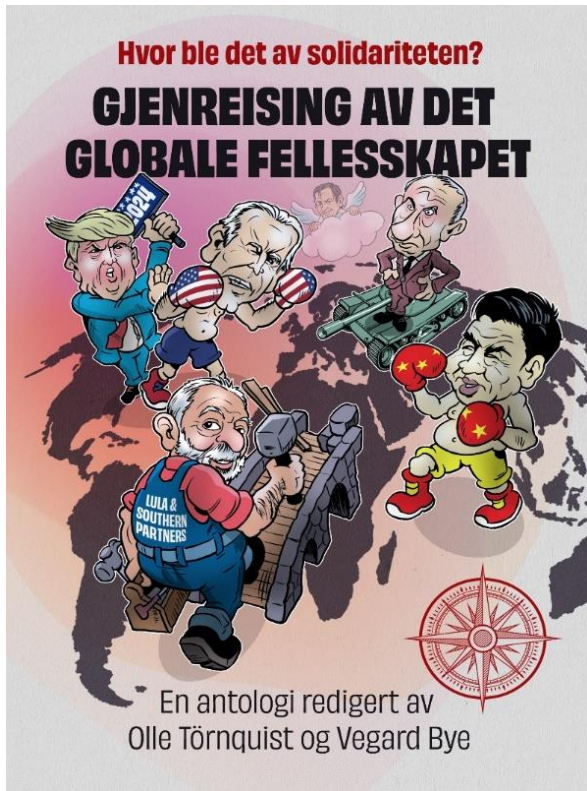


Briefing on new book



What has become of the solidarity internationalism that emerged from the middle of the twentieth century?

This new book in Norwegian brings together thematic and geographical articles from several of the most prominent Norwegian and Nordic social scientists and political actors who work for a more solidary relationship between North and South in the world. The title of the book may be translated to “Restoring the Global Community. Where has the solidarity gone?”

The main conclusions:

- (1) The global wave of right-wing nationalism, emerging in the wake of neoliberalism and elite-dominated democracy, has led to the reactionary regime changes around the world. This wave has also undermined global community's capability to resolve existential crises.
- (2) NATO – considered the only instrument to stop Putin's aggression towards Ukraine – is neither intended to, nor capable of solving these overriding problems. NATO's global expansion only makes it worse because more and more people are experiencing that “the West is turning against the Rest”, and that a new cold war is taking shape.
- (3) Therefore, a global, non-aligned community must be reconstructed while we Europeans defend ourselves against Russian imperialism. This requires us in the North to join forces with progressive democratic forces in the South, promoting a more genuine social and climate solidarity. This is our alternative to the failed neoliberalism and elite democracy.

“While bourgeois charity was most often local, the solidarity of the labour movement and of Christian organizations became clearly international in character.” Jan Egeland, secretary-general, Norwegian Refugee Council (Preface)

“When military spending is increasing to 2% of GDP, aid should also do so, not least to prevent conflict and help the poor countries face climate change.” Anna Sundström, secretary general of Olof Palme's International Centre, (Ch. 27)

“(…) the world has gone from a unipolar situation after the West won the Cold War to a multipolar dynamic. (…) The reactionary answer [is] that everything and everyone (…) should be mobilized against not only Russia, but also China. The progressive answer is of course instead what you propose in the book: an international cooperation, social democratic in character, between North and South.” Pelle Dragsted, Head of the Danish leftist party ‘Enhetslisten’ (Ch. 25)

“There is a huge need for a new international movement of progressive leftist forces” Thorbjørn Jagland, former leader of the Norwegian Labour Party, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, ex secretary general of the Council of Europe (Ch 28)

***The following text is based on the Swedish-Norwegian keynote.
at the Oslo House of Literature book seminar 9/1/24. Feel free to share!***

AGAINST THE CURRENT

By Olle Törnquist, Professor emeritus of Politics and Development Research, University of Oslo.

In a new Norwegian book, researchers and activists argue that North-South cooperation about common security, climate change, welfare and democracy is necessary to counter the right-wing nationalism.

We live in a time of crises: nuclear threats, wars like in Ukraine and Gaza, global warming, increasing inequalities, the fact that more and more people live in social and economic insecurity and that there are as many neglected refugees as in 2015. But the world-wide right-wing national populism is worst, with its thesis that everything can be “great again” if we get stronger leaders, less rule of law, fewer

human rights, and "take back control" by closing the borders and defend "what's ours". This is worst, because without equal rights, liberal and participatory democracy, and international solidarity, we cannot fight the other threats.

So how should right-wing nationalism be opposed? While there is some resistance in the South, such as in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Kerala, Pedro Sanchez's liberal social democratic alliance with other leftists in Spain is a fragile exception in Europe. Typically, the middle ground of politics tries instead to avoid right-wing nationalist arguments about migrants and Muslims by adjusting to the prejudices – with the hope of being able to talk more about welfare. But right-wing nationalists talk about welfare too – for the natives – and thus win elections. Hence, the midfield adapts again. Like in Denmark. And now in Sweden too, where the social democratic party's magazine raves about the People's Home policies in the 1930s. Certainly with more focus on equality than the right-wing nationalists. And with less racism than in Roosevelt's New Deal, which completely neglected the blacks. But without refugees and with more state-paternalism than civic rights and popular movements. Even Olof Palme's internationalism and human rights allegedly stand in the way of national welfare.

What kind of vision is this? Is it even realistic? In Norway it is contested! Several prominent social scientists and political actors have quickly and professionally prioritised a book in which they emphasize the importance of international solidarity - for peace, democracy, sustainable development, and welfare. With support from the foundation for the freedom of expression 'Fritt Ord', the Norwegian Church, the trade union confederation LO, and individual unions. *Hvor ble det av solidariteten? Gjenreising av det Global Felleskapet* Eds. Olle Törnquist and Vegard Bye (Oslo: Kolofon, 2023) [“Restoring the Global Community. Where has the solidarity gone?”].

In contrast to national romanticism, the book starts from the material basis of the people's home policies in the 1930s, namely national capacity to combine domestic keynesianism and welfare policy with agreements between employers and unions for collective bargaining, industrial peace, international competitiveness, and growth. Supplemented after World War II with international agreements and aid to promote growth and welfare in the Northwest as a whole.

During the then Cold War, however, conditions changed. National freedom of action was threatened. The Nordic model required more international rules and regulations to survive the dominance of the great powers. This could be promoted in cooperation with other export-dependent small countries, and especially with the anti-colonial movement. Olof Palme was one of the leading figures. It was hopeful and successful, for a while.

But as the book also shows, it became obvious in the 70s that the situation had deteriorated again. Capital was internationalised and currency regulations were scrapped. In the South, authoritarian left- and right-wing regimes multiplied. In the North, the link between welfare and growth was weakened by more mobile capital, relocation of production and because national keynesianism was undermined by OPEC's oil price increases not being matched by corresponding demand for our goods and services. The national social democratic model was at stake.

Hence, Palme and Willy Brandt argued for a new world order with internationalised Keynesianism and partnership between North and South, but lost out. As the book shows, while the allies in the South had been weakened, the international capital had been strengthened. The coup in Chile and the Nobel Prize to Milton Friedman were the culmination of a long process. From the 80s, global neoliberalism stormed forward with Reagan and Thatcher at the forefront. Radical social democracy was run over when capital went on strike and exited, most clearly in Mitterrand's France in 1983.

Instead, the centre-left embraced Tony Blair's "third way" – with adaptation to global neoliberalism and market-driven welfare. Capital owners and people with appropriate skills benefited, but not others. Norway could offer some resistance with national control of its oil, but in general social democracy was even more weakened by less national freedom of action, privatisation, unregulated globalisation, and fewer partners in the South who could resist. The anxiety among many people and their lack of democratic alternatives became the seed of today's right-wing nationalism, in the North and the South.

Yet, right-wing nationalism was not only due to the weakening of the anti-colonial movement and the hegemony of global neoliberalism. There was also the failure of the great hope for change: the new wave of freedom and democracy. The wave of hope rose in the mid-70s, when the United States lost in Vietnam, and Portugal in Africa, and when fascism was replaced by democratisation in both Lisbon and Madrid. After which the wave rolled on to Latin America, parts of Africa and Asia and Eastern Europe. But subsequently when democratisation backslided, the opportunities to resist neoliberalism diminished and "strong nationalism" became a viable proposition.

This is the main theme of the book. Because if one cannot explain why the wave of democracy ebbed and people that were frustrated with neoliberalism lost the chance to alter it and listened to "strong leaders", one cannot discuss democratic alternatives to right-wing nationalism either.

An answer calls for good tools to study what happened in relation to what the pro-democrats wanted – namely more social democracy. Not necessarily in terms of what the parties calling themselves social democratic say, for several of them have abandoned the foundations of social democracy – nor by excluding its red or green critics, whatever they call themselves, for most of them have given up on ruptures and now builds on old social democratic principles. The book's second chapter therefore identifies the classic social democratic vision, means and strategies that most left-wing democrats strive for, in different ways. That is: interest-based popular movements; democracy and other human rights; rights-based welfare; and broad agreements on sustainable development – by replacing elements of capitalism from above, taming it, protesting it, avoiding it, and transforming it.

The book reviews the anti-colonial efforts at democratisation, in cooperation with likeminded actors in the North, and then focus on critical cases during the subsequent liberal wave of democracy, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Kerala, Iran, the Arab Spring, Tunisia, Nigeria, South Africa, Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil, and Chile. What were the problems, what are the options? But it refrains from discussing Trump, about whom so much has already been written. As well as from Eastern Europe and Russia, because it is well known how its neoliberal shock therapy and elite-dominated democratisation paved the way for right-wing national autocrats like Putin. Instead, the book concentrates on showing that Putin is not alone but part of the global right-wing national wave. Hence, NATO and the US may support Ukraine and maybe protect us in Europe against Russia, but they can do nothing about Gaza, and they are not suited to fight global right-wing nationalism, especially its foundations. Instead, this requires an alliance of democratic forces in the North, South and East, basically as in the days of Palme.

Step one is thus to study how not only neoliberalism but also the flaws of democratisation paved the way for right-wing nationalism. Of course, this happened in different ways in different contexts, but three factors are universal.

The first is the lack of common class interests. Democratisation was not backed up with inclusive social and economic policies as in the Northwest after World War II. Subsequently the internationalisation of capital led to some industrialisation in the South, but only through authoritarian rule, lousy working conditions, and environmental destruction. Some workers and professionals with permanent

employment in large companies and administration can organise, but most working people are up against precarious conditions in informal sectors and as freelancers. Problems and interests vary. Joint organisation is difficult. Unemployment is widespread. The unions are extremely important but like the employers' organisations weak and without common focus to negotiate agreements that combine welfare and development.

The second obstacle was that "bottom up" is insufficient. In the absence of common class interests, student and action groups, unions and social movements sought to promote social democracy from below by relating to various forms of oppression and subordination, plus neighbourhood organisations and cooperatives. Their dynamism and potential were impressive, but they rarely managed to agree on a common agenda, strategy, and organisation. Even local cooperation and direct democracy have been difficult to combine, scale up and make a difference at regional and central levels.

The third problem was that while democratisation was made possible by popular forces, the institutions were designed and implemented through pacts within the elite of politicians, businessmen and the military as well as some leaders of liberation movements and religious and ethnic groups – with support from the international community. Freedoms and rights were poor, and the problems of good governance neglected, but worst of all was the lack of institutions and policies to promote good representation. It was hard for ordinary people and their organisations to participate and assert themselves in elections, policy development and the fight against corruption.

Nevertheless, there are signs that there *are* possibilities to foster unity, organisation, and the deepening of democracy. From Brazil's Workers' Party in alliance with social movements, and Kerala's participatory local democracy and welfare programs, now also combined with knowledge-based development – to the short-lived unity in Indonesia of all progressive forces for a public health reform, and Chile's and Colombia's new fragile fronts for alternative politics. From them and others, we know that the way forward is about broad alliances for series of comprehensive and viable reform programs with democratic participation, as sketched out on the conclusion of the book.

To promote reforms of this kind in today's world of new superpower dominance, and neoliberalism combined with mercantile economics, national independence and freedom of action must be backed up, both in the South and in the North – by international institutions on rights and democracy, taxation of capital, impartial investment funds, fair trade and commodity chains, rights to technology and education, and the prevention of competition through poor welfare and destruction of the environment.

Alternatives of this kind are necessary to fight right-wing nationalism and thus be able to tackle the other crises of war, refugee flows, climate threats and social and economic inequality and insecurity. Introverted nationalism is no solution. National independence and room for manoeuvre must be based on equal freedom and rights, and outward cooperation with like-minded people – just as the national and democratic struggle for freedom in the colonies required international cooperation against racists and empires.

What can Scandinavians do? In the final part of the book, experts and politicians emphasise that internationalism must be part of our own democratic project, include progressive religious cooperation, involve Norwegian petroleum money, curb the dominance of free speech in social media, broaden the cooperation among unions and, along with scholars, develop unifying reform agendas. This calls for international dialogue and alliances, which Norwegian and Swedish popular movements should help initiating.