

To ISV's lunch seminar May 4, 2021

Dear colleagues, I shall make an old-fashioned presentation without disturbing power points for about 20 - 25 minutes, after which there will be another 20 minutes or so for discussion.

In 2010 -- when the third wave of democracy began to peter out, when social democracy was losing steam in Europe, and the same seemed to happen in the South -- I decided to round up my community work of directing the Indonesian Power and Democracy Studies, which I had been involved in since the mid-90s, and to concentrate instead -- during the remaining ten years before retirement -- on my own conclusions, based on this research and engagement, as well as my parallel comparative studies since the 1970s of social democratically oriented movements.

It was quite possible to summarise the lessons on how to assess not just democracy but also *the dynamics of democratisation*, and to do this with *people on the ground* rather than with air-conditioned experts. So a book about this was published by Palgrave in 2013 /SHOW/
<https://olle-tornquist.com/books>

However, it proved much more difficult to summarise results on the problems and options of Social Democracy. I tried to do this in two parallel steps.

The first step was a comparison between Indian and Scandinavian experiences. Many said it was a 'crazy comparison'. But John Harriss and I, backed up by Neera Chandhoke and Fredrik Engelstad, managed to publish a closely structured anthology, based on what Theda Skocpol once called the method of contrasting contexts. /SHOW/
<https://olle-tornquist.com/anthologies>

That challenge was nothing, however, in comparison with the 2nd step to also summarise my results about social democratic oriented movements in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as in wider southern contexts, and in comparison with Scandinavia. My question was whether *Social Democracy had become obsolete or might be reinvented?*

On the one hand, Göran Therborn, among others, had arrived at the conclusion that social democracy would never gain significance in the South, in spite of the new global division of labour and related industrialisation, because these processes were too uneven and

authoritarian. On the other hand, my studies since the 1970s indicated that this might be wrong. *Instead, Social Democracy might develop in other ways than in the North.*

So what would be the best way to try these arguments?

As some of you may remember, I presented a synopsis for how to go about this at Björn Erik's democracy-programme-workshop during some lovely early November days in Rome in 2011. But my plan failed. My summaries of previous results turned either a voluminous and fragmented kind of 'collected works' – or an overly theorised, dense and boring report – drowning, moreover, in footnotes and references.

Finally I gave up and tried something quite different, which we shall return to in a minute. But in any case, it has thus taken me almost 10 years after Rome, to finalise a readable 'endbook'.

Right now I am still checking the proofs, so we shall have to return to the crucial contextual substance when Zed-Bloomsbury is launching the book in September/October. As you have seen in the link that was distributed for this seminar, this is the cover: **SHOW**

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/in-search-of-new-social-democracy-9780755639762/>

But since I should account for my research during the last few years before turning full emeritus in June -- let's now have a sneak premiere, focussing on how to write a concluding book like this, plus briefly on what it arrives at.

The main problem, I thought, with the argument that Social Democracy would not stand a chance in the South, was thus that it repeated the old mistake of the modernisation school that this process had to be the same in the South as in the North. Rather, it may come about in other ways, given the different conditions and contextual dynamics. But how to study this?

My way of going about it has been to distance myself from the specific historical and current brands of Social Democracy, and return instead to the classical broad definition of *sustainable development based on social justice by democratic means* – and to then specify this in terms of three dimensions that most theorists and historians should be able to agree on:

- (i) the cornerstones,
- (ii) the strategies
- (iii) and the generations.

As for the cornerstones, there are four of them:

- (1) broad interest-based collectivities;
- (2) democratic links between state and society of equal citizens;
- (3) social rights and welfare programmes;
- (4) and social growth pacts between capital, labour and primary producers.

Similarly, there are five inter-related strategies to counter capitalism:

- (1) To get into the state and dismantle capitalism from above;
- (2) to tame it with rules and regulations;
- (3) to resist it from outside the state;
- (4) to escape it by various societal actions such as cooperatives and alternative lifestyles;
- (5) and to develop series of transformative reforms, like envisioned by Nils Karleby in the late 1920s.

Finally these cornerstones and strategies have been combined during three generations of Social Democracy:

- (1) during the northern industrial revolution with strong states and early democracy;
- (2) during the anti-fascist and anti-colonial second wave of democracy;
- (3) and during capitalist globalisation and the liberal third wave of democracy.

If you imagine these pillars and strategies along two dimensions and combine them, the result is a three dimensional table with 20 combinations that vary during three generations. (But pls note that the generational dimension is misplaced in the few pages of proofs that were distributed, it shall not be vertical by kind of diagonal.) **/SHOW/**

It was not meaningful, of course, to fill in all the boxes. In reality, the Weberian-like ideal-type cornerstones and strategies overlap in different ways. So this remains to be studied historically in different contexts. Yet, the basic characteristics are helpful as a point of departure for systematic analyses. So then the next question was, what would be the most critical historical contexts to study this, in comparative perspective?

Fortunately, the cases that I had followed since long made sense. India, especially Kerala, and Indonesia were among the most significant attempts at social democratic development during the 2nd wave of democracy, and are now the largest and third largest nominal democracies in the world. The Philippines is the Latin American-like case in Asia and among the pioneers of

the third wave of democracy. And Scandinavia, especially Sweden, stands out as a paradigmatic internationally oriented case of the 1st generation Social Democracy.

But would it be possible to compare these cases? The common methods of difference and similarity did not make sense. Hence, I have again applied instead the method that Skocpol called contrasting contexts. That is, to focus on the singular well defined theme of Social Democracy in four very different contexts over time. As Clifford Geertz put it when comparing Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, the cases may thus ‘form a kind of commentary on another’s character’. And, as in Ben Andersons pioneering ‘Imagined Communities’, the commentaries may thus help us to ask the most revealing questions, from one context to the other.

The structure of my book should be clear from the annotated table of contents that has been distributed ahead of the seminar.

But how on earth could this be done in a reasonably brief, readable, exciting and at best even enjoyable way? To this end, I made two radical decisions.

The first was that I should not just make use of my previous studies, plus updates, but also draw on my old logbooks from the field. Thus, I have once again gone through my transcribed in-depth interviews, which came to some 1635, plus logbook-notes from visits, meetings, focus group discussions and seminars. Also, I have looked at numerous photographs, which awake one’s memory. Plus consulted the about 1800 structured 6-8 hour long interviews by assistants for the participatory assessment of Indonesia’s democratisation. The main purpose with these ‘revisits’ has been to find ways of occasionally bringing alive major arguments and conclusions with quotes and episodes, almost as when one makes a film instead of writing a long book.

Second, I decided to drop all the lengthy references in the text – in order to make it more readable. Rather the references are at the end of the book, chapter by chapter.

Then the final critical question is of course if this approach and design generated any new results – in addition to what had already been published in my previous books and articles?

The answer is that it did. Primarily, the book is now a retrospective thematic analysis. I revisit previous results and updates by re-reading them with my analytical framework in mind – as well as with questions that relate to the current challenges of Social Democracy.

So very briefly, what are the general conclusions and main lessons?

We begin with the 2nd generation social democrats during the anti-fascist and anti-colonial 2nd wave of democracy. Particularly in Kerala and Indonesia until the late 50s, they actually proved that broad unity was possible even in fragmented societies, as long as there was a focus on equal civil and political rights, plus thus based social rights.

From the late 50's, however, this successful focus on equal and democratic citizen rights was often downgraded in favour of anti-imperial and anti-feudal left-populism. Thus it was difficult to fight the political and often statist pathways to capitalism. Particularly clearly so during the final days of Sukarno in Indonesia, followed by the extinction of the Left, and the following dictatorships of Suharto, as well as of Marcos in the Philippines. This was part of the general western promotion at the time of Samuel Huntington's 'politics of order', and middle class coups --while Moscow, on its hand, supported statist leftism and Beijing sponsored Maoist guerrillas.

Meanwhile in the North, these setbacks also added to the difficulties for the 1st generation Social Democracy under Palme, Brandt and others to counter capitalist globalisation with a New International Economic Order and a North-South Programme for Survival. Short of alternative global Keynesianism, the nationally confined Social Democracy in countries like Sweden was thus gradually undermined, and the leaders opted instead for 'structural adjustment'.

However, there were also new contradictions and developments. Back in the South from the late 70's, and later on in the East too, market driven globalisation provided some space for liberal and a 3rd generation social democratically oriented opposition against authoritarian rule and exploitation. This resulted in the 3rd wave of democracy. And the focus of my book is of course the openings and challenges for the progressives during this period. What are they?

- (i) In the South, there is no doubt that the first premise for Social Democracy of broad interest-based collectivities cannot, as once in the North, primarily be based on the working class, given the uneven development with divisive interests and organisations.

- (ii) The efforts to rather build progressive alternatives by way of bottom-up polycentric social movements and CSOs have also been stuck by fragmented interests and organisations. So coordination and scaling up have proved very difficult, including in terms of united fronts, common parties and programmes.
- (iii) Decentralisation has also been no panacea for local democracy, as long as progressives have not been strong enough to make a difference, as in exceptional Kerala.
- (iv) Meanwhile the liberal oriented transitions to democracy accommodated the powerful elites to such an extent that genuine pro-democrats had little chance to advance. Rather they were confined to civil society with few chances to make a difference.
- (v) It is true that Tony Blair inspired liberals and social democrats tried to combine global market driven growth with welfare programmes, and labour organising too, such as in Brazil, South Africa, India and the Philippines, and to some extent Indonesia. But this growth strategy and these welfare programmes did not combine. The growth was often extractive and generated more corruption than jobs – and the welfare programmes did not serve to transform the growth but were mainly limited to handouts.
- (vi) The leftist attempt to rather congregate behind populist leaders, then, were undermined by poor sequencing and equally poor democratic representation.
- (vii) And with these setbacks for liberal social democrats as well as left-populism, the field was open instead for rightist populism and renewed emphasis on ‘politics of order’, like by accommodating the military in Myanmar, who have now captured full powers.

Finally, do these setbacks mean that Social Democracy is doomed? With reference to its four cornerstones (of broad collectivities, genuine democracy, social rights and welfare, and social growth pacts): the book identifies the following four openings and options.

- (i) Broad alliances have proved possible in favour of (1) equal civil, political and social rights, and (2) welfare reforms. The best examples include the rights and land reforms in Kerala and more recently the universal health reform in Indonesia.
- (ii) This in turn may alter the 1st generation’s sequence of growth pacts before welfare states. Productive oriented welfare reforms based on broad alliances may shape growth pacts!
- (iii) The main problems involved are political – not structural:
 - (1) the lack of transformative reforms to follow up on, for example, the Indonesian health reform and

- (2) the lack of democratic partnership governance to counter elitist democracy and foster comprehensive negotiations about such reforms.
- (iv) Support for this would also be in the best interest of Social Democracy in the North, which has to alter its structural adjustment, and otherwise inward, neo-nationalist orientation.

Thanks for your attention. Questions and comments?