali-
tion promise from the Social Democracy even before an election, and on top of that the Swedish Left Party for the first time has the prospect of becoming a governing party. This would indeed be a historic event and it is within reach. With the opinion polls currently showing a double-digit lead over the ruling right-wing coalition, a change of government in Stockholm seems all but inevitable.

At such a historic moment it is little wonder that it took the three participating parties so long to reach agreement on a coalition. For the Left Party the prospect of joining a government opens another chapter in the long and painful process of revising its self-image. This process was initiated in the 1990s and soon produced a split in the party and is now peaking with the formation of a firm electoral alliance with the Greens and Social Democrats, which is being accompanied by a fundamental reform of party work.

Tectonic shift in the political system

The fact that at the end of 2008 the chairman of the post-communist Left Party of Sweden was able to go before the cameras of the Swedish media in the Stockholm Riksdagen and present himself as the political winner in the struggle to unify the opposition, is a direct result of the last Riksdagen election campaign, when the SAP, the Greens and the Left Party had been engaged in an increasingly close, albeit increasingly complicated form of cooperation in government matters since 1998. It was a cooperation that began with the toleration of a Social Democratic minority government. In 2002 it was given firmer form with the adoption of a kind of declaration of intent for the life of the existing parliament and underpinned in 2006 with a clear statement that this cooperation was intended to continue after the election.

However this form of cooperation met with a positively traumatic rejection from the Swedish voters in September 2006. This marked the end of an epoch in Swedish party politics and the transition to a bipolar party system. Swedish politics is now for all practical purposes dual and takes place between two political alliances that exclude any possibility of inter-bloc cooperation per se. This in principle marked the end of an over 70-year phase in Swedish party politics. Although up to the 2006 election there were also in practice two political “blocs”, the “epicentre” of parliamentary politics was the SAP, which had no interest in binding itself too firmly or for any length of time to specific political partners. Instead the smaller Centre parties and the opposition to the left of the Social Democracy were regu-
larly played off against each other so as to keep political power (for a long time successfully) out of the hands of the Right. As a result, Social Democratic governments stayed in power for decades either with their own majorities or as a minority by doing deals with bourgeois Centre parties or letting themselves be tolerated by deputies of the Communists/Left Party.\footnote{The Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) was founded in April 1917 under the name of Social Democratic Left Party of Sweden (SSV) and joined the Communist International in 1919. By accepting the notorious 21 theses of the Comintern in 1921 the party was obliged to adopt the name of Communist Party of Sweden (SKP). In 1967 the party was re-christened the “Left Party-Communists” (VPK), and in 1990 it finally received its present name: the Left Party.}

The former dilemma of the Left Party

An interesting phenomenon was that there were times – e.g. in the 1970s – when the Left Party could have toppled a Social Democratic cabinet but refrained from doing so, as this would have opened the way to a right-wing coalition. The awareness of the Left’s political dilemma enabled Social Democratic governments to reach political compromises with Liberals and Centrists on major issues, such as getting structural economic reforms through parliament. At the same time the SAP government could rely on obtaining the support of the Left Party on important issues where no agreement with the political Centre was possible. The Left’s toleration of Social Democratic governments was as good as automatic.

It was not until the 1990s that this long-established pattern began to change somewhat. At the beginning of that decade the new Party Executive of the recently renamed Left Party introduced a post-communist recasting of the party profile. At that time the Left Party found itself in a profound crisis. The party was in danger of failing to clear the 4-percent hurdle to the Riksdagen, and the political manifesto had been overtaken by history after barely three years, as Eurocommunism was basically dead after the collapse of the communist regimes. Furthermore the party membership tended to be elderly and traditionally concentrated in Sweden’s northern regions, which had been steadily losing in importance with the opening of the Swedish market to international capital interests.

In this difficult situation the ambitious Party Chairwoman Gudrun Schyman successfully managed to give the party a new and very feminist profile in the media. At the same time the party’s traditional programme was gradually revised, and since 1995 the Left Party has been described in its statutes as a “socialist and feminist” party. This made the Left Party attractive to
new groups of voters, and it continuously increased its share of the vote in the Rikdagen elections. In 1998, while the Social Democrats were going through a crisis of confidence, the Left Party scored its historic electoral success in which it received 12 percent of the vote, making it the third-largest party in the Stockholm Rikdagen.

Although the successes of the Left Party forced the ruling Social Democracy to come to the negotiating table, the SAP began by playing off the Greens and the Left Party against each other. It was interesting to note that the Greens, despite having achieved considerably worse election results, were able to do better in the negotiations by entering into talks with the bourgeois opposition as well. The Left Party, on the other hand, had much less freedom of action, as it only negotiated with the Social Democrats. After the 2002 Rikdagen elections, having learned from this experience, they joined with the Greens to force the ruling Social Democrats for the first time ever to enter into a long-term and contractually guaranteed cooperation agreement.

After the 2002 election the two junior coalition partners were allowed to contribute councillors to the ministries and were awarded one provincial governorship each (Gotland and Jämtland), while the SAP continued to form its own government. This agreement enabled the Social Democrats to stay in power, reduced the Greens’ scope for negotiations, and gave the Left its first ever opportunity to exert indirect influence on the work of the government.

The most far-reaching effect was the establishment of a purely dual system in the Rikdagen, as SAP, Greens and Left Party presented a united front in parliament, while the opposition consisted of four bourgeois parties, which also worked very closely together. But while the left-wing side sought no particular unity on questions of principle – on the contrary, it was noted that there was no possibility of agreement on the issue of Swedish EU membership or on a basic analysis of the Swedish economy – the bourgeois parties worked systematically to achieve unity on basic issues so that they could form a firm electoral alliance by 2006. This alliance was formed in 2005 and achieved its aim of breaking the SAP’s twelve-year monopoly of power and assumed the reins of government in autumn 2006. Although the big loser of the election was the SAP, the election was a catastrophe for the much smaller Left Party. With 5.85 percent of the votes its support had plunged to the level it had been at during the identity crisis of the early 1990s.

The Party Executive wanted to know the reason for this and this time did not intend to content itself with blaming the hostile bourgeois media for
its defeat. In its initial analysis of the election results it found that the Left Party’s election campaign had been unfocused, and that the main issues of its platform had received little media attention. The analysts also criticized the party for a half-hearted campaign, pointing out that there had been an insufficient effort to reach out to voters.

What to do?

In 2007, on the basis of the realization that the local party structures of the Left Party were often weak and made even weaker by national election results, a group was formed with the task of seeking positive examples of left-wing politics in Europe which could then be imported to Sweden. The group’s mission was summed up by its name: “The Art of Party Building”. At the same time the party’s Programme Commission was charged with fundamentally reforming the party programme. Efforts were made in the Riksdagen to achieve unity within the opposition.

The aim of the political programme is to defeat the right-wing government alliance in the next Riksdagen elections (2010) and replace it with a Red-Green coalition government. As of 7 December 2008, as was mentioned at the outset, this political aim is now within reach. The model for this is the Left Coalition that has been in power in neighbouring Norway since 2005. As in Norway, the Social Democratic party leadership was almost forced by the industrial trade unions to draw up a joint election platform together with the Left Party. To this end, as in Norway, inter-party working groups were formed in January 2009, to work out the key points of this election platform. As in Norway, an attempt was made to create a favourable negotiating atmosphere by making the party’s programme more specific and eliminating outdated political jargon. The political aim has thus largely been achieved, and Sweden’s Left Party seems all set to form part of a government.

The aim of the current renewal goes much further than that, however. The party is to be fundamentally reformed, new structures are to be created for daily party work, and the political understanding of party members has to be improved. An important point of departure is the sober realization that both the number of members and their degree of activity has fallen off in

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54 In this connection it should be noted that in Sweden municipal, regional and national elections are held simultaneously.
recent years, which in the long run could jeopardize the very existence of the Left Party.

It has been found that – except during election campaigns – party life is largely sustained by a very small core of active members, so that the day-to-day political work of the Left Party has become synonymous with municipal administration and at best routine, old-fashioned election campaign work. The party’s other activities often involve little more than sitting on parliamentary committees that are sometimes hard to bring up to strength. At the same time, however, it is stressed that the party is deeply committed to its extra-parliamentary activities, such as the active participation of party members in the trade unions, the tenants’ movement, etc.

In order to resolve the dilemma created by the fact that in the past there have been too few constructive conflicts between the respective advocates of realistic and fundamentalist policies, there is now to be an attempt to learn from positive examples, such as that of the Socialist Party in the Netherlands. Moving the Left Party in the direction of a party with local roots and links to civic groups is intended to prevent its profile from becoming blurred and determined by its not always positive media coverage. Ways must be found of expanding citizen participation while emerging from political anonymity. The aim is to make the party less vulnerable to political success or failure in parliamentary elections. Following the Dutch model, such methods as public opinion polls and door-to-door canvassing should be used to demonstrate a regular presence at the local level.

The future of the Left Party should also be seen as a kind of reconstruction of the party as a movement. The Left should be present in Sweden’s extra-parliamentary movements, which have regained in strength in recent years. This is of course a challenge that the Swedish Left, like other European left-wing parties, has to face, and a task that may be easier said than done. Consequently the party has recently taken a conscious decision to take part in open and radical political networks, and can already claim to have played an active role in the 2008 European Social Forum in Malmö and to be present in the young radical environmental action network “Climax”.

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55 At the end of 2008 the number of party members was around 11,000, down from 14,000 in 2002.
Whether this ambitious programme of renewal can be implemented in its entirety and the Left Party re-invented and given new life, remains to be seen. However it is already evident that party work – at least in the urban centres of the Swedish Left, such as Lund/Malmö, Gothenburg, Stockholm, and Uppsala – has undergone a revival. This is due not least to the recruitment of new and mostly younger members who have experience of extra-parliamentary movements, and who out of dislike for the present government’s policies are now prepared to take the step of joining the party.
In a recent sketch on Rory Bremner’s BBC comedy show, Blair and Brown meet one year after the hand-over of the premiership. Brown: ‘You went lucky. You got out just in time.’ Blair: ‘What do you mean lucky? You don’t think this was an accident? I’m not stupid!’ Indeed, Tony Blair ended his tenure as prime minister at a point in time when the historical status quo which underpinned New Labour’s dominance in British society was beginning to disintegrate. More than one year on, liberal academics (such as David Marquand) and left-leaning critics (such as Anthony Barnett) agree that the advent of the financial crisis poses a major problem for the New Labour government – a problem resulting from a widespread breakdown of trust in anglo-traditional neoliberal certainties as well as a loss of confidence in British historical institutions.\(^{58}\) According to current polls, 70 per cent of the British now think that the super-rich do not contribute sufficiently to the welfare of society in their country, and that they ‘deserved’ to be taxed more. At the same time, more and more Brits get sensitised to the interrelationship of wealth accumulation, speculation, and crisis.\(^{59}\)

As yet, the only immediate party-political effect of the crisis is a (temporary?) setback for the Scottish nationalists (SNP). Their erstwhile socialist rhetoric had, from the early 1990s onwards, been completely reworked by the much-trumpeted vision of Scotland as a potential neo-liberal wonder-economy if only independence could be achieved, all dished up with Anti-English insinuations. However, the unexpected Labour win in the Glenrothes by-election (October 2008) seems to suggest that the Scottish electorate begin to understand that, in the Brave New World of world economic recession, the tenet ‘small is beautiful’ holds no longer. The result promises a new lease of life for the idea of a multi-cultural, multi-national Britain, and for a new Scottish Socialist Party, who went into political


oblivion 3 years ago through wranglings of their own making. The question posed in this article, however, holds for the whole of Britain: What are the political resources of the British left at this crucial juncture of British political life? Will it be capable of profiting from the crisis of legitimacy of the economic and institutional establishment which emenates from the economic crisis?

In this article, I shall review the three most important actors in the political field: First, I shall look at the Labour left, then at the activities of the left in the trades unions, and finally I will look at the new realignments of different political groupings in the far left, in so far as they (aspire to) become electorally relevant. First though, in order to map these actors in their social terrain, a look at the current macro-political situation and government acting under the impact of the crisis seems in order.

A ‘new’ New Labour? Labours reluctant reconversion to (some sort of) social democracy

As much as the New Labour project is being attacked by the left in Britain, the Labour Party is still the main point of reference for its political compass, even in its often outright rejection. The prime reason is electoral – the British parliament is elected on a first-past-the-post system, in which one territory (constituency) is only ever represented by one individual member of parliament. For a long time, that has been making the Labour Party the first traditional port of call for many left-wing activists, and generally for many people with a left-wing view of life. However, the more and more visible contradiction between the grassroots still dominated by some kind of left-wing sentiment, and the unashamedly right-wing practice of governance under the New Labour leadership has lead to a continuous withering-away of the party: When Blair was elected amid high hopes, the Labour Party had 405 000 members. At the end of 2007 this had shrunk to an all-time record low of 176 000.\(^{60}\)

The few hopes for a change in strategy after the Blair-Brown handover (voiced e.g. by Polly Toynbee of The Guardian) were quickly dashed. They hovered vaguely around the idea to make up for Blair’s charismatic rapport with the middle classes by a more welfarist appeal to the traditional Labour electorate. Brown has since steadfastly refused any such move. As recently as Spring 2008, Brown pushed an agenda of further deregulation ranging from financial services to working time on the European level, and blocked

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\(^{60}\) UK electoral commission, quoted in The Daily Telegraph, 30 July 2008.
any move in the direction of tax harmonisation. In the same year, the abolition of the 10 per cent tax credit, which left scores of low-income earners worse off, resulted in a PR desaster for the prime minister.

Partly as a result, the party has been in a steady decline in the polls (lagging 12 per cent behind the Tories in January 2009). The Labour agony makes a hung parliament, or an outright victory of the Conservative Party in the general elections next year, very probable.

In August 2008, however, under the impression of the near-bankruptcies of Northern Rock and HBOS, the government executed a U-turn in fiscal and economic policy. The state so vilified by City bankers and New Labour ideologues alike, now offered practically unlimited cover for the losses which these, and later other banks, admitted to have incurred. In November 2008, the government decided to bolster the ‘real’ economy with a stimulus spending package of about 21 billion Pounds financed by a massive increase in Britain’s budget deficit. The banking giants HBOS and RBS were practically taken over by the state, a step unheard of in the history of the market-adhering British economy.

All this highlights the dimension of a reversal of policies in which major tenets of neoliberal macro-economics are being discarded. (Not) surprisingly, however, this not been used by the Labour government to rally around what could be a new social-democratic vision, and to set the agenda in the political argument with the Conservatives in due time for the upcoming election. On the contrary, Brown and chancellor Darling emphasise again and again the pragmatic and transitory nature of their acting. Be it because of or in spite of this: Hopes - or fears - of a general strategic left-swing of the Labour Party abound in the media and in inner-left debates. Are they justified?

1. The Labour Left

At the moment, the most important institutional core of the active left within the Labour Party is the Socialist Campaign Group. This parliamentary group of Labour MPs (Members of Parliament) developed in the aftermath of the inner-party confrontation between the ‘traditionalist’ left and the so-called ‘reformer’ right in the 1970s and 80s, especially in the fight for the retention of socialist tenets in the programme of the party. At

61 Throughout 2009, the main stimulus of domestic consumption, according to the plans, is the cut in VAT by 2 per cent, which alone is projected to result in a rise of total public debt to nearly 8 per cent of Britain’s GDP. All figures from Guardian Weekly 24/10/08, and Guardian Weekly, 21/11/08.
present, it numbers about 20 to 30 MPs. The group was mainly set up and, until 2001, lead by Tony Benn, who is still widely respected as the spiritus rector of the British Left. The political principles of the MPs who sign up to membership are the advocacy of social justice, the redistribution of wealth, equality of opportunity in education, the rejection of nuclear weapons and ‘humanitarian interventions’ in foreign policy, but also, in many cases, a rejection of the EU, which is perceived as little more than the common market and as only serving capitalist designs.

It seems that the mobilisation surrounding British participation in the Iraq war have given a new impetus to what was for a rather long time a rather sidelined political project. Arguably the most innovative development was, in 2004, the setting-up of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). Its chairman is the MP John MacDonnell. The aim of the organisation is to ‘to appeal to the tens of thousands who have turned away from Labour in disillusion and despair’, in the face of New Labour hegemony. In an attempt to reach out to the grass-roots of the party in the face of a party apparatus strictly in New Labour hands, the socialist MPs apparently set out to develop their own organisational infrastructure within the party. At the same time, another fresh step forward into the world outside Labour was the establishment of the Left Economics Advisory Panel (LEAP). LEAP is a panel of left-wing economists that has started to publish academic analyses on the crisis, and is coming up with worked-through neokynsian proposals for an alternative macro-economic and fiscal policy. These may be highly desirable, even necessary steps forward. However, as yet, Socialist Campaign or LRC, while being recognised as one of the political factions of importance within Labour, have not achieved anything like a blocking minority in order e.g. to challenge the passage of major New Labour projects either on the National Executive Committee of the party or the party conference. Even less so in the Parliamentary Labour Party: Intent on mounting a challenge to Gordon Brown in the 2007 elections of the party leader, John MacDonnell was not able to collect even the twenty-four signatures by Labour MPs he needed to get his name on the ballot sheets.

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62 On retiring from his parliamentary seat, Benn said he would withdraw from parliament ‘in order to devote more time to politics’.
63 cf. LRC website: www.l-r-c.org.uk/about/
64 The upstarts certainly look promising, with an apparently very campaign and project oriented political style, lowering the threshold for activists and simply interested citizens to participate. See LRC website.
However, dissent with the old New Labour policies and style has spread far beyond the realms of the traditional socialist left. In 2005, the pressure group Compass was set up, a think-tank and activist network which also criticises the New Labour consensus in the party from the left, but with less of a focus: proposals stray from the fields of tax increases for the rich to campaigns for sustainable development to human rights legislation in the UK. There is also a Compass group of MPs, but its personals do not necessarily project a sense of political direction. In different left-wing blogs it has even been suggested that Compass serves New Labour well by trying to assuage rifts between the leadership of the party and ‘Middle Labour’, the mainstream of the party grassroots.  

Two more pressure groups within Labour also contribute to airing left-wing dissent within the party. Grassroots Alliance and Save the Labour Party are both groups of party activists arguing for the democratisation of party structures. They blame the drainage of party members and the authoritarian style of leadership on the New Labour functionaries. Through a punctual cooperation with the LRC, they ensured in 2008 that 4 out of 6 newly appointed members to the party’s National Executive Committee were from their slate.

Even if their programmatic aims differ, all four formations share the same procedural approach towards Labour: It is the attempt to ‘regain the party’, to create relative majorities for a strategic change in the politics of Labour. The basic problem with this approach is that it is the struggle for positions which themselves have already been widely disconnected from the actual policy-making of the leadership at the top – passed motions at party conferences are an embarrassment to New Labour, but not more, and certainly not an effective challenge of its power within Labour. Moreover, in the face of the drainage of committed leftwingers from Labour, there is the genuine question if even radical social-democratic (i.e. redistributive) policies would still be capable of winning majorities in the party. Surely, the campaigns for a democratisation of the party had their success when the leadership agreed in 2007 for the first time to have at least the deputy leader of the party directly elected by the party members. In the end, though, the centre-left candidate John Cruddas still lost against the Brown-loyalist Harriet Harman. Labour’s much-awaited, much-feared, swing to the left, if ever and how ever it may have been possible, is over before it began.

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65 The resignation of Jon Trickett MP from the chairmanship of the Compass Group of Labour MPs in October 2008, followed by his immediate appointment to the post of Private Personal Secretary to the Prime Minister does not contribute towards dispelling these rumours.
2. The Trade unions – defensiveness and lack of courage

Without doubt, the British trade unions remain an important reservoir of left-wing activism. In 2008, the trade unions organised in the TUC had a membership of about seven million employees (the large majority of which work in the public sector). Throughout the Blair-Era, the decline in trade union membership could be stopped. However, the unwillingness of the New Labour government to repeal any of the anti-union legislation devised under Thatcher meant that the structural inability of the unions to engage in strike action was cemented, especially in the private sector of the economy, where unionisation of employees has dropped to a mere 17.8 per cent.66 The unions too placed some hopes in Gordon Brown’s accession, which were quickly dashed however by his refusal to legalise secondary strike action, and to implement the EU working time directive in British labour law.

Disaffiliation contra Social Partnership?

Still, the TUC leadership, under its chairman Brendan Barber, feels all the same bound to the New Labour leadership under the Social Partnership agreement which was signed and renewed by the TUC and the government under Blair. While nearly all union bosses try to position themselves publicly as New Labour critics regularly, namely in due time before the conferences of their own union, only very few have actually drawn consequences from New Labour’s ignorance towards their demands: The fire workers union (FBU) decided in 2002 to leave the Labour Party (all TUC unions are still automatically collective Labour members) and to end its financial support for the party. In 2004, the Scottish branch of the rail workers union RMT followed this example and affiliated with the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). The entire RMT union was consequently expelled from the Labour Party, and it in turn decided to rechannel its financial support to the LRC. However, the more influential unions remain backers, and financial supporters, of the New Labour leadership, and a further obvious candidate to strengthen the ranks of the disaffected disaffiliated in not in sight. The biggest union in Britain, the public services union Unite, decided at the beginning of this year to donate eleven Million Pounds to the Labour Party in

66 In their recent authoritative book on the subject, Gary Daniels and John McIlroy paint a pessimistic picture about current union leverage on the private sector shop floor. See Daniels/McIlroy (eds.): Unions in a neoliberal world: trade unions under New Labour, Routledge 2008.
order to salvage the party’s shaky financial situation. At the same time, Unite is the union most notorious for its rough methods in dealing with left-wing union activists or dissenting shop stewards.

However, the relative political abstinence of the union leadership must also be addressed back to the political apathy of the union membership itself: In the eighties and nineties majorities of the unionised working class had consistently elected Conservative governments, and, when disaffiliating from the Labour Party, the RMT union pointed out that only 500 of its 40,000 members are actually personal members in the Labour Party.

New problems – new solutions? The example of the posting workers directive

In the face of a largely demoralised membership, especially in the private sector, the TUC has meanwhile started to respond: With the set-up of an Organising and Activist Academy, the unions attempt to school their activists not only in the intricacies of industrial action legislation, but also in new techniques for the recruitment of new members. With the arrival of the consequences of the financial crisis in the real economy, and forecasts of up to 3.4 million unemployed for 2010, a proactive, innovative stance by the unions is all the more quintessential in defending the interests of employees.67 One example where the topicality of the issue becomes clear is the freedom of the movement of workers throughout the EU. With reference to the Laval judgement of the European Court of Justice, British employers use this provision of the EU treaty more and more to undercut working standards in British outlets, and to sidestep local (unionised) workforces. In the Winter of 2008/09, several thousand workers in Northern England, Wales and Northern Ireland protested against these practices.

Although the wildcat strike action, such as the one at Lindsey oil refinery in Yorkshire, is strictly speaking illegal (according to legislation passed by Thatcher), the union leadership did not dissociate itself openly from them, a departure from former, very angst-ridden responses towards such actions.
But it still took the initiative of left-wing activists in the union grassroots to respond to this playing-off of local and migrant workforces – on the one

67 For figures cf. National office for statistics: Labour Market Statistics, January 2009. The employers’ perspective was freely laid out in the interview which Oliver Blanchard of the IMF gave the BBC: According to him, ‘a precondition’ for the recovery of the British economy would be ‘a decisive decline of employment in the services sector’. (BBC interview, 23 December 2008)
hand to help organising protests, on the other to start unionising the migrant workers. One of the first successful projects can be studied in the South England branch of the GMB. This branch established a special sub-branch for its (mainly Central and Eastern European) migrant workers, which are being recruited through an appealing combination of legal advice (offered in their home language) and English tuition at reduced rates. In the Southampton area alone, several hundred Polish migrants could be won for the union through this scheme.\(^6^8\) As a further measure, the GMB initiated a cross-unions campaign for political education amongst the union membership. The campaign ‘Hope not Hate’ is directed against the attempts of the far-right, racist British National Party (BNP) to instrumentalise these industrial actions for their ends.\(^6^9\) There are, to summarize, some first signs that union disaffection with the New Labour leadership is finally, at last, turning into political action. How thorough this tendency is, and if it will lead to qualitatively more TUC unions openly turning against New Labour, remains very much to be seen.

3. Respect and the nonparliamentary left – divorce and new bliss?

The foundation of the Respect Coalition in 2004 and its evolution since can be seen as the most important development within the ‘far left’ in British politics since the Iraq war. An analysis of its strengths and weaknesses can highlight many of the issues that characterise the momentary situation of the extra-parliamentary left in Britain as a whole.\(^7^0\)

Clearly, the impulse leading to the setting up of Respect was the success of the Anti-War-Coalition in 2003. Its recipe for success in mobilisation, pluralism, was to lead the Respect Coalition to its electoral success. The most important factions coming together in this project were the SWP, a trotskyite party with a high political profile and a very active membership, some of the protagonists of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and the followers of George Galloway, a longstanding Labour MP who spoke out against the war and was expelled from his party by the New Labour apparatus. In May 2005 Galloway celebrated his own, and indeed Respect’s, greatest success: It that year’s general elections, Galloway was the

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\(^{68}\) cf. Joanna Lucyscyn, Thomas Kachel: Sprachkurse zum Mitgliederfang, in Neues Deutschland, 7/11/08.

\(^{69}\) cf. Daily Telegraph, 1/11/08.

\(^{70}\) For reasons of space I shall concentrate on those actors of the far left which concentrate their political activity on electoral goals. There is, however, no limit on revolutionary splinter parties in Britain, but also other left-wing grass-roots activist groups with a single issue campaign focus, whose portrayal would massively exceed the scope of this paper.
first MP since 1945 to be elected on a left-wing ticket to the left of the Labour Party. Quite a number of mandates could be won in the 2006 local elections, mostly in boroughs or towns with a high percentage of Muslim or immigrant population, such as Tower Hamlets in London, or in Birmingham, where Selma Yacoob scored 49 per cent of votes in her district. An electoral breakthrough did not occur, however. Even in June 2004, under the direct impression of the Iraq war, the party had achieved only a disappointing 1.5 per cent in the European elections.\footnote{cf. European Elections: United Kingdom result, in: http: news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/vote2004/ euro\_uk/html/front.stm.}

In the consequence of these relative misfortunes, 2007 saw a inner-party confrontation emerging on a question of personnel, but it quickly it became a struggle for the politico-strategic orientation of Respect. The holding of two rival party conferences in 2007 made the divorce between the Gallowites and the SWP-followers official, the SWP effectively exited.

Galloway had, since 2004, tried more and more to woo the group of Islamic immigrants in Britain. That meant perhaps not a different agenda, but a weighing-up of priorities different from those of John Rees, the then first secretary of the SWP. The SWP leadership held on to rather classic socialist priorities for the political profiling of the party, namely the fight against privatisation and support for industrial action. For some time already the membership of the SWP had voiced unease about some of Galloways policies and about certain parts of his voting behaviour in parliament: Galloway was reproached for his ‘communalism’. SWP papers criticised in 2006 that he wanted Respect to act like ‘a cross-class party whose horizons were limited to representing just one “community”’.\footnote{SWP internal paper, quoted in: Car crash on the left’, Alex Nunns, Red Pepper, 16 May 2008.} Many gay rights activists were angered by his (dodging of) votes on equal rights bills, in spite of Respect’s clear positive stance towards this issue, the implication being that Galloway shied away from a confrontation with the reactionary, homophobic strand in the traditionalist Muslim voters base. His continuous focus on the Palestinian question, to the detriment of important home issues, has also resulted in reproaches, some justified, some unjustified.\footnote{Surely in order is the reproach of ‘single issuism’: in projecting political interrelations, Galloway always arrives at the Palestinian conflict – a reduction which is surely due to electoral calculating on his part. Nonsensical though is the reproach of ‘anti-semitism’: Quite apart from the fact that this label has been over-stretched massively in inner-left political debate, Galloway never uses ethnic ascriptions or labels to explain political acting.}

However, with all that said, Galloway remains, through his unique rhetorical gift and his media-savvy art of self-projection, by far the most
prominent and the most effective political figure of the non-parliamentary left in Britain. It is difficult to foresee a realignment of forces with electoral ambitions to the left of Labour without him as some kind of figurehead. What will be necessary in any such new start, however, is the open negotiation of the rank and importance of the traditional and modern political contents of such a project: Respect’s inability to carry many of the people mobilised by the Anti-war campaign over to the ballot box seems to suggest that the case for justice on a global scale (third world), and the case for social justice at home (e.g. the struggle of unions) needs to be more plausibly interlinked in order to unite both voter groups. If that can be achieved, winning parliamentary constituencies (in urban areas) should become a real possibility.

4. Outlook

Viewing the situation in which all three strands of the left in Britain find themselves, it is fair to conclude that the current crisis situation may provide favourable conditions for a left-wing revival after the long hard reign of neoliberalism. However, the events of the unfolding crisis hit all of them unprepared and in a state of intensive self-reflection. This is one of the reasons why latest developments, e.g. the successful realignments of the left in France and Germany, have not played much of a role in the left-wing debate on the island: A Europeanisation of the debate within the British left has yet to happen.74

The economic crisis poses an excellent opportunity to make a fresh start, and to renegotiate the important political values and aims around which a left realignment can take shape. Indeed, one can note a new flurry of activity with a multitude of meetings, campaigns and public discussions. The RMT has staged a proposal for a People’s charter: Because clearing the organisational hurdles (Labour or not Labour, SWP or not a.s.o.) has proved so difficult in the past, all interested organisations should first of all agree on the formulation of basic aims and aspirations for a left-wing alternative to New Labour, such as an end to privatisation, anti-racism, strengthening of the local authorities, equal opportunity in education a.s.o. In the run-up to the European elections, the internet platform Progressive London has also offered itself for such a major strategic conversation.

74 That also holds for most of the left-wing internet blogs and threads in Britain. Exceptions are former Labour left MEP Andrew Coates with his blog www.tendancecoatesy.wordpress.com and the enthusiasts of the Initiative for a European Left in England: www.eurleft.wordpress.com.
However, it’s not even clear if there is any plan for a coordinated process for the next months. Apparently for that reason, RMT boss Bob Crowe has broken ranks with his own initiative, and has set up a list ‘No to the EU – yes to Democracy’ with a clearly Euro-sceptic political message, in time for the European elections, with only minute chances for a decent result on June 4th. Despite that, hopes are that such a ‘great conversation’ can be staged in time for the next general elections (most likely due in May 2010). Already, the major actors agree on their most imminent political task: To prevent the BNP from using the economic crisis as a launch pad to get elected into Parliament. The campaign ‘Hope not Hate’, organised by ‘working-class hero’ Billy Bragg and the anti-fascist magazine ‘Searchlight’ is now supported by nearly all British trade unions.

To be sure, the current situation offers up the best chance possibly in a generation to shift the balance of power, and public opinion, in British society towards the left and to establish a new institutional core for left-wing politics – be it within the Labour Party or as a party-political realignment to its left. In how far can the present window of opportunity be used to perform this task – that is now the question.
Who are the Members of Sinn Féin?

Sinn Féin doesn’t publish its membership figures, but by most estimates the membership is estimated at around 3,500 activists, organised into local branches called *cumainn*. The party places a high demand upon its members, with weekly activities such as meetings, leaflet drops, demonstrations, canvassing etc. The party’s youth wing *Ógra Shinn Féin* has a presence in all universities, as well as in a number of other third-level institutions. Similarly it also has branches in a number of urban and rural areas; the membership of *Ógra* is around 500.

Primarily, the party rank and file come from the lower socio-economic strata of society, with a particular focus on the urban working class. Uniquely for a party on the Irish left, Sinn Féin draws strong support from a number of rural areas, primarily in the border region in the north of Ireland and in the south-west of the country. Support for the party in these areas is largely the result of traditional hostility to British rule and a strong nationalistic tradition. Supporters of the party in these areas are typically the working class in the small towns and the small-farmer class. Recently however, there has been a trend towards an increase in university educated activists among activists and administrative personnel. Party participation among civil service staff in Ireland is generally quite low, with Sinn Féin being no exception.

Concrete figures on the proportion of women are unavailable, but a fair estimate would be that women constitute around 15% of party membership. However, women are overrepresented in officer positions in Sinn Féin, since the party’s constitution stipulates that a third of the members of the ruling executive, the *Ard Comhairle*, be female. Similarly a third of candidates put forward in any election must be female. This policy is keenly enforced, and in cases where a female candidate is unavailable, detailed reports must be submitted to the National Executive by way of explanation. The party also has a Women’s Department, which has been established since the 1980s at the local level, and each regional body has a network of formal and informal women’s forums. The position of women within the
party must be formally assessed by a series of procedures and is reviewed annually by the party leadership. Greater participation of women within Sinn Féin remains a top priority for the leadership.

In recent years Ireland has experienced an influx of migrants from Eastern Europe and across the world. A conservative estimate of migrant membership would be around five 5 percent. Due to the political conflict in Ireland, Irish Republicans traditionally had links with like-minded groups in other countries, so that the party has a number of activists from the Basque Country and Palestine, as well as formal and informal links with representatives of these groups in Ireland and abroad. The party has a prominent international department with a number of specific outreach programmes, with a mass network in a number of countries, significantly amongst the Irish diaspora in the USA, Britain and Australia. However, the party also includes migrants from Eastern Europe, continental Europe and Africa. The majority of members of foreign origin are probably English. Interestingly, there are a number of cumainn which consist exclusively of migrants, e.g. a Nigerian cumann in Galway and a Polish cumann in Kerry. Some party literature includes sections in Polish, the largest minority language in Ireland.

Roughly 55 percent of party members live in the north of Ireland, where Sinn Féin is the second-largest party, with the remainder in the southern state. However, growth is more rapid in the south, and membership should equalise between the two states within a few years. This is the most significant distribution divide within the party, as it places different demands on the respective areas. Primarily, it means contesting different elections, which places a high demand on resources, as well as addressing the different priorities and issues amongst the respective electorates. Outside of the traditional rural strongholds of Irish Republicanism in the southern state, Sinn Féin generally has its greatest presence in the cities and large towns. The party has elected numerous local representatives in Dublin; the vast majority of its local councillors are in urban areas.

Sinn Féin is generally considered the youngest of the major political parties in Ireland, with one of the largest and most active youth wings amongst the parties. However, in many areas, most specifically rural areas in the south of the country, the party membership is ageing. Each region must have a youth officer, responsible for recruiting and training young people within the party.
Amongst the Irish political parties, the “broad left” includes Sinn Féin, Labour and the Green Party, which is currently in government. Sinn Féin’s electoral base in the north of Ireland is amongst the working and middle class of the nationalist community, both urban and rural. In the south those voting for Sinn Féin would primarily be the urban working classes in the major towns and cities and small farmers is rural Republican heartlands. The party membership is generally similar in social structure with its support base. The Labour Party too draws support from elements of the urban working and middle classes, while the Greens are typically supported by the post-modernist, suburban middle class.

According to party strategy documents in the public domain, it is Sinn Féin’s objective to have activists and elected representatives embedded in all aspects of civic society. It has recently established and prioritised a trade union department to co-ordinate activists involved in organised labour, as well as a cultural department whose responsibilities include fostering relations with the Irish language movement. Similarly, the party has stressed the need for activists to develop community links through participation in residents’ associations and sporting groups such as the Gaelic Athletic Association. This has been largely successful in many working class areas of Ireland’s cities.

In the European context, Ireland’s party system is an anomaly. The two major competing political blocks, instead of representing the left and right, respectively, would both be considered “christian democratic” in tradition. They have their origins in two competing nationalist trends that arose during the Irish Civil War of the 1920s; both were generally conservative. Because of this, and the overwhelmingly Catholic ethos of the population, the concept of an opposition based on class politics was skewed from the time of the foundation of the state. While there has always been a minor left-wing niche, which has fluctuated in size over the years, left wing politics is not a major trend in Ireland. To date, there has never been a centre-left government. While occasionally left-wing parties have participated in coalitions, those governments have retained a conservative ethos.

Sinn Féin, Labour, the Green Party and progressive independents account for 18% of the seats of the national parliament; the rest are held by the two main right-wing parties. Within this left trend there is minimal cooperation, with no shared strategy at the national level. Instead, the three parties each seek to enter coalitions with one of the major parties. Nonetheless, relations are not at all hostile, and the potential exists for greater cooperation in future.
Connections to the trade unions play an important role for Sinn Féin. The vast bulk of the trade union movement in Ireland is rooted in the public sector, and is currently locked into a system of social partnership with the government and employers’ organisations. However, due to the current economic crisis in Ireland, this process is under review, and a number of strikes on behalf of the main unions are planned. Smaller, independent unions with a socialist agenda, while having a presence in some workplaces, carry little political or industrial weight. Social movements such as those representing minority ethnic groups, or supporting environmental or anti-war goals, are generally quite small, and have little or no relationship with organised labour.

The party undoubtedly has a willingness to attract university graduates and professionals. In the north of the country, there are a number of working-class community-based artists affiliated with the party who have painted Belfast’s famous murals and engage in other agit-prop artistic activities. However, the position of artists, writers etc., is not a high priority within the party – although this is not unique to Sinn Féin. Prominent cultural figures, while often vaguely supportive of a given political trend, are rarely involved in the activities of political parties. Irish parties do not usually provide a specific space for the intelligentsia.

Previous discourses involving Sinn Féin generally centred around the status of the party as a main player in Ireland’s peace process. Now that that has largely been settled, and Sinn Féin is in a power-sharing government in the North, this discourse has concluded in the southern part of the country. However, the issue of Irish unity has also taken on greater prominence in recent years, with the party staging mass demonstrations in cities around the country, as well as pushing the issue in the Irish diaspora in the USA.

During Sinn Féin’s electoral rise, the majority of the votes it received were taken from Fianna Fáil, Ireland’s dominant party. As a result, Fianna Fáil and other parties began to address the issue of Irish unity, thus creating a new discourse. In the current climate of economic crisis and spiralling unemployment, the main national discourse addresses the issue of restoring the economy and alleviating the bursting of the property bubble. However, the position of Sinn Féin is not receiving much prominence in the media, and the party will have to articulate a clear and coherent alternative, if its message is to stand out from those of the largely centrist parties.

Sinn Féin’s Political Views and its Strategic Direction
Sinn Féin has two main objectives, one being the unification of Ireland and the other, the creation of a socialist state. Both of these goals are viewed as symbiotic and indivisible. To this effect, the party seeks to incorporate all strata of society, so that it can be described as a broad social and cultural coalition. However, the fact remains that the party is primarily seen as concerned with radical change, seeking to represent the interests of the working and lower-middle classes. Recently, Sinn Féin has had a much higher proportion of lower-middle class support than in the past.

With regard to capitalism as expressed in the existing neo-liberal, market-driven economic system, it is obvious to Sinn Féin and other left movements in Ireland that essentially civic society has been mutated into a market-based society. Thus, many, if not most, of the core tenets of the European radical left pertaining to communities and broader society have been completely undermined. In Ireland, most public services have been privatised or semi-privatised since the beginning of the economic boom in the mid-‘90s. The country has seen the rich-poor gap become the largest in the world outside of the United States. Currently 300,000 people live below the poverty line, with many more estimated to be in danger of falling below it in future.

The importance of the current crisis lies primarily in the form of the political, societal and economic discourses, in which many of the ideals of the radical left now have won a space. It is clear that the current system of unrestrained capitalism has failed, and across Europe we now see many of the former proponents of this theory undertaking such measures as the nationalisation of banks and state intervention in a variety of industries. In light of the recent capitalist crisis, it is imperative that the left articulate a clear alternative centring around production on the basis of society’s needs, as opposed to production on the basis of profit. Very recently, we have seen in Ireland a major rise in the popularity of parties on the broad left, most specifically the Labour Party; the current discontent amongst the working and middle classes has opened the door to the left, and provided the left with a receptive ear. Thus, many of the policies being espoused by the left, and Sinn Féin in particular, reflect key core positions such as an increase on taxation of higher earners, the closing of tax loopholes for the wealthy, the creation of a state bank, and the nationalisation of basic social services such as health and education. Sinn Féin also has a policy of promoting indigenous small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in order to decrease the existing over-reliance in Ireland on foreign direct investment, as embodied in large multinational corporations.
While Sinn Féin is constitutionally a socialist party, to describe its view of capitalism as a system in need of upheaval would be inaccurate. The party does not subscribe to the traditional Marxist outlook of socialist revolution. While in the past, the party looked to radical examples such as Cuba or Nicaragua, it has increasingly been citing the Nordic social democracies as an example of the type of economic and social system it aspires to create. Thus the party supports the concept of wide-reaching welfare state with free and equal access to health, housing, education and employment. Similarly it believes in state ownership of such core and peripheral services as refuse and public transport. It sees a clear role for the state in the national economy. Thus it could be argued that Sinn Féin is concerned with creating a fairer and more equitable society, without removing its basic capitalist foundations.

Though strongly promoting its own stance, Sinn Féin regularly cooperates with groups in parliament and at other levels. In the previous term, the Dáil saw the creation of a “technical group” (since disbanded) in which Sinn Féin, the Trotskyite Socialist Party and progressive left independents formed an alliance which allowed all its members greater speaking rights and access to debates via Leader’s Questions. Likewise, on issues of common concern to the left, the Labour Party often donated part of its speaking time in parliament to Sinn Féin, and also facilitated the election of a Sinn Féin member of the Upper House (Seanad). Informally parties of the left such as Socialists, Greens, Sinn Féin, Independents and Labour have cooperated on numerous issues at the local council level.

Sinn Féin has expressed internally and publicly the need to move as a party away from the politics of being simply anti-government, and towards the promotion of a transformation of Irish society. This centres around the unification of Ireland as a state, and the use of this new state as a blank canvas upon which to create a more inclusive society structured on social democratic principles. It sums up its programme in the slogan “An Ireland of Equals”, in which the needs of all strata of society are met equally, with particular concern for the weakest and most vulnerable.

As outlined above, Sinn Féin seeks to embed itself as a party in the fabric of working-class communities. However, an important distinction is the party’s continued expressions of the need for community empowerment, as opposed to party clientelism. To this end, the party encourages all activists to be active in the voluntary sector, as well as in such institutions as residents’ associations and organised labour.

The party sees the attainment of state power as vital for the realisation of its stated goals and objectives – Irish unity and the creation of a socially-
orientated society. Currently, the party is in a power sharing government with Irish Unionists in the North, and aspires to participation in a coalition in the south. However, opinion is divided within the party as to whether this should entail a coalition with a larger conservative nationalistic party, or the creation of a progressive left alternative. The party sees governmental and extra-parliamentary work as vital and intrinsic aspects of its overall programme, and seeks to link the two at every opportunity.

Currently, Sinn Féin is engaged in a policy overhaul, involving the creation of internal committees and teams tasked with developing and rolling out policy on the economy, ecology and sustainability, and the renewal of the social welfare systems. The party was seen during the 2007 General Election to be enunciating contradictory and unclear economic policies, which led to its electoral set-back. As outlined above, major alternatives in Sinn Féin economic policy include the promotion of SMEs, as opposed to over-reliance on FDI, the introduction of a higher tax bracket for high earners, and the use of such revenue to expand social services. On the subject of the ecology, the party is in avid supporter of renewable energy sources, such as “wind and wave”, and the protection of key historic sites from development, such as Tara.

One major project for the party has been an analysis of the deprived rural west of the country, one of the most peripheral regions in Western Europe, and the formation of detailed and concrete proposals for its development. Over the past year, the party has conducted detailed studies of the region, gathering and compiling statistics and interviews with various interest groups. On this basis, it has formulated an all-encompassing programme of development, centring around transport, tourism, heritage, environment, social services, employment and centres of higher learning. This project was very-well received by people in the region and the national media, and key aspects of the programme were adopted by a relevant parliamentary committee.

*Sinn Féin and Europe*

Sinn Féin has identified Europe as an important area of engagement, and is an enthusiastic member of the GUE-NGL alliance in the European Parliament. The party seeks a renewal of the European Union, and feels it should return to the concept of a social Europe. However, Sinn Féin is primarily concerned with the issue of Irish sovereignty, and feels this should take priority over anything else. It feels a unified Ireland would have a positive contribution to make within the broader European family.
Sinn Féin, along with a number of single-issue groups, was the main voice in opposition to the recent Lisbon Treaty and the previous Nice and Maastricht Treaties. The party believes the passing of the Lisbon Treaty will further cede Irish sovereignty to a Commission which it believes is unelected and unaccountable to the average European citizen. Similarly, the party believes that Lisbon and previous treaties were launched with a view to creating a corporate Europe, which has been moving away from a Europe based on social solidarity, towards neo-liberal capitalism.

Publicly, Sinn Féin has been branded by some of its opponents as “Eurosceptic”. The party rejects this label vigorously, and stresses that it is not against the concept of a European Union, but is rather opposed to the economically conservative nature of the Union as it exists today. However, the main problem which Sinn Féin identifies within the EU is its democratic deficit and the chasm that has arisen between the EU as an institution and the ordinary citizen. The party believes that national government should be the primary actor on issues of national concern. However, it is important to stress that European issues are not a primary area of concern in the Irish electorate, and hence not for the various political parties, either.

Concerning the European left, Sinn Féin views its main areas of commonality amongst its allies in GUE/NGL as that of the issue of workers’ rights within Europe and the protection of the environment. Additionally, the party was in full agreement with GUE/NGL’s stance on the recent invasion of the Gaza Strip and the subsequent human rights violations. A possible source of disagreement with GUE might be the issue of fisheries and the exclusion of the lucrative Irish box zone from the Common Fisheries Policy.

As was outlined earlier, Sinn Féin and Irish republicans in general share deep political and organisational links with a variety of progressive groups and governments. The links between the Irish republican movement and the Basque Country and Palestine stretch back to the early 1970s, with both parties and groups frequently exchanging visits. Every year, Sinn Féin’s conferences feature speakers from such places as Cuba and Venezuela, as well as members of the South African ANC, the Basque Herri Batasuna, and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. Sinn Féin heavily prioritises solidarity and the establishment of links with like-minded progressives across the world. Its youth wing is a member of the ENDYL group, which consists of left-wing political youth organisations from both eastern and western Europe. Sinn Féin sends delegates to attend the annual Social Forum, and in the past has made submissions on a range of issues. Participa-
tion in the World Social Forum is viewed as an integral part of the party’s internationalism.

Organisational structure and currents

Officially, under Sinn Féin’s constitution, the annual national conference (Ard Fheis: High Gathering) is the supreme decision-making body of the party. The National Executive (Ard Comhairle: High Council) is elected at this conference, and is entrusted with formulating party direction and strategy. The Standing Committee (An Coiste Seasta), which is responsible for the day to day running of the party, is a sub-committee of this body. Locally Sinn Féin is organised into branches (cumainn) and regional executives (cúigi). All official positions are filled from the cumainn up through a process of conventions and elections.

Within Sinn Féin, the Ard Comhairle establishes various committees and think-tanks with a view to formulating specific policy objectives. Officially, all these bodies must be transparent and accountable, and submissions by ordinary rank and file membership are actively encouraged. Additionally, national consultations are sometimes arranged around issues of particular importance, such as the party’s participation in policing in the North, or the party review after the 2007 General Election. These are the processes with which Sinn Féin seeks to represent the rank and file as well as compiling and formulating policy.

There are a number of currents and trends within Sinn Féin, from the specifically nationalist to centrist to social democratic to radical socialists. Because of these trends and the broad-based nature of the party, there is frequent debate and disagreement on many aspects of party policy and strategy. Such discussion and debate is encouraged and facilitated within Sinn Féin structures. None of these currents or trends is formal to the point where they could be considered an organised faction. Organised factionalism is not a feature within the party and is generally not tolerated; the last example of factionalism was the 32-County Sovereignty Committee, which left en-masse in 1998 upon the party’s signing of the Mitchell Principles. Submissions and minority opinions are sought and encouraged from the grassroots structures of the party, and are reviewed within the specific party committees, regardless the trend submitting them. All party members have

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75 The Mitchell Principles were widely seen as a key basis for the Good Friday Agreement, which formalised the Irish Peace Process.
equal rights of expression of their opinions at conferences, conventions and
committees; specifically those relating to strategic-programmatic questions.

As has mentioned above, the most significant divide in the party is the
almost even split between the northern and southern states. The political
cultures in the two states are very different, so that the respective halves of
the party have to address different cultural and political perspectives, which
sometimes leads to a divergence of priorities. However, it is important not
to overstate this point, as party cohesion is generally quite strong, and all
tendencies within the party view party unity as paramount.

Sinn Féin views itself as a grassroots and community orientated party.
Because of this, and its left-wing orientation, it is frequently seen as attrac-
tive for the deprived sections of the community, as well as for the urban
working class. While there is no specific outreach programmes aimed to-
ward recruiting the intelligencia, the party’s forums surrounding the devel-
opment of strategic-programmatic policy provide a space where such peo-
ple can contribute whatever expertise they may have. The party views co-
operation with them as vital to its development, and sees alliances and sup-
port networks as being reflective of its goal of a socialist society.
Changes in the social structure

In Austria, as in the other EU countries (and beyond), the nature of paid employment has changed radically in recent decades and with it the political weight of the working class. For one thing the importance of industry (and hence that of the industrial workers) has been substantially reduced in favour of the service sector. At the same time the traditional terms of employment have begun to get worse, especially since the transition from the Fordist to the neo-liberal phase of capitalism, and are now fast becoming more and more precarious. In addition, the working class has long since acquired a multinational and multiethnic character.76

The traditional “normal worker” (male, white, Austrian, relatively well paid and socially insured, with an employment contract extending from the day he completed his training to the day he retired, ideally with the same company) is increasingly becoming the exception. On the other hand precarious terms of employment (part-time work, minimal employment, temporary work, pseudo-self-employment, traineeships, etc.) are increasingly becoming the rule and no longer affect just women alone, even if the latter constitute the bulk of those employed on this basis.

This differentiation is also expressed in voting behaviour, as it has long ceased to be the case that workers necessarily vote Social Democrat: A study by the SORA social science institute found that in the 2008 elections to the National Council more blue-collar workers (38 percent) voted for the bloc of right-wing parties, consisting of the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) and BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria), than voted for the Social Democratic Party of Austria, or SPÖ, (37 percent). Among white-collar workers the FPÖ/BZÖ led with 31 percent to the Austrian People’s Party’s (ÖVP) 25 percent. The ÖVP was most popular with public service employees (40 percent) and other gainfully employed persons (32 percent). The Greens had their best result – 25 percent – in the apprentice category, while the SPÖ was most popular with pensioners (38 percent). Alarmingly,

among voters under 30, 42 percent of men and 32 percent of women had voted FPÖ/BZÖ.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{The position of the trade unions}

Thus the political articulation of the working class in Austria has also changed markedly. A peculiar feature in relation to other countries is the former very high proportion of state ownership, a historical result of the weakness of Austrian capital after the Second World War, which led to former German assets being taken over by the Austrian state.\textsuperscript{78}

For decades the strongholds of both trade unions and traditional working class parties, such as the SPÖ and the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), lay in these nationalized enterprises. When they began to be broken up and privatized in 1986 the first things to disappear were those former strongholds of the KPÖ and the Trade Union Left Bloc (GLB) – which was closely associated with it – in the Austrian Trade Union Association (ÖGB). Early retirement, social compensation plans and layoffs were used to bring about a massive drain in personnel that could only be plugged in individual cases by new activists. Today Leftists are a rarity among works council members and trade unionists in the former nationalized enterprises.

Although the Social Democracy was able to hold its own at least formally and, as the results of works council elections show, even expand here and there, its political weight was still much less than it had been up to the mid-1980s. It is no accident that the bulk of the privatizations that took place up to 1999 did so when the SPÖ was in power, and the former Minister for Nationalized Industries, Rudolf Streicher (SPÖ), summed up the policy of his party with the words “Our catechism is the law of the Stock Exchange”.\textsuperscript{79}

Membership of the ÖGB fell from a peak of 1.67 million in 1981 to 1.27 million in 2006.\textsuperscript{80} With a unionization rate of 35 percent (2000) the Austrian trade unions correspond to the international average and are still com-

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Margit Scherb, Inge Morawetz (eds.): In deutscher Hand? Österreich und sein großer Nachbar, Vienna 1990.
paratively strong, although in the Scandinavian countries the rate is much higher. An unusual feature of Austrian trade unions is that they are strictly sub-divided according to parliamentary groups.\textsuperscript{81} The social democratic parliamentary group (FSG) has far and away the most with nine (formerly as much as 15) trade unions. Only the Public Service Trade Union (GÖD) is dominated by the conservative ÖVP.

The GLB is represented – with the support of an appropriate number of works council members, in the leaderships of the trade unions Vida (railways, catering, commerce, transport), GPA-DJP (white-collar workers, printing), GdG (municipal employees) and GMTN (metalworking, food, textiles). Left-wing forces close to the Greens play a similarly modest role to that of the GLB in the GPA-DJ, GdG, Vida and GÖD. Having – despite their claims – little or no grass roots support, such diverse radical leftist groups essentially confine themselves to the verbal articulation of grievances.

\textit{Opportunity for reform missed}

The breaking of the BAWAG scandal in 2006 (the Bank für Arbeit und Wirtschaft was a trade union bank that had lost billions in questionable investments and had to be sold off as a result) brought to light a profound crisis in the ÖGB which had been long in the making and which led to a hectic reform discussion. But the opportunity for a thoroughgoing reform and democratization of the trade unions was not taken, and the broad reform debate came to nothing. The social democratic trade union fraction FSG attempted to sit out the crisis, as the ÖGB Congress in January 2006 made clear.\textsuperscript{82} The disapproval only made itself felt when it came to a vote, when Vice-President Renate Csörgits (FSG) and GÖD chief Fritz Neugebauer (FCG) failed to be re-elected.

After some uncertainty and soul-searching in the ÖGB there was a new strengthening of the social partnership between both sides of industry which had evolved over a period of decades and in Austria is not just a form of politics, but a regular institution.\textsuperscript{83} Whereas in the era of Chancel-

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lor and SPÖ leader Alfred Gusenbauer from 2006 to 2008 a definite cool-
ness between SPÖ and FSG was discernible in that, for example, leading
trade-unionists were refused seats in Parliament, the axis between the cur-
rent minister for social affairs and former ÖGB leader, Rudolf Hundstorfer,
and the president of the Federal Economic Chamber, Christoph Leitl, was
strengthened. So even a few serious welfare cuts had their origins in bills
presented by these social partners, which were gleefully seized upon and
implemented by the government.

The ÖGB continues to take a very traditionalist view of itself and to this
day has an uneasy relationship with the social movements, most of which
are alien to it. In view of this fact it is no wonder that the very broad protest
movement against the formation of the Black-Blue government in 2000
was shamefully left in the lurch by the ÖGB. Meanwhile the ÖGB has also

Like the ÖGB questionnaire of 2001,84 in which 88 percent of members
declared themselves in favour of an active struggle in defence of their in-
terests, the great strike movement of 2003 against the socially unjust pen-
sion reform of the then Black-Blue government showed the great potential
and high motivation of wage earners. But the ÖGB leadership opted for
appeasement and after a few days of the strike shifted the dispute to the
negotiating table and to Parliament. Thus after their return to power in 2007
neither the SPÖ nor the ÖGB showed any interest in repealing the socially
unjust pension reform.

Apart from the exceptional year of 2003 with its 1.3 million strike days
Austrian strike statistics have hovered about the zero mark for decades.85 It
is true that recent years have seen an increasing readiness to strike, but the
trade-union leaders tend to confine themselves to empty threats. This is also
reflected in wages policy, where real wages are allowed to stagnate at their
1995 level, while productivity gains go unrewarded.86

The Chambers of Labour

The fate of the trade unions has also overtaken the Chambers of Labour, a
public institution representing the interests of wage earners and having the

84 Cf. ÖGB-Nachrichtendienst 3089, 22.01.2001, in:
http://www.oegb.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=OEGBZ/Page/OEGBZ_Index&n=
OEGBZ_4.2.a, accessed on 1.2.2009.
85 Cf. BAK, ÖGB: Streikstatistik 1946-2006, in: http://wko.at/mk/60jahre/ZDF/StreikZDF_60Jahre.pdf,
accessed on 1.2.2009.
power to influence legislation, whose General Assembly is elected every five years by the wage earners (except for those whose employment involves sovereignty issues). Seven of the nine state chambers are governed by the Social Democratic parliamentary group, only the chambers in Tyrol and Vorarlberg having ÖVP majorities. The GLB last ran for office in 2004 in eight states, but is only represented in the General Assemblies in Vienna and Styria.87

In the late 1980s, rocked by scandals involving privileges and finding themselves in a veritable crisis, the Chambers of Labour did, however succeed, unlike the ÖGB, in carrying out a comprehensive reform process, which won them substantially higher acceptance among the public and their own members. In a direct ballot of all members held in 1996 over 90 percent gave a vote of confidence to their Chambers of Labour as representing their interests as public self-administered corporations. However, the higher acceptance essentially rests on an enhanced service function, while the political powers of the Chambers of Labour, such as that of proposing their own legislation, are not really exercised out of consideration for the government and the “social partners”.

The Social Democracy

In view of the important fact that the Social Democracy in Austria moved politically to the right after 1945 and today largely belongs to the neoliberal mainstream, the significance of the Left in Austria is very modest. The main reasons for this are historical: Unlike in France, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Germany the CP in Austria did not arise after the end of the First World War as the result of a major split with the Social Democracy. Only after the crushing of the February uprising in 1934 was the KPÖ able to acquire greater influence in the years of illegality and after 1945 by relying on its role in the antifascist resistance, and also on the Soviet occupation forces in the eastern part of the country (with all the problems that involved).88

For the Austrian Left another important factor is that the Social Democracy has for decades been at pains to distance itself from its left wing. This includes such acts as defaming the October strike of 1950 (with over four million strike days the greatest strike movement of the post-war period) as an “attempted communist putsch” and the issuing of the “Eisenstadt Decla-

ration” in 1968 and never formally renounced, banning any cooperation between Social Democrats and Communists.\(^8^9\) The role of the Left within the Social Democracy, which is mainly confined to the Socialist Youth and Trotskyite tendencies, is therefore modest. This is all the more true in view of the prevailing dogma that the “unity of the working class” has been achieved in the Social Democracy anyway. And finally former Chancellor Kreisky made it unmistakably clear that government is of the right.

On the other hand, the SPÖ leadership is open to the right, from the courting of the Association of Independents (Verband der Unabhängigen – VdU) founded in 1949 as a political home for former Nazis,\(^9^0\) through the toleration by the FPÖ of the SPÖ minority government in 1970/71, to the government coalition with that party from 1983 to 1986. That the far right parties FPÖ and BZÖ are supported by almost one third of voters, is primarily due to the fact that for decades it has been normal for both SPÖ and ÖVP to woo them.

In keeping with the general trend SPÖ membership fell from an all-time high of over 700,000 to its current level of under 300,000, which still makes it relatively one of the strongest social democracies in the world. As in the case of the KPÖ, the average age of SPÖ members is very high, and the party has only a small proportion of young members.

**The Greens**

Originally having a strong left-wing orientation, the Austrian Greens have in recent years moved clearly towards the political centre, which is so hotly disputed by the established parties. This is seen in the Black-Green coalitions in the Upper Austrian state government and the city governments of the state capitals Bregenz and Graz.

A clear expression of this development is the attitude of the Greens to the EU. In the 1994 referendum on EU accession, when a clear majority was still critical of the EU, Johannes Voggenhuber, a prominent Green, experienced a sudden conversion and changed into an “ardent European” overnight. So it is probably not to be wondered at if the Greens voted together with ÖVP and SPÖ for the EU Constitution in 2005 and the EU Treaty in 2008, vehemently rejecting a referendum on the issue. The only

left-wing remnants in the Green spectrum left today are in Vienna and among trade unionists who are clearly remote in party-political terms.

*The place of the KPÖ*

From 1945 to 1959 the KPÖ was only represented in the National Council with a modest three to five (out of a then total of 165) deputies, having been part of a national unity government until 1947. The KPÖ was only represented in the provincial diets until 1970, and only managed to regain a comparatively strong position in 2005, when it won over six percent of the vote in Styria. Otherwise the KPÖ’s influence is confined to municipal and district councils in Styria (being very strongly represented in Graz), Lower Austria and Vienna. Although the KPÖ was the only nationally operating left-wing party to make gains in the elections of recent years and in most federal states scored the best voting results since the early 1970s or even the 1960s, it was still far from clearing the one-percent hurdle needed to enter Parliament in 2006 (the electoral laws prescribe a ”basic mandate“, or 4 percent).

As the meagre election result for a left-wing project\(^91\) in the 2008 elections to the National Council has shown, the mere addition of a few small left-wing groups is not enough to create a Left with mass support. Similarly, the policy of extending KPÖ support to other left-wing candidates in the 2004 elections to the European Parliament was not successful either in enabling us to tap broader sources of support. The KPÖ sees itself as a segment of the Left in Austria and is open to alliances. The key question for the development of a broader-based Left in Austria is, however, whether there is going to be a clear differentiation within the Social Democracy and the trade unions.

Since that fateful year of 1991 the KPÖ has gone through difficult times in which its very survival was often at stake. Geared for decades to the CPSU – apart from the attempt at “Austrocommunism” in the years 1965-1969\(^92\) – the KPÖ and other communist parties lost their traditional political point of reference, which was extremely significant for small parties forced by lack of representation to operate mainly outside of parliament. However in 1991 the Austrian communists decided neither to rename nor


dissolve the party, but to renew it on the basis of a new understanding of Marxism.

The resultant conflict between the forces of renewal and those who, regardless of the upheavals in the world, continued to insist on a dogmatic “Marxist-Leninist” approach to politics and resisted with all their might a self-critical analysis of their own policies and past, lasted for many years. It escalated at the party congress of 2003 and was finally terminated in 2004 with the departure of the dogmatic wing. An unwanted consequence, it must be admitted, was that the Styrian party organization, which for years had had dealings with these elements, ceased to recognize the authority of the National Executive and turned itself into a regional party. It has, however, always maintained that it remains part of the KPÖ.93

The renewal of the KPÖ has always been bound up with the aim of developing a modern party that includes feminism, internationalism, inclusiveness and radicalism in equal measure. Such an aim can only be impeded by a simplified notion of a working class that consists of nothing but “normal workers”, the defamation of feminism as bourgeois, an internationalism based on the view that any enemy of the USA is automatically to be considered an ally, and the reduction of criticism of the EU to a demand that Austria should leave it. To the extent that the KPÖ sees itself as heir to the traditions of Social Democracy, this can only apply to certain traditions and experiences. The KPÖ has no wish to adopt the classic contradiction in Austrian Social Democracy between revolutionary phraseology and pragmatism in practice. The KPÖ sees its programme94 as a work in progress. It wants to take a modern and future-oriented view of Marxism, which is not possible without a really comprehensive examination of the reasons for the failure of the former communist-ruled countries.

The practical expropriation of the party by the German government and courts in autumn 2003 confronted the KPÖ with an existential crisis.95 However, by turning itself into a party of activists led almost exclusively by unpaid volunteers it succeeded not only in preserving the existence of the party under the most difficult conditions, but also in improving its showing in elections.

95 In 1993 the German legal authorities seized the assets of the Berlin-based commercial enterprise Novum, which until 1989 had acted as an intermediary for orders played by the GDR with Austrian nationalized industries. Although a ruling of the first instance court recognized the KPÖ’s rights of ownership to Novum in 1996, in 2003 a German court of the second instance ruled against the KPÖ, which thereby lost the bulk of its party assets.
The KPÖ as a party is critical of the EU. Back in the 1960s, backed by the achievement of Austrian neutrality, it resisted efforts to bring Austria into what was then the Common Market. And in the debate on EU accession the KPÖ also rejected the course pursued by the then Red-Black coalition, as did the Austrian Greens. Accordingly in the 1994 referendum the KPÖ was for a No vote, although it had to take note of the fact that 66 percent of Austrians (not least as a result of massive political pressure and media influence) voted for accession.

In the intervening 14 years of EU membership a lot has of course changed. The capitalist globalization, of which the EU is a part (and not an alternative), has substantially increased the international factor in politics. That is why the KPÖ has been a member of the European Left since its founding in 2004. It is also in contact with other left-wing parties in the EU and beyond. The KPÖ cooperates actively in the EL executive in keeping with its limited possibilities and in some networks (EL-Fem, trade union network) and in 2007 even organized the second EL Summer University in Gosau.

As the current Eurobarometer surveys\textsuperscript{96} show, there is a strong hostility to the EU feeling in Austria, but not for left-wing reasons – it is rather a special form of xenophobia. Although all important EU regulations are adopted with the assent of Austria’s government and parliament, both establishment politicians and the right-wing “opposition”, to say nothing of the gutter press, always represent it as though “Brussels” were always governing over Austria’s head.

The fact that the government parties (and the Greens) care little for democracy and have vehemently rejected, for example, a referendum on the EU Treaty, makes it easier for right-wing demagogues to play on the hostility to Europe. This is a particular challenge for the KPÖ and other left-wing forces – namely, to develop a progressive form of EU criticism from an internationalist perspective.\textsuperscript{97} Only in this way can it present itself as an alternative both to the bloc of dedicated pro-EU government parties – SPÖ and ÖVP, with the Greens as an appendage – and to the bloc of right-wing populists, such as the FPÖ, BZÖ and others.

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 Czechia. 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 percent of the vote (1990: 13%, 1992: 14%, 1996: 10%, 1998: 11%, 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 per cent of all members in 2003; workers (13.6%) and intelligence and officials (approx. 10%) are minorities within the party. Only a few party members are unemployed or small businesspeople. 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 twenty-six KSČM MPs were army officers before the upheaval, 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 party many political problems after the 2006 elections. He did not apologise, but rather commented to the effect that he had “protected honest citizens from various parasites” 99 there. Vondruska

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is an MP to this day, and the court has not yet initiated the proceedings against him.

The membership of the KSČM has been shrinking continually since the upheaval of 1989. In 1991, it was still 562,529, but in the first year after the upheaval, many members withdrew. This involved primarily younger and better educated members; in 1989, the proportion of members with higher-education degrees was still 19 per cent, but by 1999, that figure had shrunk to 9.2 per cent. 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, which accounts for an annual loss of approx. 6-7 per cent of the KSČM membership. As of 1 January 2008, the party had 77,115 members, which does mean that the KSČM had a relatively large membership figure, relative to the political parties of Czechia. Only 7.9 per cent of KSČM members have newly joined the party since the upheaval, however (2007 figures).

The shrinking number of members is leading to the feminisation of the party. The more the average age increases in the party, the higher the share of women in its membership. The average age of party members was seventy in 2008; only 18,217 members were younger than sixty, and today, 44% of members are women. The feminist organisation Fórum 50% has described the KSČM as the second or third most pro-women party in Czechia. The Czech Greens are the only party which has introduced a quota for women. 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 per cent 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 per cent of the parliamentary group consists of women.

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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 fifties, notably the singer Statis Prusalis, and students from the Third World who came to Czechoslovakia 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, and is not 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 Romany people (Gypsies). This minority makes up approximately 3-5 per cent of the Czech population, and exists in a very precarious social situation. The political activity of the Romanies is rather low. It is assumed that of the few who do vote, many vote KSČM; no relevant Romany party exists. However, 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 17 November 2008, the KSČM issued no official statement of condemnation.\textsuperscript{104} 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 Romanies – SH].\textsuperscript{105} However, other articles in this party organ warn against right-wing extremism.

\textit{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 is a winner of the transformation process.\textsuperscript{106} In 2006, it won only 7.9 per

\textsuperscript{104} Stated during an interview by the author with party chair Jiří Dolejš on 15 Dec. 2008.
cent of the votes here, compared with 12.8 per cent 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 upheaval. The only exception is in certain northern Moravian towns, where the KSČM ruled between 2002 and 2006 in a coalition with the Social Democrats. In fact, it provided the mayors of Havířov (84,000 inhabitants) and Karivná (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 upheaval. The party has also achieved good election results in the formerly German-speaking border areas, where 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 twenty-six of the total of 200 parliamentary seats. In the Senate, with its majority voting electoral system, the KSČM has never held more than three 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 couple of cases voted with the main right wing party ODS, as for example in the election of Vaclav Klaus to his first presidential term in 2004. KSČM MPs also hold 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, but they see as possible the support of the KSČM for their future 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.\textsuperscript{107} 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 only in only one major city, Most, with 70,000 inhabitants, where it has provided the deputy mayor. The KSČM provides the mayors in 132 smaller villages, of whom thirty are party members.\textsuperscript{108} 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 vote for the left in Czechia.\textsuperscript{109} 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 for voting behaviour in Czechia: social stratum and, possibly even more significant, 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 Czechia during the 20th Century was 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-upheaval period. Moreover, the older generations were the first victims of the transformation after the upheaval: their pensions dropped relative to wages, and they were blamed for the existence of “communism”.

Despite its stable position as the third strongest vote-getter – it has the strongest membership base stronger than the Social Democrats (ČSSD) and the Civic Democrats (ODS) – the KSČM does not play a commensurate role in society. The media predominantly have an anticommunist orientation, the old age of the party’s members 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 for the KSČM carries with it a real threat to one’s career in Czechia. The KSČM of course has no business lobby.

\textsuperscript{108} Personal interview with Petr Šimůnek und Ivan Dvořák of the staff of the CC of the KSČM, 10 Jan. 2008.
\textsuperscript{109} 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.
The parliamentary elections in Czechia in 2006: Analysis voting groups (row percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>ODS Civic Democrats</th>
<th>ČSSD Social Democrats</th>
<th>KSČM Communists</th>
<th>KDU - CSL Christian Democrats</th>
<th>SZ Greens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>all voters</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<td>(&gt; 85,000 pop.)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>40.5</td>
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</table>

The non-parliamentary work of parties is not very widespread in Czechia. Most citizens keep their distance from politics, and the KSČM has few activists able to communicate with the broader society. The KSČM organises demonstrations of its own only very seldom. 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 Kunecká 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 councillors and 114 members of regional parliaments.

The front organisations of the party gather the party members according to interest groups. Those who are against Sudeten Germans are members of the Club of the Czech Border Areas, the anti Roman Catholics, of the Club of Freethinkers, and the salaried employee of the Federation of Trades Unions of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, which 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 upheaval). 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 the 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 Czechia since the upheaval, and hostile towards the KSČM. This situation changed to some extent in 2006 when the party took part at successful initiative against the planned U.S. radar base (“Ne základnám”). Many KSČM members are involved this initiative, and representatives of the initiative speak at communist demonstrations. The Federation of Communist Youth was also a collective member of the initia-

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tive, but it was excluded because of its Stalinist agitation at the demonstrations.

The orientation of the public discourse in Czechia is strongly neoliberal and right-wing conservative. With the exception of the *Haló novinys* 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 documentations have also been anticommunist-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” 113. The short-term demands and solutions in its programme are very similar to those of the Social Democrats; the party states there that its primary goal is the “transition from the capitalist social structure to a socially more just society – socialism.” The KSČM defines socialism as “a democratic society which, due to its prospering economy and full employment, will protect the political, personnel, economic and social rights of all people.” 114

In everyday politics, the KSČM rather plays the role of a critic of existing society. It defends the biographies 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 neoliberal parties, and the media which report negatively about the KSČM. As regards foreign affairs, its strongest criticism is

114 Ibid.
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. 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.\textsuperscript{115}

The KSČM strives actively to assume government responsibility at the regional level, but is not really clear about the question of government 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 officially 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 toleration of a Social-Democratic minority government.

In societal 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 Czechia 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. The economic crisis is not discussed much in Czechia on the whole, either within the KSČM or in the public discourse – as of January 2009. Controversial topics which rather dominate the public debate include the 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.

\textit{The European Policy Koncepts 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. 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 neoliberal 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. The Party of Democratic Socialism, a grouping with no political influence and which does not run in elections, got the full membership from Czechia. 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 “us” – i.e., the Czechs.\footnote{Cf. Stanislav Holubec: \textit{Vznikla Strana evropské levice}, 12 May 2004, in: http://www.sds.cz/docs/precete/epubl/sho_vsel.htm, accessed 10 Jan. 2009.} Moreover, the KSČM justified the rejection of full membership by saying it did not want to lose its identity in a non-communist party, that it did not 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.

The KSČM has traditionally good contacts to the Slovak Communists and to the Left Party in Germany. This is due to their being neighbours, their common fate, and the fact, that the two CPs 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 the communist and workers’ parties.

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. The Party Congress votes on the party programme and various party calls (always at the last day of the Party Congress: e.g. 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, which has approximately ninety members. This organ meets four times a year. The Central Comittee (CC) consists of the representatives of the district comitees. 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 after the Party Congress. The “Executive Committee,” which consists of twenty-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 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 overaged and inactive. Even the highest party functionaries must submit to

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the CC. In case of emergency, the CC can also vote out the party leadership. The party functionaries are mostly older than sixty. Nor is there any 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 position on to their children.

The two most important factions in the party are the Nostalgia Faction – also known as the Stalinists, e.g. such people 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, Milošlav Ransdorf). The Stalinists mostly want to defend the past, and deeply reject today’s capitalism. The Pragmatists primarily want to promote their 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 twenty-first 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. Even nationalistic, Stalinist, authoritarian and homophobic items are published from time to time, however (e.g. articles by Jan Minár, Pavel Sirucek, Václav Jumr, Jaroslav Doubrava). Many articles also contain sexist prejudices. 118

The following event reveals much about the inner culture of the party: In 2007, 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 the social 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 spontaneously 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 upheaval”. 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.
The social and political Left in Germany is pluralist. This is shown in numerous initiatives and protests against welfare cuts and the erosion of democratic structures, in public discourses on left-wing issues such as democratic and social justice, or lasting peace and security. It is reflected in the struggles waged by social movements, trade unions and left-wing parties. It is currently operating in a situation created by the crisis of financial market capitalism, in which the neo-liberal hegemony, with its demands for privatization and deregulation of public assets, is losing social acceptance. Unlike previous crises, this one is marked by its global scale, its simultaneity, and the linkage between financial, economic, social, political and environmental crises. The search for answers by the ruling political class, the radical nature of its language in the public and private media, including the adoption of what used to be considered left-wing vocabulary, like the demand for the nationalization of banks and companies and the expropriation of shareholders, reveals cracks and spaces for new public discourses. Crises are phases in which power relations change, in which new social and political majorities are possible.

Whether the present crisis-related openings can be used by the Left in Germany will largely depend on its ability to bundle the wide variety of left-wing alternative approaches adopted by social movements, trade unions and left-wing parties and forge them into a new Left project with majority appeal. A special role in this is played by the DIE LINKE (= THE LEFT) party.

Who are the new Left Party?

DIE LINKE was formed in the summer of 2007 as the result of a merger between the Left Party/PDS and Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative (WASG). The two merging parties arose at different times and have their own history and identity.

The Left Party/PDS emerged from the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which, in keeping with its basic consensus – breaking with Stalinism as a system – had changed its name in 1990 to the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). It was renamed in 2005 as a necessary step in the unifica-
tion process leading to the emergence of a new all-German left-wing party as defined in the cooperation agreements of the merger process. In July 2005 the PDS adopted the new name of *The Left Party/PDS*.

The trigger and catalyst for the emergence of the WASG in 2004 was the neo-liberal policy being pursued by the SPD-Green government since 2002 with its “Agenda 2010”, the general assault on existing employment-policy instruments and social security systems, which no longer hit only isolated social groups, but also, indiscriminately, large sections of the population. With this policy the SPD had abandoned its principles, and many social democrats found themselves no longer able to vote for it. What was needed, therefore, was an electoral alternative, which arose in 2004 and merged with the simultaneously founded initiative of members of the IG Metall trade union called “Labour & Social Justice” to form a new left-wing party named “Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative” (WASG).

*DIE LINKE* is thus a party that has been strongly influenced by the collapse of the state socialist GDR and the subsequent triumph of neo-liberalism in Germany. Since 2008 it has been faced with the problem of how to cope with what is likely to be a long and open-ended crisis of neo-liberalism.

*DIE LINKE* is a left-wing pluralist party whose main strategic task is to change the social and political power relations as a prelude to a political change of direction. It combines left-wing social-democratic approaches to a renewal of the welfare state with left-wing socialist attempts to pursue parliamentary politics while engaging in a radical critique of capitalism. It aspires to transform capitalism into a solidarity-based and ultimately a socialist society, in which the freedom of each is the condition for the freedom of all. The ideas of a modernized welfare state and democratic socialism play a key role in the party’s thinking.\(^{119}\) *DIE LINKE* is rooted in the history of the German and international working-class movements, the peace movement, and feminism. It is pledged to antifascism, rejects any form of dictatorship, and condemns Stalinism as a system that criminally abused socialism. It holds the following values to be indivisible: freedom and equality, socialism and democracy, human rights and justice. At the same time there are debates in the party about new ways of combining them.

*DIE LINKE* sees itself as a partner of movements with social agendas and is a member of the Party of the European Left.

\(^{119}\) *DIE LINKE* (2007). *Programmatische Eckpunkte*. p. 2
As of 2008 DIE LINKE had 76,139 members, of whom 29,085 were women. This gives it a higher proportion of women (38.2 percent) than any of the other parties represented in the Bundestag. In 2004 the proportion in the former PDS was 45 percent. It is worrying that only a quarter of the new members are women. The regional differences are of interest here. The proportion of women in the East German party associations varies between 44 percent in Thuringia and 46 percent in Saxony, and in the West German associations between 22 percent in Bavaria and 27 percent in Bremen. On the other hand the average party member in the West is almost 20 years younger than in the East.

The age structure of DIE LINKE as of 2008 is as follows: The proportion of members under 30 is 6 percent, those aged between 30 and 60 make up about 37 percent, and those aged over 60 almost 54 percent. The prospect of a slight rise in the proportion of young members will not be enough to ensure a rejuvenation of the party’s active base.

Since the merger DIE LINKE has been well on its way to becoming an all-German grass-roots party, which in the long term will overcome its East-West asymmetry. In 2006 78 percent of its members were still to be found in the East German party associations as opposed to only 22 percent in the West. In the past three years this ratio has shifted to one of 66 to 34 percent. This was due to an increase of about 10,000 members in the West (mainly in the most populous state of North Rhine/Westphalia as well as in the Saarland, Lower Saxony and Bavaria) and a loss of 3,500 members in East Germany (mainly through death). In the East German states the new Left Party, despite its unfavourable age structure, has largely succeeded in maintaining its membership levels since 2005. Thus DIE LINKE, unlike the two mass parties CDU and SPD and despite a general loosening of party-political ties, which affects all parties, was able to strengthen its profile as a growing grass-roots party.

On the social composition of the new Left Party only a few conclusions can be drawn at present. It is clear that the social structures of the two merging parties differed sharply. The low party dues in the former WASG suggest that most of its members came from the intermediate and – even

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120 Inner-party analysis by the Party Executive on 30.09.2008
more so – lower social strata. The WASG tended to see itself – unlike the PDS, the left-wing mass party in the East German regions – as a party of workers, mainly trade unionists, works council members and medium-ranking office workers in the public service. The social structure of the former Left Party/PDS had scarcely changed in previous years: 77 percent of its members were pensioners, early retirees or unemployed. Students and trainees made up three percent, workers eight percent and office workers 18 percent of the membership.

For many members of the early PDS the end of the GDR also put an involuntary end to their vocational careers. It was mainly such people who held party offices and stood as PDS candidates in elections in the early 1990s, i.e. at a time when the success of this party project was uncertain. Their generally voluntary commitment facilitated the emergence and stabilization of the PDS as a “caring party” at the local level – a party that had communal roots and was developing a programme.

The proportion of PDS members of the generation now aged between 40 and 55, who after the fall of communism had to seek out new careers for themselves and their families in conditions of collapse and upheaval, was relatively small in percentage terms. Yet it was precisely this age group that was disproportionately represented among those who held party or public offices. There was a lack of younger members. The weak foothold of the PDS in the West was unable to make up for this structural deficit.

Not until the emergence of the DIE LINKE party did the ratio between gainfully employed and non-gainfully employed change in relation to new members. Whereas in 2004 52 percent of new members were non-gainfully employed and 48 percent gainfully employed, in 2007 this ratio changed in favour of the gainfully employed. Now the DIE LINKE party members typically have very different career patterns, a trend accompanied by growing social, cultural and political fragmentation. This may represent an opportunity for DIE LINKE, if it is viewed and exploited as such and the necessary organizational framework is created.

The fact that the rapid growth of a party also leads to conflicts is part of the complicated process by which new party-political collective identities emerge. Differences in background, political experience, socialization, organizational preferences, and ideas about what a party should be, inevitably lead to debates during the formation of a new pluralist party. DIE LINKE is

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121 In 2008 the party dues of the DIE LINKE party averaged 13.44 euros a month in the East German regional party associations and 3.80 euros in the West German party associations. Data of the Party Development Section of the Party Executive from December 2008.
also an unusually heterogeneous party in political and cultural terms. It is faced with the task of dealing constructively with the persisting cultural differences between East and West, the differing experiences of success and failure, and the differences created by living in different social systems.

At present it unites socialists and social democrats, Marxists and communists, anti-globalists and anti-capitalists, orthodoxists and pragmatists, feminists and trade unionists. They differ in their views of the history of the working-class movement and its organizations, their assessment of the civilizational achievements of capitalism, the potential of parliamentary democracy, the importance of changing property relations, and the role and character of the state. Also discussed are the questions of the relation between civil-society commitment, market regulation, the national welfare state and international institutions, and the question of the relationship between international politics – under conditions of globalization – and the scope for national action.

What holds them all together is the joint struggle against degrading living conditions, welfare cuts and the erosion of democratic structures; against a political class that is ultimately prepared to accept the destruction of the natural environment if need be; and the shared utopia of a society free from exploitation. While protest and criticism bring people together, the formulation of that criticism often leads to divisions which multiply the more concrete the formulations become, and extend from claiming the right to conduct protests and resistance on the streets and in public places via the use of parliaments as a platform against neo-liberal policies to the question of how to conduct left-wing radical politics in a parliamentary context. As in the other left-wing parties of Europe, the question of Left Party members’ participation in government is a crucial and controversial question.

When the PDS was founded there were four groups that determined its character: a) individuals who belonged to the founder generation of the GDR; b) people who had been or been close to reformist intellectuals in the old SED, who today still occupy most of the political leadership positions in the DIE LINKE party; c) reform-oriented pragmatists, who now hold party and public offices in the East German party associations and mostly belong to the “Forum of Democratic Socialism”; and d) the orthodox socialists who have organized themselves into the Communist Platform and the Marxist Forum. The latter have received a rise in status in the DIE LINKE party with the emergence of the “Anti-capitalist Left” (AKL) tendency.

The WASG began as a collection of trade-union-oriented left-wing intellectuals, academics, publicists and left-wing representatives of IG Metall with
decades of SPD membership behind them. The tendencies within the WASG – at one in their criticism of the dismantling of the welfare state and the neo-liberal turn taken by the SPD – represented different positions on strategic orientation within the party spectrum: was the aim to rebuild classical social democracy or to create a durable formation to the left of the SPD, incorporating the concepts and experience of left-wing socialism and the new social and anti-globalization movement? There were also differences on organizational matters: classical social democratic, or trade-union and/or openly movement-oriented. It was only logical that with the emergence of the DIE LINKE party there should develop, in addition to the aforementioned tendencies, a strongly trade-union-oriented tendency, the “Socialist Left”, and the “Emancipatory Left” with roots in the old alternative scene.

The emergence of these different political perspectives in the DIE LINKE party largely replaced the groups represented in the PDS in its early days. All tendencies within the party have an East-West dimension. The plurality this entails is, however, still strongly geared to inner-party debates, access to positions of power, and participation in decisions concerning the course to be followed. They dominate the inner-party discourses, although the bulk of members do not belong to a tendency – or at least not actively.

In Oskar Lafontaine, Gregor Gysi and Lothar Bisky the DIE LINKE party has strong leadership personalities who come from very different political backgrounds and are generally perceived as representatives of the all-German Left in East and West, although they are subjects of controversy in the left-wing movement itself. In addition, it has competent experts and leaders at the federal and regional levels with many years of political experience in parliaments, trade unions and social movements behind them. The DIE LINKE party has become a nationwide political force which is able to act and exert pressure on its party-political rivals.

The Solid youth association had about 8,200 members in 2008. The Students’ Association (which does not keep lists of individual members) comprises 60 student bodies.

*The voters*
Nationwide acceptance of the DIE LINKE party lies at present between 10 and 12 percent, while in Brandenburg, Sachsen-Anhalt and Thuringia it is about 30 percent, making it the second strongest party in these states.

It attracts votes mainly because of its criticism of the neo-liberal reforms of the welfare state and labour market (Agenda 2010), which criticism systematically reinterpreted the basic social democratic value of solidarity – a solidarity between equals.

Citizens expect from the DIE LINKE party an effective commitment to social justice, especially for the socially weak, and concrete policies on such issues as improving the situation of children and young people, modernizing the educational system, reducing unemployment, resolving international conflicts without resorting to violence, and its commitment to being a citizens’ party.122

If we look at the decisive issues of the latest regional elections, we see that the DIE LINKE party is the only political force to address the issue of social justice, which makes it the party people expect to offer solutions to labour market problems and original political approaches to social questions, especially those affecting educational and economic policy. Worthy of note in the 2009 elections in Hesse is not only the relatively high attribution of competence in economic policy, but also the attribution of competence in the solution of problems connected with the financial and economic crisis.123 This marks a change from the PDS.

122 Results of a CATI representative survey in Germany in April 2005.
If we look at the social structure of its electorate, we find that DIE LINKE is a mass party in East Germany and a party with growing support among blue- and white-collar workers, the self-employed and above all the unemployed in the West. Those who vote for DIE LINKE are those who see their standard of living threatened, and those who, while themselves being upwardly mobile take a critical view of overall social developments. The social allegiance of its adherents is distributed according to the political milieus in all social strata. Its adherents in the upper and intermediate strata are mainly members of the critical and committed educated elites with social-libertarian views. Many of DIE LINKE’s adherents are to be found among office workers in the public service or associated institutions in the educational and social spheres.

In the 2005 Bundestag elections and the 2007 regional elections in Bremen a tendency became clear that was confirmed in the following four regional elections in 2008/2009. Voters for DIE LINKE were mainly men
ag ed between 45 and 59; workers, especially those with trade-union ties; and unemployed. But these groups alone cannot help the Left clear the 5 percent hurdle. It is therefore continually forced to make political overtures to social-libertarian circles.


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Table of election results based on infratest dimap of 27.1.08 and 25.2.2008

Transformation of the party system in Germany

As of 2005 DIE LINKE had 53 deputies in the German Bundestag, about 186 deputies in ten regional parliaments (with parliamentary group [Fraktion] status) and 5,729 deputies in local representative bodies. It has 204 mayors, 4 county officers and 69 deputy mayors, heads of municipal de-
The Left in Europe

departments and other elected officials.\textsuperscript{124} It has transformed the party system of the Federal Republic. With the emergence of the five-party system\textsuperscript{125} previous coalitions, such as CDU/FDP or SPD/Greens, are not automatically capable of gaining majorities, i.e. dual alliances between one large and one smaller party are not always enough to ensure political majorities. This is a special problem for the SPD, which currently lies between 23 and 26 percent in the polls. This, however, changes the ground rules, making the DIE LINKE party into a strategic force with an influence that is greater than that of its own voters, enabling it to raise more forcefully in the elected bodies the issues on which its proposals often enjoy the support of a majority of the public.

All this is gradually dawning on an SPD whose participation in government undermines its chances of gaining a majority and which, because of its direct rivalry with DIE LINKE, has so far been unable to make use of these new possibilities and constraints to gain a parliamentary majority. It finds itself in a strategic dilemma that can only be resolved by a leftward shift of its entire voter potential. Nor has the SPD clarified the question of its identity with the new Hamburg 2008 programme, any more than it has the question of how it intends to regain political freedom of action in terms of ideas and strategies. It cannot do this by ignoring DIE LINKE, especially since 40 percent of its adherents identify with the left wing of the SPD and are in favour of social justice, a minimum wage, equality of opportunity, and access to education and public provision for existence (\textit{Daseinsvorsorge}) for all. If, however, it shows itself open to an alliance with the Left, it will lose large sections of its followers who incline towards the bourgeois camp. If it decides in favour of a strategy of continuing the grand coalition at federal level, it will be permanently doomed to the role of junior partner.

\textit{For a new alliance for a political change of direction}

Against this background DIE LINKE must continue to emphasize its identity as a social force, as a political home for those whose social claims have made them political orphans. It must raise its profile in social and political struggles and develop social activities which bring together programme, people and values.

\textsuperscript{124} List of all elected officials belonging to DIE LINKE dated 17.2.09
\textsuperscript{125} The five-party system in Germany refers to the five parties (CDU; SPD, Greens, FDP and DIE LINKE), which can count on a stable base of more than 5 percent of the voters. The parties are in a state of open rivalry with the possibility of forming different coalitions consisting of two or three parties.
If it intends to play a strong, sustained role as a left-wing, democratic, nationwide political force, it must bring together its typically diverse social interests and tendencies from the various social camps to form an alliance of the Centre from below. At the same time, if it is to bring about a political change of direction, it needs social majorities – new social alliances and Centre-Left alliances supported by both trade unions and social movements. To do this DIE LINKE must, operating from a minority position, combine the many forms of resistance with political activities to create a new, alternative project of social development based on the equal value of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary alliances.

It must also take advantage of the present window of opportunity by launching public discourses on such issues as the regulation of accumulation and investments, property, nationalization, and expropriation of shareholders, and strengthen their system-critical dimension by taking part in these public discourses and presenting its own policies. It must indicate what forms of government intervention it favours and what property relations it considers contribute to social stabilization and development.

Sixty-six percent of the German population think the government’s measures for tackling the crisis are inadequate. At the same time a representative Emnid study has found that two thirds of the population, across all age groups and income brackets, approve of certain major demands of the Left. These include the demand that power networks and hospitals should be in public hands (73 percent approval); that pensions and unemployment benefits must be raised (77 percent); and that employee co-determination in companies must be extended (80 percent). This ties in with DIE LINKE’s proposal for an emergency programme to deal with the economic crisis. Key demands include the democratization of all sectors of the economy; a stimulus package to tackle the crisis and strengthen municipal finances; a real strengthening of private purchasing power by the introduction of a minimum wage; the raising of Unemployment Benefits II; and the restoration of the pension formula. DIE LINKE also demands the extension of public investments to expand all-day schools and hospitals, a change in energy policy involving the renovation of buildings, and the expansion of public transport.

DIE LINKE in Germany demands social, political, democratic and ecological standards that are worthy of human beings. It inquires into the consequences of measures for tackling crises and exposes their class character –

as in the case of tax cuts planned by the federal government which in fact benefit the highest income groups. DIE LINKE opposes precarious terms of employment and subcontracted labour – especially if performed under degrading conditions.

It demands not only social control, but also the nationalization of banks and a future-oriented industrial policy involving a switch to value-added-intensive products. For this it calls for a fund to finance an innovative industrial policy geared to social and ecological conditions, and for democratic co-determination to ensure it. It thus formulates standards of left-wing reform policy: to transform power and property relations on a socially, democratically and ecologically sustainable basis.

Further steps required for a social and ecological transformation beyond Germany’s borders are described in the party’s programme for the European elections. They include:

- an investment programme focused on a new energy policy, social infrastructure, education, social welfare, and culture;
- a pact for growth, full employment, social security and environmental protection to replace the stability pact;
- controls on the movement of capital and a ban on hedge funds and other speculative derivatives and another ban on investing pension and life insurance policies in speculative funds;
- a European minimum wage;
- a pact against poverty, especially child poverty;
- a strategy of disarmament that is not just limited to a disarmament agency;
- a European constitution, in which the goals of a peaceful, social and democratic and ecologically sustainable European Union are specifically enshrined, including a charter of basic rights, each of which can be claimed individually.

The radical nature of the party’s policies lies not just in the formulation of individual, parallel demands, and radicalism cannot expect the support of a majority of society without effective and palpable changes. For this reason DIE LINKE requires concrete projects which touch people’s lives while at the same time conveying a vision of a different society, in which human beings can live in freedom, social security and solidarity. There are already moves in this direction, such as the concept of the non-denominational school and the successful experiments with the participative budget at municipal level and the public employment sector (ÖBS). The latter must be
developed into a new sector of cultural and social services and integration on the basis of solidarity involving new forms of economics and the development of economically and socially sustainable management.

It is possible to find majorities in Germany for a democratic-social ecological policy. There are new pluralist networks of social and political forces that support such a change of direction, and there is a party – DIE LINKE – that stands for such a change. These are the initial preconditions for a new policy. They will not be enough. But for the first time since 1990 Germany once again has the opportunity for a left-wing democratic upsurge.
From 2001 to 2005 Poland was ruled by the social democratic flagship, the SLD (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej; Democratic Left Alliance), which, however, in these four years lost three quarters of its voters, falling from almost 40 percent of the votes in 2001 to just 11 percent in autumn 2005. These few figures make clear what a precipitous drop in popularity this party suffered a few years ago and from which it has not recovered in the three years that have passed since then. All attempts to extricate the party 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. As of the beginning of 2009 the SLD faces poll ratings about the 10 percent mark, leaving it far behind its right-wing liberal and national conservative rivals. Even if the tendency is showing a slight upturn, the warning signals cannot be overlooked. The party’s strongest support is among pensioners, i.e. among people who can look back on an active career in the Polish People’s Republic (up to 1989). In this sense the SLD shares the fate of many of the so-called successor parties to the former state parties, however much their programmes may differ.

The high popularity of this party, which sees itself as a social democratic formation, in the late 1990s, especially among younger people, has been lost. In the rivalry to win over these constituencies the SLD has lost the struggle against the strictly market-liberal PO (Platforma Obywatelska; Civic Platform). The mobilization of younger, well-educated constituencies against the national conservative presumptuousness of the Kaczyński brothers has so far benefited the PO almost exclusively, so that the SLD has largely lost its trump card of being regarded as Poland’s most competent and pro-EU party. The attitude adopted in the mid-1990s, which might be summarized as: “We choose the future, leaving the entrenched positions of the past behind us. Our aim is to be admitted to the EU and integrated in the transatlantic structures, and we take a clear stand for the development of a ‘modern society’”, has exhausted its potential. The party is now faced with a choice between making itself a clearly identifiable left-wing force with
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 right-wing liberals at present in power or as their greatest rival with a liberal agenda. On the question posed by the opinion polls about what other party people might consider voting for, the SLD has been leading for some time now. On this issue it is the most favoured party, scoring much better results than on the question of what party people would vote for if parliamentary elections were to be held tomorrow. For many of today’s PO adherents in particular it is definitely the second choice. Influential party strategists therefore are constantly reflecting on this tendency, calculating that it represents the greatest potential for the party. It must not be overlooked that the claim to be a party of social justice is being abandoned out of inability to deliver. It is even pointed out occasionally that voters concerned with social welfare issues have all switched over to the national conservatives around the Kaczyński brothers.

Another approach, geared more to the country’s social issues and the trade unions, has been called for by the young Party Chairman, Grzegorz Napieralski, who has been in office since summer 2008 and favours a discernible left-wing trend within the framework set by the PES (Party of European Socialists). His model is the Spanish Socialist Party, especially its leader, José Zapatero. On important decisions in recent months, however, Napieralski and his followers have suffered inner-party defeats, as they did on the issue of how to respond to the government’s drastic cuts in relation to early retirement. For the impending elections to the European Parliament (EP) the SLD leadership has opted in favour of a uniform social democratic list containing representatives of other social democratic parties.

Even if the SLD 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 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 marginalized, with men having the ultimate say. Perhaps it is no accident that for some years now the proportion of men among SLD voters has predominated.

Although the SLD officially sees itself as a very modern and up-to-date left-wing political force, there is no overlooking its lack of popularity among two important voter categories – younger people and women. 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 pedigrees have suffered elsewhere.

But even though some years have passed since the time of the SLD’s
heyday, it still continues to be a dominant factor among Poland’s left-wing and left-leaning forces. No other force has yet succeeded in establishing itself as a strong permanent presence next to the SLD. All other groupings have a hard time emerging from the huge shadow of the SLD at all. In almost every respect it is superior to the others – this goes for its accumulated experience of parliamentary work, its many years in power, the number of politically experienced leaders, its financial resources, its roots in all parts of the country, its experience of election campaigning, its sophistication, its integration in the European political structures and its intellectual milieu. The fact that the party in years gone by was not able to integrate these facets in equal measure, is another story. In any case the bottom line is that all the other left-wing forces have learned the bitter lesson that none of them has yet succeeded in exploiting the fall of the SLD to gain lasting and solid successes. So the frequently heard conclusion that only the complete downfall of the SLD could clear the way for a genuine new beginning for the Left in Poland could soon turn out to be a foolhardy blunder.

Other social democratic options

The most loyal grouping at the side of the SLD is the UP (*Unia Pracy*; Union of Labour), that 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 chairpersons (including one party chairwoman!) have thrown away their party cards, the party still exists. Although its great days when it took part in government coalitions, held ministerial posts and had influence in the country have gone never to return, the party still benefits from state financing, to which it is entitled as a member of the former Centre-Left bloc, even if it no longer has a single seat in the *Sejm*. The party sees itself as social democratic, explaining that it differs from the SLD primarily in terms of political pedigree. So it may come as a surprise that throughout the years the UP was always a reliable ally of the SLD. But this was a lesson in political decency, important for parties in which personal ambitions are frequently a substitute for sober political calculation. Although the party has failed to score any more election successes in recent years, it has at present few options for merging with other parties. It is geared more to broader left-wing electoral alliances which would enhance its own chances. The UP sees itself in a sense as an “ecumenical” force on the Polish Left, that could also imagine teaming up with forces to the left of the Social Democracy.

The party is a member of the Socialist International and currently has
one deputy in the European Parliament, who sits in the socialist parliamentary group. Like the SLD, it sees itself as a “pro-European force” that works to further the progress of 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. Admittedly the party, despite its Solidarność origins and its name, currently has few close contacts with Polish trade unions. It is, however, popular with the left-liberal spectrum and has always stressed emancipatory issues – such as the protection of minorities – more vigorously than the SLD.

A breakaway group from the SLD is the SDPL (Socjaldemokracja Polska; Polish Social Democracy), which 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 SDPL went before the voters for the first time in the EP elections of June 2004, winning several seats in a surprise result. In the EP the SDPL deputies, like those of the SLD and UP, sit in the socialist parliamentary group. The SDPL’s greatest election success came in autumn 2007, when it won 10 seats as part of a Centre-Left bloc. Unlike the SLD leadership, which left this Centre-Left bloc in early 2008 and continued on its own, the SDPL is trying to preserve such a bloc as giving it the best chance of getting elected. This course, however, is hotly disputed in the party, which led to a profound inner-party crisis in the course of the year 2008. It was a testing time from which the party emerged greatly weakened. Like the UP, the SDPL can take advantage of the state party financing system, which at present guarantees the party’s existence. The SDPL sees itself as social democratic, although it does not qualify for admission to the Socialist International. The party is a strongly “pro-European” force.

The little party PL (Polska Lewica; Polish Left) was founded in September 2007, when the former SLD chairman and prime minister Leszek Miller left the SLD in protest against the formation of the Centre-Left bloc. In some parts of the country he succeeded in setting up viable structures. So far, however, the party has not managed to find a firm place in the left-wing party spectrum. The SLD recently offered to include Leszek Miller on a uniform social democratic list that would allow him to contest the elections to the EP in June 2009.

Options to the left of the Social Democracy

Pride of place in this connection is the PPS (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna;
Polish Socialist Party), a party whose 115-year-old tradition makes it one of the oldest socialist and indeed left-wing parties in our continent. 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 election successes to speak of since 1997. Even at the local-government level there is hardly a glimmer of hope for the PPS. Furthermore the party is racked by violent internal disputes which has led to a situation in which the decisions of the last two party congresses are being challenged in the courts, reinforcing 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, which incorporates the entire history of the party. It had always been for social justice, for a democratic socialism, and for Polish independence, for which causes it had fought at various times and made numerous sacrifices. So it is painful to see for how little these things seem to count in its present political activities. And there have been various proposals in the party on how to extricate it from its present predicament. First and foremost of these is that the party should join forces with others without, however, abandoning its own identity or its own organization. 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 and 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.

A typically Polish party may be seen in the Racja Party (*Partia “Racja” Polskiej Lewicy*; “Racja” Party of the Polish Left), which was founded in the 1990s. The word *racja* means “reason” or “correct viewpoint”, i.e. in philosophical or ideological questions. The issue that exercises most members of the party is the failure to observe the constitutionally prescribed separation of church and state. Unlike Poland’s other left-wing and left-leaning parties, the party considers this issue to be of key importance to its activities and identity. Whereas neither the SLD nor the PPS, for example, wants to instigate a “war against God” – meaning that they are more or less tacitly resigned to the situation created by the concordat between the Vatican and Poland – Racja points to the practical public monopoly enjoyed by the Catholic Church on moral, philosophical and ideological issues.

Since 2007 the party chairwoman has been Maria Szyszkowska, who is
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 room to questions of civil rights and democratic participation in the work of the party. Thus Racja 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 in the process of EU 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 Racja and other groupings launched an initiative called “Congress for an Alliance of the Left” (Kongres Porozumienia Lewicy), in which the PPS takes a leading part.

Other options

A party that has been part of the left-wing spectrum for some time now is the PPP (Polska Partia Pracy; Polish Labour Party), which is backed by the small trade union Sierpień 80 (August 80), which engages in radical rhetoric. As the trade union does not publish its membership figures, we may assume that it has under 10,000 members, most of whom are employed in the Polish coalmining industry. Away from the coalfields the trade union is much weaker. The PPP itself is estimated to have far fewer than 1,000 members. Almost all members of the party are also members of the Sierpień 80 union. There are no members of other trade unions in the party’s ranks.

The chairman in personal union of both organizations is Bogusław Ziętek, who in spring 2008 publicly stated with regard to the party’s genesis and structure that up to Poland’s accession to the EU the party had had to give its protests a nationalist slant, as Poland had been muzzled by foreign capital. Since then, however, it had discovered the left-wing project for a “Social Europe”, in which it would like to participate. All this had been inevitable, and the PPP was now the only real left-wing force in Poland, as in terms of its members it was the only real workers’ party, had the closest trade union ties, and was most consistent in its opposition to privatization. Since nearly all the party’s members are men, the PPP must be the Polish political party with the lowest proportion of women.

According to its statutes the PPP is a party that is run on authoritarian principles. The chairman is well-nigh all powerful and subject to no democratic or public control. The statutes also stipulate that the purpose of the
PPP is the strict defence of the raison d’état of independent Poland. Consequently the party is strictly opposed to the EU and NATO. While NATO is branded as a terrorist organization, Poland’s membership of the EU is seen as a one-way-street from which the country gains no benefits. The party takes a strictly “anti-capitalist” line, whatever that may mean. This includes the adventure with Le Pen, whom the party quite openly supported in his bid for the French presidency during the 2002 run-off and such campaigns as that against “NATO’s criminal war” in Iraq. In the forefront of this anti-capitalist orientation is the struggle against privatization.

At present the PPP has no cooperation arrangements with left-wing or left-leaning parties in Poland. The main political foe is the SLD, which only recently was described in a PPP document as an “anti-worker party”. The same document dismissed Maria Szyszkowska, party chairwoman of Racja, as “politically venal”. Against activists of other trade unions, such as “Sierpień 80”, insinuations of political corruption are regularly made.

In the last elections the PPP received under 1 percent of the ballots cast. It proved incapable of making its claims to be left-wing credible in the course of an election campaign. In 2006, shortly after assuming his dual function, Party Chairman Ziȩtek had declared his intention of bringing all the voters who felt let down by the SLD into the PPP fold. Two thirds of PPP voters consider themselves to be part of the conservative camp. This too should make Ziȩtek fear for his good relations with the national-conservative, Catholic radio station Radio Maryja, to which representatives of left-wing and left-leaning parties in Poland have good reason to give a wide berth.

Holger Politt heads the Warsaw bureau of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and is a long-standing "participating observer" of left-wing discussion processes in Poland.
The Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) sees itself as a Marxist-Leninist party that recognizes the bourgeois basic rights and freedoms set out in the Slovak constitution and international documents on bourgeois and political rights. It is currently in opposition to a government coalition consisting of the social-democratic party “SMĚR” (Direction), the Slovak National Party (SNS), and the mass party “Movement for a Democratic Slovakia” (HZDS), of which the first-mentioned constitutes the strongest force.

**History**

The history of the KSS can be divided into the following stages:

Originally part of the Communist Party (KPC) in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR), the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) arose in 1990 as an independent party, initially within the framework of the then Czech-Slovak Federal Republic (ČSFR). Like the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) it also emerged from the former state party in competition with other political groupings and tendencies.

On 3/4 November 1990 the last joint Party Congress was held together with the Czech sister party. This congress adopted as a compromise solution a kind of federation between the KSČM, the KSS and the SDL. In December 1990 the party adopted a double name: Communist Party of Slovakia – Party of the Democratic Left (KSS – SDL).

In the subsequent period there evolved from this the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), which increasingly developed into a social-democratic party and finally formed a government coalition with conservative and neoliberal groupings. As part of this coalition the SDL lost all semblance of a left-wing profile and finally lapsed into irrelevance. At this point one may speak of a dissolution of the Communist Party in Slovakia for all practical purposes.

After the ČSFR split up into its constituent republics in 1993, Slovak political groupings that wanted to hold on to the Communist traditions and organizational structures, redoubled their efforts to form a new communist
party and applied for official recognition in March 1993. The result of this was that the year 1993 saw the emergence of two Communist parties: the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) and the Union of Communists of Slovakia (ZKS). On 29 August 1993 a Unification Congress of these two parties was held in Banska Bystrica, giving rise to the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS). In the Slovak parliamentary elections of 2002 the KSS won 6.3 percent, being represented in the National Council for the first time with 12 deputies. In the parliamentary elections on 17 June 2006 it only got 3.8 percent of the vote, thus failing to clear the five-percent hurdle.

The strongest force to emerge from these elections was the social-democratic party SMER led by Robert Fico, which proceeded to form a coalition government with the Centre-Right party “Movement for a Democratic Slovakia” (HZDS) and the Slovak National Party (SNS).

Identity, membership and party development

In Slovakia, as in the Czech Republic, there is – and will be at least for the medium term – a persistent need in the left-wing spectrum for a party with a communist identity. In the “Report on the Orientation and Identity of the KSS” to the Sixth Party Congress in 2008 the party is defined as a Marxist-Leninist party which draws on the positive legacy of the past while at the same time being a party of the modern communist Left. The party was to develop as a principled and yet realistic and modern left-wing party that recognizes the basic bourgeois rights and freedoms as set out in the Slovak constitution and international agreements on bourgeois and political rights.

In 2006 following its defeat in the elections to the National Council, the KSS found itself in a profound crisis. An extraordinary congress was called at which the party leadership resigned. A situation arose in which there was talk – even in the ranks of the KSS itself – of an imminent collapse or disintegration of the party, although such a development was successfully averted. The party managed to stabilize itself, re-activate its various bodies and stop the decline in membership following the electoral defeat and even reverse it, albeit gradually.

Today the KSS, despite having no seats in Parliament, is by no means a weak party. As of 2008 it has 8,797 members, of whom 7,186 are men and 1,612 women, the latter thus making up about 14 percent of the total.

If we look at the ratio between the number of party members and the total population of Slovakia, which has about 5.4 million inhabitants, we find a higher member density per inhabitant than DIE LINKE, for example, has in the Federal Republic of Germany – a statistic which indicates the
depth of the social roots of the KSS. The average age of KSS members is 59, making the KSS on average “younger” than DIE LINKE in Germany. About 93 percent of the members are of Slovak nationality, while just under 7 percent belong to national minorities. At over 3 percent the Hungarian minority is particularly well represented, a fact that is all the more remarkable since Slovakia has its own Hungarian minority party.

The main strongholds of the KSS are in Banska Bystrica, Košice and Prešov, i.e. regions with relatively high unemployment.

The social composition of its membership is as follows: Just over 29 percent are workers, between one and two percent farmers, about five percent belong to the technical intelligentsia, and some four percent are social scientists. Almost four percent are employed in public services, two percent are businessmen, while just under one percent are students. Approximately seven percent are unemployed, and about 44 percent are pensioners. Although the power base of the KSS at municipal level cannot compare with that of the big coalition or opposition parties, the KSS mayors and local politicians actively ensure that the KSS continues to have roots in Slovak society.

The economic and financial situation of the KSS is difficult. It benefits, however, from the solidarity of other left-wing parties in the region, especially the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) in the Czech Republic.

In contrast to the situation of the KSČM in the Czech Republic, the comparatively strong position of the conservative Catholic clergy in Slovakia makes things particularly difficult for the KSS.

As in other parties, the highest organ is the party congress. The Sixth Party Congress of the KSS was held in Prešov on 6 and 7 September 2008. Among the foreign guests invited to this congress included – reflecting the party’s closer party-political partners in Europe – representatives of: the AKEL from Cyprus, the KSČM from the Czech Republic, the Communist Party of Greece, the DIE LINKE party and the DKP from the Federal Republic of Germany, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Communist Party of Austria, the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Workers’ Party of Hungary, the Communist Party of Spain and a strong delegation from the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Party of the European Left was officially represented by its treasurer, Pedro Marset Kampus. Other guests of the congress were the ambassadors of Cuba, Palestine and North Korea. Representatives of various Slovak trade unions and trade union associations and the Federation of the Antifascist Resistance of Slovakia were also present.
The party’s relations with DIE LINKE are of particular importance. Since 1990 there have not only been continuous contacts between the leading bodies of the two parties, but also traditional cooperative relations between the district associations of DIE LINKE in Bautzen and Sächsische Schweiz/Osterzgebirge, KSČM district associations in the Czech Republic and KSS district associations in Slovakia in a three-way partnership.

The current situation

The result of the 2006 elections to the National Council is seen by the party itself as a devastating defeat, whose consequences the party still has to come to terms with today. The KSS is confronted with a situation in which the current social-democrat-dominated government under Robert Fico has a much more left-wing profile than other social-democratic parties in Europe, especially in the fields of economic policy, social welfare and foreign policy. Apart from the loss of any KSS representation in the National Council, this is described and discussed as the most important reason for current difficult situation of the KSS.

Under the leadership of SMĚR – SD a coalition government has come to power that has adopted the whole of the social welfare policy programme of the KSS and is now putting it into practice on a wide scale. In view of this many citizens of Slovak Republic continue to believe, even two years after the elections, that the government led by Fico and his party will manage to bring back the welfare state and correct and reverse the anti-social reforms of the preceding right-wing conservative and neo-liberal Slovak governments since 1990. Even the attempts by the conservative parties and media to accuse Robert Fico of communism only drove up the approval ratings for him and his party.

These developments of recent years took place despite the clear positions of the KSS on welfare issues and concrete proposals, such as the package of measures for a humane health service. Above all, the KSS spoke out uncompromisingly against the privatization of pension funds and the amendment of the Labour Code. It called for strengthening the position of the trade unions in the social dialogue, a free education system at all levels up to and including university level, and a law against the effects of the privatization orgies of the early 1990s. Long before the current crisis the KSS demanded that the state should acquire majority holdings in the strategically important sectors of the economy. It also called for an objective treatment of historical events after the Second World War.
The clear left-wing profile of the KSS is also to be seen in its rejection of the aggressive policies of NATO and the USA in such places as Yugoslavia and Iraq. The party demanded the withdrawal of Slovak soldiers for such missions.

In the meantime many KSS demands were adopted by Robert Fico’s social-democratic government and in large part put into practice. In such areas as social welfare, health, the economy and foreign relations the government is pursuing indisputably left-wing policies. This problem – the implementation of left-wing policies by a ruling social-democratic party forces not only the Left in Slovakia to consider its own profile and political utility value as an independent entity.

So how can the Left – in this case the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) – develop its own independent profile when faced by a left-wing, social-democratic party? How must a consistently left-wing party position itself that helped bring about the fall of the neo-liberal government, that welcomed Robert Fico’s social-democratic cabinet because it used all the powers of the ministries to improve citizens’ social situation and standard of living, all of which corresponded to the KSS programme? The KSS is going to have to find an answer to this question soon. This will also require initiatives in the field of financial and economic policy. For the Fico government has still not touched the uniform tax rate – the political showpiece of the Slovak neo-liberals – and despite the financial and economic crisis there is still no law to counteract the privatization orgies of the past.

**Current debates**

Since the 2006 defeat there have been constant debates within the party on the further strategic orientation of the KSS. The extraordinary Party Congress of 2006 was unable to lay these debates to rest. What is the function and task of a left-wing party faced with a strong left-wing social democracy? The fact that answers to this question differ is only natural. What does seem important, however, is not just the content but the form of these debates. In this connection the proposal of the Party Executive at the Sixth Party Congress in 2008 to change the statute governing the expulsion of party members who have problems with the KSS programme and are unable to abide by majority decisions is just as worthy of note as the majority rejection of this proposal in the district associations. The majority of the KSS membership stands for a party with a clear left-wing profile and clear communist identity, but in view of the history of communist parties most members vote to have expulsions from the party limited to special, excep-
tional cases as a last resort and subject to strict and precisely formulated conditions.

Also worthy of note are the party’s active attempts to counter the media blackout following the loss of its parliamentary seats by producing its own media, such as the newspaper “Kroky”, which is sold as the official organ of the KSS, and other periodicals and newspapers which are distributed in individual districts and regions. Some of the articles also appear in the languages of the national minorities, especially Hungarian. Another step towards overcoming the media blockade was the decision of the KSS to field its own candidate in the presidential elections. The party is aware that it cannot successfully compete with other parties in these elections. But in this way it can air its own political positions in the media during the presidential election campaign. The presidential candidate of the KSS is a non-party 58-year-old university lecturer, Dr. Milan Sidor.

The relationship of the KSS to other left-wing political parties and groupings in the Slovak Republic

In the past two years the KSS has systematically sought dialogue with other parties and associations which profess allegiance to left-wing political values. Even if its relationship to the ruling social-democratic party SMĚR – SD is of the kind that is usual between opposition and government parties, and SMĚR – SD naturally does all it can to prevent any serious parliamentary rival from emerging to the left of itself, there have been political consultations between representatives of the two parties at various levels, thus laying the foundations for a possible positive political dialogue in the future. Various rounds of talks have also taken place with leading representatives of other left-wing political parties and groupings, such as the Workers’ Association of Slovakia, the Left Block and the Party of Bourgeois Solidarity. These parties and organizations are political structures that currently have at most marginal significance. The Left Block has now become largely integrated with the social-democratic party SMĚR – SD. The Workers’ Association of Slovakia and the Party of Bourgeois Solidarity have refused to do this so far, as on the other hand they have refused to join the KSS. However, the Workers’ Association of Slovakia and the Party of Bourgeois Solidarity have declared an interest in cooperating with the KSS at the municipal level. Traditionally the KSS maintains good relations with the organizations of antifascist resistance fighters in Slovakia.
The Communist Party of Slovakia has joined the Party of the European Left (EL) with observer status. It welcomed the founding of the EL and is actively helping to shape it. It attends its congresses – ten KSS delegates took part in the EL Party Congress in Prague in 2007.

The KSS appreciates the EL’s claim to uphold the values and traditions of the socialist, communist and working-class movement, of international solidarity, of humanism and antifascism, regarding this as a contribution to the struggle against capitalism, exploitation, political persecution and wars of aggression, against fascism and dictatorship. The KSS does not share – as can be seen from its documents – all the EL’s views on the recent history of Eastern and Central Europe, especially the “equation of the building of socialism with Stalinist repression”. It therefore addressed a resolution of its Sixth Party Congress of September 2008 to the party bodies of the EL and all its constituent parties with the urgent request to bring about a re-evaluation of certain attitudes to historical events in the former socialist states. Representatives of communist and workers’ parties from East European countries should be involved in the cooperative effort to reach such a re-evaluation.

But it is not only in relation to questions of history that the EL should take more of an interest in the East European countries and their left-wing parties, regardless of whether they are EU members or not.

Nevertheless the KSS supports the joint electoral platform of the Party of the European Left. The fundamental political formulations it contains on the elections to the European Parliament have been described by KSS Chairman Josef Hrdlička as a considerable step forward.

In addition to the EL the KSS supports the international organizations of communist parties, including the coordination of joint action campaigns and the provision of concrete mutual assistance in the political struggle.

At its Sixth Party Congress in September 2008 the KSS showed that it is a party that has stabilized itself since the consolidation phase begun in 2006 under complicated political, economic and religious-cultural conditions and is developing a perspective with its current programmatic and structural orientation.

It is engaged in creating the inner-party conditions that will enable it to emerge once again from the next elections as a successful parliamentary force. A main factor in its stabilization is the work of its mayors and municipal councillors – its local grass roots which practically amount to its
sole presence both in the Slovak majority population and among the country’s numerically strong national minorities. Another strength of the KSS is its considerable networking effort with left-wing parties of the mainly Slav neighbouring states of Central and Eastern Europe and – despite or precisely because of the occasional tensions in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship at state level – with left-wing parties and groupings in Hungary.
In the winter of 2009 it is difficult to talk about the power base, organization or culture of the Radical Left in Italy, as it was routed in the national elections of spring 2008, which brought about a realignment of its alliances and tectonic shifts in its party-political landscape. These processes are still going on at the time of writing, and no one knows how they will play out.

The 2008 elections brought Berlusconi and the Centre-Right alliance an unprecedented majority, while the parties on the single list of the Rainbow Left (*Sinistra Arcobaleno*) gained only 3.1 percent of the vote, thus failing to achieve the minimum four percent necessary to enter the national parliament. The Rainbow Coalition consisted of the Communist Refoundation Party (*Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*), the Party of Italian Communists (*Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*), the Greens (*Partito dei Verdi*), and the Democratic Left (*Sinistra Democratica*). In the 2006 elections, which ended in the victory of the Centre-Left alliance under Romano Prodi, the left-wing parties campaigned separately and together garnered 10.2 percent of the vote.

For the first time in the history of the Italian Republic there is no party in parliament that expressly identifies with socialism or communism. How are we to explain this state of affairs?

The first reason for this situation was undoubtedly the Radical Left’s participation in the Prodi government, which was seen by most Italians as a fiasco. In a country whose social structure (with many small to very small enterprises) inclines it towards the Centre-Right, with a television culture of a very low level and a political system whose opposing poles both represent the ruling classes without any representation of the social groups threatened by discrimination, exploitation and exclusion – in such a country the Prodi government failed to rise to the social challenges it faced. Nor was it able to counter the savage media campaign which accused it of dependence on the Radical Left.

The difficulties of the Radical Left in the coalition government can perhaps best be explained on the basis of two examples. Although the Left insisted
on the necessity of an immediate redistribution in favour of the lower social strata, the government decided to put the finances in order first, before taking steps towards redistribution. This confirmed a paradox of Italian politics: If the Right are in power, the Maastricht criteria are simply brushed aside, but if a Centre-Left government comes to power, the first thing to be done is to balance the books.

In summer 2007 the Prodi government decided to reform the pension system. Although the enormous cuts made by the Centre-Right government were rescinded, the pension protection fund as a whole was reduced. The Radical Left sought to stave this off by associating itself closely with the trade unions, even outbidding the trade-union demands. In the end, however, the trade unions accepted the government proposals and a subsequent referendum among the workers yielded a broad majority in favour of such a compromise. This was a stinging defeat for the Radical Left, which had been counting on the support of the workers and trade unions. Nevertheless the Centre-Left government set about initiating, albeit hesitantly, a policy of top-down redistribution based on the considerable successes that had been achieved in combating the export of capital for purposes of tax evasion. After all, such a redistribution policy could have made the Radical Left and its participation in the government appear in a new light. But Prodi fell before he could put his new policy into effect.

In order to see this in perspective it is worth looking back to the year 2006, when the “left-wing” camp scored a very narrow victory over Berlusconi’s right-wing alliance. The Centre-Left alliance’s lead was just 0.7 percent, i.e. 25,224 votes: 159 senators of the Left alliance confronted 156 senators of the Right alliance. In other words, the right-wing Berlusconi government had not been completely defeated.

Other members of the Centre-Left alliance were the social democrat-oriented Democratici di sinistra (DS); the left-liberal party of the centre “Margherita”; and the Rifondazione Comunista. The aims of the three parties differed widely. The only thing that united them was the desire to bring down Berlusconi. Their joint project was to replace Berlusconi’s casino capitalism with the progressive Centre-Left alliance.

However an alternative to the Berlusconi project required both a strong alliance with the trade unions and an agreement between the alliance parties on the main planks of an alternative platform, so as to turn the electoral alliance into a pluralist political unity. But this proved impossible. The two governing parties, DS and Margherita, were pursuing a moderate liberal course akin to that of European Social Democracy and Bill Clinton’s Democrats. On the other side were the Rifondazione, Comunisti Italiani,
parts of the Green minority, and the left wing of the DS. Although constantly at loggerheads among themselves, they tried to hammer out a uniform platform, the core of which was taken from Article 1 of the Italian Constitution, which states that Italy is a “republic founded on work”. It was hoped that this approach would win the support of the trade unions and rally the various social movements and powerful civil society organizations. This hope proved vain. Although Rifondazione Comunista considers itself to be part of the social movements, the government majority remained closed to such movements, so that the idea of a parliamentary system that would be open to the social movements became unfeasible, and the relationship between the left-wing parties and social movements against the background of left-wing participation in government became increasingly complicated and tense. At the same time differences broke out within the movements: various struggles on the various fronts – whether in the municipalities or against military missions, etc. – were not combined to form part of a broad alliance. The struggles remained isolated and did not blend into a single political and cultural programme.

Given the realities of power relations it was only possible to agree on a minimum programme for the government coalition from which many demands of the Rifondazione Comunista were excluded. All that was agreed on was a minimum programme of political regulation: a functioning public sector, an improved social infrastructure, and certain economic measures. But in this last field the differences within the Centre-Left government were greatest, and Prodi’s economic policy remained within the neo-liberal framework. The Centre-Left programme itself took up more than 200 pages, but it contained few specifics. There was no reference to the civil-society protests of 2001-2006, no promise of a shift in policy, and even with regard to the troops in Iraq the government only agreed to hold out the prospect of their withdrawal.

Some bills on the issues of immigration and employment and the curtailing of Berlusconi’s media empire were postponed. Acceptance could not be won for taxing company profits to combat poverty or taking measures designed to loosen the Catholic Church’s grip on Italian society, such as the proposed law on extra-marital unions.

Thus many hopes hung on the Centre-Left government, especially those for an end to Berlusconi’s economic and social policies. But these hopes could not be fulfilled.

The second reason for the Radical Left’s poor election result is connected with the rise of the new Democratic Party (Partito Democratico). This new party arose out of a union between the Left Democrats and the “Margher-
ita” (a partial successor to the old Christian Democrats). The leader of the new party, Walter Veltroni, refused to renew the anti-Berlusconi alliance, believing he could fight Berlusconi better on his own than in alliance with the Radical Left and the small centre parties, and waging his election campaign under the slogan that a vote for him would be “a useful vote against Berlusconi”. This strategy of the Partito Democratico had already been taking shape before the fall of the Centre-Left government and ultimately led to the latter’s premature end. Veltroni had begun to dominate the alliance politically, so that the small centre parties felt excluded from a future Centre-Left alliance and, having realized this, regarded the existing government coalition as terminated. Furthermore Veltroni’s initiative had given Berlusconi new legitimacy, in that he wanted to change the bipolar political system into a two-party system. This was also the thinking behind the merger of Berlusconi’s party (Forza Italia) with the Party of National Unity (Alleanza Nazionale – the post-fascist party) to form the new party People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà). Finally, the campaign slogans used in the election (“Vote for the Democratic Party – the only party that can beat Berlusconi!”) drew away votes from the Radical Left, without the centre making any gains. The result was that all Centre-Left forces lost. Meanwhile Veltroni resigned in February 2009 following the PD’s defeat in the regional elections in Sardinia.

The third reason for the election defeat is undoubtedly to be sought in the electoral coalition of the left-wing Rainbow (Sinistra Arcobaleno) itself. The original project of opening the lists of candidates to the social/civic movements and unifying the parties belonging to the alliance in the medium term became – partly because of their participation in the Prodi government and partly because of the abrupt fall of that government and the resulting early elections – a “top-down” measure on the part of an electoral coalition, without any consultation with the grass roots in the various groups and parties. It was an electoral alliance without a clearly discernible profile, an alliance forced on its members by circumstances and intended exclusively for the elections. Consequently the aim of the Rainbow Left was to get the Left into parliament. Although it had this one clear aim, it was far from clear on the issues and behind the times in the modalities and symbols it used (see the dispute over the retention of the hammer and sickle symbols). Its political decision-making processes were just as out of date as the principles on which it drew up the lists. This enabled the Partito Democratico to take votes away from the Sinistra Arcobaleno.

The combined effect of all these factors meant that the Radical Left lost voters of nearly all tendencies: of a former 100 voters only 22 voted for the
Rainbow Left, 30 for the Democratic Party, four for the “Italy of Values” party (which is growing rapidly and criticizing Berlusconi from a moral perspective), six for the federalist and racist party Lega Nord, while 18 voted for other small parties, and 20 did not vote at all.

Clear this kind of defeat cannot just be explained away in terms of mistaken individual or collective decisions. It also raises the question of the structural relationship of the Radical Left to itself and to the country in which it operates: i.e. what are its historical and social functions, and how far is it able to perform these functions?

It would appear that the elections of 2008 have revealed the deep gulf between the Radical Left and its own country. Even if it should succeed in winning back a proportion of the lost votes, it is certain that the Radical Left is failing to exploit the basic dynamics at work in Italian society, even although it did provide a competent analysis of neo-liberalism and its effects. The most significant aspect of this situation is the fact that only a small section of the traditional working class votes for the Radical Left, although tough labour struggles, the protection of pensions, and the overcoming of precarious employment, are important points of the Radical Left’s programme. Even more modest, however, is the approval on the part of the “new” category of precarious employees and the self-employed. The paradox of the struggle to secure pensions, in which the Radical Left was rebuffed by the workers it wanted to represent, and the paradox of the precarious employees, who did nothing at all to reward the Radical Left for its efforts on behalf of good and secure jobs, prove that what is at stake is not only the question of left-wing participation in government, but the extent of its ability to influence government policy.

It is a question of the Left’s cultural relationship with the workers. On the one hand the Left is resented for being too strongly committed to the civil rights of migrants and not enough to the struggles of workers as such, while on the other the Radical Left appears to the individualized workers in the information networks to be culturally, politically and organizationally too “traditional” – too much on the side of the “traditional” workers.

To sum up, we can say that even an improved modus operandi on the part of the Centre-Left government would presumably not have sufficed for the Radical Left to cement the Left’s disintegrating social base. The election defeat of 2008 made clear the gravity of the problem to be overcome.

Initial reactions to the defeat did not include any broad process of reflection nor any change of course, but passionate debates between and within the left-wing parties. In the case of the PRC (Partito Rifondazione Comunista) the participants in these debates fell into three categories: those who
maintained that the hypothesis of the Rainbow Left had failed; those who decided to rebuild the PRC independently in keeping with its social roots; and those who considered the whole Radical Left unfitted for today’s tasks, thus essentially pleading for a dissolution of the PRC. Those who speak out in favour of a dissolution of the radical party-political Left combine this with the idea of founding a new left-wing party “without adjectives” that would supersede the primary association with communism as a distinguishing mark. Behind these varying and occasionally opposed positions, even if not explicitly stated, is the question of the relation to the _Partito Democratico_ (PD): Should one regard an alliance with this party “always – without ifs or buts” as a self-evident given, or should one discuss the possibility of such an alliance on a case-by-case basis, even if it means occasional conflict with the PD?

At the PRC congress in Chianciano in summer 2008 there was a narrow majority for a strategy of continuing the previous PRC line, mainly geared to the interests of traditional and new workers, above all those with precarious terms of employment. This line was reinforced by the election of Paolo Ferreros as new National Secretary of the PRC. Ferreros was elected with the support of the “most traditional” elements in the PRC grouped around Claudio Grassi.

The defeated minority at this party congress, led by the regional president of Apulia, Nichi Vendola, and supported by Fausto Bertinotti and Franco Giordano, stood for a different strategic approach: the building up of a broad political Left – a People’s Left – in Italy. For this reason they did not want to be associated with the majority proposal for a joint leadership of the party. After months of tension and conflicts a section of the minority (Vendola, Giordano, Migliore, Mascia and others) left the party and created a new entity named Rifondazione per la Sinistra, which later renamed itself “Movimento per la Sinistra”. Fausto Bertinotti is still undecided about this development and is adopting a wait-and-see attitude. The Party of the Italian Communists aspires to a reunification with the PRC, while the Greens and the Democratic Left are seeking a rapprochement with the PD.

The situation is rendered more complicated by the fact that Walter Veltroni, in order to weaken the Radical Left further and promote only moderate tendencies, has – together with Berlusconi – fixed the electoral hurdle for the European Parliament at 4 percent. The consequence of this decision could be the formation of two different mergers: on the one side the Greens, the Democratic Left and the new entity led by Nichi Vendola, and on the other the PRC with places on its lists open to the Party of the Italian Communists and also – though this will be more difficult – to the Critical Left.
and the Party of Employees. Whether or not such a development takes place is an open question. What may be seen as certain, however, is the Left’s determination to take sides in the social conflicts and its criticism of a European policy of dismantling social and democratic institutions. Against this background the analysis of the world financial and economic crises and their social and political effects is one of the key tasks facing the Left in Italy. The Left will have to fight harder than ever for the building of a truly political, social, democratic and peaceful Europe, and develop concrete proposals to this end.

The present crisis, which will also hit Italy with unprecedented force, the government’s responses, and the as yet vacuous policy of the PD, may give rise to feelings of profound disappointment and a desire to return to the old familiar values. Under these circumstances a significant proportion of the “historical” voters of the Radical Left and the PRC in particular might clear the 4-percent hurdle and thus snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Such an outcome of the European elections could be favoured by the fact that the idea of the “useful” vote does not apply in the European elections, so that voters feel freer to state their first choice. A joint programme of the European Left to solve the economic crisis and a joint European Left Alliance, made visible for the first time through its joint election platform with the Party of the European Left (EL), may also contribute to a positive result in Italy.

A positive result in the European elections could also herald a fresh start and foster the ability to take on the central contradictions of capitalism – always assuming that this is accompanied by a process of cultural and organizational renewal that is much more convincing and deep-rooted than was the case before.

The emergence of the anti-globalization movements enabled the parties of the Radical Left, especially the Rifondazione Comunista, to form political alliances which have determined the shape of the European Left. This greatly facilitated the task of analysing the social transformations that were taking place and identifying the changed nature of work as a key challenge facing the Left. Despite all differences the Left still has the potential to draw on all this again and can rely on the support of a civil society for which street battles and general strikes are not just theoretical options. Hundreds of thousands of Italians, including representatives of the various left-wing parties, demonstrated in Rome on 11 October 2008 against the government of Silvio Berlusconi under the slogan: ”Another Italy is possible”. They were protesting against the anti-social family policy and failed financial policy, against the cuts in schools and higher education, and also
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against the setting up of special classes for non-Italian pupils. The wind is
changing, and the Left is on the way to re-organizing itself.

Chi confessa il proprio errore, è sulla via della verità – “He who admits
his own mistakes is on the road to truth” runs the Italian proverb, whose
significance is certainly not limited to the Left in Italy.
The Spanish left alliance *Izquierda Unida* between regionalization and authoritarian politics

*Dominic Heilig*

The subject of the present article is the Spanish United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU). The analysis of this alliance will cover the following aspects: first, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) as the largest constituent force in the IU; second, the IU’s place in the history of the country; and third, the Spanish electoral system.

Since the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, or rather since the first free elections of 1977, the political landscape of Spain has been characterized by a strong polarization. This is expressed in the struggle between two political blocs, one dominated by the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), and the other by the conservative and arch-Catholic People’s Party (PP). Between these two blocs and on their respective political fringes other smaller political formations and parties organize and position themselves. Above all Spain’s high degree of regionalization still favours the emergence of regional parties on both the left and right ends of the political spectrum.

*The Communist Party of Spain (PCE)*

On 15 April 1920 the youth organization of the Socialist Workers’ Party reconstituted itself as the Partido Comunista Espanol (PCE). At the same time members of the Socialist Party had attempted to induce their party to join the Communist International. This political venture failed, and the Socialist Party joined the International Association of Socialist Parties, whereupon the proponents of the Communist International left the party to found the *Partido Comunista Obrero Espanol* (PCOE) on 13 April 1921. The two young communist parties – the PCE and the PCOE – merged to form the *Partido Comunista de Espana* (PCE) on 14 November 1921.

In the late 1920s a pro-Soviet orientation came to prevail in the still very small and numerically weak organization, leading to further splits and walkouts. When the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1931, the
party was in a sorry state. Its internal conflicts were driving it to the brink of collapse. Nevertheless, in 1933, the communists managed to enter the Spanish parliament.

The PCE took an active part in the provincial workers’ uprisings that began in 1934 and contested the 1936 elections as part of the Popular Front (*Frente Popular*). Although the left-leaning Popular Front won a parliamentary majority, it was a very thin one. When the Spanish Civil War – which was to go on until 1939 – broke out in 1936, people flocked to join the ranks of the PCE, whose membership rose to around 200,000. In the Spanish Civil War most PCE members fought on the side of the Soviet-dominated Popular Front. With the defeat of the Republic the PCE was banned, and under the Franco dictatorship its members and sympathizers were persecuted, tortured and murdered. Many went into exile, mainly in the Soviet Union and France. Until it was legalized on 9 April 1977 the party operated illegally from abroad.

When the first free elections were held in 1977, the PCE, which again had about 200,000 members, won 9.4 percent of the votes, giving it 20 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. At this time the party was allied with the Socialist Workers’ Party in the *Coordinación Democrática* against the representatives of the old regime. The next time it went to the polls, in 1979, the PCE managed to increase its result to 10.8 percent of the votes, gaining 24 parliamentary seats.

The history of the Communist Party of Spain can be divided into five phases:

- 1st phase: Split from the PSOE and founding of the PCE;
- 2nd phase: Spanish Civil War and establishment of the PCE;
- 3rd phase: Illegality and tilt towards Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU);
- 4th phase: Legalization and acceptance of the constitutional monarchy;
- 5th phase: Socialist turning point and emergence of new alliances.

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Since the 1960s the Communist Party had been adopting an increasingly moderate stance, which can be mainly attributed to the expected legalization of the party in 1977. While this moderate strategy proved successful, as was reflected in the elections of 1979, it also triggered inner-party debates, especially as regards the party’s relationship to the Soviet Union and the CPSU. Finally the party renounced the influence of the CPSU, adopting the Eurocommunist model and accepting the system of parliamentary democracy in Spain. In the 1982 elections, however, the party received just 4.1 percent of the votes and four seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The party’s centralized structures continued to work against its political and programmatic opening and its successful adoption of Eurocommunism. But an explanation for the loss of votes in the 1982 parliamentary elections must also be sought in the polarization of the political debate between the PSOE and the PP.

The socialist turning point of 1982

In the late 1970s the Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) established itself as a strong alternative to the ruling Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD), a bourgeois party of the Centre-Right. By making the government’s decision unpopular to take Spain into NATO (1982) into an election campaign issue and announcing a referendum on whether Spain should leave the military alliance in the event of an election victory, it aggravated the crisis of the UCD government. In the elections of October 1982 the PSOE won an absolute majority and was able to remain continuously in power until 1996.

Spain’s accession to the European Community (EC) in 1986 began a period of strong economic growth that is often compared by economists with the German “Wirtschaftswunder”. The “Spanish economic miracle” wrought massive changes in political attitudes, social behaviour and cultural preferences, yet the radical Left, i.e. the movements and parties to the left of the Socialist Workers’ Party or of the Social Democracy had hardly any answers to the effects of the increasing globalization of economic and financial processes. Above all the structural funds from the EC – later the EU – helped bring about a dissolution of the classical proletariat in Spain.

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This deprived the PCE of large sections of its power base. The increasingly neo-liberal privatization policy of the ruling PSOE as part of the “New Social Democracy” and the continuing protests against Spain’s NATO membership brought about a re-orientation of the party. Against this background the radical Left had to reconstitute itself.

Shortly after the 1982 elections the Socialist Workers’ Party had changed its attitude to Spain’s NATO membership. After Spain joined the EC in 1986 the referendum announced before the 1982 parliamentary elections was held, but this time the PSOE was arguing in favour of Spanish membership of NATO. In the referendum a narrow majority (52 percent) voted to keep Spain in the Western military alliance.

*NATO protests and the founding of the Izquierda Unida*

The *Izquierda Unida* is the most important radical left-wing party in Spain today. The IU began not as a party, but as a loose electoral alliance based on a common stance on the question of Spain’s NATO membership. Although Spain accepted US military bases back in 1950, thus bringing its international isolation to an end, Spain’s accession to NATO in 1982 marked a qualitative change for the still young democracy in the context of the Cold War and in view of the nuclear offensive of the Reagan administration. Many voters were disappointed by the PSOE and abandoned it for civic movements and other left-wing parties which were actively opposing Spain’s NATO membership. Although the broad left-wing alliance lost the 1986 referendum, the NATO debate enabled a new political alliance to be established to the left of the Socialist Workers’ Party. By the time of the 1986 parliamentary elections the *Plataforma Cívica por la salida de España de la OTAN* (Civic Platform to Take Spain out of NATO) had developed into the electoral alliance *Plataforma de la Izquierda Unida*, which won 4.6 percent of the vote and seven seats.\footnote{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, New York 2001, p. 163ff.} In the 1987 local elections the electoral alliance increased its share of the votes to 7.18 percent and finally garnered 9.07 percent of the votes in the nationwide elections of 1989. The Izquierda Unida now had 17 deputies in the national Chamber of Deputies. In 1992 the IU was officially registered as a Spanish party.
The eight founding members of the IU were:

- Partido Comunista de Espana (PCE);
- Partido Comunista de los Pueblos de Espana (PCPE);
- Partido de Acción Socialista (PASOC);
- Izquierda Republicana (IR);
- Federación Progresista (FP);
- Partido Carlista;
- Partido Humanista;
- Colectivo de Unidad de los Trabajadores – Bloque Andaluz de Izquierdas.

The IU is thus an alliance of parties, for despite the fact that the IU is registered and publicly active as a political party in its own right, the constituent members’ organizations and parties retain their formal, legal, organizational and political independence. This fact is a constant source of tensions among the member organizations, especially when it comes to drawing up electoral lists, IU financial resources, and the line to be followed by the alliance. The supreme organ of the IU is the Federal Assembly (Asamblea Federal), which appoints the Federal Political Council (Consejo Politico Federal), the highest organ between party congresses, which has about 100 members. From their number the Executive Bureau is elected, which is headed by the General Coordinator as Speaker of the IU. The party is also divided into 17 regional organizations, which represent, organize and develop local political activities, sometimes in parallel to the regional organizations of the IU member parties.

Since its founding the IU has tried to strengthen its pluralist profile and to open itself to new, anti-globalization and social movements by acting as part of Spain’s anti-globalization movement in the various social forums at regional, national, European and global level. The report to the Seventh Federal Assembly of the IU in December 2003 clearly states that the members of the IU explicitly profess socialism. They desire a society which is

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133 It should be pointed out that apart from the PCE and the Colectivo de Unidad the other founding parties left the IU in the years between 1987 and 2001. Today the IU’s members include many smaller regional and local groups, such as the Catalonian Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, the alternative-leftist Trotskyite Espacio Alternativo, the Colectivo de Unidad, and the smaller Trotskyite groups Cuadernos Internacionales, Nuevo Claridad, Partido Obrero Revolucionario and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores – Izquierda Revolucionaria.
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“participatory, critical and an alternative to the prevalent model”. This includes, in the members’ view, pacifism, ecological concerns, and feminism. The party also seeks to raise the Spanish minimum wage to 1,100 euros a month; to introduce a 35-hour week; to raise banks’ taxes to 35 percent; to introduce a minimum pension of 800 euros a month; to reform the abortion law by permitting abortion in the first three months; and to reform the franchise.

The party’s ties to the trade unions are conducted mainly through its member party, the PCE, which has traditionally been closely linked with the country’s largest trade union, the Workers’ Commissions (Comisiones Obreras, CC.OO.). The recent decline in the PCE’s influence on the trade union has been made up for by the election of Ignacio Fernández Toxo at the last trade union congress in late December 2008.

The fact that the PCE decided as early as 1986 to take an active part in the creation of the IU electoral alliance and finally to transform the Izquierda Unida into a party cushioned the effects of the collapse of “really existing socialism” for the PCE in Spain. Thus the very good showing of the electoral alliance in the 1989 parliamentary elections was even improved in 1993, when it gained 9.55 percent of the votes and 18 seats. In the 1996 elections to the Chamber of Deputies the IU received 10.54 percent of the votes and 21 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The successful launching of the IU as a red-green party project was helped by the fact that no established green party exists in Spain. The IU’s outstanding result in 1996 could not, however, be sustained in the subsequent national elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008.


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<tr>
<td>Chamber of Deputies</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,858,588</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Parliament</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>961,742</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>2,253,722</td>
<td>9.55</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>2,497,671</td>
<td>13.44</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>2,639,774</td>
<td>10.54</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In parallel to the party’s failure to score any election successes there was a continuous proliferation of political, strategic and programmatic debates within the IU. The PCE in particular, which for a long time had acted with defensive reticence despite its strong position in the alliance, now demanded more influence in the IU bodies. In the legislative period 2004-2008 the IU tolerated a minority government under Premier Zapatero (PSOE), while hardly achieving any of its own political goals. The fact that the PSOE on issues of relevance to the IU sought an alliance with the conservative opposition party PP, and the PSOE strategy of *voto útil* (useful vote) and *voto de miedo* (vote out of fear) were especially influential in forcing the IU’s election results down.

Ahead of the national congress on 15 and 16 November 2008 the IU General Director, Gaspar Llamazares, announced his resignation from the party leadership. Racked by intense political debate the congress still managed to appoint a new executive, but could not agree on a new General Director. Finally, on 14 December the IU Executive chose the PCE member Cayo Lara as new General Director of the IU. The latter is now trying to dissolve the strategic alliance forged by his predecessor as General Director with the ruling Socialist Workers’ Party, stressing the IU’s independence.

Today’s *Izquierda Unida*, with all its various politically and organizationally independent parties and organizations, officially has 66,000 members. Its voters, if the policies and campaign slogans of the alliance are anything to go by, presumably consist of youngish people with higher education from urban centres.¹³⁶

**International activities of the Izquierda Unida**

Even in its founding phase the IU was active on the international stage, being involved in the formation of various left-wing European structures. The IU has been represented in the European Parliament since the elections

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¹³⁶ Data on IU members and IU voters are either not in the public domain or do not exist.
of 1989. It is a founding member of the GUE/NGL parliamentary group. The IU was also one of the founding parties of the NELF, the Forum of the New European Left, which came into being in Madrid in 1991 as a place for discourse and exchanging views between left-wing parties. In 2004 the IU was one of the founding members of the Party of the European Left (EL). In addition to the IU its member parties Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (Catalonia) and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) are also independent members of the EL. At the same time other member parties of the IU and the IU itself are part of the European Anti-capitalist Left (EAL).\textsuperscript{137}

Although the IU takes an essentially positive view of the process of European integration and sees the European dimension as offering additional scope for left-wing politics, it is critical of the current form assumed by the European Union (EU). In the current policies of the EU the IU sees massive social, democratic, ecological and economic shortcomings. Thus the IU is pushing for an expansion of the rights of the European Parliament. It is also in favour of a European constitution, though it rejects the failed EU Constitution Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty. In an article for the periodical Europarot the former IU MEP Pedro Marset wrote: “We are convinced that the neo-liberal Europe of the Maastricht Treaty will have to be revised. Social clauses must be included in the treaties providing for full employment and the strengthening of public services. This means abolishing the autonomy of the European Central Bank and the cancellation of the Stability Pact. We believe that a future European constitution must defend the democratic rights of citizens.”\textsuperscript{138}

\textbf{The significance of the Spanish electoral system for the Izquierda Unida}

The Spanish parliament (\textit{Cortes Generales}) consists of two chambers, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the former being the more important. Article 68 of the Constitution stipulates that the Chamber of Deputies shall have a variable number of deputies, but not less than 300 and not more than 400. They shall be elected on the principle of proportional representation for a period of four years.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} Spanish member parties of the EAL include Izquierda Unida (IU), Esquerra Unida i Alternative (EUiA) and Espacio Alternativo (EA).
A peculiar feature of the electoral system is that in some provinces the percentage hurdle is higher than in others, which works to the disadvantage of smaller parties. Thus in the 2004 elections, for example, the IU needed an average of 254,000 votes for a seat, while the PSOE only needed 66,000. In a proper proportional representation system the IU vote would have entitled it to 18 seats in parliament instead of five. For the 2008 elections this means that although the IU received about four percent of the votes, it only got one percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The electoral system strongly favours the thinly settled regions at the expense of the populous ones. This affects the IU’s representation in the Chamber of Deputies, since the party is traditionally stronger in the urban centres than in the countryside. Thus in the Spanish electoral system the cards are stacked against the parliamentary representation of the radical Left.

Peculiarities of the Spanish political system

The main point at issue following the changes in Spanish society and the party system after Franco’s death in 1975 was the relationship between church and state. Another factor is that Spanish society and the Spanish party system are characterized by cronyism and paternalism. This authoritarian political tradition is reflected to this day in a strong personalization of politics and weak political participation. In comparison to other European countries Spain has a very low party membership quota. The change in Spanish society is also affected by the fact that in the late 1970s the parties were assigned a role in the institutional framework, which hampers their acting as social mobilization forces. The appearance of the modern mass media changed the communication between social subsystems and between parties and voters. Furthermore the transition from fascist dictatorship to constitutional monarchy was accompanied by a regionalism that to this day determines large areas of political discourse. Regional parties not only dominate the political party system but have also become entrenched in the national Chamber of Deputies.

At present the lines of conflict – state vs. church, parties vs. institutional framework; and centre vs. periphery – are preventing national parties like

the IU from building up and broadening a nationwide power base. It is dif-
ficult for the IU to offer voters a continuous, uniform political programme. 
In particular, the subordination of the class conflict to regional issues ag-
gravates the problems encountered in establishing radical left-wing parties 
that want to be able to act on the national stage.
The “Bloco de Esquerda” and the founding of a new Left in Portugal

José Soeiro

The complexity of Portuguese society

Portuguese society is a complex society which shows certain peculiarities in a European context. The fact is that in Portugal pre-capitalist principles coexist with a strongly developed post-Fordist segment in the production sphere and the widespread thinking patterns of a consumer society. Old inequalities coexist with an asymmetric distribution of new resources. To long-standing social issues new ones have been added. And the contradictions of our society are aggravated by the huge upheavals that have taken place in the decades since the April Revolution of 1974. Portugal has experienced a problematic transition, which extends and reinforces structural inequalities (Estanque, 2005).

If we accept the analysis proposed by João Teixeira Lopes, we may list in broad outline some of the features making for stability and change in Portuguese society: the consolidation of a modern demographic system with certain inequalities between the family-oriented and Catholic North and the more secular and less traditionalist South; the focus on the coast; the concentration of population in the major conurbations, which in spite of everything is compensated by the existence and self-assertiveness of a few medium-sized cities; a very sharp rise – particularly in relation to other European countries – in the educational level, especially among young people, which is also responsible for the significant expansion of the “new urban middle classes”; a continuing high proportion of premature school-leavers, illiterates and poorly educated people; a strong feminization of the gainfully employed and student populations; the direct transition from a rural and agriculturally-oriented economy to a service economy, omitting the second, industrial phase of development (probably the only such case in the European Union); an accelerated and semi-peripheral integration in the world of business, characterized by the intensive use of cheap labour, “human decapitalization” and the presence of a very large contingent of un-
qualified and poorly paid workers in industry and the service sector; an explosion in the level of consumption, especially among the so-called urban middle classes; an inversion of the migration flow (Portugal, that historically was a country of emigrants, became at the beginning of this century a country of immigrants, i.e. a destination for workers from Eastern Europe, China, Brazil and African – especially Portuguese-speaking – countries); cutbacks in the welfare state and continuation of models of cronyism, assistentialism and paternalism in relation to the state and in class conflicts (Lopes, 2003).

These tendencies are particularly manifest in Portugal’s labour market. New internal divisions are appearing among the gainfully employed, whose mobility indicators have risen as a result of outsourcing and increased internal differentiation in the intermediate strata, while the old inequalities were joined by new social differences of a post-Fordist and post-industrial nature as well as by signs of proletarianization, especially in the service sector (Estanque, 2005). The Portuguese economic model was always based on low salaries and poorly qualified labour, which was always seen as one of the great economic attractions of our country, a factor that is being undermined by international competition and companies deciding to move to countries with even lower pay, but possibly better qualified workers. Secondly, the welfare state is poorly organized, and the social situation in Portugal would be even worse if it were not for the other “welfare society” in the shape of widely ramified family networks and Church relief.

Furthermore, employment in Portugal is becoming palpably more precarious, a process which hits young people and women particularly hard, and which comes on top of the chronic problems caused by salaries that were low in any case (in Portugal, where 20% of workers are poor, the reality of “poverty despite employment” is particularly blatant); impoverishment (a fifth of all Portuguese live below the poverty line); a weak social security system (as we have a welfare state that was dismantled before it could be consolidated, having only been introduced in the 1970s and not – as in most European countries – in the immediate post-war period); and unemployment (about 8.5% according to official statistics, but there are many more who do not feature in the statistics).

At the same time profound social upheavals have produced new class segments and an increasingly well-educated youth, whose efforts are marked by models and a lifestyle which are typical of the consumer society model. The deep gulf between expectations and real possibilities can thus become a generator of phenomena such as resentment and revolt. In a country undergoing conservative modernization, in which modern forms of
labour regulation and industrial safety were introduced only very recently, which is currently experiencing the neo-liberal phase of capitalist development, and which is going through the same development tendencies that are common to all Europe countries, while at the same time exhibiting the peculiarities of a semi-peripheral society, the conditions for transformational political action by the Left could come together.

The emergence of the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda)

The emergence of the “Bloco de Esquerda” in 1999 united in one and the same organization various traditions of the political struggle of the Left in Portugal. In the post-revolutionary period since the 1970s the Portuguese Left was dominated by the Socialist (social-democratic) Party and – on the Left – by the Communist Party. A wide range of extreme left organizations, which in the revolutionary period had had various degrees of influence, went through a deep social and political crisis in the 1990s and were reduced to a few hundred active members capable only of marginal protest.

In 1999 the Revolutionary Socialist Party – PSR (Portuguese Section of the Fourth International, SU), the Democratic People’s Party – UDP (a revolutionary Marxist party with historical links to Maoism and Albania – and “Política XXI” (which had essentially been formed by ex-members of the PCP who had left the party in the late 1980s and 1990s) – resolved to propose the creation of a new political movement. This movement was not to be a simple coalition, but a new organization. It was to be socialist and anti-capitalist. And it would assume the form of a party of a new type, with strong inner-party democracy that permitted the co-existence of various political tendencies and platforms. Furthermore it was necessary right at the start – out of a desire to create something new that was more than the sum of its parts – that the three parties which had given birth to the new one, agreed that in the leading bodies of the movement more than half of the elected members were to come from none of these three organizations. The “Bloco” sought to facilitate a convergence process of many Leftists who could not identify with a PCP (Portuguese Communist Party), which had been left behind in thrall to Stalinism, and a PS (Socialist Party), which was openly liberal and incorporated the surrender of social democracy to neo-liberalism all over Europe.

This means that the “Bloco” was to fill a gap, the gap waiting to be filled by a new Left which would be able to unify the labour struggles and the struggle against all abuses of power while adopting an anti-capitalist, but also ecologically and feminist-oriented identity, which would oppose
racism and discrimination against sexual minorities and interpret socialism as a struggle against any form of oppression. A Left with the ability to build bridges between old and new movements, which would be able to advance the cause of the social struggles and address the new concerns of the Portuguese movement in all their complexity.

Seen from this angle the “Bloco de Esquerda” represented a qualitative leap for the culture of the extreme Left in Portugal. It was not a question of reproducing the logic of small, sectarian and hyper-ideologized propaganda organizations, but of building an alliance against war, imperialism, neoliberalism and discrimination, based on a concrete programme of breaking with the past and changing Portuguese society. In other words, the aim was not to reduce politics to choosing more radical calls for social justice, but to play a role in the class struggle and influence the political struggle while finding the words which, once said, could trigger transformational action and mobilize the population. The bloc’s ideological identity thus arose out of a programme for the present and not from a discussion of the past or an attempt at ideological purification. This decision meant that an alliance no longer had to be permanently postponed in the name of a settling of accounts with the past, or that artificial notions of a possible new start in the future were used as a pretext for the impossibility of joining forces in the present.

In this way the “Bloco” became a left-wing force which on the one hand did not want to lose the historical memory of the Left as a whole, but on the other was determined to learn how to bring about unity and pursue this aim on the basis of a joint diagnosis of capitalist globalization and the delayed development of Portuguese society and a programme for doing something about it. On the basis of this programme it was possible to define socialism as a concrete policy of struggle against exploitation and oppression and for the democratization of social relationships and the defence of the public good.

Today the “Bloco de Esquerda” is a permanent feature of Portuguese society. If in the first elections it contested it achieved just over 1% of the vote, ten years on the polls are giving it about 10%. Its membership figures are rising as its roots among the population grow deeper, while its influence among the ranks of the employed and in elected bodies is increasing, as it now has a few hundred local deputies and a parliamentary group of eight representatives in the national parliament.

The bloc defines itself as an anti-capitalist alliance that speaks for the majority of the population and fights uncompromisingly for a policy that represents the interests of the majority. At the same time it does not neglect
the interests of minorities – whether in the struggle for the rights of immigrants or the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual populations. On the other hand the “Bloco” seeks to win over social majorities for concrete policies, whether for the defence of public services, or for a change in the law on abortion, which last year was finally decriminalized, thus putting an end to the arrests of women who had terminated their pregnancies.

The path followed by the “Bloco” was a path of learning and mutual inspiration. Each of the parties that made up the “Bloco” contributed its own experience and traditions, which of course were very different. But these three founding parties wanted to open themselves to mutual inspiration and the involvement of many other people in order to build up a new organization. They also wanted to overcome their own past culture of sectarianism and isolation and learn to play a role in the social struggle.

Today the “Bloco” constitutes a point of reference for a significant section of Portuguese society. In the struggle against conservative modernization and in view of the failure of the bourgeoisie to come up with a democratic development project for the country, the “Bloco” has placed new issues and alternative policies on the political agenda. By combining the struggle for jobs and against unemployment with the stepping up of initiatives against precarious employment by applying new forms of representing employees, especially the post-Fordist segments, on the one hand, with the courage to raise the concerns of all minorities in the political struggle and stand up for the interests of the majority of the population against the business and financial elites on the other, the “Bloco” has become a reliable champion of the Left for thousands of Portuguese.

The strategy of a militant Left: political clarity and alliances on the Left

The “Bloco”’s intervention strategy, especially last year, in relation to concrete issues was characterized by a policy of joining forces with those who were dissatisfied with the Social Democracy (specifically the PS) and critical of the neo-liberal policy of José Sócrates and the absolute majority of the Socialist Party. Today the “Bloco”’s political strategy is focused on the struggle for jobs and the defence of public services, a field in which the hegemony of neo-liberalism can be weakened and in which the Social Democracy itself is experiencing the most contradictions and the greatest opposition. Various initiatives were therefore launched side by side with those affected, e.g. with the teachers’ movement (the first step being to bring 80% of the members of this profession onto the streets to protest against the government and the “teacher classification” measures it had imposed, while
limiting their salaries and seniority status, which gave rise to the greatest
demonstration we ever had, with more than 100,000 teachers on the
streets). Then there was the state health service initiative, with a joint peti-
tion from leaders and activists of the “Bloco” and a few socialists of the old
school, and most particularly an important PS personage who had brought
the public state health service into existence in the 1970s and was now vot-
ing with the “Bloco” and many other people in protest against the PS gov-
ernment’s policy of turning hospitals into business enterprises, closing
down health centres, and promoting private health care. Other political ini-
tiatives were launched together with Manuel Alegre and his movement.
Alegre is a Socialist Party deputy, Vice-President of the National Assembly
and a long-standing leading member of the PS. In the presidential elections
of January 2006 Alegre stood alone, without the support of the PS, and won
more than a million votes (18%), which put him in second place ahead of
the PS and government candidate, the well-known Mário Soares (who got
13% of the vote). Since then Alegre has intensified his criticism of the gov-
ernment, voting, for example, against the Labour Code, which contains the
laws governing employment and is imbued with such liberal features as
increased flexibility of the terms of employment, the weakening of collect-
eive bargaining agreements and cutting back the social rights of employees.
Together with Alegre and his political supporters the “Bloco” organized a
Public Services Forum in which the fields of employment, economy,
health, education and social insurance were discussed and which was at-
tended by the leader of Portugal’s largest trade union association, Carvalho
da Silva of the CGTP, a member of the PCP. Although his participation was
not in keeping with the orthodox leadership style of his party, he does have
an excellent reputation and is influential among PCP members and employ-
ees.

This consolidation of forces which are dissatisfied with the Social De-
mocracy, extends the critique of liberalism beyond mere anti-capitalism and
weaken the political hegemony of the government’s liberal policy which
has dominated the country in recent decades. Speculation on the formation
of a new party by Manuel Alegre on his own or in collaboration with oth-
ers, has been met by the “Bloco” with concrete policies, thus stressing that
it is concerned with a lengthy and profound process of redrawing the poli-
tical map of Portugal and a reorientation of the Left which is not and will not
be allowed to be subordinated to mere electoral calculation and which can-
not be implemented quickly just because elections are in the offing. On the
other hand the “Bloco” has responded to the increasing sectarianism of the
Communist Party with a policy of unity in the social struggles and a desire
for dialogue on the Left. Incidentally the “Bloco” has launched a number of very open initiatives in recent years, such as the political and theoretical debate conducted by the periodical “Vírus” with its several thousand online readers, or the Socialism Initiative, a forum in which many protagonists from the fields of academia, culture, art and politics take part and which has launched left-wing campaigns and provoked reflections on a wide range of issues.

In the drafting of a political programme for the forthcoming elections the “Bloco” has also opted for a process of consultation (online and face-to-face), in which social protagonists and activists from the various fields (whether business or culture, health or education), most of them from outside the “Bloco”, were consulted in the search for a strong and sustainable programme detailing alternatives in the various fields of government and acting as an instrument of political struggle against the policies pursued by the PS government.

*Alternative Left and power*

The question of governing, i.e. the question of power, is naturally part of the political discussions between the Left and the “Bloco”. The decisions taken on this question are very clear. The “Bloco” wants to build on the protests of the Left to form social majorities that would overturn government policies. In the struggle against the Labour Code or for the legalization of same-sex unions, in the struggle for the state health service or for a public education system, the “Bloco” wants to mobilize a majority of the population and form the necessary alliances. In the elected bodies, too, the “Bloco” was always ready to support all concrete measures promoting social rights and justice. On the other hand we know that public pressure exerted through the media and aimed at getting the “Bloco” to enter into coalitions with the PS in a context in which neither the conditions nor the power relations for a left-wing government programme exist represents an attempt to neutralize our political project and the force of our proposals. For this reason the “Bloco” refuses to join the PS government because it is pursuing opposing policies. The “Bloco” seeks social majorities in order to implement specific policies and wants to have a political majority based on its programme, which is an alternative to that of the PS and social democracy, which has gone over to liberalism and consensus, to a Europe without democracy and social rights. Social transformation is a struggle to change the balance of forces in society, and no power is worth the trouble if it
doesn’t also mean transformational autonomy and the effective ability to make a break with the prevailing interests and existing forms of rule in the economic, political and social fields. In truth the “Bloco” project is much more ambitious than any institutional arrangement. Its aim is to destroy the present political map of Portugal inherited from the last century and find a new direction for the Portuguese Left, a new hegemony and an anti-capitalist pole, which is to be a source of attraction and unity in Portugal and in Europe in the name of a project of finding an alternative to neoliberalism for many of those sections of society that are dissatisfied with social democracy. This will be a protracted process, but it has been launched and is the long-term strategic vision of the “Bloco de Esquerda”. The more time we devote to it, the faster we’ll get there.

Bibliographical references:


Cyprus has a remarkably strong left-wing tradition, as the world was recently reminded when Dimitrios Christofias was elected President of the Republic. For decades the Progressive Party of the Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόµµα Εργαζόµενων Λαού, AKEL) has been a significant factor in the island’s politics. Constituted in 1941 as a successor to the banned Communist Party, it aimed right from the start at cooperation and dialogue with other political forces. It helped pioneer the struggle against British colonialism although, in contrast to other groups, it renounced violence as a political instrument. After independence it was continuously represented in parliament, achieving up to 39.8% of the vote in elections.

When Dimitrios Christofias assumed the leadership of AKEL in 1988, its future, like that of other communist movements, was uncertain. A section of the party split off, and it required a lot of effort on the part of the chairman to overcome this setback. Against the trend in other European countries, its share of the vote did not shrink in elections. The party’s current conception of socialism dates from this period, having been adopted in 1990 and constituting a positive evaluation of Marxism-Leninism. The last party congress in 2005 confirmed this assessment, approving the use of scientific socialism as a method. Its statutes also continue to be those of a cadre party. In practical terms AKEL had opted for a reform-communist course even before the collapse of the Soviet Union. It does not take the view that the party, as the vanguard of the working class, is the latter’s sole legitimate representative and pursues not a revolutionary, but a democratic transformation of society in the direction of socialism. Observers of the Cypriot political scene consider the success of AKEL to be due to its oft-demonstrated ability to adapt to new international and local conditions without abandoning its communist profile.

The altermondialist movement, like other progressive forces, is regarded by the party as a possible ally of the international Left. Even the Social Democracy is not dismissed out of hand, though in Cyprus it plays a subordinate role. The Movement of Social Democrats (Κίνηµα Σοσιαλδηµοκρατών, EDEK) gained 8.9% of the vote in the last elections, and the Green Party 2.0%. While the EDEK has existed for some decades
under various names and has a small, but loyal following, the Greens are a very new phenomenon. On the radical Left there are just a few Trotskyite organizations. Attac is not represented in Cyprus.

At the other end of the political spectrum is the conservative Democratic Assembly (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός, DISY). In elections it scores almost as much as AKEL, being particularly strong in rural regions. AKEL rules out any possibility of cooperation with it. The middle ground between the two camps is occupied by the centrist Democratic Party (Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα, DIKO).

AKEL’s well organized party apparatus is an expression of its deep roots in Cypriot society. Party offices are to be found even in small villages, and many institutions of everyday life regard themselves as communist, whether they be sports clubs, cafés or whole enterprises. Like other left-wing parties, it is stronger in the towns than in the countryside, where its main support comes from refugees and minorities. Political convictions are also a matter of family tradition, which ensures the two big parties, AKEL and DISY, a constant share of the vote.

The party owns several enterprises in the manufacturing and service sectors. As in the earlier relationship between the French CP and the CGT, AKEL is close to the Pan-Cypriot Workers’ Federation (Παγκύπρια Εργατική Ομοσπονδία, PEO), a trade-union umbrella organization that has existed under this name since 1941 and is the most important association of its kind. The party’s youth wing is the United Democratic Youth Organization (Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Οργάνωση Νεολαίας, EDON), which has about 8,000 members. It also has considerable influence – the student movement associated with it scored over 42% of the vote in the last elections at the universities. The party continues to maintain a women’s association and a trade union for farmers, each of which has over 10,000 members.

At the head of the government

Despite its great support among the population and many seats at local and municipal level, AKEL did not join a national government until 2004. The idea was that the then elected President Tassos Papadopoulos (DIKO) would step down after five years in office, and AKEL would put up its own candidate. It was strongly represented in the government, but had to make concessions to the president’s policies on many issues. The Annan plan for the unification of Cyprus was particularly disputed. AKEL had demanded that the referenda on the plan should be postponed in order to ensure a clear evaluation. This did not happen, which is why it was finally rejected by the
communists, after Papadopoulos had made it clear that he would not support it. After the collapse of the referendum on the Greek side, the atmosphere in the government got steadily worse, and it proved impossible to agree on a common line to resolve the conflict. When Papadopoulos announced in 2007 that he was going to stand for election again, thus breaking the original agreement, Christofias followed suit and became the first presidential candidate of his party.

The first round of the presidential elections brought an unexpected and very close result. Christofias received 150,016 votes (33.3%), narrowly behind the DISY candidate, Ioannis Kasoulidis, who got 980 votes more (33.5%). President Tassos Papadopoulos, on the other hand, was surprisingly eliminated with 143,249 votes (31.8%), although EDEK and the Green Party had supported him. In the second round DIKO, EDEK and Greens backed Christofias, while Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus openly supported Kasoulidis. The final victory went to Christofias, who managed to get 240,604 votes (53.4%), while Kasoulidis only got 210,195 votes (46.6%). The turnout was 90.8%.

Since the election Dimitris Christofias has been presiding over a government in which four of the eleven ministers belong to AKEL, three to DIKO and two to the Social Democrats, the remaining two being independents. President Christofias’s programme does not mention the building of a classless society as being among its aims. Nor do the terms socialism and communism occur. It is clearly meant to be the programme of a coalition and contains a few carry-overs from the last government. It aspires to progress in the social sphere – such as measures to enhance the transparency of government and upgrade local authorities – and stresses the interests of the workers, small businessmen, and farmers. Despite the reticent rhetoric there are plenty of social promises. There are several passages energetically refuting neo-liberalism, especially the subjection of more and more aspects of life to the laws of the market, while the doctrine of using the war on terror as a pretext for curtailing privacy rights is rejected. The most urgent task remains the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, and it was the competence of the communists on this issue that contributed to their election victory.

**AKEL and the north of the island**

Before Cyprus received her independence many Turkish Cypriots were members of AKEL, although it supported unification with Greece, known as Enosis. This was opposed by the nationalistic Turkish resistance organization (Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı, TMT) of Rauf Denktaş, the later presi-
dent of North Cyprus. The TMT forced the Turks to break off all contacts with the party, murdering some prominent members by way of example.

In 1970 the Republican Turkish Party (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi, CTP) was founded in the north of the island as a left-wing opposition to Denktaş. After its founding the CTP maintained good relations with AKEL. These came to an end in 2004, when CTP Chairman Mehmet Ali Talat was appointed prime minister of North Cyprus, and his party, like AKEL, found itself in government for the first time. This step led to mutual recriminations, after political realities made the dividing lines between the two become clear. Since then the personal relationship between Christofias and Talat has been plagued by difficulties. Nevertheless they belong to the few politicians of North and South who remain in contact over and above the Cyprus question.

The re-unification negotiations have been going on for several months in the shape of regular meetings between the two presidents. This makes the starting point all the more hopeful than it was for the Annan plan. Nevertheless the initial optimism on the Turkish side that a solution could quickly be found has faded somewhat. The experience of the failed plan and referendum has induced AKEL not to set or accept any time limits, which can only facilitate a resolution of the conflict in the medium term. President Christofias sees fundamental differences on two key issues: the powers of the future central government and the return of the Greeks to the north of the island. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the influence of Turkey behind the scenes is hard to assess.

Foreign policy

The focus of the electoral programme is the policy of Cyprus towards the EU. As a small but active member, Cyprus wants to strive for a democratic, solidarity-based and people-friendly Europe. Turkey’s EU prospects are supported, although the precondition of this is an end to the occupation of northern Cyprus, i.e. the re-unification of the island, and the opening of Turkish ports to Cypriot ships. AKEL opposes the neo-liberal and conservative policies of the EU. It stresses the struggle against inequality and the destructive aspects of globalization, supporting sustainability and a Europe based on peace and justice.

After the election the EU Commissioner for Cyprus, Markos Kyprianou, was appointed foreign minister. The decision in favour of this experienced politician from the DIKO party of former President Papadopoulos was, as in the case of all cabinet posts, uncontroversial. Last year Cyprus pursued
an independent foreign policy. Kyprianou was the first EU foreign minister to visit Cuba after the lifting of trade restrictions. Government representatives have announced plans to open an embassy in Cuba. A second journey in January 2009 took Kyprianou to Latin America again, where Venezuela was his first port of call. On the occasion of the Olympic Games there was a top-level exchange of views between President Hu Jintao of the People’s Republic of China and Dimitris Christofias.

Immediately after assuming office the new president launched an initiative in “all directions”, in the course of which he made his first foreign visit to Athens. In early June he held talks with Gordon Brown, which led to a memorandum, which is important as the United Kingdom is the guarantor power for Cyprus. At the end of the year he made a state visit to Russia, which took Christofias back to the scene of his student days. Both sides expressed a desire to further expand the good relations between them and called for a European security policy without NATO. This was a challenge to the conservative opposition, which is not averse to cooperating with NATO.

At EU level it is noteworthy that AKEL was the only ruling party in Europe to vote against the Lisbon Treaty. Earlier Christofias had given the EU an assurance that the treaty would nevertheless be passed by the votes of the coalition partners and the opposition, which duly took place. As one of five EU countries Cyprus has not recognized the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo and stresses it will not do so even if Serbia recognizes it. Outside of diplomacy Cyprus cropped up more than once in the headlines, when ships left Larnaca headed for Gaza to break the Israeli blockade.

Cypriot foreign policy in the first year of the Christofias presidency revealed that for a small European state it pursues an independent course, even more so than in the past. Relations were maintained with governments – like Syria – out of favour with the West. The tilt towards Moscow was clearly noticeable, without however neglecting EU ties. In many cases it was simply a matter of an assurance to support the government’s course in the question of re-unification. The USA retained pride of place, the election of Obama being generally regarded as positive, as the Greek Lobby is close to the Democrats. The main problem for Cypriot foreign policy is that although the country has good contacts all over the world, these are not always accompanied – especially in the case of the EU countries – by the desired pressure on the Turkish-occupied North and Turkey itself.
Financial and domestic policy

Cyprus’s economy is strongly dependent on trade. The island has the reputation of being a tax haven, as reflected in the large number of offshore companies and ships flying the Cypriot flag. AKEL has no plans to change this basic system for the time being. The Cypriot budget for 2008 set new priorities. Spending on education and culture rose by almost 30%, health spending by 13.5% and that of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security by 12.5%, while outlays on agriculture and armaments were cut. The military budget in particular is falling steadily, as parts of it have been shifted to other portfolios. Overall Cyprus showed a positive economic development, which is reflected in low unemployment and falling government debt in relation to GDP. The non-party Charilaos Stavrakis was appointed as new finance minister.

The budget approved in November for 2009 goes a step further, raising welfare spending by 26%, and enabling the government to keep certain promises, such as the introduction of additional pension payments as of Easter and benefits for inhabitants of the mountain regions. The sole change in the tax system so far has been the introduction of a value-added tax on property transactions as demanded by the EU.

The domestic banking sector has been hardly affected by the financial crisis, as it has been carefully managed and has a high degree of credit cover. The steep drops in tourism and construction, both sectors that depend on foreign cash flows, are being met by government countermeasures to the tune of €300 million, or over 1.5% of GDP. €51 million of this is being spent on subsidizing tourist infrastructure, while €245 million is earmarked for state construction projects and low-interest mortgages for low-income families. The prime beneficiaries of the construction projects are to be schools, refugee settlements and social infrastructure.

The new government’s educational policy ran into opposition, as it introduced new school books intended to help overcome the hostile stereotype of the “Turk” and stop presenting everything in categories of black and white. In view of the decades-old shibboleths that were taught in schools this was an important step that represented a challenge to the Church in particular. In the past it was customary to involve it in such decisions, but these days are gone, as Christofias put it. Similar disputes with the Church and the conservatives arose in other fields, but the constant disagreements in educational and youth policy were particularly evident. Even AKEL’s proposal to abolish school parades aroused bitter nationalistic resentment. At present the network of free school buses is being expanded on the is-
land. By September 2009 their number should have risen from 300 to 350, with fixed and clearly marked bus stops for these services.

Both candidates in the run-off had made proposals to reduce military service. The new defence minister Kostas Papakostas has now approved a plan for a gradual reduction in the length of service from 25 months to 19. DISY had proposed a final target of 14 months, to be offset by a regular army of 2,500 professional soldiers.

A Cypriot tradition with which Christofias has broken is the reduction of sentences for prison inmates at the beginning of his term of office. So far he has exercised his right to pardon three times, including two mass pardons of prisoners whose sentences did not have long to run. Controversy was aroused by the pardoning of a lawyer jailed for traffic offences.

One of the island’s most serious problems is the water supply. Drought produced a water shortage in the summer months, a situation that was not remedied until the end of the year. Despite a lot of rain and snow in the winter of 2009, because of climate change there is no long-term prospect of improvement. The dependence on imports is expected to rise. Meanwhile there are plans for the construction of additional seawater desalination plants, although legal hurdles and opposition protests will have to be overcome first. In November 2008 parliament passed a law restricting the right to import and distribute liquefied natural gas to the state enterprise EAC. This invalidated a license that had already been issued to a private company. The state is to get its own gas distribution plant by 2015. This is in response to the demands of the trade unions involved. A partial privatisation of the power supply has been rejected, as has an increase in imports of natural gas.

Another legal amendment of the past year concerns the possibility of enabling Cypriots to vote abroad and the limitation of campaign expenses. A reform of the right of adoption is in the committee stage, the final bill being expected shortly. There is also talk of a smoking ban, an initiative that did not come from AKEL, but from DISY and the Greens, who have one seat in parliament. This year a major reform of the police and the prison system is to be tackled. The recent escape of a convicted rapist, Antonis Kitas, from a hospital and the circumstances of his stay there revealed serious shortcomings, forcing the justice minister, Kypros Chrysostomides, a member of AKEL, to resign.

The most important construction project to be completed last year was a new terminal for Paphos Airport. At the end of January the foundation stone was laid for the new building of the State Theatre of the Cyprus Theatrical Organization. A move in the same direction is the construction of a cultural
centre that is to contain concert halls, libraries and educational institutions and be the most important institution of its kind on the island. As promised in the President’s programme it was resolved to establish a Medical Faculty at the University of Cyprus.

From the point of view of the Left a positive judgement can be passed on the first year in office. Major upheavals were not to be expected, as the balance between the parties has been relatively unchanged for decades. AKEL aims to establish a caring and just society and has adopted a course of reforms to this end. It has been helped in this by its relations with the other form of working-class organization, the trade unions, whose influence over the past year could not be overlooked. President Christofias makes an energetic impression and so far has been able to keep his promises. But whether AKEL can maintain its position as the main force in the government will depend less on the success of its social and welfare policies, than on whether it can achieve the re-unification of Cyprus.
Ever since the founding of the Bulgarian Workers’ Party in 1903 the Bulgarian communists had close contacts with Russia, sympathized with the communist revolutionaries of the Soviet Union and belonged to the founder members of the Communist International (1919). At the end of the Second World War the Fatherland Front, with the support of the Red Army, assumed power in the country. In 1948 the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) was united with the Bulgarian Workers’ Party (K) to form the new Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), which acted as a state party for four decades. Finally, on 10 November 1989, Todor Zhivkov (1954-1989) resigned as head of state and general secretary of the BKP. At an extraordinary congress of the BKP, which since the mid-1980s had been initiating important reform processes in Bulgaria along the lines of glasnost and perestroika, a new manifesto and new party statutes were adopted. In March 1990 the party changed its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). The BSP sees itself as the legitimate successor party to the BKP, accepts political responsibility for the past and has been seeking social dialogue since the beginning of the 1990s. As the post-socialist transformation got under way there arose in Bulgaria a new pluralist party system with a large number of left-wing parties. Political life was defined by the rivalry between a left-wing and a rightist political camp.

This division into camps on the one hand and the Bulgarian Socialist Party’s view of its role on the other led to the emergence in 2001 of a broad and heterogeneous political Coalition for Bulgaria (KB). This alliance helped many smaller parties to enter parliament in addition to the BSP. Thus for example the Communist Party of Bulgaria (KPB), reconstituted as a rival to the BSP, which in the 1994 and 1997 parliamentary elections received barely one percent of the votes, was part of the Coalition. Other coalition partners were of conservative peasant origin (Bulgarian National Agrarian Union “Aleksander Stambolijski”, BZNS-AS) or ecological movements like the Green Party of Bulgaria (ZP). Another member of the current “Coalition for Bulgaria” alliance is the Party of Bulgarian Social

\[144\] The Bulgarian National Agrarian Union (BZNS) functioned as a bloc party until 1989. After 1990 there were several splinter groups or newly founded parties that bore this name.
Democrats (PBSD), which emerged after several party splits and sees itself as the historical successor to the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers’ Party of 1891. Earlier, up to and including the elections of 1997, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) was part of the anti-communist Union of Democratic Forces (SDS).

Outside of the present alliance other left-wing and social-democratic parties have emerged in recent years, such as the “Social Democracy” Union, the Marxist Bulgarian Communist Party, the Alternative Socialist Party, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Union (BSS), and others. To these must be added a few communist groupings such as the Zora political circle or the National Patriotic Union Fatherland, which are critical of the social-democratization process in the BSP. They represent in some cases nationalist positions and have ties to late Bulgarian state socialism. None of these parties achieved any electoral successes worth mentioning. Even after they merged in 2001 to form the Coalition of the National Patriotic Fatherland Union and Left (Koalicija Nacionalna Patriotična Sajuz Otečestvo i Levica) they received only 0.5 percent of the votes cast.

These political groupings are now somewhat close to the populist, radical right ATAKA. None of these splinter groups achieved any electoral successes on their own, nor were they able to exercise any influence as an extra-parliamentary opposition. The sole exception is the Euroleft, which was founded in the context of the 1997 riots and the toppling of the government of former members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party who were close to the party’s social-democratic wing. In the 1997 parliamentary elections the Euroleftists scored a unique electoral success of 5.5 percent. But just three years later there were further splits which left these parties as ineffectual as the other splinter groups.

In 2008 the left-oriented, ecological movement gave rise to a new Green Party (Zelenite). In addition to the social issues mentioned in their programme its activists tended to focus on specific environmental issues, such as halting the construction of new skiing facilities in the Pirin nature reserve which has to be continually defended against business encroachments. In 2008/09 the Green Party initiated or helped organize various demonstrations against the current government’s policy and the social hard-

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145 Before the 1991 elections the SDS split into three parties. The BSDP belonged to the SDS-Centre and failed to get any deputies elected to parliament.
146 Founded in 1997 from the fusion of the so-called United Bloc for Labour (OBT) and elements of the BSDP.
147 Was founded in 1990 and claimed, like the BSP, to be the successor party to the BKP.
148 Split off from the BSDP in 1998, belonged to the Coalition of United Democratic Forces (ODS).
ships and corruption it entails. The demonstrators were a heterogeneous group consisting of teachers, students, pensioners and eco-activists. Although anti-globalization organizations have not emerged in Bulgaria as yet, there has been an active anarchist movement, the Federation of Anarchists in Bulgaria, since the early 1990s. In addition to advocating the revolutionary transformation of society they address such social issues as low wages and poor working conditions.

There are many women’s organizations, such as the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation and the Centre of Women’s Studies and Policies, which tackle such issues as violence against women, traffic in human beings, and prostitution. Some also take up social issues, such as poverty among women, the ethnic discrimination of Roma, and women’s participation in politics. Most of these organizations are well networked inside and outside Bulgaria. Although they tend not to form alliances with political parties, they do attempt to influence the political process by lobbying legislators.

The two main Bulgarian trade union federations Podkrepa and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (KNSB), have no political or organizational links to the parties. But there is the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation (Tripartite), an early arrival on the political scene, in which the trade unions and employees’ representative bodies negotiate jointly with the government of the day.
The mobilization potential of Bulgaria’s left-wing parties is highly ambivalent. While shortly after the change of system the BSP won more than half the votes (52.7 percent), in 2001 it could only manage 17.2 percent, despite having numerous allies. This loss of votes was largely a matter of the strong voter volatility which presented the two political camps with electoral successes or failures at different times. In general, the formation of two rival camps is characteristic of the development of the post-socialist party system in Bulgaria up to 2001. The rivalry between these two blocs, which was chiefly based on strategic motives and historical reservations rather than insuperable policy differences, favoured the formation of electoral alliances and government coalitions. These alliances enabled smaller parties like the Political Movement “Social Democrats” or the peasant party Bulgarian National Agrarian Union “Aleksander Stamboliiski” (BZNS-AS) to win seats in parliament, which they could never have managed to do as individual parties.

The 1990 elections were based on a combination of majority and proportional representation. While the BSP won 57 percent of the votes in the majority election, it only managed to get 48.5 percent in the proportional election. The median value of 52.7 percent is given here.
Bulgarian governments in the 1990s were highly unstable because of the bipolar nature of the party landscape. The Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), which defined itself as an anti-communist alternative, refused any cooperation with the BSP, which despite its election victory in 1990, aspired to a broad governmental coalition. Twice (in 1994 and 1997) early elections had to be called and cabinets reshuffled during the legislative period (1992), while it not infrequently happened that different elements within the two big party blocs – BSP and SDS – split off and assumed the reins of government as a technical coalition (1992-1994; 1994-1995). The party of the Turkish minority – the Movement for Rights and Liberties (DPS) – tipped the scales on such occasions.

The BSP was in power in 1990-1991 and 1995-1997 and steered a course, particularly in its second term of office, between economic reforms and stagnation accompanied by sluggish privatization, which led to a financial crisis in 1997, forcing the BSP to step down following (violent) street protests. The BSP remained in opposition till 2005. The government coalition consisting of the BSP, the National Movement for Simeon II (NBSII)\(^{150}\) and the DPS clearly shows that the bipolar division into camps has lost in significance since 2001, and that the BSP is now acceptable as a coalition partner for a Centre-Right alliance. This development was only made possible by the fact that the party landscape had changed as a result of the electoral successes of the National Movement for Simeon II (NBSII) in 2001 and the emergence of the ultra-right ATAKA in 2005. At all events the long years of effort on the part of the BSP to enter into alliances with parties of the other camp had at last been crowned with success. Thus over the past twenty years the Bulgarian party system has shown signs of both stability and instability. On the one hand voter volatility is very high and the party organizations, especially those of the small parties, are unstable. Many new parties have been founded and existing parties split. Political alliances formed in the course of an election campaign often turned out to be short-lived afterwards and, after a lost election, were never a basis for collaboration in opposition. Furthermore there were several cases of governments resigning before the end of their term and having to call early elections. Stability, on the other hand, was provided on the one hand by the organizational and electoral strength of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and by the bipolar nature of the party system, which dominated party rivalry in the period up to 2001, although it did occasionally paralyse decision-making processes.

\(^{150}\) The party is now called the National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDSV).
This division into political camps is also reflected to a limited extent in citizens’ political attitudes. Although in general the percentage of Bulgarians who identify with the political centre is the highest, these percentages are still relatively low compared to other countries, and Bulgarians by their own account are widely distributed across the Left-Right spectrum.

Table 1: Self-positioning of citizens on the political spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Left</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Values Survey Bulgaria (1999-2004); authors’ own calculations. N = 673. Data in per cent.

Citizens’ reluctance to state explicitly that they are left-wing does not, however, match their approval of specific left-wing projects. About two thirds of Bulgarians are of the opinion that an evening-out of the new income disparities that have arisen in the post-socialist era is either very important or important (64.6 percent).

Table 2: Elimination of major income disparities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Values Survey Bulgaria (1999-2004); authors’ own calculations. N = 966. Data in %.

As for the role of the state in the economy, society, as in the case of the party landscape, is polarized. While 19 percent of respondents are prepared to grant companies the greatest possible freedom, 16.5 percent demand rigid state control.\textsuperscript{151} A similar split exists with regard to the state’s welfare

\textsuperscript{151} World Values Survey 1999. Question: The state should give more freedom to firms vs. The state should control firms more effectively (Scale 1 The state should give more freedom to firms – 10 The state should control firms more effectively, only 1 and 10 quoted in text).
role. While 10 percent of citizens feel obliged to look out for themselves, 15 percent of respondents see this as a classic function of the state.\textsuperscript{152}

Thus left-wing positions, despite a wavering voter base and a low level of identification with the left of the spectrum, do find support among citizens. On political issues, too, a certain polarization of positions between left and right is discernible.

The programmatic orientation of the Left was also affected by the rivalry between the two political camps in the past years, during which the Left was attacked with anti-communist slogans. Social-democratic and new left-wing parties also found themselves criticized for forming electoral alliances and coalitions with the Bulgarian Socialist Party, although they had had nothing to do with socialist Bulgaria and had originally been in opposition to the BKP. This confrontational policy placed the Social Democracy under unbearable pressure and led to the founding of numerous splinter groups, some cooperating with the BSP, others supporting the conservative camp against the BSP. The ultimate effect was to put paid to any prospect of electoral success outside of a coalition. An important role was also played by the grave economic problems connected with the transformation, which led to violent rioting in 1996/97, and by the process of European integration. Thus the strategic coherence of the Left lies in its ability to bundle its interests within an – albeit internally heterogeneous – political force.

However the programmatic diversity of the Left is not only reflected in the different orientations of the parties, but also in the various platforms within the BSP, which include the Movement for Unification and Development, the Alternative Socialist Association, the Alliance for Social Democracy, the so-called “Road to Europe”, the Marxist Platform, the Marxist Alternative, the Open Forum, and the Social Democratic Union. It is also the only party which has enshrined ideological pluralism in its statutes and adopted far-reaching rules on inner-party democracy.

As a result the programmatic reorientation of the party in the past twenty years was characterized by attempts to come to terms with its own past as a state party on the one hand and the sometimes arduous search for an inner-party consensus on the other. What distinguishes the Bulgarian Socialist Party from other smaller parties of the centre-left is its view of itself as both a Marxist party and a party of democratic socialism as well as its critical attitude to capitalism. The BSP attaches importance to drawing

\textsuperscript{152} World Values Survey 1999: Question: People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves vs. The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for (scale 1-10, only 1 and 10 quoted in text).
civil-society forces into this discussion with the party. A “citizens’ quota”\textsuperscript{153} is intended to have non-members elected to parliament via the BSP list. The BSP also stands for social justice, gender mainstreaming, and equality of opportunity. Nevertheless, with an 18 percent proportion of women deputies, the Coalition for Bulgaria is below the average figure for the Bulgarian parliament (22%). In 2005 a new women’s organization was founded within the BSP. Of the 21 members of the Party Executive seven are women. The historical Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) and other social-democratic splinter groups, on the other hand, favour a social market economy and, unlike the BSP, advocated the earliest possible integration with the European Union at the beginning of the 1990s.

The transformation and the goal of European integration have forced all political forces in Bulgaria to adopt a neo-liberal economic course, which has led to the impoverishment of wide sections of the population and a growing gulf between rich and poor. This has also meant that the Bulgarian Socialist Party, when in power, has sometimes acted in contradiction to its own declared policies. Between 1995 and 1997, for example, it forged ahead with privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state. This contradiction helped trigger inner-party conflicts and an escalation of the political conflict in the shape of mass demonstrations in 1996/97.

Moreover the whole relationship between the citizens and the political elite is problematic. The latter is not infrequently accused of cronyism and is suspected (not without cause) of self-enrichment and corruption. In one survey 72 percent of respondents said they had (very) little confidence in the parliament. Almost three quarters of respondents had (very) little confidence in the social insurance system.\textsuperscript{154}

The Bulgarian Left can make an important contribution to improving relations with other post-socialist countries, especially the successor states of the USSR. The Bulgarian Socialist Party sees itself as acting as a bridge between the industrialized West and the backward East of Europe. In this connection relations with Russia, which are currently close, are again playing a key role. Furthermore the members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party who are in government are calling upon the European Union to adopt a new strategy for the Danube region.

\textsuperscript{153} These citizens have to be experts or recognized public personages. In the 2005 elections 20 percent of the places on the BSP list went to citizens who were not BSP members.

\textsuperscript{154} European Values Survey Bulgaria (1999-2004).
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Sources and suggested further reading:


Bulgaria
The Left in Europe


**Links:**

http://www.a-bg.net Federation of Bulgarian Anarchists
http://www.ataka.bg ATAKA
http://www.bgrf.org Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation

http://www.bsp.bg Bulgarian Socialist Party
http://www.bulgariangreens.org The Greens
http://www.bznsas.org Bulgarian National Agrarian Union “Aleksandar Stambolijski”

http://www.cwsp.bg/htmls/home.php Centre of Women’s Studies and Policies
http://www.dps.bg Movement for Rights and Liberties
http://www.greenparty.bg Green Party of Bulgaria
http://www.knsb-bg.org/knsb Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (KNSB)


http://www.pbs-d.bg Party of Bulgarian Social Democracy
http://www.podkrepa.org/content Podkrepa Labour Confederation
http://www.sds.bg Union of Democratic Forces
http://www.socialdemocrati.org Political Movement Social Democracy
In autumn 1989 an organization called the National Salvation Front (FSN) made its political debut by addressing an anonymous appeal to the delegates of the 14th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR). This National Salvation Front, which later saw itself as a revolutionary movement, gave birth to a large number of left-wing parties, which in turn had a decisive influence on the process of political transformation. The development of left-wing parties after 1989 was shaped by the experiences of the interwar period and the national-communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1967-1989). In one sense the Romanian party landscape must be seen as very stable. Since the beginning of the transformation no early elections have been held, and although the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) has frequently changed its name over the years, it has always been one of the main political parties. On the other hand the rivalry among the parties is very fluid, as they frequently change from one coalition to another. There are also numerous splits leading to the formation of new parties, and prominent politicians and holders of elected office often change their party allegiance. For this reason citizens’ trust in political parties tends to be slight. Patronage, political scandals and corruption have also shaken citizens’ confidence, and this goes for left-wing parties as well.

**Moderate, radical and alternative Left**

The left-wing spectrum in Romania today consists of three different tendencies:

(i) The established, moderate Left in Parliament draws both on the Romanian tradition of national communism – although it has never explicitly claimed to be the successor party of the PCR– and the historical Social Democracy, and is now best described as Centre-Left. Since 2004 it has

155 The party has at various times been called the National Salvation Front (FSN), the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), the Party of the Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR) and, as of now, the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD).
been represented exclusively by the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD). It is also the politically most successful party in Romania, and over the past twenty years numerous smaller parties, including the historical Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSDR), have merged with it. Since the beginning of the transformation it has served in various government coalitions and played a major part in steering Romania through the various phases of adopting a new constitution, undertaking political and economic transformations, and pursuing a path from rapprochement to ultimate membership of the European Union. As the party with the most members, the PSD, unlike the other parties of the fragmented Romanian party system, has a nationwide organizational structure and established women’s, seniors’ and youth organizations which have a limited influence on the party’s internal decision-making processes. The PSD maintains close ties to the trade unions. In the run-up to the local elections in 2008, for example, a pact providing for closer cooperation between the National Confederation of Free Trade unions (CNSLR) and the PSD was renewed. In addition to raising the minimum wage, the pact also provided for participation in a future government. The PSD cooperates internationally as a member of the Socialist International (SI) and the European Social Democratic Party (PES). Another party to emerge from the National Salvation Front in recent years was the Democratic Party (PD),\textsuperscript{156} considered to be a party of the Centre-Left. By the time of the 2004 election campaign, however, it changed its programme and redefined itself as a people’s party of the Centre-Right, which merged with a breakaway wing of the National-Liberal Party (PNL) to form the Democratic-Liberal Party (PDL).

(ii) The radical Left operates exclusively in the extra-parliamentary sphere, since its constituent parties do not win a sufficient proportion of the vote to get into Parliament or because they find no suitable partner to form an electoral alliance with. The Socialist Party of Labour (PSM) claims to be the legitimate successor to the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), although a court ruling has forbidden it to bear the name of the former state party (2002). The Party of the Socialist Alliance (PAS) is a left-wing breakaway group from the PSM, which in 2003 refused a merger with the PSD. The PAS is one of the founding members of the Party of the European Left. Also to be found in the camp of the radical Left are the New Communist

\textsuperscript{156} The party has variously been called the National Salvation Front (FSN), the Social Democratic Union (USD), the Democratic Party (PD) and at the time or writing bears the name of Democratic-Liberal Party (PDL).
Party (nPCR), which was also founded in 2003, and the People’s Party for Social Security (PPPS). Unlike the Centre-Left, the radical Left in Romania upholds the tradition of the national communist past and democratic socialism. After repeated renamings, mergers and splits the extra-parliamentary Left is now marginalized, highly fragmented, in some cases politically radicalized, and occasionally nationalist as well.

(iii) Finally, there is a very weakly developed left-wing alternative scene, consisting of small political groupings founded by individual activists that operate on the level of civil society. They include the Romanian Social Forum or Attac Romania as well as isolated “single issue” campaigns, such as the one to prevent the digging of a gold mine in Roșia Montană. The Left lacks socio-political allies, particularly among environmental and women’s organizations. The relative weakness of these organizations is due to a lack of networking, little backing in the population and the general scarcity of resources among civil society actors. Thus Romania in recent years has hardly offered a favourable environment for the emergence of a left-wing alternative protest culture that could organize political resistance.

Public opinion and election successes

The election results since the beginning of the 1990s show and opinion polls confirm that on the one hand citizens’ support for left-wing positions is slight, and on the other that the voter potential for the Centre-Left is high and stable. Around one third of respondents describe themselves as Centre-Left, the proportion of women being 36.8 percent and of men 26.8 percent. Only 5.5 percent of Romania’s citizens place themselves on the left of the political spectrum, the proportion of men being somewhat higher than that of women (see Tab. 1). In general, therefore, we may assume that about half of all voters sympathize with left-wing or social democratic positions.
Table 1: Self-positioning of citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Values Survey Romania (1999-2004); authors’ own calculations. N = 635. Data in %.

While Centre-Left coalitions have in fact often gained the highest share of the votes at election time, left-wing parties like the Party of the Socialist Alliance (PAS) and the People’s Party for Social Security (PPPS) have only been able to garner very few votes (Fig. 1). Although there has been a steady decline in the left-wing vote since the 1990 elections, the political Left has always enjoyed the support of over 30 percent of voters. The articulated political preferences of the citizens are reflected in the election results to the extent that the Centre-Left plays a dominant role. The Left, on the other hand, has not yet succeeded in mobilizing its full political potential. The politically organized Left in Romania is deeply discredited by the period before 1989. This has led to the paradox that although people are disinclined to describe themselves as “left-wing”, there is still a lot of support for certain left-wing policies. This can be seen, for example, in the political attitudes of citizens to income disparities. Privatization and economic transformation have led in Romania as elsewhere to a dramatic increase in income disparities. The great majority of citizens consider these disparities to be unjust and think the state should do something about them (Tab. 2) by exercising control over companies, guaranteeing pensions and improving educational opportunities.

Table 2: Elimination of large income disparities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important (1)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Values Survey Romania (1999-2004); authors’ own calculations. N = 1052. Data in per cent.

\(^{157}\) In the 2008 parliamentary elections to the Lower House the PAS won 585 (0.008%) and the PPPR 8,388 (0.12%) out of a total of 6,886,794 valid ballots cast. Cf. http://www.beeparlamentare2008.ro/rezult/COMUNICAT_PRAG.pdf
The electoral successes of the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) are based on the one hand on the above-average proportion of votes in the east and south-east of the country (Muntenia, Oltenia and Dobrogea), and on the other on its ability to appeal to voters of all generations. A quarter of young voters (aged 18-29) vote for the PSD (25.2 percent), while the proportion of those belonging to the older generation (over 60) is 39.2 percent. On the other hand, in the case of other left-wing parties, particularly the New Communist Party (nPCR), there is a clear preponderance of older voters.

The coalition behaviour of the left-wing parties in the Romanian Parliament alternates between the pragmatic and the opportunistic. The strong position of the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) in particular has enabled it in the past to take advantage of all sorts of coalition options. In the years 1992-1996, for example, it formed a coalition with right-wing populist/radical parties and in 2004 and 2008 entered into an electoral

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159 At that time the party was still called the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN). Its coalition partners at the executive and legislative levels included the Party of National Romanian Unity (PUNR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM).
alliance with the Humanist Party of Romania (PUR), which follows a market-liberal and value-conservative line. In 2000 the PSD managed to form a minority government. Although it only received 36.6 percent of the votes, it had 44.9 percent of the seats. The missing seats it needed for a majority were gradually made up by deputies of other parties who went over to the PSD.

During the 2004-2008 legislative period the PSD supported, after the break-up of the Centre-Right coalition, the minority government of the National-Liberal Party. However an alliance with the Democratic Party (PD), which was closest to the PSD politically, failed to come about because of personal rivalries. Not until 2008, after the above-mentioned change in the PD programme, an alliance composed of the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) and the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) came to power. This new alliance of the political centre seems to prove that the artificial opposition between post- and anti-communists that has been instrumentalized for the past two decades is beginning to lose its effect. Before that all parties in the Romanian party system had recruited their members both from the new elites and from the ranks of the former Communist Party. The occasionally opportunistic coalition behaviour witnessed over the years is also an indication that the paramount consideration in forming these alliances (or office-seeking coalitions) was the need for majorities, rather than programmatic aims.

In view of its above-mentioned organizational weakness and the lack of support among the citizenry the extra-parliamentary Left is unable to exert any influence on political decision-making processes.

Programmatic orientation and issues facing the Left in Romania

The programmatic orientation of the political Left in Romania – apart from the traditionally national orientation common to all Romanian parties – boils down to two issues which sometimes lead to conflicts within the Left’s own political camp.
(i) Privatization and labour market: Whereas in the early 1990s the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) still favoured a gradual approach and aspired merely to a partial privatization of state-owned enterprises, to-
day the party stands for a social market economy and absolutely rejects any regulation of the labour market. In opposition to this the extra-parliamentary Left demands the control or abolition of the free market economy and an expansion of the state employment policy.

(ii) European Union: The Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) has completely overcome its original misgivings about EU membership and when in power did much to advance the integration process. For the extra-parliamentary Left the debate about the European Union is either pointless (nPCR) or it insists that the programmatic goals should be realized in cooperation and harmony with other European countries. Only the Party of the Socialist Alliance (PAS) points out that it aspires to a Europe of nations, thus indirectly articulating criticism of the European Union as an institution. So on these two issues the programmatic differences and similarities between the established Social Democracy on the one hand and the extra-parliamentary Left on the other are discernible.

In addition, it is to the credit of the Left that it supports a policy of equality between the sexes. While the political system in Romania continues to be strongly dominated by men, the PSD statutes lay down that at least 25 percent of party office-holders should be women. It should be noted, however, that the party is still falling short of its own targets, as only two of the party’s 14 vice-presidents are women. The proportion of PSD female deputies in both chambers of the Romanian Parliament is higher than the average for all parties: Currently 14 percent of the PSD members of the Chamber of Deputies are women (as opposed to an average of 11.4 percent), while the corresponding figures for the Senate are 8 percent and 5.8 percent respectively. In 2000 at the initiative of a female PSD deputy a parliamentary commission was set up for the first time to look into the question of equality of opportunity for men and women.

Apart from gender policy, the Left has the opportunity of articulating the interests of politically, economically and socially disadvantaged sections of the population. The People’s Party for Social Security (PPPS), demands a “stop to the genocide against pensioners” and calls for far-reaching measures to ensure their social security. It is regrettable that despite the declared rejection of any form of discrimination a discordant nationalist note is to be heard when it comes to such topics as the autochthonous economy or the potential loss of control in Transylvania. There are occasional calls for sanctions against representatives of ethnic minorities and Romanians who insult their country. Even the singing of national anthems and the display of (non-Romanian) national symbols are to be forbidden.
The Left in Europe

The Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) is constantly undertaking reforms of such things as inner-party democracy, the dialogue with social left-wing forces, and gender equality. This distinguishes it fundamentally from the other established parties. But these reform processes sometimes encounter resistance from the forces of social value conservatism in their own party. This means that such issues as putting same-sex unions on a par with marriage, the struggle against the discrimination against Roma, and other socio-political issues are not raised by the Left.

The Social Democracy takes important initiatives for European neighbourhood policy. Specifically, it presses for a stronger European commitment to the Republic of Moldova, with the aim of potential EU membership. Equally important are relations with countries on the European periphery, such as Ukraine and Georgia and the Black Sea region. The EU must react more strongly, and Romania’s Left could play the role of an intermediary in this regard.

Sources and supplementary reading


163 In the run-up to the 2004 parliamentary elections the PSD introduced a new inner-party selection procedure for nominating candidates.

164 In 2008 the PSD entered into a new social dialogue with left-wing forces in order to stimulate citizen participation after the elections.


Links:

http://www.forumulsocialroman.ro Social Forum
http://www.guengl.org European Left
http://www.npcr.ro/ New Communist Party of Romania
http://www.pasco.ro/ Socialist Alliance of Romania
http://www.pd.ro/ Democratic-Liberal Party of Romania
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.psd.ro/ Social Democratic Party of Romania
http://www.pur.ro/ Conservative Party
http://www.socialistinternational.org/ Socialist International
Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish republic once said cynically that the country’s political elite would itself found a communist party if there were a demand for it. In 1920, shortly after these words were spoken, the Turkish government asked the founders of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) -who had established the organization in the Azeri city of Baku without Atatürk’s permission- to come to Anatolia and join the Turkish independence war. Mustafa Suphi, the general secretary of the party, and his fourteen comrades responded to the call. But on orders from Ankara they were overtaken and murdered in the port city of Trabzon on the Black Sea. Their corpses were thrown into water.

Since then, the fundamentally hostile attitude of the Turkish state toward leftist movements in Turkey has hardly changed. After the September 12, 1980 military coup, which was as brutal as the coup by Augusto Pinochet in Chile, the government repression reached a new level.

Today, when the left demonstrates solidarity with the oppressed Kurdish minority, seeks to rally on May Day in Istanbul, or demands a comprehensive investigation of the murder into the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, it must take into account that the state might exact revenge. While the government in Ankara is negotiating with the European Union for full membership, leftists are being apprehended, beaten in the streets, and intimidated with the use of excessive force. Take the events of January 16, 2009: On this Friday, thousands of Islamists demonstrated in Istanbul after Friday prayers against the war in Gaza. Police forces protected the protest. Several TV stations broadcast the event live. That evening, several hundred leftist students in Ankara attempted to demonstrate against the same war, but the police did not allow them to march even five meters. The students were beaten brutally by heavily armed security forces. Many of them were detained.

This kind of oppression has for years led to a recurring problem: the left in Turkey in turmoil and at odds with itself, and therefore unable to rely on the sympathy of the people or recruit more activists. The breakdown of the socialist system has intensified these problems. Such difficulties and the
current political framework leave little space for the Party for Freedom and Solidarity (Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi, ÖDP) -a member of the European Left.

**Foundation, composition and development**

The early days of the ÖDP in 1996 quickly made it the great hope of many revolutionaries and socialists in Turkey. The party was an alliance of several established leftist groups and parties active before the military coup of 1980, but they had been willing to cooperate among themselves only sporadically.

The driving force of the new party consisted of individuals who had been active politicians before the coup as members of such organisations as the Revolutionary Way (Dev Yol), the Communist Party of Turkey (Türkiye Komünist Partisi, TKP), the Workers Party of Turkey (Türkiye İsci Partisi, TİP), the Liberation (Kurtuluş), and the Trotskyites. The party was only able to win 0.8 percent of the votes in parliamentary elections held in 2001, after which a considerable number of founding members left the organisation.

Today there are two main groups in the party: Revolutionary Solidarity and the Libertarian Left. Former members and sympathizers of Revolutionary Way constitute the majority in both of these groups. In an extraordinary convention on February 1, 2009, the Revolutionary Way emerged with a tiny majority in the administrative body of the party. Ufuk Uras, the only ÖDP member of parliament, lost his position as president of the party. Instead, the party elected Hayri Kozanoglu, who had previously served two terms as party president; he received a mandate to lead until the formal ÖDP convention, scheduled for June 2009. In the parliamentary elections of July 2007, the ÖDP had received 80,000 votes, which rivaled the tally of the TKP.

Kozanoglu argues today that the party is being supported primarily by old leftists and students. Professional organizations, such as the Chamber of Engineers, have a revolutionary tradition as well, which represents an advantage for the ÖDP. Kozanoğlu contends that good relations exist between his party and the Confederation of Revolutionary Unions, DISK. He points out that the Union of State Employees (KESK) was founded in 1995 by the same activists who established the ÖDP the following year. He adds, however, that in general the ÖDP does not have broad influence over the

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165 All quotes of Hayri Kozanoglu and Saruhan Oluc are from interviews with the author.
working class. Kozanoğlu assigns the blame for this to the weakness of not only DISK, but also to all of the other unions in Turkey. Says Saruhan Oluc, one of the founding members of the party, “Whereas the unions can not attract the working class, leftist parties can not attract them as well.”

How to spread leftist ideas in society is disputed within the party. Some members demand that the ÖDP concentrate more on parliamentary efforts. The majority around Kozanoğlu however wants to set another course. “We think parliamentary work is important” said Kozanoğlu, “but the most important things for our party are the creation of a movement in the society and a structure, organized from bottom to the top.” He added in a self-critical manner, “Unfortunately, we have been relatively unsuccessful in this matter. The military coup of 1980 has cut our bond with the society. We are not present among the poor anymore. For years we tried in vain to create a movement of peasants. We supported new social movements like the feminists or the ecological movement as well, but they are still weak in Turkey.”

Kozanoğlu sees new opportunity in the global financial crisis. He hopes that the political left in Turkey can revitalize itself, energized by the changing global mindset: “Keynesian policies can certainly be useful for those, who want to manage the crisis well. But parties like ours must offer more radical proposals. The rich must pay for the crisis. At a time in which the foundations of capitalism are shaken, we have to demand a planned economy, the collectivization of production.”

The internal conflict

Despite Kozanoğlu’s statements, the party suffers from a deep divide. The process, that ultimately forced the ÖDP to hold an extraordinary party conference can only be understood in connection with the general ideological debate on the Turkish left.

After the left had been almost completely eliminated following the military coup, it suffered another blow with the collapse of the socialist system. Leftist groups have been trying to reorganize since the early 1990s. During this time the Turkish left has consistently been forced to address two issues.

Patriotism

Until the late 1960s the Kurdish left was considered to be a natural part of the Turkish left. In the 1970s, however, several Kurdish groups broke away to pursue their own paths. The 1980 military coup inflicted enduring dam-
age on the Turkish left, invigorating Kurdish movements, above all the Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK), which was not only encouraged in its fight for freedom and justice in the wake of the coup, but also enjoyed a steady flow of new fighters. Today, the Kurdish movements not only have broad support in the Kurdish parts of Turkey, but also in a great number of Turkish metropoles as well because of large scale internal migration.

This development, which alienated Turks and Kurds and cannot be reversed in the medium term, raises for the Turkish left the issue of how to engage with the Kurdish movements, whose supporters greatly outnumber Turkish leftists. A part of the Turkish left has opted irrevocably in favor of “patriotism”, which differs little from “nationalism”. The basic idea of this patriotism is that the sovereignty and integrity of Turkey are endangered and must be defended at all costs. The consequence is that groups like the reestablished TKP and the Workers Party (İşçi Partisi, İP), led by ex-Maoist Doğu Perinçek, oppose the possible admission of Turkey to the EU. Furthermore IP and Perincek have denounced the Kurdish movements in the country as a threat.166

Another part of the Turkish left supports the idea of cooperation with leftist Kurdish movements, which was the approach before the military coup. A great number of Turkish leftists, however, also perceive the current strength of Kurdish groups as a threat. On the Kurdish side on the other hand, it is commonly understood that the Turkish activists must be subordinate to Kurdish activists, because the Kurds outnumber the Turks. Such psychological differences make a renewal of cooperation more difficult, and the majority of the Turkish left seems to be in flux between these two positions.

**Left liberalism**

The second big issue, which brings the Turkish left to the verge of disintegration, is the stance, that should be taken toward left liberalism. One of the key issues of left liberalism is the democratization of the Turkish state. This means to them banishing the hitherto existing political elites from power, bringing the army under civilian control and abolishing secret state security organizations.

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Generally speaking, left liberals, who currently gather around the daily *Taraf*, are carrying on the struggle for greater democracy. This means to them, for example, that the “Kurdish question” should be resolved through political means, that is, by instituting the greatest possible political and cultural liberties for the Kurds, like equal treatment of the Kurdish language and identity.

The left liberals see in Turkey’s potential EU membership a chance to solve the above mentioned core problems. They are ready to postpone the struggle against the capitalist economic system in order to make some progress in these areas. The Turkish left, however, rejects this willingness to postpone the anti-capitalist struggle.

*The Ergenekon factor*

A lawsuit, which triggered a political earthquake, took the Turkish left by surprise as it struggled with this ideological dispute. During a house search on June 12, 2007, in Istanbul, twenty-seven hand grenades and large amounts of explosives were found. Shortly thereafter, Turkish police took several former army commanders into custody and charged them with conspiring against the government. They were members of the organization called *Ergenekon*, police said.

In the two years since, state security agencies have repeatedly cracked down on *Ergenekon* members. In a number of raids, even former generals who had served in high-ranking, decision-making positions in the Turkish army were arrested. Professors, journalists, members of the Turkish mafia, and recently, even a dozen active army commanders were also detained. In every corner of the country, secret underground arsenals have been unearthed. Meanwhile, evidence suggesting that *Ergenekon* might be responsible for some unsolved political murders, like the assassination of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink and the political scientist Necip Hablemitoglu, continues to accumulate. Above all, however, with each arrest it becomes more obvious that *Ergenekon* played a crucial role in the war against the Kurds. Critics believe that the organization is responsible for several thousand unsolved murders of Kurds.

The lawsuit against *Ergenekon* has divided Turkey into two camps, that fiercely attack each other. One part of the population wants the authorities to resolve the case by investigating the accusations of criminal wrongdoing, which allegedly took place in the Kurdish parts of the country - and punish the culprits. Above all, however, it wants light to be thrown on the links between this secret organization, the Turkish state, and the Turkish army.
The other camp believes that all this is a US plot against the state institutions of Turkey, in collaboration with Turkish Islamists and the Islamist government of the Party of Justice and Development (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). The aim of the plot, they believe, is to weaken the state, to divide and subdue Turkey into going along with U.S. plans in the Middle East.

The left cannot ignore this ideological scuffle. On the one side, there are the left liberals who prefer the Taraf, which almost daily discovers new facts about the intrigues of Ergenekon and publishes them. On the other side, there are the “patriots”, who defend the Turkish state and build alliances to do so, that were considered impossible until recently.

The ÖDP and the breaking point

Patriotism and left liberalism constitute the extremes of the Turkish left, and the ÖDP is positioned squarely in the middle. The strong pull from both sides presented the party with a possible breaking point.

The dispute before the extraordinary party convention in early February 2009 was due to this situation. Ufuk Uras, the party president until the convention, had complained publicly about the “nationalists in the party”. At the same time Revolutionary Solidarity, criticized him for holding exploratory discussions with other leftist and Kurdish groups to form an umbrella party, that could bring all these groups together.

The Libertarian Left around Uras demands a thorough investigation of the Ergenekon case. It supports the operations of the security forces against Ergenekon. Revolutionary Solidarity, however, refuses to side with any party involved in the case. It considers the lawsuit against Ergenekon “a fight of the ruling elites among themselves” and refuses “to become part of this fight of internal powers of the system”. The new president of the Party, Hayri Kozanoglu, who characterizes the dispute about Ergenekon as “extremely delicate”, speaks with caution: “Socialist-revolutionary movements must observe the developments and find a third way between pro-American and patriotic views.”

In addition, the debate about giving priority to democratization or to anti-capitalist work within the party became increasingly relentless with the ongoing global financial crisis. A declaration of Revolutionary Solidarity makes this obvious: “The main question today is the following: Is ÖDP going to fight against imperialist-capitalist structures and systems, guided by revolution and socialism, on the basis of labor and class struggle, and answer all other questions according to this basis? Or is it going to take up
a fight, of which the horizon and the limits are determined by social justice and democratization and the issues of culture and identity (i.e., the Kurdish question)? For a long-time, leftist movements and parties have been forced by liberal and nationalist policies to fight alongside internal powers of the system. This is the evil we have to get over.”

Globalisation and the EU

Although both groups in the party fiercely fight each other over daily policies, they still agree on the party program. The ÖDP advocates, as described in the party program, a “libertarian, autonomous, internationalist, democratically planning, ecological, anti-militaristic and feminist socialism.” Thus globalisation is perceived as an opportunity, because it fosters internationalism and allows for broader organization. “We reconfirm that the struggle against imperialism gains importance, when it is guided by an internationalist and anti-capitalist perspective and fought by all the oppressed of this world collectively”, states the party program. In this sense, ÖDP attaches great importance to the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum. The party believes that these two fora form the basis of the common struggle of social movements against neo-liberalism and war.

Eventhough the ÖDP has not declared clearly whether it supports Turkey’s membership bid to the EU, it supports the democratic achievements, that were made possible only because of the admission process. The goal of the party is the revolutionary transformation of Europe. It criticizes the anti-democratic structures of the EU, which keep the decision making mechanisms out of reach of the population. The party program states, “We should not forget that the supporters of ‘social Europe’ and the ‘Europe of labour’ are the most consistent opponents of racist and imperialist policies toward the Third World, as well as the organizers of the anti-war movements and part of the global movement for justice.”

169 ibid.
170 ibid.
Relations between the ÖDP and the European Left do not appear to be strained. That the ÖDP cannot see alternatives to the European Left is one of the reasons. ÖDP president Hayri Kozanoglu, describes his party’s status as follows: “We cannot find any organizations or parties with which we can share our vision of a pluralistic socialism in the region east of Turkey. We cannot find anyone who does not deny the experiences of formerly existing socialism but critically transcends it. Therefore, we see our place among the European Left.”

As a matter of fact, the ÖDP’s best international relations are with Europe while also maintaining contacts in the Middle East and the Caucasus. The current crisis in the ÖDP is a major strategic disadvantage for the European Left. If the ÖDP could relax a bit and concentrate more on its international relations, it could bring the unfamiliar world east of Europe closer to the European Left. In this case, it could play a rectifying role against Eurocentrism.
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The Left in Europe

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Michael Brie, Cornelia Hildebrandt, Texte 30 der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Berlin 2006

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