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For a Green reconquest of equality



Benoît Lechat

Why do the Greens need to reconsider the ideal of equality in the light of the ecologic and economic crises and what are the challenges linked with such a project?

Above all, for many Greens, equality was an ideal widely pursued by social-democracy and communism, both ideologies deeply involved in what they called “productivism” that they identified as being one of the major causes of the destruction of nature

Since their emergence in the seventies, Green movements and parties have not dedicated much attention to the ideal of equality. Were not André Gorz and Ivan Illich, some of the main thinkers of the nascent political ecology, considering that equality was too often linked to materialism and to what they called an “envious individualism” based on social comparison and consumerism? They preferred the ideals of “conviviality” and of “autonomy”, promoting the project of a self-managed economy driven by cooperation and reciprocity rather than by self-interest. Above all, for many Greens, equality was an ideal widely pursued by social-democracy and communism, both ideologies deeply involved in what they called “productivism” that they identified as being one of the major causes of the destruction of nature, whether it was encouraged by the free market or by state planned economies. Thus, the Greens preferred to promote the ideals of self-determination and of inter- and intra-generational justice, synonymous with freedom of choice and sustainable development. Thirteen years later, we probably need to reconsider slightly our vision of equality, at least if we want to take seriously into account the need to tackle both the ecological and the economic crisis. What are the main reasons for such a reconsideration and what kind of challenges does it issue?

Inequality as cause and consequence

As documented in the second edition of the Green European Journal, rising inequalities are not only the consequences of the current economic crisis; they also constitute one of its major causes. Since the neo-liberal dogmas have been dominating the politics of a majority of industrialised economies, ensuring the standard levels of consumption of the western way of life was only possible through the growth of private and public indebtedness. The so-called “structural reforms”, the reduction of numerous financial and social regulations, often depicted as the most efficient means of ensuring economic development, not only caused the shrinking of the share of work incomes in the European GDP, they were also responsible for the growth of inequalities *inside* most of the developed countries and *between* these countries¹. In many countries this relative reduction of the size of work income as a percentage of GDP was compensated for by easier access to private credit that fed the financial bubbles in countries like Ireland or Spain. The lack of governance went hand in hand with the deficit of social and fiscal regulation, throughout the Eurozone and beyond, in many western economies.

¹ Divided we stand. Why Inequalities keep rising, Paris, OECD, December 2011.

Solidarities under pressure

In the theory of justice of John Rawls, a certain level of inequality is justified within a given society, so long as it contributes to improving the situation of the poorest. But what has happened in Europe during the last decades is exactly the contrary. In the name of the fight against unemployment and of the competitiveness of Europe's economy in a globalised world, the "structural reforms" undermined the concrete situation of the most underprivileged in our societies. And this tendency was radically reinforced by the competition between social welfare systems that remained regulated at the national level. As a result, solidarity in Europe has never been under such pressure, between debtors and creditors countries, like between the middle classes and the people depending on social benefits. This is probably one of the major explanations for the success of right and left wing populist parties throughout Europe which proliferate on the growing feeling of injustice.

Inequality feeds "consolation consumerism"

From a Green perspective, there is at least one more source of concern in this evolution: the growth of inequalities is not only socially unfair and a threat to social cohesion, it is one of the main driving factors of many unsustainable behaviours. An example is what some authors call "consolation consumerism", through which disadvantaged people try to compensate for their social frustrations by purchasing (mainly on credit) goods that are produced unsustainably. And it is hard to imagine

that only education would be able to change such consumption patterns, as long as the inequalities which have fed them keep on growing. But even harder would be the task of convincing these people who have been deprived of their consumerist dreams that they should give them up in order to reduce their ecological footprint. A reduction of income inequality should then be coupled with a redefinition of prosperity that should be much less dependent on the purchasing power of material goods and focus more on access to public goods.

Understanding the social acceptance of inequality

There are numerous good reasons to reduce inequality in income and improve access to public goods and there are few progressive political parties that would deny such a necessity. But they are all aware that this is far from being an easy task. The problem is not only technical. It is not just an issue of tax reforms to counter tax evasion and to reregulate the financial sector. It is above all a deeply political and social issue. In most European countries, there are no or nearly no political majorities for supporting reduced inequality and it is unlikely that this will change dramatically in the short term. Why? With Pierre Rosanvallon, we need to understand how the growth of inequalities was socially and politically legitimated over the past thirty years, with the consent of the progressive political parties which were supposed to combat it. Of course, the fall of

As a consequence, equality was increasingly considered as a relationship between singular individuals, rather than a quality of a society as a whole, an evolution which was illustrated by the development of the theories of justice.

communism contributed to the disappearance of the “reformism of the fear” which convinced many governments to develop the welfare states after the Second World War. But the evolution of capitalism and society also played an important role. The transition from a ‘fordist’ organisation of work towards a ‘cognitive capitalism’, which by the way was parallel with the emergence of the Green movement, has weakened the cultural and social basis for redistribution. In this new economy, creativity went hand in hand with the claim for individualism, for the right to be “equally different”, contrasting with the uniformity and solidarity of the workers masses of the first industrial revolutions. The sharper awareness of discrimination could not compensate for the erosion of the mechanisms of redistribution. As a consequence, equality was increasingly considered as a relationship between singular individuals, rather than a quality of a society as a whole, an evolution which was illustrated by the development of the theories of justice.

The egg of federalism and the chicken of solidarity

In 2012, if we want to give a new legitimacy to the ideal of equality we must avoid, at all cost, falling into the trap of a counterproductive nostalgia for the nationally regulated welfare states. We need to reinforce equality and solidarity inside the different European countries and between all Europeans. This implies that we also have to imagine ways of reconstructing a democratic feeling of belonging to a common society, without chauvinism i.e. without excluding others on the basis of national or ethnic characteristics. For many European federalists, this was one of the goals of the European construction process. The current crisis of the Eurozone shows the original sin of a single currency without common fiscal and social governance and without the possibility of massive transfers between the different Member States. The debate that has been recently launched between Europeans is not only about the level of these transfers that still remain at a very low level in comparison with the transfers in the United States of America. The debate should also be about the necessity of developing interpersonal transfers between all members of the Eurozone. Firstly, because the national welfare states are deeply involved in the competition between national economies and it will not be obvious for them to increase their interpersonal transfers. Secondly, because the necessary “federalist tiger jump” that is promoted by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt in order to save the European

project will not be supported by a broader audience if it is not coupled with a reinforcement of inter-state and interpersonal solidarities. The creation of something like a European welfare state might sound completely utopian; but it has to be our long term vision that we should try to pursue step by step. There will be no egg of federalism without the chicken of solidarity. They are two sides of the same coin: the construction of a European society, based on sustainability and equality, citizenship and reciprocity. ■

Benoit Lechat is editor-in-chief of the Green European Journal



Pierre Rosanvallon

Rethinking Equality in an Age of Inequalities

We need a new social contract based on the ideals of the American and French Revolutions, says Pierre Rosanvallon, whose recent book *La société des égaux* has attracted much attention in France and beyond. This article was originally published in the Institut für die Humanwissenschaften.

This article is from a speak given by Rosanvallon at the Jan Patočka Memorial Lecture 2011, organised in cooperation with the Institut francais d'Autriche.

Everybody knows that inequalities have exploded since the 1980s and that this is mainly due to the huge increase in incomes at the top. Statistics are everywhere. The point is that rising inequality stands in stark contrast to the earlier decline in inequality in Europe and America. It is indeed remarkable that the recent increase in inequality follows a lengthy period of reduced income and wealth inequality on both continents.

The current system marks a spectacular break with the past, reversing the trend of the past century. A return to the 19th century seems to be on its way – with significant repercussions for our democracies. The “people,” understood in a political sense as a collective entity that ever more powerfully imposes its will, is less and less a “social body.” Political citizenship has progressed, while social citizenship has regressed. This rending of democracy is an ominous threat to our wellbeing. If it continues, the democratic regime itself might ultimately be in danger. The rise of populist movements is at once an indicator of this distress and its driving force. To understand the present “great reversal,” we must start by understanding the preceding “great transformation.”



The rise of populist movements is an indicator of the regression of social citizenship.

The Reformism of Fear

The development of the worker’s movement and its translation into socialist votes (with the universalisation of suffrage) at the end of the 19th century put pressure on conservative governments. “We must choose between a fiscal revolution and a social revolution,” concluded Emile de Girardin in France. The German example is the most salient in this regard. For Bismarck, the reformist option was clearly a political calculation: its immediate purpose was to counter the spread of socialist ideas by showing government concern for the working class. In Germany, in other words, the plan to reduce social inequalities and compensate for the vicissitudes of working-class employment stemmed from what we might call “the reformism of fear.” Most other European countries followed the German lead. After 1918, all these social and political factors converged

The idea of a society composed of sovereign, self-sufficient individuals gave way to an approach based on interdependence.

to encourage governments to extend and accelerate reforms initiated before the war.

World Wars and the Nationalisation of Life

The development of inequalities is closely related to the detachment of certain individuals from the common run of mankind and to the legitimisation of their right to distinguish themselves and separate themselves from others. It is therefore linked to the prioritisation of private over public norms. The experience of World War One reversed this tendency; in a sense, the war nationalised people's lives. Private activities were largely shaped by collective constraints. Social relations therefore tended to become polarised between two extremes: either withdrawal into the family circle or absorption in the superior problems of the nation. Virtually no middle ground remained between family and country. The fact that the war threatened everyone's existence revived the fundamental principles of the social state of nature. The experience of the First World War thus marked a decisive turning point in democratic modernity. It restored the idea of a society of like human beings in a direct, palpable way. Fraternity in combat and the commemoration of sacrifice are complex phenomena, but they helped pave the way to greater social solidarity. The welfare payments awarded to veterans led to a general reconsideration of social benefits and other redistributive transfers.

The De-Individualisation of the World

The redistributive revolution was made possible by these historical and political conditions. But it was also the fruit of an intellectual and moral revolution, which made redistribution thinkable. In short, redistribution

became possible because the economy and society were "de-individualised" by thinkers who rejected older views of individual responsibility and talent. What ultimately emerged was a new vision of enterprise itself. A new understanding of the nature of society changed the way people thought about equality and solidarity in the late 19th century.

The founding fathers of European sociology – Albert Schaffle in Germany, J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse in England, Alfred Fouillee in France – all agreed that society was an organic whole. Socialists of the chair in Germany, Fabians and New Liberals in Britain, Solidarist Republicans in France: these various political and intellectual movements converged in the late 19th century. All reformulated the question of how society is constituted in very similar terms. The idea of a society composed of sovereign, self-sufficient individuals gave way to an approach based on interdependence. In this new context, the notions of right and duty, merit and responsibility, autonomy and solidarity were completely redefined. Equality as redistribution not only became thinkable, it also became possible. The introduction of progressive income tax and changes in the estate tax were hence closely related to the growing popularity of the idea that everyone is born owing a debt to society.

A New View of Poverty and Inequality

The development of the welfare state and redistributive institutions was abetted by the fact that the social nature of inequality was increasingly recognised. People were more and more willing to see the organisation of society, rather than objective and justifiable individual differences or personal behaviour,

It is clear that the political and historical factors for the “great transformation” no longer exist. After the fall of communism, there is no longer room for a reformism of fear.

as the structural cause of inequality. Socialist critiques of the social order gained currency in the first half of the 20th century thanks to this new social representation. Views of poverty also changed. It is clear that the political and historical factors for the “great transformation” no longer exist. After the fall of communism, there is no longer room for a reformism of fear.



The “blue ribbon against poverty” outside the European Parliament.

Social fears still exist, but they concern such things as violence, security or terrorism. They appeal to an authoritarian state and not to a state based on solidarity. Similarly, ecological threats raise fears about the fate of future generations, but these are expressed in a general and abstract way and not in terms of social redistribution. More important still, there is the impact of the transformation of capitalism and society. The capitalism that began to emerge in the 1980s differed from earlier forms of organised capitalism in

two ways. First, its relation to the market changed, as did the role assigned to stockholders. Second, labour was organised in a new way. Fordist organisation, based on the mobilisation of large masses of workers, gave way to an emphasis on the creative abilities of individuals. Creativity thus became the principal factor of production.

Phrases such as “cognitive capitalism” and “productive subjectivity” were coined to describe this change. Quality has thus become a central feature of the new economy, marking a sharp break with the previous economy of quantity. Work routines have consequently become more diverse and products more varied. These changes precipitated a crisis in societies previously ruled by the spirit of equality as redistribution. At the same time, the new age of inequality and diminished solidarity has been a time of heightened awareness of social discrimination and tolerance of many kinds of difference – a fact often overlooked by critics. The picture is contradictory, to say the least, and while some ground has been lost, there have been undeniable advances with regard to the status of women, the acceptance of differences of sexual orientation, and individual rights generally. If we want to understand recent changes in our societies, we must take note of all of these divergent tendencies. One way to do this is to look at the *internal* transformation in the “society of individuals.” This did not suddenly appear at the end of the 20th century: it has formed the framework within which modern institutions have developed for more than two centuries. Succinctly put, what we need to understand is the transition from an individualism

The most intolerable form of inequality is still not to be treated as a human being, to be rejected as worthless.

of universality to an individualism of singularity, which also reflects new democratic expectations. In democratic regimes associated with the individualism of universality, universal suffrage meant that each individual had a claim to the same share of sovereignty as every other individual. In democracies in which the individualism of singularity is the social form, the individual aspires to be important and unique in the eyes of others. Everyone implicitly claims the right to be considered a star, an expert, or an artist – that is, to expect his or her ideas and judgments to be taken into account and recognised as valuable.

Equality has lost none of its importance in this new context. The most intolerable form of inequality is still not to be treated as a human being, to be rejected as worthless. Hence the idea of equality implies a desire to be regarded as *somebody*, as a person similar to others rather than excluded by virtue of some specific difference. To be recognised as being “like” others therefore means to be recognised for the *human generality* one contains (harking back to the original sense of “humanity” as a quality of unity without distinction).

But this human generality has taken on a broader, more complex meaning. It has come to include the desire to have one’s distinctiveness – one’s history and personal characteristics – recognised by others. No one wants to be “reduced to a number.” Everyone wants to “be someone.”

Identity as a positive shared experience

Hence the centrality of the notion of discrimination, considered the mark of an insult to similarity as well as to singularity. As a consequence of these different factors, the idea of equality has today entered a deep crisis. What are the options? The first is a return to the evils of the late 19th century, the time of the first wave of globalisation, namely: aggressive nationalism, xenophobia, and protectionism. National protectionism was sustained by a purely negative vision of equality. Barres put it bluntly: “The idea of ‘fatherland’ implies a kind of inequality, but to the detriment of foreigners.” In other words, the goal was to bring (some) people closer together by exploiting a relationship of inequality. What was distinctive about national protectionism at the end of the 19th century was that it represented an extreme case, the result of a radical polarisation of both identity and equality. It reduced the idea of equality to the single dimension of community membership as homogeneity, which was itself reduced to a negative definition (“not foreign”). The constitution of an identity always needs a demarcation, a separation, a mirroring effect of some sort. But identity must also be linked to a properly positive idea of shared existence in order to produce a democratic sentiment of membership. This is what distinguished the revolutionary nation of 1789 from the nationalist nation of the late 19th century. The former was associated with the formation of a society of equals, while the latter conceived of integration in a non-political mode, solely as the fusion of individuals into a homogeneous bloc. Such a national-protectionist vision is today at the heart of populist movements in Europe and in the United States. The second option is a politics of nostalgia

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that calls for a revival of civic republicanism and/or the past values and institutions of former social democracies. The late Tony Judt recently pleaded for such a revival in his book-cum-testimony *Ill Fares the Land*. Although there is great nobility in such a vision, unfortunately it does not take seriously enough the irreversible character of the individualism of singularity, which is not to be confused with individualism as selfishness and atomism.

The crucial point is that the great reversal is not the consequence of a “broken contract” (see George Packer, “The Broken Contract,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov–Dec 2011) or moral depravity. It derives from historical and political factors as well as structured transformations affecting the mode of production and the nature of the social bond. Neoliberalism has, so far, been the main active interpretation of such changes. Neoliberalism considers market society and the perspective of generalised competition as accomplishment of modernity as the desirable form of humanity and personal achievement. But neoliberalism should not be misinterpreted. It is not only a victorious and negative ideology; it is also a perverse *instrumentalisation* of singularity. For example, modern firms use singularity as a means of production without any consideration for the self-realisation of workers. Hence new types of social conflicts about respect and moral harassment. The problem is that critiques of neoliberalism very often neglect the positive aspiration to singularity and do not take into account the fact that neoliberalism profoundly modifies judgments regarding viable forms of equality as well as tolerable forms of inequality.

Solidarity in an age of singularity

Today, there is in fact only one positive answer to the challenges of the time. Theories of justice reconsider the question of inequalities by transforming it from a social problem to an inter-individual one. They are based on a new consideration of “just inequalities” as structured by the notions of responsibility and merit. Everywhere, equality of opportunity has been the name for such a perspective – albeit with a great variety of definitions, from minimalist to radical ones. But justice is not another word for equality. It says nothing about the *nature* of democratic society. What we need is a new model of solidarity and integration in an age of singularity. But if more redistribution is needed today, it has to be re-legitimated. How? Through a redefinition of equality with a universalist dimension. That is to say, a return to the vision of the French and American Revolutions – to a vision of equality as a *social relation* and not as an arithmetic measure. At those moments in history, equality was understood primarily as a relation, as a way of making a society, of producing and living in common. It was seen as a democratic quality and not only as a measure of the distribution of wealth. This relational idea of equality was articulated in connection with three other notions: similarity, independence, and citizenship. Similarity comes under the heading of equality as equivalence: to be “alike” is to have the same essential properties, such that remaining differences do not affect the character of the relationship. Independence is equality as autonomy: it is defined negatively as the absence of subordination and positively as equilibrium in exchange. Citizenship involves *equality as participation*: it is constituted by community membership and civic activity. Consequently,

the project of equality as relationship was interpreted in terms of a world of like human beings (or semblables, as Tocqueville would say), a society of autonomous individuals, and a community of citizens. These ideas were undermined by the Industrial Revolution, which initiated the first great crisis of equality. In order to overcome the second great crisis, we must recapture the original spirit of equality in a form suitable to the present age. Today the principles of singularity, reciprocity, and commonality can restore the idea of a society of equals and revive the project of creating one. It is these principles that must provide the basic legitimacy for new policies of redistribution.

Realising a society of equals should be the new name for social progress with a universalistic dimension. For the so-called “social question” is not only about poverty and exclusion: it is also about the reconstruction of a common world for the whole of society. ■

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A Mediterranean Recipe for Disaster



Kostas Loukeris

The situation on the ground in Greece continues to worsen, with each bailout ending in failure and increased poverty. Not only do such conditions act as fertile ground for the far-right, but the failure of leadership from the EU also call into question the very future of Europe.

There is a fine line
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Would you have your car fixed by the same mechanics that gave it back to you before, with more problems than when you brought it in to them in the first place? Would you trust those who lied to you over and over again, giving unfulfilled promises? Would you judge your politicians solely by what they say in front of foreign delegations and not by what they do after the delegates leave the country?

The Greek drama entered its 3rd phase. Memorandum #3 – the more the merrier – has been signed and a sigh of relief was heard throughout the world... except in Greece. The three-party government, led by centre-right politician Antonis Samaras, seems to be losing its pace less than five months after its formation. For those with short memory, Samaras strongly opposed memorandum #1, “co-signed” #2 and is a champion of its third and harsher version. There is a fine line between being an acrobat and a charlatan in politics but not in Greek politics.

A daily struggle

In Greece, one sees more and more empty stores for rent, more and more homeless families, more and more people who line up for free meals, more and more people who search in the garbage for food leftovers. With an unemployment rate that has surpassed 25%, many young educated unemployed have started migrating followed by many “better off” immigrants who also leave the country. Hundreds of thousands of employees continue working without pay for the sixth, seventh or eighth month in a row.

The health “system” is deteriorating, creating a humanitarian crisis beyond manageable proportions. Just to give you an example: two years ago I had to pay nothing to my regular yearly visit to my endocrinologist. Last year, I was asked to pay 5 euro. This time the co-payment was 20 euro, even though I am fully insured. While at a nearby hospital to have another exam I was informed that the next available date would be in October 2014. In a recent freakish development the president of a hospital asked authorities to arrest an “illegal foreigner” and took action against the medical doctors who had the audacity to treat this woman who is suffering from cancer. We all had thought it was Hippocratic oath and not hypocritical oath.



Opposition continues to the austerity proposals of the Government

Home owners are asked to pay double tax over their property. Considering the fact that Greeks own at least one house at a rate of 75-80%, this is a direct strike against ownership that make us Greeks wonder whether capitalism's next stage will be to confiscate property en masse, as was the fear with the communists back in the 1940s. The long expected new income tax law hasn't come out yet but certain of its articles seem to go on the same direction. Tax evaders remain untouched as the usual victims – salary earners and pensioners – continue supporting the state's treasury. Those Greeks who profited a great deal during the "party years", those who stroke the big deals with the state, media and construction companies' tycoons, state suppliers, arms dealers as well as those who set up and profited from the whole network of practically tax-free oil continue enjoying their off shore accounts in exotic islands' banks or remain protected under the anonymity of other countries' bank systems. Along with the big fish, a number of Greek professionals, such as plumbers and electricians continue working by offering prices "with or without a receipt", that is with a 23% increase on the final price and a receipt or without a receipt. What would you choose with an average 40% less income and an empty refrigerator?

A generation neglected

Young people see the burden that is bestowed upon their shoulders by the older generations remaining at awe. These young people lack any memory of hardship but are used to the glamorous prosperity that "bubble gum development" brought them up in. And while family was always there to help each other

in the past, now families cannot serve as a safety net since all possible bread earners within a given family unit are hit simultaneously without the prospect of hope. No wonder more than 400,000 children are malnourished in the country nowadays.

Our newest memorandum is like a call to the funeral of what has been left of the middle class, this backbone of stability and cohesion in today's democracies. It is the failure of the democratic process as technocrats, specialists of all sorts and consultants passed the baton to the police and to fearful politicians. The latter care more for their own families, cronies and business friends than for those whose interests they were supposed to defend in the first place. In a society with limited moral reasons to "do the right thing", cynicism is on the rise.

It comes as no surprise that the power vacuum is filled by extreme and fundamentally undemocratic voices such as those of the neonazi party of Chryssi Avgghi (Golden Dawn). This militaristic, nationalistic, xenophobic and violent organisation has successfully created an amalgam of criminals, thugs, bouncers and narcissistic caricatures that would call for laughter if they were not stabbing immigrants, stopping theatre plays with "anti-Christian content" or threatening to disturb anti-junta celebrations in public schools. Faced up with a crumbling state that cannot serve its most basic reasons of existence such as security, health and education, many ordinary people seem to support Golden Dawn at growing rates as this party's organisation and "services" give answers to everyday life and not the year 2020, when

In Greece one needs not be a nationalist to be bothered by the way troika runs the show. One can still be sympathetic to Germans and be bothered by the influx of German specialists who flood the country.

Greece's public debt might be below 124% and therefore of a more manageable nature.

False Friends in Europe

And this is the crucial point as economists, politicians and bankers alike have lost touch with reality. All their miscalculations in the past three years are automatically forgotten and more of the same drug that has led the patient to his knees is prescribed over and over again in a melodramatic and punitive manner. The symbolic significance of Greece's disaster is turned into an example to be avoided throughout Europe and North America, while at the same time no one can explain why other countries which were not run by the same "careless politicians and lazy citizens" face similar if not worse problems. And how come the majority of the eurozone area member states call for support and solidarity, only to hear that countries such as Greece need to suffer before resurrection comes, sometime in the future and definitely after the German federal elections.

In Greece one needs not be a nationalist to be bothered by the way troika runs the show. One can still be sympathetic to Germans and be bothered by the influx of German specialists who flood the country. In the final analysis the place of German construction and telecommunication companies has been filled by German local government and taxation specialists this time. In a similar manner it was French companies who were selling arms to the Greek state before and this time it is French specialists who help evaluate and restructure the Greek public sector and its notorious bureaucracy.

One needs not be a scientist to understand that the Greek economy has stagnated and lives in the third year of a unique comma. The specialists around the patient expect him to "get well" and give him the bill for the medical costs that will definitely cause him a heart attack sometime in the near future. The three-party government is seeing its support deteriorating. Those who support the three political parties do not support their policies. Opinion polls give the socialists approximately 5%. The radical left SYRIZA is leading the polls with over 30% and is in the process of forming a unitary party from a coalition of many parties and political organisations while at the same time is preparing itself for the time when it will lead a Government. Some suggest that it is high time for the Greek radical left to mature and reshape itself from a protest party into a European-oriented and realistic political force that looks for allies wherever they actually are and not in the minds of its leaders.



What role will smaller states such as Greece have in a future, possibly Federal, Europe

If we do away with the
cornerstones will our
European home still
seem European?

What sort of Federalism?

As the future remains unknown, one needs to plan in order to be on top of things. The history of the European Union had so far been a series of endless efforts to discuss and compromise. The success story of the post-World War II peaceful Europe is not based on ultimatums or dictates from its stronger players. What is more, this current shift in the way “we do business” in our continent is identified with the quest for a more unified Europe, a continent that continues its way to federalism. One wonders though to what extent we can build a federal Europe by driving its peoples into poverty. One asks him or herself

whether we can achieve a federal Europe without the “European content”. Democracy, human rights, social welfare state, solidarity, openness are some of the cornerstones of our European home. If we do away with the cornerstones will our European home still seem European? The Mediterranean recipe has been a disastrous one. With or without feta don’t fool yourselves, it is an unhealthy one. ■

Kostas Loukeris is President of the Green Institute, Greece



Bartłomiej Kozek

Precariat's world

While Poland presents itself to the outside world as a country untouched by the economic crisis, the reality is far different for an entire generation of Polish people. Rather than face up to the structural difficulties in the job market, the Government ignores the problem and remains committed to the doctrines of the neoliberal model.

The article is an updated version of the article from the Zielone Wiadomości magazine, in which it was published in late 2011 under the title "Świat według prekariusza".

Making ends meet by relying on a seemingly endless round of unstable, precarious jobs is becoming a common experience for young people in Poland these days. According to a report from the European Commission, the percentage of people working in the so-called "junk job sector" in Poland hovers at around 27%, but in the younger age brackets these figures are even more shocking – 65% for people under 30 years old and 85% for people under 24!

I often hear stories from my friends that differ from the official view of the country as an island, unaffected by the economic crisis. These stories range from changes to working time in a cinema chain, which for my friend meant that he needed to work in two cinemas to make ends meet, to friends that worked in restaurants in which working time has been illegally extended, and at the end of the month the workers get little money for their extra work.

I sometimes consider myself a lucky person because I don't have a permanent job, but at least the studies or articles that I need to write to earn a living cover my areas of interest. Although – after six years of living in Warsaw – I'm still far away from enjoying financial stability. Looking through the job opportunities available, I can't shake the feeling that some time ago there were much more of them in the press or on the Internet. The statistics regarding the

labour market in Poland seem to confirm my suspicions.

A generation on the edge

Although the precariat in Poland is a huge group, a sense of community amongst its members is almost non-existent. For many couples the most dramatic days of their relationships are when you have to pay the rent. From early morning you can sense a tense atmosphere in the house. Sharing a flat with your friends or loved ones – and I know that not only from my experience – increases the risks involved in ending relationships or friendship, once one of the people involved has a problem with paying their part of the bills, or someone finds a more suitable (cheaper) housing offer, not informing their housemates early enough so that they could find a replacement without losing financial stability. With such conditions being increasingly common it comes as no surprise that according to opinion polling 81% of Poles would like to have at least 2 children, but they rarely do, because of low and unstable incomes or poor housing conditions.

For years young people in Poland have been taught that the only people responsible for their quality of lives are they themselves. It results in growing individual frustration, as sending more and more CV's ends only in rejection, or – at best – an unpaid internship or a short-term job for just a few months. The sense of failure further alienates the group of 20-25% of people with after finishing their studies have problems with finding a suitable job. They have no language to tell the world about the sense that

No political force in the Polish parliament wants to admit that a “from rags to riches” approach, which after the economic changes of 1989 became a sort of accepted idea, simply doesn’t work.

something is not right with this feeling that they have under their skin. They also don’t see the relationship between their situation and that of the workers that lost their jobs due to economic transformation or offshoring production, that they portrayed as inflexible and unfit for the times of young, ambitious and well-educated. Often living in cities where the unemployment rate is about 5%, they don’t see any similarities with people living in areas with high, structural unemployment of 25-30%.

In 2010 Izabela Desperak and Judyta Śmiałek wrote a report for the Feminist Think-Tank, focusing on the situation of young people working in the junk jobs sector in Łódź (the third largest city in Poland) which in recent years has fallen into decline due to deindustrialisation. In this report we see young people – mainly students – accepting underpaid and unstable working conditions just to get another line on their CV’s. They quickly realise that achieving a work-study balance is becoming more and more difficult for them. Their leisure time quickly shrinks and their dreams of having children are postponed. PhD students also need to find a job, as only 40% of them receive any financial assistance from their universities. But even getting a job doesn’t mean a happy ending for their – not only financial – problems. Workers’ rights are being neglected – from the issues of safety in the workplace, through to not paying overtime, up to delays in paying wages. Let us remember that it’s not easy to postpone essential payments, such as rent or food.

Regarding fixed-term contracts, Poland recently surpassed Spain as the European leader in their share of the labour market – in Spain it is “only” 26%. In Madrid, Barcelona and other Spanish cities we recently saw mass social protests of people with few prospects for a fulfilling life or even a low-paid job, as the unemployment rate for young people in Spain recently hit over 50% (52,9% in the under 25-age group in August 2012, according to Eurostat).

A problem neglected

Sadly, you can’t find protests on a similar scale in Poland – to be honest, the problem of a potentially “lost generation” only received mainstream attention after a series of articles in the press in mid-2011, and later on with the publication of a governmental report “Youth 2011”, presenting a vision of a young generation fighting bravely against the problems on the labour market. No political force in the Polish parliament wants to admit that a “from rags to riches” approach, which after the economic changes of 1989 became a sort of accepted idea, simply doesn’t work.

The need for change

If we want to limit the scale of junk jobs, which undermine the social insurance system as the contributions to the pension or the healthcare funds are reduced in some forms of working contracts, ideas such as a more flexible labour market and making it easier to fire workers won’t help. According to OECD data, Polish labour laws aren’t much more restrictive

than the average in the member countries of the organisation and more flexible than in Germany or France. Lowering of labour costs also won't do the trick – you don't have to look very far from the ruling Civic Platform's programme from 2011 to see that the level of taxes and social insurance as a percentage of GDP in Poland is one of the lowest in the European Union.

What we need is the abolishing of fiscal preferences for contracts other than the ones covered by Polish labour law. Implementing the same level of social insurance on different types of contracts will put an end to an unfavourable situation where employers that create more stable jobs face a higher tax burden than the ones preferring precarious forms of employment. Sadly, Donald Tusk, the Polish prime minister, decided recently that he will not push such legislation, worrying that an increase in costs in a time of economic crisis would hurt the economy. The situation of people with no prospects of getting health insurance or a pension when they are old was not at the centre of the prime minister's attention.



Polish Premier Donald Tusk. The Polish Government continues to insist that any divergence from the neoliberal model will hurt the economy, despite evidence to the contrary

The voices that argue that if such changes are implemented the unemployment rate will rise and more and more people will seek jobs in the black economy sound just like the ones who argued that increasing the minimum wage would be a "job killer". Well, the facts in Poland are that in January 2005, when the minimum wage was at 849 złoty's brutto (ca. 205 euro), the unemployment rate was at 19%. In the first half of 2011, when the minimum wage was set at 1386 złoty's (ca. 335 euro), 12.8% people were unemployed, with an employment rate close to historic highs. This example shows that believing in neo-liberal dogmas binding social progress with economic decline just doesn't make sense and looks similarly like 19th century opposition to the abolition of child labour or the shortening of daily work time.

looks similarly to the 19th century calls opposing to abolish child labour or shortening the daily work time. As to the “black economy argument”, the answer is not lowering labour standards, but giving adequate financial resources and law enforcement mechanisms to the public workplace inspection service. It is the cutting of the finances of such institutions that allows the black economy to thrive.

Changes will come only when we won't be embarrassed to talk about problems that occur in our lives. Although not every difficulty we come through is a result of the policies of this or that government, the idea that our lives are only shaped by ourselves is equally flawed. It requires some courage to say out

loud that the situation in the labour market can be more important than individual strategies to be more flexible and be prepared to sit quietly and have a low paid junk job. But, if we will lack this courage, the situation in Poland and its place in the global economy won't change and we will be stuck with relying on a “comparative advantage” from our low wages. ■

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Equal to the task? The UK's equality of opportunity legislation under the microscope



Mark Simpson

The UK has been a leader among EU Member States in the promotion of equality of opportunity, with far-reaching duties in place in some regions since 1998. In practice, the jury is still out on whether the equal opportunities legislation has a real impact on the protected groups or simply creates one more administrative hurdle for policymakers.

The importance of equality of opportunity in UK public policy has grown steadily over the last decade and a half to the point where the concept has become, in the words of Court of Appeal judge James Munby, a “fundamental of our society.”

A public sector equality duty, initially introduced for the National Assembly for Wales and all public authorities in Northern Ireland in 1998, now applies across the UK. Public authorities in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) are required to have “due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity” among specified groups; in Northern Ireland, the duty is to have “due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.”

The groups covered by the legislation are those of differing religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation, with political opinion also a protected category in Northern Ireland, a region with a history of discrimination against sections of the community perceived to have an Irish nationalist political outlook.

Despite the steady increase in emphasis on equality of *opportunity* in the political discourse of the New Labour years (1997 to 2010), inequality of *outcome*, in terms of incomes, continued to grow, albeit at a slower rate than under the previous Conservative governments (as highlighted by Danny Dorling of the University of Sheffield). Given the questionable commitment of the current Conservative-led coalition government to equality, it is appropriate

to ask whether the equality of opportunity legislation is strong enough to prevent vulnerable social groups being left behind.

Promoting real opportunity

Indications to date are less than promising. Most scholars and the British courts agree that equality of opportunity is about more than the mere elimination of discrimination, but requires proactive measures to ensure that every individual can avail of the same set of opportunities in life. In particular, this may entail specific measures to assist particularly or historically disadvantaged social groups.

Yet when public bodies have come before the courts to answer a claim that the equality duty has been neglected, judgements have made clear that that having “due regard” to the need to promote equality of opportunity can fall a long way short of taking actual measures to achieve it.

In the leading Court of Appeal judgement on the public sector equality duty in Great Britain, Lord Justice John Dyson – since elevated to the Supreme Court – held that there is no duty to take any step towards the achievement, advancement or promotion of equality of opportunity, only to have “the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances” to this objective, “all the circumstances” including whether a competing policy objective exists.

In Northern Ireland, the courts have proven timid even to engage with the public sector equality duty.

The High Court judgement in the leading case here concludes that the “duty” is a political, rather than a legal matter, with authorities in breach to be exposed by the region’s Equality Commission and subject to the criticism of central government rather than forced to mend their ways by the courts. Although the Court of Appeal retreated somewhat from this position, the number of cases to come before the courts remains very small and it is clear that the chances of a public authority being ordered to revise a policy are slim.

Compliance with the equality duty therefore becomes a largely procedural matter. The question for a public authority is not whether its policy promotes or advances equality of opportunity, but whether it fully considered the likely impact on equality of opportunity during the policy development process and in consultation with organisations representative of the groups specified in the equality legislation.

In the context of austerity

All this legal wordplay matters greatly in the current context of deep cuts in public spending. Many of the changes to public services and social security being introduced by the coalition government have clear potential to impact negatively upon groups that theoretically benefit from the protection of the equal opportunities legislation, particularly women, people with disabilities and people with larger numbers of dependents.

Lynn Carvill, of the Belfast-based Women’s Research and Development Agency, has described welfare

reform measures already introduced for Great Britain and currently being considered by the Northern Ireland Assembly as “the biggest ever attack on women’s economic autonomy,” echoing criticisms of a series of Coalition policies since it took office in 2010.

Areas of particular concern include radical reform of the social security system, which the government has acknowledged creates a greater incentive for (usually female) second earners to withdraw from the labour market, reduced support for childcare through the tax credits system and the payment of benefits to the (usually male) main earner.

These reforms erode women’s opportunity to have an independent income, access contributory benefits, which depend on the payment of national insurance contributions during specified periods of paid employment, or build a good pension – all areas in which women already fare worse than men.

A new cap on a household’s total income from social security benefits will disproportionately affect those with greater numbers of dependents, while local government budget cuts are eroding services for disabled people in many areas of England. Worse may be to come: Conservative Member of Parliament Philip Davies has even suggested it should be permissible to pay employees with disabilities less than the minimum wage.

The deficiencies inherent within the equality legislation are laid bare in the judicial response to challenges to public service cuts. Courts have

There therefore appears to be little prospect that the public sector equality duty will be capable of preventing further attacks on equality in the UK, much less reducing current levels of inequality.

repeatedly held that as long as the public authority has considered the likely impact on a protected group of a proposed policy, it is for the authority to decide how much weight to afford this impact in the decision-making process in comparison to other considerations, as long as its conclusion is not wholly irrational.

Often, it has been cuts to services aimed at people with disabilities or minority ethnic communities that have prompted proceedings. Judgements have made clear that as long as the impact on equality of opportunity has been assessed and the feasibility of mitigating measures considered, affording greater weight to the desirability of reducing public expenditure than to the promotion of equality of opportunity will *not* be considered irrational.

There therefore appears to be little prospect that the public sector equality duty will be capable of preventing further attacks on equality in the UK, much less reducing current levels of inequality. The EU's equal treatment legislation is no more promising, being focused on the elimination of discrimination *against* people on certain grounds of race in specified circumstances, not on the promotion of proactive measures to address the disadvantage experienced by certain groups.



What role is there for the Courts in securing equality?

What can be done?

The Equality Act 2010, which introduced Great Britain's public sector equality duty in its current form, also included a requirement that public authorities have "due regard to the desirability of exercising [strategic functions] a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage." The potential impact of the provision is limited, again, by an emphasis on having "due regard" to an objective rather than actually achieving it; in any case, it has not been implemented by the coalition government and is now set to be repealed.

For Northern Ireland, an alternative means of promoting equality may be through a Bill of Rights. The Agreement reached in 1998's multi-party talks aimed at ending 30 years of political violence in the region – which is also the genesis of the public sector equality duty – places on the agenda the possible

Even if the socio-economic provisions of the Equality Act were implemented and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland created, effective enjoyment of these rights would face a formidable barrier in the form of resistance on the part of judges and politicians alike to a view of socio-economic matters as judicially enforceable.

creation of a Bill of Rights for the province, to build on the European Convention rights in light of the “particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.” 83% of the population of the region would like to see a Bill of Rights and 90% think socio-economic rights should be included (IPSOS/MORI, July 2011).

The Courts as promoters of equality

Arguably, however, the true solution lies with the judiciary. Even if the socio-economic provisions of the Equality Act were implemented and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland created, effective enjoyment of these rights would face a formidable barrier in the form of resistance on the part of judges and politicians alike to a view of socio-economic matters as judicially enforceable, redistribution of resources being regarded as a political rather than judicial matter.

Persuasive counter-arguments can be made. Grainne McKeever (University of Ulster) and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (University of Edinburgh) argue that judgements in civil cases routinely redistribute large sums between litigants, or between the state and a litigant, and that refusal to countenance the same in cases involving a discourse of socio-economic rights simply reflects an ideological aversion to extending the principle to other specified areas. Precedent exists in other states, notably South Africa, of courts actively engaging with the upholding of socio-economic rights.

Even if the courts' view that socio-economic rights are a political matter is accepted, it does not follow that the judiciary has no place in their enforcement. While other European states take a different approach, under the UK constitution *every* matter is a political matter in the sense that Parliament has the right to make or unmake *any* law it wishes. Once Parliament has made a decision, it is for the courts to enforce it.

Arguably, if Parliament felt sufficiently strongly about equality of opportunity that it passed a series of Acts from 1998 to 2010, this gives the courts a mandate to uphold the concept. What constitutes “due regard” for equality of opportunity is, of course, open to interpretation, but it is not too great a leap to suggest that the courts' current view that the duty is essentially to think about equality of opportunity is too cautious.

If equality of opportunity is truly to be a “fundamental of our society,” it may be appropriate to say that “due regard” means taking steps to achieve. This in turn could lead to proactive measures to ensure all groups have equal opportunity to avail of social support even in the absence of specific provision on socio-economic rights. ■

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Philippe Van Parijs

A quasi-American strategy for European egalitarians

Belgian philosopher Philippe Van Parijs analysis the issue of inequality from a European and international perspective. Comparing the contrasting economic systems of the US and Europe, he outlines a series of measures to reduce inequalities that exists across Europe today.

I might as well recognise it straight away: we egalitarians are a bit in a mess today. Worldwide, but especially in Europe, we seem to be irremediably stuck between two impossibilities. On the one hand the increasing economic impossibility of doing something serious about inequality at the national (let alone sub-national) level. And on the other the persisting political impossibility of doing something serious about inequality at a supranational level. I shall say more about this predicament shortly. I shall do so essentially by spelling it out and next sketching the three-pronged strategy which I believe we need in order to overcome it. But I first need to say a few words, if only to clear some misunderstandings, about whether and when inequalities are a problem.

When are inequalities unjust?

First, what inequality are we talking about when we see it as a problem? We are not talking about inequality, say, in the grades we are giving to our students. We are not talking about inequality in levels of happiness or of personal satisfaction among our fellow citizens. As in most of the papers at this conference, we are talking primarily about inequalities of income and wealth. There are all sorts of tricky difficulties, which will no doubt be discussed in depth at this conference, in measuring income or wealth, both practical and conceptual, for example because of the importance of the informal economy in many countries, because of the subtleties in the notion of purchasing power parity, because of the less tangible components of people's incomes such as the quality of their living environment, or because

of the question of whether income and wealth should be measured at the individual or household level. However, I shall here leave these difficulties aside and simply assume that we have defined some meaningful notion of personal income.

Is inequality of income a problem? Not, in my view, if – and only if – this inequality of income can be justified in at least one of two distinct ways. The first one appeals to *personal responsibility*. Suppose we are given some possibilities at the start. One person chooses to work less, another to work more. One chooses to save less, another to save more. It does not take long for one person to earn a higher income or possess greater wealth than another. Those who consider like me that inequalities generated in this way are fine need not cease to be egalitarians. They can be *opportunity-egalitarians*, as opposed to outcome-egalitarians.

The second consideration that can justify inequality is *economic efficiency*. Sometimes efficiency and responsibility go together, but not always. Those who want to make room for efficiency can be called *lax egalitarians*, as opposed to strict egalitarians. They deny that justice demands that we should go for equality at all cost. If more equality of whatever matters for the sake of justice – say income for simplicity – means less of it for all, including the victims of the inequality, then they say: stop equalising. Making room for efficiency considerations in this way, typically because of the effect of greater equality on material incentives, naturally leads to some criterion of *sustainable maximin*. What justice

The bulk of today's inequality between people worldwide is international and hence linked to the massively different opportunities that are afforded to individuals depending on the situation of the country in which they happen to be born.

requires is not that we should go for full equality or maximally possible equality but that the worst off – those with least income, least wealth, least of whatever matters for the sake of justice – should be as well off as sustainably possible.

Consequently, inequality in income or wealth is not a problem if it can be justified in at least one of these two ways. However, if we look at inequality between individuals in today's world, as documented in some of the contributions to this conference, it will be very hard to justify much of it in either of these two ways, if only because of a feature of this inequality spectacularly displayed, for example, in Branko Milanovic's (2011) contribution: the bulk of today's inequality between people worldwide is international and hence linked to the massively different opportunities that are afforded to individuals depending on the situation of the country in which they happen to be born. Neither personal responsibility nor economic efficiency could justify inequalities of this type and magnitude.

Yet, there is at least one respectable view which says that international inequality, unlike intranational inequality, is a sort of inequality that should not bother us on grounds of justice. I am saying that it is a respectable view because it is held by a rightly admired political philosopher, whom I had an opportunity to honour yesterday here in Milan, together with others in this room, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the publication of his first book, *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971). The view I have in mind, however, is not a view John Rawls defended in his *Theory of Justice*, but only in his later book *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999). According to this view, there is a duty of assistance for so-called burdened societies, that is societies that are so underdeveloped that they are unable to sustain a just, basic structure. But if, say, Costa Rica and Denmark are each sufficiently developed to protect fundamental liberties and institutionalise distributive justice between the citizens of their respective countries, then there is no injustice involved in Denmark having a GDP per capita twice as high as Costa Rica, or five times higher or ten times higher. Such inequality is not a matter of justice according to *The Law of Peoples*.



Where is the inequality on Denmark and Costa Rica's differing GDP levels?

I am not saying that there is nothing to this view. But for reasons I cannot discuss properly here I believe that its plausibility becomes increasingly fragile in today's globalised world. My own view is that fundamentally, ethically speaking, we owe the same sort of justification for the inequality between, say, the income of a Milanese and that of another Milanese, or that of a Sicilian settled in Milan, or that of an Albanian immigrant, or that of an Albanian still living in Albania, or that of a Libyan etc. It does not follow that there is no good reason for some of these gaps to remain larger than others. But these reasons must always be rooted in the same two fundamental considerations which I said were relevant in a domestic context, namely responsibility and efficiency. There is no other fundamental justification for inequalities between people belonging to

different regions than those applying to inequalities between people belonging to the same nation.

Against this background, it should be clear enough that both across national borders and within each country there is plenty of equality today that can be explained in many ways but that cannot be justified. Whether this inequality increases or decreases, where and why is interesting to know and there will be a lot more about that at this conference. But even if it could be shown that there is some sign of this inequality decreasing everywhere, it would remain urgent to ask how we can move away from a situation in which, according to Branko Milanovic's data, half the world's income is appropriated by 8% of its population, including possibly some of the people in this room.

Three strategies against global inequality

So, how can we move away from this situation? There are three possible strategies. The first one consists in boosting GDP and local production in the poorer countries. This could be through targeted development aid or through remittances from immigrants channelled to investment in their country of origin. This could also be through direct foreign investment or technology transfers facilitated both by the openness of the richer countries' markets to what is being produced in less developed countries and by the important trust-building role played by diasporas in the richer countries. But there are places in the world where this will only tackle a fraction of the problem. Having visited the so-called Democratic Republic of the Congo a couple of times I have often wondered first of all how much it would cost in air conditioning and in petrol to make the steadily growing Congolese population as productive as the Texans. It is hard to escape the thought that achieving this could only come at the expense of making life on the planet completely unsustainable. Secondly, I have also often wondered how utopian the rule of law and an efficient administration – both essential to make such a country more productive – will remain as long as any local graduate with the capacity to get some sort of reforms going in that direction is poached by the private sector, or by some job opportunities abroad or even by some international NGOs. I do not mean to deny that this first strategy, GDP boosting, may work for some countries, sometimes even a bit too well according to some – when noting, for example, that Belgian steel is now in Mittal's Indian hands and (worse still!) Belgian beer in Ambev's Brazilian hands. But

it certainly won't work everywhere, and particularly it won't work in some of the poorest countries in today's world.



The challenge is to reduce inequalities in a way that doesn't further damage the planet

The second strategy consists in opening the borders, in relying migration. I find that we Europeans are often unfair when assessing the performance of the United States in terms of inequality. When you look at the trend displayed by some indices of inequality through time in a country with a high rate of immigration like the United States, you should not compare inequality in today's resident population with the inequality in the resident population in that same territory ten years ago or twenty years ago. You should instead compare the level of inequality in today's population with the level of inequality in that same population today as it was ten years ago or twenty years *ago wherever they were then living*. What you could detect with this more sophisticated

index is the extent to which migration contributes to increasing the level of income of people who were in a situation of great poverty before they moved, and thereby decreasing inequality globally possibly at the expense of increasing it in the host country. However, this second strategy leads quickly to what I believe is the most cruel dilemma of the Northern left, of progressive people in more developed countries. It is hard to deny that opening the borders especially to the poorly skilled workers from poor countries is a significant contribution to the reduction of unjust inequality. But at the same time it is hard to deny that the newcomers, coming from these poorer countries, will compete most directly, sometimes ferociously, not with the bourgeois, whose shoes and bathrooms they came to clean, but with the poor local guys and women who qualify for the same sort of jobs as the newcomers, are confined to the same sort of housing and are dependent on the same sort of social services. It is simply impossible for the Northern left to be both as generous as it feels it ought to be towards outsiders and as generous as it feels it ought to at least remain with the most vulnerable of its own population. Barring an *apartheid* regime that rests on the perpetuation of the sub-status of *Gastarbeiter*, borders cannot be widely opened without accepting the dismantling of the genuinely redistributive part of our welfare states. Genuine redistribution, i.e. a transfer system that is not only insurance-based, cannot be sustained without a fortress to protect it.

Bearing in mind the limits of the first strategy, how can this dilemma inherent in the second strategy be, if not solved, at least alleviated? Only through a third strategy that consists in organising genuine interpersonal redistribution at a higher level than the only one at which it has been organised so far, namely that of the nation-state. This third strategy, I believe, is relevant at the global level but I want to zoom in to a level at which it is both more urgent and more immediately relevant, namely the level of the European Union, on which I shall focus for the rest of my talk.

The EU's predicament

Within the borders of the European Union, a quite amazing lot has been achieved along the first two strategies which I have just mentioned. Firstly, GDP boosting has certainly happened in the poorer parts of the European Union, in part through the so-called structural funds and through regional policy, but above all as a direct and indirect result of the free movement of capital, goods and services. Secondly, and no doubt most remarkably compared to what was happening in the past and to what is happening elsewhere, this freedom of movement has been extended to people. This has led to the crowding of immigrants in the EU's most thriving cities and even to spectacular decreases in population in some peripheral areas, such as Bulgaria and Romania.

For throughout the European Union we are witnessing the rise of a general feeling, more or less founded empirically, that governments must reduce the levels of the social benefits and services they provide.



Movement of workers, especially young people, ensures inequality between member states is lower than it would otherwise have been

As a result of all this, income inequality between Member States is arguably a lot lower than it would otherwise have been. But this trend, which egalitarians are bound to welcome, may well be offset by another phenomenon induced by precisely the same causes. For throughout the European Union we are witnessing the rise of a general feeling, more or less founded empirically, that governments must reduce the levels of the social benefits and services they provide, or to make them more conditional, to avoid becoming magnets for net beneficiaries, and that they also have to reduce the taxation of the wealthier households and firms in order to reduce the risk of their moving country. In other words, it is now widely believed that the European Union's national governments have become economically unable to do what they had been doing not too badly in the past, namely reduce unjust inequality through

a combination of progressive taxation, the welfare state and a high-quality public education system. The single market, including the single currency, is in the process of killing what we European lefties used to be so proud of. Perhaps, we Europeans would therefore be wise to pay attention to a warning issued to us over a decade ago by the respectable political philosopher I already referred to:

"One question the Europeans should ask themselves, if I may hazard a suggestion", this American citizen writes, "is how far-reaching they want their union to be. It seems to me that much would be lost if the European union became a federal union like the United States. Here there is a common language of political discourse and a ready willingness to move from one state to another. Isn't there a conflict between a large free and open market comprising all of Europe and the individual nation-states, each with its separate political and social institutions, historical memories, and forms and traditions of social policy. Surely these are great value to the citizens of these countries and give meaning to their life. The large open market including all of Europe is the aim of the large banks and the capitalist business class whose main goal is simply larger profit. The idea of economic growth, onwards and upwards, with no specific end in sight, fits this class perfectly. If they speak about distribution, it is [al]most always in terms of trickle down. The long-term result of this – which we already have in the United States – is a civil society awash in a meaningless consumerism of some kind. I can't believe that that is what you want."
(Rawls & Van Parijs 2003)

Because of this bulky transfer system being funded at the federal level, its automatic operation works as a powerful in-built stabiliser in case of inter-state divergences, without any ad hoc decision needing to be taken.

In brief, what John Rawls is telling us is “Please, Europeans, don’t go the way we Americans went.” I believe, however, that there is no way back to our nation states and that in order not to end up doing far worse than the United States in terms of unjust inequalities, we have no option but to do what may look like the exact opposite of what Rawls is recommending, i.e. move in the direction of the US along three distinct dimensions, though in each case in a specific way. These three dimensions can be understood as features or preconditions of the third strategy for fighting international inequalities mentioned earlier: transnational redistribution.

A three-pronged quasi-American strategy?

Perhaps the best way of explaining the intuition behind the three-pronged strategy I am about to sketch starts with the current crisis of the Euro. How do other currency unions, such as the United States of America, manage to cope with what is the most fundamental difficulty behind the so-called Greek crisis? How do they handle significant divergences in productivity between their individual states despite their inability, intrinsic to a currency union, to use devaluation as an adjustment mechanism? Schematically, but essentially, through two in-built stabilisers: one is a high level of interstate migration, to which Rawls alluded in the passage I quoted, and the other is a massive system of interpersonal redistribution, organised and funded at the federal level, as it is in the United States, through the nationwide pension system, Medicare, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the food stamps programme, etc. Because of

this bulky transfer system being funded at the federal level, its automatic operation works as a powerful in-built stabiliser in case of inter-state divergences, without any ad hoc decision needing to be taken.



What are the barriers to US-style fiscal transfers being introduced in Europe?

What about Europe? If only for linguistic reasons, inter-member-state migration will remain comparatively low or, when it happens, will tend to lead to more acute tensions and to far greater and longer-lasting integration costs. Secondly, the degree of EU-level redistribution is peanuts relative to federal redistribution in the United States, whereas given the greater obstacles to inter-state migration, it should precisely be higher. What needs doing in the European Union therefore, and most urgently, both to supplement and to support the welfare systems of the Member States, is to make significant EU-level interpersonal redistribution politically possible. This is the only serious way of tackling the predicament I mentioned at the very beginning: as national

we need our European political institutions to be designed in such fashion that the top EU decision makers are not electorally accountable exclusively to their respective national constituencies.

inequality-reducing policies become economically unsustainable, we need to make supranational, EU-level inequality-reducing policies politically possible. How? Necessarily by making the EU a bit more like the US along three dimensions, in each case with a crucially distinctive European touch.

Firstly, we cannot go for a EU-level mega welfare state, something as ambitious and complex as the US welfare state. We therefore need to go for something more modest, far simpler, far easier both to implement and to monitor, namely something like a universal basic income, funded, by an EU-wide value added tax, possibly also in part by some form of EU-wide carbon or energy tax.

Secondly, we need our European political institutions to be designed in such fashion that the top EU decision makers are not electorally accountable exclusively to their respective national constituencies, as Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy and all the others currently are. This does not mean that we should go for a US-type presidential system, with a directly elected president. Instead, we need to implement something that should achieve an analogous outcome, such as an EU-wide constituency for part of the seats at the European Parliament, with the job of president of the executive of the EU (whether the Commission or the Council) being dependent on the outcome of this election.

Thirdly, and most fundamentally perhaps, we must bear in mind that the national welfare states did not drop ready-made from the desk of a bureaucrat, let alone from the mind of a philosopher. They were the outcome of struggles, conducted by movements, associations, trade unions, political parties. The success of such struggles depended on effective communication, coordination and mobilisation among between those who stood to gain most from the gradual development of those welfare states and their inequality-reducing impact. This was greatly helped, indeed made possible, by the sharing of a national language. The absence of a common language is one great obstacle to effective trans-member-state mobilisation, not among the rich and the powerful who can afford the great but tremendously expensive services of translators and interpreters, but among the weakest, the most vulnerable and their organisations. Hence the importance of democratising, as quickly and effectively as possible, competence in the same language in all layers of the population. This language, you might have guessed it, will not be Italian. It will be the language adopted at this conference. The process of spreading English among young Europeans is well on its way, though some countries, including Italy or francophone Belgium, lag behind because they are stupidly handicapping their youth, especially the youth from the poorer groups, by dubbing American films instead of subtitling them. This privilege given to the native language of a subset of the European population

raises serious issues of linguistic justice, which I try to address systematically in a book published this month (Van Parijs 2011b). In its penultimate chapter, I argue that one of the ways in which linguistic justice needs to be pursued, implies that all official languages of the EU will be entitled to enjoy a form of coercive protection within a particular territory defined in most cases by the borders of the Member States. This feature of the language regime of the European Union, commonly called the “linguistic territoriality principle”, is bound to be and remain a major difference with the United States.

To conclude, let us return to the predicament I formulated at the very start. In order to address the problem created by the nation states’ growing economic incapacity to reduce inequality, we need to develop the political capacity of the European Union – and of the world as a whole – to reduce inequality at a higher level. This will require us Europeans to take the US route, notwithstanding Rawls’s advice to the contrary, though in a specific way that should help handle the difficulties he saw with that route. In particular:

- 1.** Like the US, we must develop interpersonal redistribution at the level of the Union but in a simpler, more universal, more basic way than what the US welfare state does;
- 2.** Like the US, we must design our political institutions so as to require Union-wide electoral Accountability from the Union’s top decision-makers, but without adopting a presidential system; and
- 3.** Like the US, we should adopt English as our shared language, as is already happening today, but without eradicating the other languages in the process – *per fortuna*. ■

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Fintan Farrell

An enormous step backwards: Raising inequality and poverty in Europe

Europe is facing inequality levels that bring us back to the 1930s. Many southern European countries are facing a humanitarian emergency. The debt crisis caused by transfers of wealth from the public to the private sector has been dramatically reinforced by the austerity measures. We need a real social inclusion strategy for the EU and a major shift in its political orientation. An interview with Fintan Farrell, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

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GEF: The second edition of the Green European Journal published a debate with Romuald Jadgodzinski, an advisor at the European Trade Union Institute, and Jean Lambert, Green Member of the European Parliament. One of their common conclusions was that inequality was both a cause and a consequence of the crisis. Do you share this diagnosis, and how do you see, from your point of view of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), this situation of poverty and inequality, and which distinction do you make between both concepts?

FF: Well, we would share this analysis, and from the very beginning of the EAPN, 22 years ago, we thought that the fight against poverty is very much connected to the fight for a good society for everybody. So we did not want just special measures for the poor, we wanted a society that was capable of providing a good life for everybody. And for a society to be able to deliver a good life for everybody, it needs to be a more equal society. This has been the point that the EAPN has been making, and we have been doing work, not just on poverty, but on wealth and inequality, for a number of years now, including an explainer that we have done on wealth and inequality in this area. The book by Pickett and Wilkinson, 'The Spirit Level', brought this discussion to a very high level of visibility and helped to make the connections and the visibility of the actions very clearly, but we have been making similar points for a long time. We believe that it is this failure across a lot of political groupings to look at the impact of inequalities, to try just concentrating on safety nets, rather than just looking at the whole of the system,

has led us to the crisis that we are in now, and globally we are at levels of inequality last seen in the 1930s. It's an enormous step backwards in terms of inequalities globally, and within Europe.

GEF: And you can see it in every country, or only in a few groups of countries?

FF: No, I think in most countries in Europe, the level of inequality is growing, including the Nordic countries, where there were traditionally more equal societies. But you have had political decisions in some of the Nordic countries that they wanted to be more unequal societies. In the run up to the last Swedish election, there was a clear statement that nothing was as important as growth, not even growing levels of inequalities. This was a statement at a high level, from the Prime Minister, and the party that was re-elected. So, it is a political choice, and it is about the model of development that we are pursuing.



Even in traditionally egalitarian Nordic countries, political decisions are being made that will widen inequality

GEF: In the '90s, neo-liberalism was at its highest level, don't you have the feeling that these inequality tendencies are getting more and more visible, and are becoming a problem also.

FF: It is enormously visible now, and the impact of the austerity approach has really driven these inequalities to enormous levels. We are talking about a situation of humanitarian crisis in a number of European countries. In Portugal and Spain we are beginning to have difficulties in getting medicines, you have a tripling in the numbers attending food banks. In Greece, you have an almost abandonment of all labour law, you have people going to work and not getting paid. In Bulgaria, with the official figures around 24% or 25% of people in poverty or social exclusion, if you were to use some other well respected indicators of poverty and social exclusion, you would be talking, more like 70% to 75% of the population in poverty. This is a reality which is not at all reflected in terms of a solidarity response at European level. It took Greece a long time to develop the level of debt due to an escape of wealth from the public to the private sector, but in fact, the austerity measures have managed to triple that debt in little over two years. So it is really incredible that the Troika complains about something – the build-up of public debt – but implements measures which triple it in an amazingly short space of time, which is making the future viability of Greece, and life for Greek people, really, really precarious.

GEF: Do we need an emergency programme, or do we need more structural measures in the longer term, in order to face the humanitarian crisis in some of these countries?

FF: There is a need for an emergency programme. We have this small programme for the most deprived, which is proposed by the Commission now, and the countries are rejecting it. So it is going to be quite hard to push it through, even it is a tiny programme, in proportion to what is needed. But it will not solve the problem. You need to start with a real recognition of what was the cause of the crisis. And you have to have a total shift in the sort of policies, to really address what caused the crisis, which was, I do not say capitalism, but unsustainable forms of capitalism, which are facilitated by hedge funds, by derivative trading, by tax havens. You need to really tackle those issues, which allowed the escape of wealth from the public sector to the private sector. That is the inequality that has grown in the private sector. You have had a total loss of respect for social knowledge, whether that social knowledge comes from social scientists, social NGOs, or people experienced in poverty, and this became very visible in the Wim Kok report of 2004, when they were reviewing the Lisbon Agenda, and then they said that Lisbon was not working. But there was nobody in that group who had social knowledge, and the bit of the Lisbon that was working was the social inclusion strategy. As a result, since 2005, we have been weakening the EU social inclusion strategy to the extent that you could say that since 2007 it has not really existed. So part of the solution is that we need a really distinct

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EU social inclusion strategy that works at the different levels: local, national, and European.

GEF: For the moment, it seems that there is no political majority for this in the European Parliament, or in the European Council.

FF: No. That's the problem. There isn't a political majority for this approach. It is difficult to understand why. People are very scared by the realities at the moment; it's quite hard to make decisions. But you see now, a further 30% drop in confidence measures in the European institutions. So is confidence in the EU institutions down to about 31% now? Is that a sustainable approach for the future? Something has to happen to bring the people back into the European project, and that requires a major shift in the political orientation.

GEF: But if you do not have the political voices to support this change, and to organise it, isn't there a need for a social response, of a social movement, of a new kind of coalition, not only of the unions, but of all the other components of civil society?

FF: It really now needs people who are committed to and who really value the European social model to find all sorts of different ways to combine to try to defend that model. You had the President of the European Central Bank saying that the European social model is dead. What he meant by this statement is a little bit unclear. But that is a very big statement by the President of the European Central Bank, and that is an unacceptable vision for the future

for many Europeans. And now we need to combine in all sorts of ways, across all sorts of sectors, because there are people in the institutions who are very concerned about these issues, there are even people in the police force, beginning to be concerned, in terms of law and order. There is this incredible rise of fascism, and Europe is not immune to violence. So we should learn the lessons, and I think, even if the political majority is not in this direction at the moment, the political leaders are aware, and are increasingly aware of how big the problem is. They know that they have to find some new solutions.

GEF: We are moving slowly from a definition of wealth linked to incomes to a new kind of definition, much more measured to the access to public goods, for example, education, health systems, culture, and so on, and public services. How do you see this from your point of view as the European Anti-Poverty Network?

FF: First, I think sometimes there is a long gap between the debates and their real influence on the political decision-making. All of this discussion of beyond-GDP indicators (well-being indicators, indicators of happiness) is important because they come closer to measuring a healthy society than some of the measures that are being used now. We also really think that this model of growth that is used now is unsustainable, both for people, and for the planet, so there needs to be at least some other way to think about growth. We have to try to help set an agenda that could get us back from the brink of the disastrous position we are in now, and get us to move

into a new direction. Like Richard Wilkinson often says, he would love that when the prime ministers meet, the first thing they say is, "how's your inequality indicator doing?" It is an image of the sort of society we'd like to get to, which I think is important.

GEJ: But at the same time throughout Europe personal indebtedness is becoming a huge problem, and it is linked to a conception of wealth and consumerism that is completely unsustainable.

FF: There was indeed a policy, which encouraged lots of individuals to take up levels of debt, which in the end, it was really clear that they would have real problems to pay back. So there are real problems of individual personal indebtedness. There is a specialist organisation in the membership of the EAPN, dealing with this issue, the European Consumer Debt Network. There is, in some countries, much better legislation to help people deal with these questions.

I am not a specialist in this area, but it is a question that is very important, because if the debt levels have been allowed to grow to levels where they can never return back, then you need to find a solution that works for the people concerned. And this is connected to the model of, "spend spend growth model", and that, for sure, is no longer a viable model for the future. We should have more fiscal discipline, we can't be running up large public debts, but you need to move to that system in a careful way. The shock-therapy they tried to impose in Greece had a disastrous impact. We should have had something more like the Marshall Plan for Greece.

GEF: More socially balanced?

FF: Yes, more planned and more balanced. And given the time that is necessary to make these very big changes. ■

Fintan Farrell is Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

On the importance of equality for the European Greens



Edgar Szoc

Inequality helped set in motion a downward spiral that resulted in the global financial crisis. Today, that inequality has finally been acknowledged as a central problem, and addressing it successfully can help us to not only overcome the crisis but to move to a more sustainable society. In this article, Edgar Szoc examines the historic links between Greens and equality; highlights the urgency of the need to address the topic, and suggests how this could be done. No less than a new green theory of justice has to be developed.

why did economic inequality matter when – in absolute terms – the standard of living of the most deprived people in society increased?

As the most visible outbreak of the sub-prime mortgage crisis took hold and the unthinkable bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers was declared in October 2008, so the finger-pointing began. And it did not take long to identify those responsible: greedy bankers, corrupt intermediaries, complacent rating agencies, and senseless regulators. It was but a financial saga: a speculative bubble disconnected from the “real economy” and fuelled by circuitous dealings, asymmetric information, and deregulation before bursting and producing immeasurable “collateral damage”.¹

None of the above information is incorrect, but an analysis which puts the blame for the largest global crisis in the last 80 years down to failures and embezzlements within the financial sector alone remains largely inadequate. Once emotions had allayed and worst fears had passed, economists convincingly tried to show the extent to which none of this would have been possible without increasing inequalities and, more specifically, without an ensuing stagnation of average incomes (particularly American incomes).²



It is now agreed by most economist that the growth in inequality played a key role in the 2008 financial crisis

It was, in fact, the pressure to maintain a constant standard of living with a relatively lower salary that opened the floodgates for credit applications. Deregulation did the rest. But deregulation would not have been able to do its damage without this initial stagnation of salaries.

This observation and the parallel trend of soaring top-salaries have placed the issue of economic inequalities at the heart of public debate, which for three decades had been dominated by neoliberal hegemony. Even the traditional champions of the fight against inequality had a tendency to rather focus their energy on the fight against poverty: why did economic inequality matter when – in absolute terms – the standard of living of the most deprived people in society increased?

¹ This article benefited from invaluable ideas and advice offered by Aurélie Maréchal.

² Also see Jacques Sapir, « Un an après » in « Actualités de la Recherche en histoire visuelle », available under <http://www.arhv.lhivic.org/index.php/2009/09/15/1053-un-an-apres>; Raguram Rajan, *Fault Lines: How Hidden Fractures Still Threaten the World Economy*, Princeton Press, 2010.

Following the same logic, the majority of governmental parties – some in more, some in less euphemistic tones – echoed the sentiments of Gordon Gekko in Oliver Stone's *Wall Street*: "Greed is good".³ Peter Mandelson was no less explicit in his view of New Labour: "*New Labour* is intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich – as long as they pay their taxes".

Where Do The Greens Stand?

To use the categories forged by Nancy Fraser, we must acknowledge that since they were founded, ecological parties have fought more strongly against inequalities in terms of their "recognition" rather than their "redistribution". This fight in favour of recognition (of different minorities or minority groups including women, people from an immigrant background, homosexuals, etc.) is both integral to the Greens identity and has been a driving force since their arrival on the scene of institutional politics. They have an impressive track record in this area: within the space of just a few years, laws and mentalities have evolved at an astonishing rate in many countries.

The overall track record when it comes to economic inequalities and therefore the concept of "redistribution" is considerably less noble (even though this can only be attributed to the Greens very marginally). In fact, the birth of the different Green parties has essentially

coincided with the rise in economic inequalities which they have been irrevocably committed to reducing (at least in industrialised societies) under the pressure of labour movements and the integration of this pressure into post-war social agreements.

Even though the green's connection to economic inequalities is a complex, multifaceted and contentious one, to limit ourselves to this tale of struggle for recognition and blindness to redistribution, is to demonstrate historical and geographical short-sightedness.

Historically, the battles waged by greens and trade unions actually stemmed from common roots which were much older than one might think given the emergence of political movements and Green parties in the aftermath of 1968. The first labour struggles irrevocably revisited socio-economic aspects (salary, working hours, etc.) and environmental aspects in a broader sense (the products used, the report as a tool, etc.), as discussed by Alain Lipietz. This entanglement is still apparent in a number of emerging countries today. The social struggle is inevitably one to improve basic (material) conditions, or at the very least, to preserve respect for standards of living. Joan Martinez Alier proposes a number of examples which are both astonishing and convincing in his masterful publication: "*The Environmentalism of the Poor*".⁵

3 Or to quote the famous words of François Guizot declared in 1840 « Enrichissez-vous » [*enrich yourselves*].

4 Alain Lipietz, *Le développement soutenable : histoire et défis*, ENSBA Conference Paris 1997, available under <http://lipietz.net/spip.php?article305>.

5 Joan Martinez Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A study of ecological conflicts and valuation*, Edward Elgar, 2002.

the environmental dimension should now be added to the social, economic, ethnic, and gender inequalities traditionally studied and measured

If this privileged connection with the labour movement may appear somewhat foreign to the Greens in Western Europe today, this is evidently due both to the specific evolution of representative bodies for the working class, and also to the changes brought about by the transition to a post-industrial economy. But perhaps there is another reason. We greens will not allow ourselves to be brainwashed by the boat metaphor.

The prevailing definitions of the concept of the environment generally tend to turn it into a universal entity which is both objective and immune from social differentiations. We would therefore all be in the same boat when it comes to dealing with damage to our environment such as radioactive fallouts or global warming. Thus, echoing the sentiments of German sociologist Ulrich Beck: are social science researchers designating this global, systemic and undifferentiated risk as the new impassable horizon of our contemporary societies? According to Beck, there would no longer remain important territorial borders or social barriers. However, this would mean forgetting – rather too quickly – that environmental damage is far from limited to these global risks and that in light of trends such as atmospheric or noise pollution, the metaphor of everyone being on the same boat is less appropriate than that of a medley of cruise liners and old “tub” boats. The movements fighting for climate justice also serve as a useful reminder that when it comes to climate change, the global risk, the historical (and current) responsibilities, as well as other risks, are very unequally distributed.



Is the impact of climate change the greatest form of inequality?

The ecological perspective on matters of inequality cannot ignore this new dimension (new from a scientific perspective, not in its actual existence): the environmental dimension should now be added to the social, economic, ethnic, and gender inequalities traditionally studied and measured (both in terms of environmental damage caused and that endured). The integration of this dimension also sheds light on other dimensions: indeed, the cases studied attest to the fact that environmental inequalities go beyond and intensify social and economic inequalities, amongst others.⁶

⁶ Also see Cornut P., Bauler T. and Zaccai E. (dir.) *Environnement et inégalités sociales*, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2007.

Towards a New Theory of Justice

Bringing the issue of inequalities back to the fore, however, still lacks theoretical support. Although the observations of Sapir and Rajan, as well as those of Wilkinson and Pickett⁷ do clearly point out the crucial impact of inequalities on stability; well-being; and the sustainability of societies; public policies continue to be guided, whether implicitly or explicitly, by the Rawls Maximin Criterion and his blindness to inequalities.⁸ If empirical observations are very much still active today and contradictions are found, we are largely devoid of an intellectual organisation which could give meaning to these and reconstruct a Theory of Justice by centrally integrating inequalities (in all dimensions) and the structural effects of these.

At a time when the pillars on which socio-economic models have been built, both since the post-war period and since the transition towards neoliberalism, are collapsing in quick succession, an overhaul of the Theory of Justice on the basis of environmental issues and the new limits imposed by these, is one of the most urgent and important challenges today. This task – both intellectually stimulating and politically necessary – will undoubtedly present one of the most important challenges for the Greens in the years to come. And it will, incidentally, be a condition for electoral success. ■

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7 Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level. Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Allen Lane, 2009.

8 See Edgar Szoc, « La taille du gâteau et l'assiette du voisin : ce que Jackson fait à Rawls » in *Etopia, Revue d'écologie politique*, n°9, 2011.



Reinhard Bütikofer

Next challenges for the European Greens

In the 2009 European Parliament elections, the Green Group of MEPs won 13 more seats to become the 4th largest group. However when the European Parliament faces elections again in 2014, the political environment will be vastly different. How to do the Greens repeat their success of 2009 in such a situation? The Green European Journal talks to European Green Party Co-Chair Reinhard Bütikofer about his plans.

But just saying 'no to austerity' is not enough of an answer. We have to also provide a green reformist perspective.

GEJ: On November 14th the European Trade Unions organised a day of action against austerity. It showed once more the north/south divide inside Europe. The European Green Party supported this action. Can you explain this choice and how you understand this movement?

RB: I met the demonstrators on Place Schuman in Brussels with Isabelle Durant MEP and a small group of Belgian greens. The demonstration there was rather symbolic. But it was different in other European cities, mirroring an increasingly deep division inside the EU through the spectre of trade unions, although we might have expected that trade unions could bridge the gap among the governments. But it was not the case. The crisis of cohesion goes very deep. For the Greens who have always portrayed themselves as a new political force that gives new orientations, the challenge is to be able to help to bring the two sides back together. At a meeting of the European Green Party leaders in the European Parliament in October, there was no real agreement between the Spanish leader of Equo saying that the Greens should be in the streets demonstrating with protestors and the Finnish representative who basically said "look, there has to be some austerity after all".

Eventually we provided a common understanding by using the formula that we should pursue solidarity and solidity and sustainability. By putting solidarity first, we give a clear signal where our heart is and what should take priority. But by using the word solidity, we indicate that we think that solidarity will need a companion: reforms are necessary. I'm not saying

the reforms that the Troika is advocating in the case of Greece. But just saying 'no to austerity' is not enough of an answer. We have to also provide a green reformist perspective. In Athens, I discussed with the leader of Democratic Left of Greece who basically argued that there should be more reforms in Greece, abolishing some of the traditional privileges of certain segments of society and creating more justice and fairness and that on the other hand there should also be an easing of the fiscal measures, reducing the burden on the broad population and most notably on the poor. The third aspect of the formula is that we include sustainability, something that neither the governments nor the traditional left talk about. This alludes to the basic understanding that all greens share the view that a way out of the crisis can only be forged on the basis of a new economic dynamism that would be built on what we have described with the slogan of the "Green New Deal", which is an integration of environmentally oriented economic innovation and reregulation, a strong social plank and a macro economic regulation, particularly a re-regulation of the financial markets. In theory these three terms indicate the elements for a strategy. But our weakness is that our member parties do not talk to one another enough. There is very scant exchange between the Portuguese, the Spanish or the Greek experiences and the Nordic experiences or the German experiences. It is not enough to meet twice a year at European Green Party Council meetings. Unless we start working on those divisions much more actively by promoting bilateral exchanges between the parties we will not be up to the challenge of imposing a common answer.

GEJ: In the 2009 European Parliament elections in Belgium we were really successful with the Green New Deal not only because it was allusive to the memory of the welfare state but also to the aspect of 'deal', as the result of negotiations. Shouldn't we focus more on this side and identify our partners, and on top of it, what we call in Belgium the "social partners"?

RB: In 2009, the GND was indeed a very potent political instrument at least I can say that for Germany. In the debates, I was the only one willing to talk about jobs while all the other politicians from the traditional parties were reluctant to even mention that because their economic theories had all just been proven wrong. It was very useful to be able to say that the Greens have an integrated approach that brings together different aspects of what we have to deal with in this crisis. The Green New Deal has however, in the years since, not caught on much beyond the narrow confines of the Green family. The Green parties like the GND agenda, but few pursue it as an agenda. The problem is that if you do not put a lot of effort into promoting a strategy, you will not be successful. Had we not been extremely persistent as European Greens and particularly as German Greens in opposing nuclear in sunshine and rain and thunderstorm and always sticking to that clear agenda whether it was popular or unpopular we wouldn't have been able to make this a brand mark of the Greens. With the GND, we have not shown that same emphasis and that same eagerness. So for instance, with the trade unions it has not resonated, as far as I can see.



The Green New Deal was credited with helping the Greens in the 2009 European Parliament elections, but can it repeat the magic in 2014?

GEJ: In Belgium, when Jean-Marc Nollet, our current Green minister in the regional government of Wallonia, published his "Green New Deal" book, it was well received by the Unions.

RB: Maybe we should all learn more from that experience. But on the broader scale, that has not happened and that brings me back to your question "who is there to negotiate"? On the side of business and industry, there are obviously some forces that do see a certain potential in the GND and that would go for an innovative and progressive economic agenda and this now includes actors far beyond the traditional "green" sectors. But I also see a structural conservative turning back while on the other hand the bridge between the ecologist community and

the traditional social forces has just not been strong enough to really make us part of an alliance of actors that could play a role in such a deal. So basically our role was to be a kind of environmental minded consultant offering his business advice for actors that are reticent to go by the advice. This means that the Greens have to change their self-definition. Even if we had always a very strong social plank we have not been able enough to integrate our environmental and social agendas. But this is not tantamount to saying “let’s try to start copying the radical left”. This will need a lot of creative thinking and to avoid the traps of some of the old fallacies, like that a really much misunderstood left Keynesianism would be a solution.

BL: Indeed, some Greens are critical of the GND concept because they identified it as too Keynesian.

RB: Obviously, for the European South, a Keynesian understanding of the GND is not going to work. Where is the public budget to be spent on GND investments? So we will have to tackle the issue of financing the GND beyond just relying on possible public spending, like the German financing mechanism for the promotion of renewable energies, the feed-in tariff, which is being financed by the consumers or the European Trading System for CO₂ emissions. The credibility of the Green New Deal hinges a lot on whether people believe that the financing can be there for such a strategy. Thus we should maybe highlight the reduction of harmful subsidies, in particular for fossil fuels.

GEJ: But before such pragmatic solutions, shouldn’t we first address the feeling of injustice that is currently so present throughout Europe?

RB: In all the Member States, there is a very strong perception of lack of justice. The GINI coefficient has increased for all Member States considerably over the years, also in Germany. There are two possible strategies to tackle this challenge. One is from the perspective of tax policy. The German Greens have developed a concept of property levy that we want to introduce if we get into government next year. It is supposed to raise revenue of €100 billion over 10 years from the wealthy and I have been advocating that we should put that front and centre in our Bundestag campaign in 2013.

GEJ: Even though the members and voters of the Greens may be the first to pay?

RB: Well, this levy would burden the 1% and I do not think the Green voters are necessarily the part of that 1%. But even if that would be the case, I would argue that the typical green members are different from people with a similar income who would be members of the German Liberals or German conservatives by having a very strong social involvement and a sense of justice that prevails throughout society. I recall a poll in which people were being asked what is the greatest problem confronting Germany and surprisingly the number of people answering that social division was the greatest problem was four times higher among green voters than social democratic voters and double as high as with left

The fact that we are lacking tax justice throughout Europe is being employed as a weapon against solidarity. In Germany, the conservatives have asked why should average German tax payers bail out the prosperous Greek Dentist who has been smart enough to avoid paying taxes.

party voters. So we should not at all be afraid of making tax justice a core campaign issue. The fact that we are lacking tax justice throughout Europe is being employed as a weapon against solidarity. In Germany, the conservatives have asked why should average German tax payers bail out the prosperous Greek Dentist who has been smart enough to avoid paying taxes. So it has been used as a chauvinist tool to put people against each other. Thus we need tax justice not only from the perspective of creating more equality and more social inclusion inside our societies but also to fight against divisive strategy that you find in many Northern countries.

GEJ: We should all probably have been much more supporting the creation of a social Europe...

Indeed, one of the major strategic failures of the European left has been to reject Jacques Delors' offer when he was constructing the common market to also create a social Union. Everybody felt that they would be better off if they were just allowed to stick to their national social mechanisms and social protection schemes. And it turns out that this has been terribly wrong, even if, as far as I know, in the polling of Eurostat, the opinion prevails that the major social protection systems should remain national. In Sunday's sermon, there is a lot of talk about 'social Europe', but during the week, people do not want to implement it. Of course it is also obvious that some of these social systems are creating better results. So the Scandinavian model is broadly speaking creating better results with regard

to justice than the continental European German and French models. To focus on public infrastructure and on public goods creates more social justice than focusing on individual social transfers. But it will be extremely hard and particularly under the present crisis to create a vast agenda for a new social Europe. Therefore we should rely on youth, which are more mobile than others and which is more willing to experiment with new ways. This is why I have proposed that in the next EGP Council we should focus on youth issues and try to move beyond the conventional social democratic "blah blah" about "youth guarantees" that de facto guarantee nothing to no one.



What contribution can the Greens make to the issue of jobs and youth unemployment in the 2014 elections?

GEJ: Considering the level of youth unemployment in many European countries there seems to be an absolute necessity to be much more creative. There is for example a proposal of the Belgian philosopher Philip Van Parijs to create a small European basic income.

RB: I agree with your general thrust but I am reluctant with regard to the basic income idea, when I was still Chair of the German Greens we worked a lot on that discussion and in 2007 we had a party conference that focused almost exclusively on that topic.

GEJ: That was a really interesting congress by the way.

RB: Yes it was. But we came up with a different solution. We integrated some of the ideas of basic income approach into a “guarantist” strategy that focuses primarily on public institutions and not on

transfers. I still think that there is some room for conceptual flexibility but so far I’m not convinced that the basic income idea as such in its pure form could provide a solid basis for the future. Again I would argue that maybe we should not bite off too large a piece of the cake. The Basic income is a bit posing all the questions of social cohesion at the same time. We should really focus more specifically on the youth or maybe a “European plank” in the unemployment systems. It is in the last electoral platform of the German Greens for the European elections 2009 and we will again, I hope, try to promote that in the next election, despite the fact that in the working class there is not a spontaneous attraction towards proposals that have a clear solidarity character. ■

Reinhard Bütikofer MEP is Co-Chair of the European Green Party



Monica Frassoni



Per Gahrton

Federalism? What Federalism? A European debate

The crisis of the Eurozone has given new arguments for a radically more federal Europe. But what does it concretely mean from a Green European point of view? An interview with Monica Frassoni, co-chair of the European Green Party and Per Garthton, former Swedish MEP.

But there has been a tendency in the European Parliament, and very much, among the Greens, that whatever competencies the European Union has got once, they should never be given back.

Per Gahrton

GEJ: On 4th December in the “Palais des Beaux Arts” in Brussels 1.700 people attended the conference of Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt who claim a kind of “federalist jump”, with a radical reinforcement of the European democracy. This shows a raising awareness that we are close to an historical tipping point. Everybody agrees that we are lacking a democratic basis in the European Union. But when you go further, you can meet completely different points of views.

Monica Frassoni: There is a general feeling today, which is different from what happened a few years ago, that decision making is in the hands of very few people, and that this decision making is not able to reach a solution to the crisis. On the other hand, we cannot say that there is no democracy at European level. But the European Parliament is not able to – or not always able to – impose itself as a herald of this democracy that we all need. The majorities in the Parliament do not allow policies which put solidarity and common welfare to the forefront. So there is a real mixture in the perception. But this is also the case at national level, where, at least in some countries, decision-making is concentrated in the hands of few people, in a not very transparent way. But the elections give the majority to these people. So, it is very difficult to say that there is no democracy. All these elements have to be taken together.

GEJ: Per, is this the same picture that the Swedes have of the European decision-making process?

Per Garthon: Well, most Swedes have accepted membership of the European Union for quite some time. There is a majority in favour of remaining a member. And as you may know, even the Swedish Green party changed its position a few years ago. So membership of the European Union is not put into question. That is completely accepted. But still, there is a basic suspicion against the European institutions, putting their noses into issues where they should be absent. Most people, especially the Greens, would like the European Union to be much stronger, even have more competencies concerning common environmental policies, and similar policies, which are genuinely trans-boundary international policies. But in today's major newspaper of Sweden, it is written that a new EU proposal will be snuff. This is the typical example of where I would say 99% or 100% of Swedes think this should not be an EU issue, but should be decided locally, or nationally. The discussion about European democracy is important (should the European Parliament have more power in comparison to the Council and the Commission?) but the debate on the level of decisions (subsidiarity) is also crucial. There are a lot of issues that maybe should be brought down to national or even regional or local level. But there has been a tendency in the European Parliament, and very much, among the Greens, that whatever competencies the European Union has got once, they should never be given back.

But I think some of the competencies should be given back. People realise this as a major issue, in a state like Belgium, now in Catalonia, in Scotland and so on.

The single currency reviewed

GEJ: There is one issue, for the moment, inside the Eurozone, where there is a growing agreement that we should reinforce the power of the Union. It is the so-called macroeconomic governance.

MF: Yes, but the way in which they want to introduce that is very strange. Because it is by keeping power within the intergovernmental system, with unanimity, veto rights. Today there is a little bit of an illogical development, because what the markets want, and what some federalists want, is relatively similar. If three years ago, we had had a situation in which it was very clear that Greece, and the others would not be left down, and where the central bank would be the lender of last resort, we would have spared ourselves a lot of problems. But a greater degree of stability on the financial markets does not mean that you are getting out from the crisis. The fact of doing things together does not mean that you do the right things.

PG: In Sweden we were against the common currency, because we believe that if you have a common currency, you need a common economic policy, and a common space which is much more coherent and integrated than the current European

Union. It is true that there are parts of the European Union that are pretty integrated. But the whole of the European Union is socially and economically, absolutely not integrated enough. And we foresaw that there was going to be a crisis. We won a referendum in Sweden, so Sweden is not part of the Euro. And you can find almost no one in Sweden who regrets not joining the Euro.

GEJ: Does it mean that if there was a real European common policy you would support the common currency? Can you imagine this as a Swedish Green, living in one of the best welfare states at the European level? Can you imagine the possibility that you could support a European common currency, supported by a European common welfare state?



Frassonni: "The fact of doing things together does not mean that you do the right things."

The basis for a common Europe

PG: The social structures must be more integrated. Maybe, but it will take more time, when Europe has grown together, and I hope it will grow together. We have, in the past, even proposed a common Scandinavian, or Nordic, currency for Norway, Denmark, maybe Iceland, Sweden, the five Nordic countries. These countries, not for any linguistic reason, but socially, structurally, are pretty close. The Swedish Green attitude is not, in principle, against common currencies. But we think that the Eurozone was not an optimal area because we knew it would be very difficult to introduce the necessary common policies. But it is one thing not to join, it is quite another to wish the system to break down. So we hope the Eurozone will cope with its problems and introduce some measures, and when they show that they work, there might be another discussion, even in Sweden and Denmark. In Sweden, there is only one really anti-European party, and this is the fascist party, or the racist party.

GEJ: But does it mean that the Swedish people are ready to increase the solidarity with other countries of the European Union? For example Greece or Spain.

PG: It depends on how. As you know, the Swedish Government is against increasing the budget of the EU, and that is supported by all parties.

GEJ: Even by the Greens?

PG: I think, yes. Because we think a lot of money is wasted on inefficient agricultural subsidies.

MF: It is true, not because it is the Union as such, but the Member States, the regions that are responsible for this, etc. so it is not Europe, but it is some of the Member States. There is often a huge difference between the “clichés”, the perceptions and the reality. We had for example a discussion on Europe between the board of the Finnish Green Party and the leader of the Spanish Green Party Equo, Juan Lopez de Uralde. It was not obvious at all for them that Spain never had a problem of excessive public spending. Who knows for example, that Italy is still today a net contributor to the European Union, because the debt of Italy is held by Italians? Some people still believe that the European Commission is a sort of French bureaucratic system although it is mainly controlled by British or German people.

PG: In Sweden, I have not seen many vulgar opinions about Southern Europe. We have had more and more reporting on the real social issues in Spain, and also some facts showing that their budgets were not so mishandled and that the role of the banks was important.

GEJ: What you are explaining is that we need time to develop a kind of European society, where the public meet, where experiences are exchanged. To go beyond the clichés.

PG: I have always been in favour of much more cultural cooperation. Sweden, maybe is extreme, but we are like a 51st state of the United States of America culturally. We know a lot about petty details

We know a lot about petty details of American policy and American personalities, compared to close neighbour states, not to speak about states like Romania and Bulgaria.

Per Gahrton

of American policy and American personalities, compared to close neighbour states, not to speak about states like Romania and Bulgaria. When I was young, we still looked at Italian, French films. Now it is hard to find a film that is not Americanised.

GEJ: Let us go back to the issue of democracy. In the last edition of the Green European Journal we published an article of Etienne Balibar. It was an answer to Habermas vision on European democracy. Balibar's opinion is quite challenging because he says that if we want something like European democracy, it has to be more democratic than the democracy on the national level.

MF: The real question is once you have said that, to be able to indicate what you are planning to do. In Athens, at our last Council, the European Greens adopted a resolution in which they give some priorities for the reform, and some ways to open the debate. We support the idea of an inter-parliamentary conference together with national parliaments. This should be accompanied with a peoples' convention, with a discussion about the crisis. To call for more Union, or to call for a battle for Europe can be important, but then you also have to describe what are the instruments that you have. And we have at least two instruments. The first one is the European Parliament, that is directly elected, even if I do not know if they want to play this. The second one, is the public opinion and the civil society. What do we do with the 1,700 people attending the conference of Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt? We also have to orientate them towards some political fallout.

A Europe with meaning

PG: I think there are two main issues where a stronger European Union, or stronger international decision-making is needed. Firstly, there is the ecological issue. Secondly, to defend the democratic system against the 'big capitalism', or whatever you like to call it, 'big finance' or 'the market'. The European Union has done something on certain ecological issues. Far from enough, but there has been a slight tendency. But concerning financial powers, very little. The proposal of Tobin Tax was interesting, because it is a principle breaking into the monopoly of big finance, and I am really ashamed as a Swede that Sweden was against it. Swedish Greens are of course, in favour of it. But if there could be more credibility in the European Union, as really recovering power to the democratic institutions from financial institutions, there will be, all over Europe, much more enthusiasm for it.

GEJ: It means that before reinforcing democracy, you have to recover sovereignty of the politic against the financial system...

MF: You have to win the majorities at European level.

PG: Absolutely, I mean, that is what the EU is for. I have never been in favour of the breakdown of the European Union that works, because as I've said before, to break down the Union that you have already, that is really dangerous.

A conversion to Europe

GEJ: Maybe a last question to Per Garthorn. Why did you change your point of view on the European Union? On the membership of Sweden inside the European Union?

PG: I think the most important explanation was enlargement. When the issue of Swedish membership arose in the early '90s, there were only 12 members of the European Union, then with Sweden and Austria, and Finland, it became 15. It was still quite a small group from the whole of Europe, so we were figuring alternatives still. You had the EFTA, which could have been another kind of confederate association. So we had other projects for that, but with enlargement, and finally in 2004, with the enlargement to 25 states, then all alternatives were gone. In my notebook, I noticed that I changed my mind already in 2004. But then for some kind of political reasons, I waited for others. And then, just a couple of years later, the leaders of the Swedish Green Party came to the conclusion by themselves. They called me and asked, 'will you support us or will you go against us?' And I said, "I will support you 100%".

MF: Also there was a big evolution of the Swedish Greens that we see it today in the European Green Party. Their role in discussion on the future of Europe is extremely constructive. OK, they keep their own views, but they really participate, they table amendments, and we work together really well.

GEJ: Because they feel they are part of the same movement?

PG: The Greens are not an anti-EU movement, they are a Green movement. For some reasons, call them tactical or whatever, the Swedish Greens were for some years against the membership of the European Union, because it was the wrong body for this cooperation. But we never wanted to have that as our main vision. We were Green. And Greens have always been, and must be, internationalist. We cannot be nationalist. It must be very clear.

GEJ: If you are not nationalist, what does it mean for you to be a federalist ?

PG: To me, federalism, and this is a very formal definition, is a unit which is considered to be one unit in the international arena. That is one member in the United Nations, like the federation of India, the federation of the United States of America, or whatever. A confederation like it is more or less the case of the European Union can have very close links, but its constituent parts, are, if not sovereign, in their own right, members of the international community.

What is Federalism?

GEJ: Monica, what is your definition?

MF: My definition of federalism is different layers. On some issues you have one voice, which is actually composed and created by the other layers of power. In the christian origin of federalism, the decentralisation is more underlined than the centralisation. Whereas in the Nordic countries, or in the UK, when you talk about federalism, you actually insist on the single system. But in the normal discussion, it is really the articulation of different levels of power, according to what is needed. For example, when you discuss the single seat in the UN, everybody said, 'ah, the EU was divided on the question of Palestine'. Well it depends, because if you see the European Parliament, they had a big majority. If you count member states, there were 12 in favour, 10 abstained, and one (the Czech Republic) was against. The European Parliament voted with a very big majority, including the centre-right EPP, and then you had more Member States in favour than against. So what does it mean? It depends really much on how you count the majorities, and which institutions you count in the majorities.



A box of snuff, a form of tobacco that the EU wishes to ban, but is this the sort of policy area that the Union should be getting into?

PG: One difficulty for the European federalism is that most, as I can remember, many federations have been created from a more or less unitary state which has divided up itself.

MF: The interesting thing with the USA is that the federal state came from a pragmatic compromise between the people who wanted to have centralisation and the people who wanted to have decentralisation. Afterwards, it became also a theory. Even if we need some strong idealist elements (no wars, opening to other cultures...) politically, there should also be a pragmatic endeavour, and if there is something to give back to Member States, just do it.

PG: That last thing you said was very important.

MF: I have no problems. We accepted the Swedish amendment in Athens. ■

Monica Frassoni is currently co-chair of the European Green Party. Per Gahrton is a former MEP and currently President of the Swedish think-tank Cogito.

For the European Republic



Stefan Collignon

The EU cannot be conceived of as a democracy in the traditional sense and its methods of making decisions to date has been ineffective and brought about a crisis of confidence. As the EU's powers have grown, this problem has become more acute. What is needed is a more transparent form of democracy, with European Citizens given a means of deciding between competing visions and policies.

Who would call it a democracy if governments only ever acceded to their legal parliaments following by-elections? But this is exactly how the European Council functions.

The European Union is established according to democratic principles. Democracy is a form of government in which the citizens act as the sovereign people with a mandate for an institution to pursue specific policies in their interest. This mandate is enforced through free, equal and general elections. Elections are free insofar as no coercion is exercised over voters; they are equal because each citizen has a single vote and general because every eligible voter can participate in the elections. Europe must be measured according to this standard.

The European Union is no democracy

The European Union is no democracy. Rather in Montesquieu's terms it resembles a monarchy and the prince is replaced with a collective body of governmental heads of state from the individual member countries. Montesquieu defined monarchy as constituted by the fact that there is "the most natural, intermediate, and subordinate power" (Book II, Chapter 4, p. 16), which guarantees that the head of state is not a despotic ruler. We call this a constitutional monarchy. By contrast, "a republican government is that in which the body, or only a part of the people, is possessed of the supreme power" (Book II, Chapter 1, p. 8). If all citizens exercise this power collectively, the republic is a democracy. In the European Union, member states are the "the most natural, intermediate, and subordinate power(s)". But the citizens cannot appoint the European Council as the legislator in free, equal and general elections. They are powerless.

Be subordinate or leave

The undemocratic nature of the EU is especially evident in the current Euro crisis. The European Council "compels" those countries experiencing difficulties to adopt a policy, which may have consequences for all citizens in the Euro zone, but those citizens involved are not eligible to vote on this. While elections take place in a national context, they are not 'general' because they are only ever held nationally. Who would call it a democracy if governments only ever acceded to their legal parliaments following by-elections? But this is exactly how the European Council functions. The Greeks may well say "No" to Merkel's austerity measures, but this sole instrument of democratic control does very little to change political will. To quote Berthold Brecht, "[...] Would it not be easier / for the government / to dissolve the people / and elect another?" Greece was always a pioneer of democratic innovation! In this case, democratic elections are reduced to a simple ultimatum: be subordinate or leave, be for or against the Euro. In this Union, however, there is no option to choose a different political strategy. There is no alternative to the strict path of austerity, or at least for a policy with a chance of greater success to get through the crises than those policies practised over the past three years. Democratic legitimacy would require all citizens concerned to have the opportunity to cast their vote.

Jürgen Habermas has frequently suggested that citizens in a democracy are “the addressees of the law” and “simultaneously the authors of their rights.

European republic

The German Federal Constitutional Court has objected to the idea of a European democracy on the grounds that there is no “European people”. This is undoubtedly correct. Nevertheless, there are European citizens, that is, individuals who uphold the rules and regulations of the European Union and who are directly and indirectly affected by political decisions of the European institutions. In other words, even if they feel no sense of “European identity”, Europe’s citizens still have common interests deriving from the existence of the European Union and its institutions. The focus of this interest can be called a common cause, public goods or the “res publica”. I call the entirety of these public goods the European republic which is defined according to the extent of its influence. Every citizen in Europe is simultaneously a stakeholder for local, national and European public goods that must all be subject to their own specific form of government. Those who are affected by them, that is, the people using and therefore also funding such public goods must be entitled to decide collectively how they are to be governed. Jürgen Habermas has frequently suggested that citizens in a democracy are “the addressees of the law” and “simultaneously the authors of their rights.”



What is meant by the term “European people”?

National parliaments cannot reinforce European democracy

This also means that national governments and parliaments cannot provide an adequate mandate for European policies because they only ever represent partial interests and not the interest of the people as a whole. The idea of strengthening democracy in Europe through the integration of national parliaments leads into a blind alley. This makes the business of government more difficult and offers no improvement, nor indeed a more attractive process. At the same time, the nation state is not obsolete, since it is still accountable for the vast spectrum of national public goods, in particular, for those areas relevant for everyday life such as social security, education, regional infrastructure and so on. However, the European republic is supplementary and complementary to the nation state and this

may also require national institutions to adapt to the European republic. Logically, this is the correct interpretation and application of the subsidiarity principle.

The “Monnet method” in crisis

From the outset, the ambiguous nature of Europe’s political union influenced the process. On the one hand, the distant goal was a European federal state. On the other hand, the ideal was its actual realisation through practical steps of intergovernmentalism in conjunction with delegating competencies to the community institutions. This model, which is also called the “Monnet method”, is now in crisis. Precisely the success of European integration has always created an increasingly plentiful supply of public European goods, and at the same time attracted more and more “club members” like a magnet. The result is the increasing complexity – in geometric proportions – of the bureaucratic “coordination” of member state governments. In its early phase, integration was influenced by so-called “inclusive” public goods whose logic emerged from synergy effects, ‘win-win’ situations and community interests. This idyllic context changed as soon as there was community money. To adopt the economists’ phrase, money is the “hard budget constraint”. Hence, in numerous new political fields ‘either-or’ and ‘win-lose’ situations now prevail where one person’s gain is another person’s loss. In this new world, a strong government is required to assert the common interest defined by the majority of the voters. Since it is becoming increasingly difficult to generate

“output legitimacy” or “good” political results, governing at a European level must be supplemented by “input legitimacy” emerging from the debates about democratic alternatives.

Politics means conflict

Consequently, the European republic is a political commonwealth. Politics means conflict – ideological conflict, too. It can only be appropriate for German Social Democrats to support Francois Hollande in his fight for an improved political agenda. Moreover, it cannot be wrong for German Christian Democrats to side with Nicolas Sarkozy. The problem is that German men and women and the French, Greeks, Italians and everybody else cannot collectively elect a government whose policies apply universally to them. However, we are definitely relapsing to a pre-democratic era when Die Welt newspaper describes Social Democrats as “traitors to the country” who are apparently stabbing Mrs “Merkel-Brüning” in the back.

An alternative political agenda for a renewal of Europe

The traditional discourse of those federalists supporting a ‘United States of Europe’ has lost its power of attraction, among other things, because the federalists never took a stand for the right or left, and opted neither for a neo-liberal nor social Europe. Renewal can only emerge from a new polarisation of Europe where the parties put forward alternative programmes as well as candidates, and citizens as opposed to governments become the referees. The Europe of nations cannot do justice to the new tasks,

in particular, inside a monetary union. Divide et impera – according to this dictum, governing the different peoples may make it easier for the small leaders to rule, but this is not in the citizens' interest. As Willy Brandt so pertinently stated, "We must risk more democracy" because "Europe belongs to all of us!"

Vive la République européenne! ■

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