

## BOOK BRIEFING

Olle Törnquist, Anna Sundström & Ulf Carmesund et al. (red), *Egentligen är världen full av hopp: Trettiosex röster om det solidariska motståndet mot den globala konservativa nationalismen*. Korpen, 2025. (*Actually, the world is full of hope: Thirty-six voices<sup>1</sup> on solidarity in resistance to global conservative nationalism.*)

This book grew out of the concern of scholars and experts working on global politics and development over the inward-looking Scandinavian reaction to the refugee crisis in 2015 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In view of their studies, our own countries shared responsibility for the crises causing people to flee from South to North. Moreover, the origins of the popular support in Russia for Vladimir Putin's aggressive nationalism are reminiscent of the problems generated by liberal globalisation in the rest of the world. Wider and deeper analyses seemed essential. Hence, we set out to summarise our insights about the worldwide dynamics of the rise of conservative nationalism (i.e. authoritarian rule of countries with supposedly native citizens with similar cultural and historical interests) and the possibilities to resist it.<sup>2</sup>

Given that conservative nationalism has typically gained ground with popular support, there must also be other explanatory factors than the well-known frustration over global neo-liberalism. Hence, we asked (i) why the classical alternatives to neo-liberalism such as widely defined social-democratically oriented models have not turned out to be viable, (ii) why social movements and civil society organisations have not been able to have much political impact, despite the global wave of liberal democratisation, and (iii) whether there have been signs of new democratic opportunities.

As such dynamics vary with different contexts, the book covers numerous areas, countries and cases around the world.<sup>3</sup> However, we have asked similar questions based on a common analysis of the characteristics of social-democratically oriented development and major theories of democratic development – beginning with the wave of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles after the second world war, and following up with the liberal wave of democratisation from the mid-1970s until the 2010s.

In addition, the recent breakdown of rule-based world order has called for supplementary analyses: (i) of the logics of increasingly international conservative nationalism; (ii) of the new more state-supported than neo-liberal global capitalist competition; (iii) of the challenges of liberal European cooperation, and (iv) of the Latin America initiated attempts at reinventing active politics of non-alignment. Leading experts and activists have been invited to add insights and visions.

In brief, the general conclusions of the editorial group are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Contributors to the book are, in order of first appearance: Sven-Eric Liedman, Olle Törnquist, Lars Rudebeck, Anders Sjögren, Vegard Bye, Inga Näslund, Eva Hansson, Kristian Stokke, Arild-Engelsen Ruud, MeeNilankeo Theiventhran, Einar Braathen, Andrés Rivarola Puntigliano, Martin Sandgren, Marianne Millstein, Odd Karsten Tveit, Nils Butenschøn, Selma Sofia Forfod Yssen, Mohammad Fazlhashemi, Omar Sheikmous, Helena Lindholm, Aase Mygind Madsen, Elinor Odeberg, Staffan Laestadius, Stefan de Vylder, Per Wirtén, Benedicte Bull, Anna Sundström, Oscar Ernerot, Pierre Schori, Mikael Leyi, Lina Stenberg, Ulf Bjereld, Ruben Wågman, Maria Nyberg, Ulf Carmesund and Elfva Barrio.

<sup>2</sup> Due to difficulties of financing this kind of work in Sweden today, the first book was published in Norway with the support of *Fritt Ord*, unions and the church, followed now by this extended and upgraded Swedish edition based on pro bono efforts and back up by colleagues in Norway and Denmark.

<sup>3</sup> Regional reviews of Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and East Asia. Case studies of South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, India (especially Kerala), Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, South Africa, the Arab spring, Tunisia, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Sweden.

Firstly, our studies show how conservative nationalism is not only embraced by Putin and Trump and others in the North, but also, for example, by Israel's Netanyahu, Turkey's Erdoğan, China's Xi, the Philippines' Marcos Jr., India's Modi, several others in Latin America and Africa as well as by jihadism in the Middle East – in addition to global oligarchs. Against this, inward-looking national defence is insufficient. Instead, broad international cooperation is required, not least through a stronger Europe and support for democratic movements and organisations.

Secondly, the new nationalism has certainly gained sympathy among people whose economic, social and cultural insecurity has increased under neo-liberal globalisation. But the crucial point in all countries studied was that national welfare-based models (such as social democracy) had been undermined and thus had failed to offer new alternatives. When Olof Palme and Willy Brandt et al. could not push through a New International Economic Order, structural adjustment and failed attempts to combine neo-liberalism and welfare followed both in North and South. Above all, the liberal democratic wave was not inclusive enough to empower scattered social movements and civil organisations.

Nevertheless, it is hopeful that it is exactly this lack of alternative reform policies and functioning democracy that has led many people to support conservative nationalism. For obviously, then, the top priority must be to invest in promoting precisely this –welfare-based sustainable development, human rights and more democracy.

The most important priorities in Sweden's and similar countries' international cooperation must therefore include:

- Establishing the principles of fossil-free growth, democracy based on human rights and not taking advantage of others.
- Focusing on international cooperation in areas crucial also to our own goals in important areas such as security, taxes and investments, jobs, welfare and integration.
- Working hard with like-minded people to counter conflictual conservative nationalism by promoting rule-based cooperation, common security, and peace based on the cornerstones of the UN and international law.
- Strengthening the democratic forces, wherever necessary. During the struggle for national independence, democratisation was often set aside. Then followed global neoliberalism and democratisation hijacked by powerful groups. Yet, our research indicates that the situation is not hopeless.
  - Inclusive education and labour market policies can benefit local development in competition with international technology-monopolies and create more jobs.
  - Efforts at comprehensive reforms for better working conditions and equal social and political rights can lead to broad alliances between unions, civil society and political parties – thus providing alternatives to “strong leaders”.
  - Movements for equal citizenship, social justice and respect for human rights have been the driving force in processes of democratisation, as most recently in Brazil, Colombia and Sri Lanka. Yet, international support has rarely focused on giving pro-democratic counter movements the chance to enter mainstream political processes.
  - In addition, students, academics, journalists and cultural workers have often played important roles in democracy promotion. They also need more support. Reliable education, research, news reporting and authentic culture must be prioritised in the fight against “alternative facts”.
- Hence, our own trade unions and popular organisations as well as academics, cultural workers and journalists must be more involved – not less as now in Sweden.