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Conclusion

The question raised in the foregoing essays is whether and how the parties of the "democratic left," variously defined, may successfully compete in majoritarian democracy. We are not looking at minority parties that combine successfully in parliamentary coalition governments, as in the Low Countries and Scandinavia, with the possible exception of Russia, where the party system is still in its early stages of development. Our concern is with parties that aspire to be governments. A harder question lurks beneath the first query. Is there a trade-off between a posture of pragmatic left-of-center politics and the left politics of social democracy? This hard question is most evident in Britain, France, and Germany, the homes of strong left parties.

Britain, France, and Germany

New Labour in Britain preaches a Third Way between pure models of capitalism and socialism. It has abandoned the strong state model of Old Labour and adopted a "neoliberalism," which seeks to combine regulated free markets with public goods provided by government, but with greater attention than in the past to equality of opportunity rather than universal welfare. Government policies and programs must follow a pragmatic politics in which middle-class and working-class voters and representative interest groups are balanced in policies. Critics, usually from the left, regard this posture as unprincipled mishmash without clear purpose. But the intent is clear: help capitalism to work efficiently and deal with the externalities and social deprivations that capitalism ignores. To the degree that

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the Conservative party is fiercely capitalist, insisting as Mrs. Thatcher put it, that there is no such thing as "society," then New Labour has a firm place in politics. New Labour's greatest problems, for the moment, are not political but administrative, that is, injecting renewed life into a moribund health service and underperforming school systems. This requires money, but it also requires organizational innovations that New Labour has yet to invent. It would be ironic if New Labour lost political ground because it was not "new" enough.

French socialists are prisoners of a historical Marxist left wing. Its leaders, in control of government from 1997 to early 2002, copied New Labour with somewhat pragmatic, centrist policies, but made no effort to persuade the bulk of socialists in the rank and file that the center-left was a fruitful path for the future. They copied President Mitterrand in this respect. But this is a harder task than in Britain because the old Labour party burned itself out with ineffective programs of nationalization and there was no Marxist ideology to deter moving on to more practical policies. The French left still carries the torch of social revolution.

The French electoral system promotes multiparty factions and is not congenial to majoritarian politics, as in Britain. It appears that the PS will now have to look to its constituencies on the left after losing the 2002 presidential election and such factions might do well in parliamentary elections. But the search for a balance of new and old left is elusive.

The SPD has officially abandoned its Marxist legacy several times and created effective center-left governments. But the situation it faces is much like that of the French PS. It has developed a communications strategy for a center-left pragmatic party, with a progressive Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, who has sought to portray himself as a Tony Blair figure of personal popularity, something that Lionel Jospin in France could not do. But the party has not been prepared officially to embrace a Third Way of "neoliberal" politics and policy. The ideal of a "social justice" state is still strong throughout the party; for example, social security is seen as a basic right in a world of flexible labor markets. The party failed in an attempt in the Alliance for Employment to unite unions and employers behind such an understanding. The party is caught between its commitment to social justice and the need to win elections as a party of alliances. For example, the party in government seeks both budgetary discipline and a full welfare state. The SPD must balance the Greens, its coalition partners, and the PDS, on its left, with var-

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iegated voters from all social groups if it is to win elections. It is more like the PS than New Labour.

Britain stands apart from its continental counterparts in the absence of a historical legacy of Marxism on the left and in a historic tradition, even on the left, of pragmatic politics and policy. British left intellectuals write about a desired "social democracy," but this is only an ideal and the ideal falls short in the politics of France and Germany, where it would seem more realizable than in Britain.

European Socialists in the European Union

The introduction of the European Monetary Union, and eventually the Euro as the currency of Europe, was accompanied by EU commitments to central monetary policy, low inflation, high economic growth, balanced budgets, free labor markets, and limits to state industry. Conservative national governments acted in concert. These developments stimulated the reformation of the Party of European Socialists (PRS), designed to press social democratic positions in EU arenas in which its influence was not great—the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. However, by working astutely through its party leaders, in cooperation with EU bureaucrats, the Employment Chapter of 1997 was created. The nondemocratic, centralist character of EU institutions was both an obstacle and a resource for such an effort. But it is clear that only the broad presence of center-left parties in European national governments would permit even a potential tilt toward policies of the left in the EU itself. Another problem is that national social democratic parties are unwilling to forgo their domestic influence in order to transfer power to a centralized European quasi-government. The rock and the hard place seem built into EU institutions.

Poland and Russia

The question for Poland and Russia is whether a form of social democracy will develop as a strong political force in response to uncertain, developing capitalist institutions and parties. Such parties appear to need capitalism as a source for their own direction of purpose. One would expect to see similarities, and also differences, with

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Western European social democratic parties. Such patterns, as they appear, are in embryonic form.

Hubert Tworzecki concludes that the SLD party in Poland, which has become a party of government, is not a social democratic party in any meaningful sense. It plays by the rules of the democratic election game. But it is not social democratic in the sense of a left party seeking to protect public goods and working electorates. Rather, it speaks for organized groups, including business, across the political spectrum. The party has filled a vacuum because the politics of the right has not been "liberal" in the West European sense but nationalistic, religious, and authoritarian. There are thus weak incentives for the SLD to push left. The hope is that economic modernization will generate a new competitive politics of left-right, but then the democratic left party would face the same issues as the PS and the SPD, even if the Marxist legacy were abandoned altogether.

Thomas Remington gives the best definition of the democratic left in a generic sense that I have seen: "By the democratic left I refer to social and political associations with a programmatic commitment to pluralist democracy and guarantees of individual civil and political rights in the political sphere, combined with state policies that counteract the tendency of the market economy to exacerbate social inequality. Consistent with European norms, policies associated with the democratic left emphasize social solidarity and the protection of vulnerable strata of the population against poverty, give priority to the provision of public goods over the dismantling of state-provided public services, and employ fiscal and monetary tools to redistribute income so as to reduce inequality."[1]

Gorbachev failed in this definition because he tried to combine new liberties without sufficient reform of party or government. The weight from the top was too heavy. The CPRF, which replaced the Communist party in Russia, was from the beginning an antiliberal party, which played to church, nationalism, anti-Americanism and resisted presidential policies for civil liberties and the deliberate privatization of state industries. The party guards the legacies of the communist past, unlike some of its Eastern European counterparts. But it is stuck with a declining electorate. One would think that a democratic party of the left would have developed as competition in the new parliamentary institutions, but, despite liberal minor parties, and efforts of successive presidents to nurture them or something like them, the effort has not been successful.

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Strong central power, weak civil society, limited accountability of government to citizens, and strong, often corrupt, privatized industries, and a presidency that names the parliamentary government but is not accountable to it, all contribute to parties as factions but not parties of government. It is clear that Russia needs parties that are "transmission belts" between government and the public. It appears that social democracy in Russia awaits constitutional government in Russia in which parties of government are accountable to electorates. But this may be beyond the present capacities of Russian institutions. There must be congruence between patterns of authority in government and society if government is to be stable, and authoritarian practices are currently too strong in all spheres.

The United States

Alonzo Hamby's essay was first, but we review him last because he presents a historical overview of the decline of the social democratic left and argues for the necessity of working within the broad spectrum of the Third Way of Anglo-American liberalism. He suggests that American "exceptionalism" is not so exceptional in the long view because democratic socialism has failed. One knows the historical failures of socialism in America and the dominance of the "liberal" mainstream, whether of the right or left, and Hamby with those who dream of an American and European social democratic left. One can only conclude that democratic politics will be political trench war without end.

Even so, Americans have always feared government more than Europeans; our founding documents call for the protection of citizens from government. Our political center of gravity has always been further to the right than in Europe, including Britain. Americans are ideological conservatives but pragmatic liberals. Liberal reformers must therefore defend incremental reforms with conservative rhetoric; for example, the War on Poverty of 1964 was justified as a form of self-help. Old-age insurance is saving for yourself. It follows that even if European democratic left politics moves more to the center, they might still be to the left of the American center of gravity, just as European conservatives are further to the left than American conservatives.

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Hamby explains how the Great Society programs were devoured by their own children and produced a conservative backlash against which Democratic efforts at top-bottom coalitions, which ignored the middle, have failed. The Democrats eventually fought their way back as New Democrats, much like New Labour, with appeals to the center, but with the same criticism from the left that electability had torpedoed reform. Clinton and Blair were love mates politically and ideologically. However, there is room for a strong center-left within Democratic politics in the face of increasingly rigid Republican conservatism. The center is a large place with room for maneuver.

Last Thoughts

Does one conclude from these studies that parties of the democratic left must be center-left parties, without ideological hopes outside the capitalist paradigm, if they wish to be parties of government? The basis of such a claim is that modern economic and social structures demand such politics and that no one has yet conceived of alternative structures, which also permit democracy. One could modify the proposition by discerning the possibility of national variations in center-left politics according to national histories and political culture. This would leave room for different centers of political gravity in different nations. Politics shapes economics as much as economics shape politics. Liberal reform is willing to live with a regulated capitalism. One should not preclude the possibilities of future social democratic politics, but the near future is not promising for such a vision.

By the same token, electorally successful parties must be more than collections of disparate interests. The evidence shows that effective parties must be coalitions organized and guided by leading ideas and purposes. Otherwise coalitions, which are always at risk of fragmenting, cannot hold together over time. They lack the sense of purpose and direction that voters want. This is not to say that parties should stick with dead ideologies. It takes imagination by politicians to articulate new purposes for their parties, something that political scientists and theorists cannot do for them.

These essays do not touch on development in modern democracies that appear to hamstring accountable government: powerful organized interests, popular mistrust of politicians and parties, and

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media sensationalism and short-term focus. One must hope that programmatic political appeals, if well crafted and directed to the real, concrete problems of ordinary people, will overcome these negative factors, which thrive on governments of passivity and political fear and strengthen the democratic left as they strengthen democracy.

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Notes

1. Thomas F. Remington, "Prospects for a Democratic Left in Postcommunist Russia, this issue.

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