

THE NORTH-SOUTH QUESTION FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

THE PARADIGMATIC CASE OF SWEDEN

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Introduction

What has been – and what is – the relevance of the South in advancing Social Democracy in the North? The answer depends on how Social Democracy is defined and what contextual cases and historical periods we focus on.¹ From an historical point of view, Social Democracy is not the property of certain parties but a broad perspective and movement against the deterministic Marxist dogmas of inevitable crises of capitalism and the rise of socialism with a little help from enlightened revolutionaries. Leftists of various kinds may therefore be deemed social democratic oriented as long as they adhere to the kingpin that it takes democratic politics to nourish the basic aims of socialism, and as long as they define these aims less in terms of ownership than on means and output, i.e., as sustainable development based on as much social equity as possible and by way of democratic methods.

More specifically we may use the most successful social democratic oriented politics and policies as a point of departure – which was in the North as well as the South from the 1930s until the early 1980s. The essence of Social Democracy may thus be summarised as efforts at constructing a house on four pillars with five strategies. The first two pillars relate to capacity: (1) broad democratic collectivities rooted in class and related contradictions, such as unions, popular movements, action- and issue groups, plus of course political parties. (2) democratic links between the state and a society of equal citizens. The other two pillars concern policies: (1) social- and working-life-rights, plus welfare, as a basis for equity and sustainable development. (2) social pacts on (nowadays) *sustainable* economic development

¹ This essay is based on Törnquist, Olle and Harriss, John with Chandhoke, Neera and Engelstad, Fredrik (eds), *Reinventing Social Democratic Development: Insights from Indian and Scandinavian Comparisons*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016, (Indian edition published by Manohar, New Delhi); Törnquist, Olle, *In Search of New Social Democracy: Insights from the South – Implications for the North*, London and New York: Zed-Bloomsbury, 2021; Törnquist, Olle, "Social Democratic Challenges in the South – And Why They Matter for the North Too", in Brandal, Nic, Bratberg, Øivind and Thorsen, Dag Einar, *Social Democracy in the 21st Century*", Bingley; Emerald, 2021; Törnquist, Olle, "Contribution to the critique of 'Social Democracy in One Country': the Case of Sweden", in Granadino, Alan, Nygård, Stefan and Stadius, Peter (eds), *Rethinking European Social Democracy and Socialism: The History of the Centre-Left in Northern and Southern Europe in the Late 20th Century*, London and New York: Routledge, 2022.

between prime producers, labour, and capital. To enhance the political capacities and promote the policies, the four most generally accepted strategies (that may be combined) have been succinctly summarised by Erik Olin Wright² as: (1) win elections and dismantle elements of capitalism from top down; (2) tame it by reducing its negative effects; (3) fight it from outside the state with various actions; and (4) escape it with non-capitalist ideas and practices. We shall soon return to the fifth strategy.

There are no longer any important alternatives to these foundation stones and strategies within the broad democratic left, but certainly different experiences, ideas, and priorities that must be considered. But while there are therefore good reasons to be inclusive when considering what parties, groups and movements that should be studied, there are also two supplementary dimensions that cause major divisions and call for special attention. The first disagreement is whether and how capitalism should only be tamed by reducing its bad effects through social welfare and the like, or if social democrats should also try to transform capitalism with a fifth strategy of actions, rules, and regulations that alter the destructive logics of capitalism. In other words, the difference between taming and breeding a wolf into a working dog.³ The second controversy is if Social Democracy can be expanded and transformative with nationally confined politics and policies, or whether and how it must also be internationalised. It is precisely these fundamental controversies that make it important to focus on the historical and current relevance of the South in advancing Social Democracy in the North.

In addition, as already indicated, the answer to the query depends on what contextual cases and historical periods one pays attention to. Given that critical studies are most fruitful when focusing on the strongest cases, this paper is mainly about Sweden which was paradigmatic but has then deteriorated sharply. Firstly, it was perhaps the most successful case of hegemonic and transformative social democratic politics and policies, from the 1930s until the late 1970s. Secondly, it combined this with export-oriented politics, and, for many years, non-alignment and support and cooperation with likeminded actors in the South. Thirdly, however, the focus on partnership with the South was adjusted to global neo-liberalism from the 1980s, and, most recently, by compromises with nativist positions on

² Olin Wright, Erik, *How to Be an Anti-capitalist in the 21st Century*, London and New York: Verso

³ To mention a few examples, transformative strategies may be: (1) The series of politics and policies in Scandinavia that have strengthened women's capacity to organise and gain personal, economic, and political equality – and thus improve society at large. This is perhaps the most successful transformation since the 1930s of the Scandinavian societies. (2) The reduction of the powers associated with private ownership by legislations and reforms such as to prevent outright exploitation of people and nature and the use of fossil energy – often called 'functional socialism'; first suggested in the mid-1920s by the Swedish activist and theoretician Nils Karleby. (3) The reduction of the right of the owners of land and capital to control how the surplus that is produced shall be used by way of e.g., land reform laws, participation in investment decisions or wage earners funds. (4) To expand liberal political democracy by way of direct local participation of those concerned through partnership representation by unions, and issue- and cause oriented groups as well as entrepreneurs in regional and national policy making and implementation.

immigration as well as the abandonment of the principle of non-alignment in international relations in favour of NATO and Washington. Fourthly, this has spurred criticism and discussion on whether national or international priorities are fundamental for the reinvention of transformative Social Democracy.

Six phases

More precisely, the positions of the social democratic oriented actors in Sweden on the relevance of the South for their advancement of Social Democracy “at home” have varied historically with six phases of political and socio-economic conditions.

The *first* phase was shaped by the world economic crisis in the late 1920s and early 1930’s and the subsequent new policies that evolved. These were the formative years of the strong social democratic movement.

The *second* period was the ‘golden years’ of post-war cooperation between western countries in the North towards regulated capitalism along with social welfare and democracy. It was also when decolonisation gave rise of second wave of democracy (after the first wave in the North and in Latin America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) thanks to strong popular movements in the South. Both efforts were however also affected by the intensified world-wide cold war between the West and the East and the rise of autocratic rule, particularly in the South.

During the subsequent *third* phase, from the late 1960s, the cold war, autocratisation and internationalisation of capital were only partially balanced by the rise of non-aligned actors, liberation movements and efforts by social democrats and leftist liberals at a New International Economic Order, democratisation, and North-South Partnership.

Thereafter, already by the early 1980s, there was instead a *fourth* Janus-faced period characterised by, on the one hand, intensified internationalisation of capital, new division of labour and increasingly important global neo-liberalism – and, on the other hand, the liberal third wave of democracy that arose in southern Europe and spread to Latin America as well as Eastern Europe and parts of Africa and Asia.

By the early 2010s, in the wake of the financial crisis, there was a brief *fifth* period in Sweden with efforts to resume progressive internationalism. These attempts were soon overtaken, however, by the growing problems of democratisation in the South and the effects of the US-led “war against terror”. The latter generated a huge refugee crisis in Europe in particular, and the inability to handle it played into the hands of right-wing nationalism, causing adjustment among many leading social democrats.

The current *sixth* period, then, is characterised by the rise of a dual global crisis of climate change and authoritarian nationalism along with a possible new cold war. Broadly defined social democrats differ on how to respond to this: by inward looking nationalism and adjustment to the West, or by reinventing non-aligned internationalism.

So, during these periods, how have broadly defined Swedish social democrats analysed the importance of the international framework and especially the South?

(I) Dynamic nation-centrism – but irrelevance of the South (1930 – 1946)

The losses for the quite radical Swedish social democrats in the 1928 elections and the then world economic crisis were turning points in the development of their remarkably successful project. The leaders realised that there was a need for broader alliances, notably with the numerous small farmers and rural labourers, and by engaging in the special concerns of women. Moreover, radical socialist ideas did not help much against the economic crisis with unemployment and social hardships. Instead, it was necessary to develop social and economic reform proposals that might reduce the burdens for ordinary people and kick start the economy – albeit in such a way that their capacity to foster radical politics would also be enhanced.

The result was a package of economic and social reform proposals in face of the 1932 elections to increase the purchasing power among common people, including by way of decently paid public works and welfare policies that would be to the benefit of not only unionised workers but also informal labourers, many of whom were women. The slogan was to make Sweden a ‘people’s home’ and to stimulate the economy along the lines of emerging Keynesianism. Thus, the proposals were also combined with arguments in favour of a liberal economic trade regime to support the export sectors, except for special protection of the farmers.

One major outcome was electoral advances and new alliances. The initially most crucial social pact was with the farmers and their agrarian party – in exchange for social and economic protection. This enabled the social democrats to form a new government – and to stand tall against fascist and Nazi ideas of authoritarian native welfarism.

Given the uneven spread of economic development and rapid urbanisation, most of the new Keynesian oriented economic policies and universal welfare reforms had to be centralised. The disadvantage was that the new measures reduced the potential of expanding popular participation in local governments as well as the importance of the extensive self-help schemes and cooperatives within the broad labour movement. The former could at least partially be addressed through negotiations, but to compensate for the latter, the state hierarchical and bureaucratic state apparatus itself had to be democratised. The formula was that unions, and other interest- and issue-based organisations, as well as employers’ organisations and other stakeholders, were enabled to participate with representatives that they themselves appointed in public policy making and implementation. This partnership-democracy (or “social corporatism” in contrast to fascist-statist corporatism) was thus a vital supplement to the liberal representative system and the rule of law.

These developments also paved the way for the second and more widely known social pact between the unions and employers, based on mutual acceptance of the unions’ right to organise and negotiate collective labour agreements, and the employers right to govern

production. The aim was to reduce the frequent strikes on wages and work conditions, to foster economic growth and to generate new jobs by supplementing the Keynesian economic policies and public welfare reforms with co-operation between unions and employers. There was wide agreement that this agreement between unions and employers (within, as it were, civil society) was better than if the government had tried to handle the matters with statist legislation and at worst cohesive means.⁴

A vital precondition was that the cooperation was driven by the two dominant factions among the employers and unions – both related to the dynamic export industry that was exposed to international competition. These factions were able to agree on similar wage levels and conditions for all workers, irrespective of economic sectors. The result was threefold. Firstly, increased wages for labour in low-productive sectors, which put pressure on the employers in these sectors to “modernise or die”. Secondly, reduced chances for the better paid workers in for example the construction sectors to increase their wages because of the employers’ ability to compensate themselves with higher out-put prices on the domestic market. Thirdly, the enabling of the employers in the export industries to increase their international competitiveness – thanks to modest wages and favourable prices on the domestic market – as well as to reinvest their profits and generate more employment, including for those losing jobs in low-productivity sectors.

In addition to this, Sweden’s absence of colonial interests, its international politics of non-alignment and other forms of export promotion were also important. In fact, parts of the export during the 1930s and early 1940s was to Germany and its war machine.

The magic social democratic formula for how social democrats gained hegemony in Sweden was, in other words, to build broad alliances in favour of Keynesian economics, universal welfare and women’s rights, democratic partnership representation and social pacts *on the national level*. Social democrats and farmer representatives in government, unions and employers could act and negotiate within a democratic and autonomous *national polity*. Liberal trade and export promotion was crucial, as were the politics of non-alignment – *but today’s Global South was almost irrelevant*.

(II) Nationalist-Internationalism (c.1946 – 1970s)

The successful social democratic model that was initiated during the 1930s survived the War and blossomed during the 1950s and 1960s in the wider context of the western post-war cooperation on reconstruction by way of regulated capitalism (including through the Bretton Woods agreement), welfare and democratisation.

This was also, however, the time of the cold war, with nuclear threats and intensive political and economic competition and dominance. So, given that international autonomy as well as free trade was essential for the further development of the Swedish social democratic model,

⁴ It may be noted that this position is again fundamental in the critique of the Swedish unions as well as employers’ associations against top-down EU-legislations.

the principles of non-alignment, resistance to trade monopolies and the dominance of the US and Soviet super-powers became increasingly important. In contrast to the first phase before and during the War, Sweden therefore nourished the strength of international organisations, especially within the UN-family. Among the natural partners in this regard were the anti-colonial movements and new nations in the South that had given rise to non-nativist nationalism, a second wave of democracy and the international movement of non-alignment.

These efforts intensified from the 1960s under the dynamic leadership of Olof Palme. International development and other forms of cooperation expanded. In addition to the common interest in human rights, democracy, and autonomy to build Social Democracy in one's own country, there was a supplementary argument. This was that the international cooperation along with solidarity was also crucial to support the new movements' and nations' ability to resist autocratisation and to abstain from joining the communist camp in the cold war. Hence Sweden and Palme engaged actively in support of popular organisations and liberation movements (such as in Latin America, the Portuguese colonies, and Vietnam) as well as new governments whose social-democratic potentials could not yet evolve because of old colonial and new imperial politics and, at times, limited options to resist them with democratic means.

(III) North – South partnership for democratic development (1970s – early-1980s)

From the late 1960s, the international political economy was altered in several respects. With the rise of new communication technologies and the East Asian developmental states, there was a new international division of labour. Another factor behind the internationalisation of capital was the growing importance of financial sectors along with the abandonment in 1971 of the post-war international currency regulations in Bretton Woods. Hence transnational companies, banks and financiers escaped much of the national agreements and regulations that had formed the basis for the previously so successful social democratic model. Instead, global neo-liberalism gained ground, often combined with authoritarian regimes, as in Chile 1973, followed up three years later in Stockholm with the Nobel Prize in economics to Milton Friedman. Meanwhile the OPEC oil-price hike added to the undermining of nationally confined Keynesianism and caused stagflation, given that the oil-rents were rarely used to foster inclusive development that might have increased demand for northern products.

For leaders like Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt the obvious answer was to try to internationalise social democratic Keynesianism, along with the necessary alliances and institutions. One step was to organise support outside and within the UN for the idea of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). Another was the Brandt Commission for North-South Partnership, followed by the initiation of Gro Harlem Brundtland's commission on Sustainable Development and Palme's on Common Security. In addition to proposals for what governments should do, the Socialist International was also reactivated.

However, the proposals did not gain sufficient support. The progressive forces in the Global South were either too weak or had lost steam during the cold war and internalisation of

capital. Many countries had turned authoritarian and opted for cooperation with international investors, Washington, or Moscow. In the North, moreover, not even Palme's and Brandt's own parties and associated unions were fully convinced.

The emerging parallel option was to promote the rise of more positive movements, regimes, and policies in the context of the new emerging wave of democracy that arose in Portugal 1974 – much thanks to the successful liberation movements in its colonies – and in Spain after the death of General Franco in 1975. This spread to Latin America, Eastern Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. While constrained by neo-liberalism, democratisation gained importance during the following decades.

(IV) Structural adjustment and liberal democratisation (1980s – 2010s)

Instead of the ideas of a New International Economic Order, Democratic Partnership between the North and South, Sustainable Development and Common Security, it was thus, primarily, the forces of neo-liberalism and the authoritarian development states that gained prominence by the early 1980's, with leaders like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the forefront.

Given that the preconditions for nationally confined Social Democracy as well as its internationalisation through North-South partnership had been undermined, it was now even more difficult than earlier to push for transformative Social Democracy in countries like Sweden. Just as, for example, Francois Mitterrand's radical socialist reforms in France must be abandoned, Sweden's wage earners funds had to be shelved. While Sweden's politics of non-alignment was formally sustained, the aim of most leading social democrats was limited to the taming of capitalism, abandoning the ideas of also transforming it.

This was in accordance with Tony Blair's, Bill Clinton's, Gerard Schröder's *and* Sweden's Göran Persson's "third way" policies. Credit markets had already been deregulated, in Sweden 1985 when Olof Palme lost control of his finance minister. Financial ventures became more profitable than productive investments. And the financial crisis of 2008 did not alter it. Sweden, as many other rich countries in the North, was partly de-industrialised. The idea was to "climb the value-added ladder" and combine neoliberalism and new public managed welfare. But there was no solid broad coalition of modest winners and losers. Instead, Sweden too (albeit a bit later than many other European countries because of its previously important social democratic reforms) was affected by rising economic inequalities and cultural differences. On the one hand were the smart liberal oriented folks with the right education, jobs in competitive sectors and opportunities to obtain their own insurance as well as to speculate on housing and cheap credit. On the other hand were the rust belts and the left behind wage earners and small business owners who were only given standing room. Among them were many (through rarely women) who considered migrants to be the main competitors for jobs and welfare. This fed right-wing nationalism.

By implication, partnership with social democrats in the South was not a major priority anymore – not even to promote environmental sustainability. Internationalism focused on the EU, of which Sweden became a member in 1995. The focus was “structural adjustment” to liberal globalisation and to promote exports and cheap imports. The wider international cooperation was adjusted accordingly.

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In the meantime, the remaining hope was that democratisation in the South and East would create better conditions through more options and influence for progressive movements and governments. As already indicated, the new wave of democracy began when the United States lost in Vietnam, the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies contributed to the fall of the dictatorship in Lisbon, and Spain showed that a transition from fascism to democracy could be negotiated. The Socialist International with Brandt and Palme in the forefront was revitalised in support of democrats in the South and East. Progressive liberals were engaged too.

There was much initial progress – but subsequently stagnation. This was not inevitable. But with few exceptions, the committed liberals and broadly defined social democrats did little to identify the main problems and to fight them.

Michail Gorbachev's social democratically oriented attempts at reform were not supported, and instead Russia was taken over by Boris Yeltsin and neoliberal shock therapy. This created social and economic insecurity for ordinary people but delivered opportunities for the oligarchs to loot the state – followed by support for a "strong man", Vladimir Putin. Eastern Europe in general was beset by similar problems. Meanwhile the West's "war on terror" made matters worse in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya – in addition to the insufficient support for the progressives in Syria, Turkey, and Kurdistan. ‘Non-aligned’ Sweden took part too, especially in the Afghanistan disaster.

Meanwhile, things went wrong even in the many promising cases in the South where, for example, military dictatorships fell in Latin America, dictators like Ferdinand Marcos and General Suharto were deposed, Nelson Mandela took over in South Africa and a centre-left front won the national elections in India. Three troublesome factors were most important, but none of them were really addressed by liberals and social democrats, including in Sweden.

First, the absence of common class interests. The wave of democracy was not backed up with inclusive social and economic policies as in Western Europe after the Second World War. The limited industrialisation in the South was combined with the plundering of nature, inequality, miserable working conditions, widespread unemployment, lack of class identity and organisation. There were constant difficulties in uniting people with insecure jobs. Popular movements cannot be built in workplaces alone because most people are ignored as they have temporary jobs and in the informal sector. The old celebrated Scandinavian

growth strategies that require relatively low unemployment and strong parties in the labour market are insufficient as blueprints, painfully illustrated in South Africa.

The second factor is the lack of democratic representation. In countries where dictatorships were replaced by democratic rules of the game, these came to be dominated – with international support, including from Sweden – by elites and businessmen, who had no interest in including others in politics, honouring freedom of speech and organisation for everyone, and in fighting corruption. Genuine democrats and embryonic popular movements had little opportunity to make a political difference. There were exceptions, but generally frustration and protests increased. Things went wrong even in celebrated examples of liberal democratisation, such as in the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, and Brazil.

Democratisation in Burma was crushed by the same military that the West had said would accept it. Neither was left-wing populism with popular enthusiasm behind charismatic leaders a solution, as these were typically not controlled through democratic representation, as for example in the cases of Joseph Estrada in the Philippines and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela – initially applauded by northern radical leftists.

The third factor is that "bottom up" was insufficient. Ideally, it would be possible to promote democracy and inclusive development from below. But civil society groups, unions and social movements that really tried to build democracy on the ground and combine different interests and issues rarely made a political difference. Being marginalised in internationally guided negotiations for transition from dictatorship to democracy, they mostly became fragmented pressure groups that failed to broaden their base even as politics was decentralised. Given that the dominance of political bosses, businessmen and vigilantes had not been challenged. Even Brazil's participatory local budgeting that was celebrated around the world, including by Swedish leftists, could not stop corruption higher up in the system.

The main exception was the Indian state of Kerala where popular movements ran educational campaigns, mapping of local resources and brought about a huge state-coordinated programme for popular participation in planning at the municipal level. But the activists who propelled these de-facto social democratic oriented initiatives were deemed communists and critics of the Indian Congress that dominated the relations with northern social democrats. Hence there was very little exchange of experiences between Kerala and social democrats elsewhere. It is only recently that Kerala has been able to begin institutionalising the advances, promoting production, engaging sceptical citizens and left-wing bosses, and creating links to other administrative levels and other actors than those involved in the public planning. These advances explain why Kerala was among the best in the South to fight Covid-19 in combination with welfare for all, and why it has managed to withstand the right-wing nationalism in India at large.

All in all, many positive movements gained more room for action during the liberal wave of democracy but could not build a credible social democratic alternative to neoliberalism – including because of insufficient cooperation with and support from the North. As in the

North, the failures in the South led to frustration and protests. This allowed right-wing populist nationalists to take over – which is the major cause for the crisis of democratisation and the present autocratisation. Compliant oligarchs were acquitted, while migrants, addicts, LGBTQ people, the left, and ethnic and religious minorities were blamed.

(V) Failed return to nationalist-internationalism – revival of nation-centrism (2012 – 2022)

Meanwhile in the North, social democrats ignored their unredeemed internationalisation, which had also been made more difficult by the setbacks in the East and South. This became particularly clear in Sweden from 2012 when the new party leader and prime minister Stefan Löfven's team tried to return to the basics of Social Democracy in the wake of the financial crisis. The agenda emphasised more welfare, cooperation between unions and employers, a corresponding "global deal" around the world, cooperation with the Greens against the climate crisis, feminist and human rights-based foreign policy, and support for refugees. But to realise such priorities remained as difficult as it had been for Mitterrand and Palme in the early 80s. The employers ignored cooperation with state and unions, nationally and internationally. The unions were sceptical of the Greens and put the profitability of export industry and good jobs within it ahead of radical foreign policy. This also lacked strong foreign partners.

At the same time, a lack of broad international commitment to the progressives of the Middle East and North Africa contributed to a wave of refugees that the Swedish municipalities could not cope with (and were unable to cooperate with civil society to handle). So, in the fall of 2015, Löfven gave up his effort at international renewal and next to sealed the borders. Subsequently the party leadership adjusted to the increasingly strong right-wing nationalist opinion, following the pattern of the Danish social democrats.

Meanwhile leftist social democrats (and the Left Party) called for the return to a transformative social democratic agenda to counter the right-wing nationalism. But the critics do *not* also ask for the return to Palme's international engagement (incl. with the South) to enable such national priorities.

In essence, the developments after Löfven's capitulation may be described as defensive efforts to resume the nationalist-sovereignty priorities of the first phase (1930s-1946s). But the times have changed. The original social democratic model was first undermined by the internationalisation of capital and then by the lack of its own internationalisation along with likeminded progressives, including in the South. In addition, it is now affected by the global crisis of inequality, climate change and refugees. Hence, the current attempts to return to the old sovereignty model without internationalisation tend to nourish nativist social welfare priorities – which are alien to the core democratic principles of Social Democracy – as well as nationalism in cooperation with dominant western powers.

(VI) Adjustment to new cold war or red-green internationalism (2022→)

In addition to its swift adjustment to right-wing nationalist arguments in face of the refugee crisis in late 2015, the Swedish social democratic leadership panicked yet again when Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022. After hasty, insubstantial, and ultimately “democratic-centralistic” discussions in the party, the leadership decided to abandon what was left of Olof Palme’s internationalism and Sweden’s 200-year-old non-alignment in favour of applying for membership in NATO. There was no analysis of whether sustained non-alignment combined with intensified coordination with the other Nordic countries and NATO would have been sufficient to defend Sweden’s sovereignty and ability to assist its neighbours. The prime aims were coordination with much more threatened Finland and to win the 2022 election (by not allowing the Swedish liberals and conservatives to benefit from being the only ones in favour of NATO and to claim that they were the only ones that stood tall against Russia). But the election was lost anyway. There was also no discussion of the consequences of the shift in policy for social democratic partners. Yet Turkey’s President Erdogan now keeps illustrating this by demanding an end to Swedish support for Turkish and Kurdish pro-democrats to support Swedish membership in NATO.

Consequently, there are also dissenting positions among liberal-leftists, greens, social democrats, and radical leftists. All critics agree that Ukraine must be supported. But aside from the “realists” that focus on the interest of the big powers, the peace-fundamentalists focusing on negotiations, and the anti-imperialists claiming that the US has an omnipotent position of power, there is also a more balanced argument that considers the importance of the South. The core of this argument is, firstly, that Putin is not the only right-wing nationalist in the world who prevents democratic struggle against the existential crises of our time – from nuclear threat and climate collapse to social insecurity, inequality, and more refugees. Secondly, that NATO is neither capable nor meant to solve this. Its global expansion only makes things worse, given that increasingly many actors say that “the West turns against the Rest”, and that a new cold war is emerging. To handle the crises beyond Ukraine, these critics argue, other alliances are required, and the principle of non-alignment is fundamental. In short, there is a need to return to Palme’s and Brandt’s analysis that the nationally limited Social Democracy must be internationalised *as well as* be more green *and* pro-democratic to become strong again.⁵

According to these dissidents, Palme and Brandt’s main hurdle was that they had only weak partners. That problem might have been solved during the global democracy wave, but it collapsed. It is also well known why and what is needed: support for democratic development as in Europe after the Second World War, broader alliances than on the shop floor level,

⁵ See for example, Törnquist, Olle, “Kan den socialdemokratiska idén räddas” in Swedish and Norwegian <https://www.dagensarena.se/essa/kan-den-socialdemokratiska-iden-raddas/> <https://agendamagasinet.no/debatt/kan-den-socialdemokratiske-ideen-redde/> and in English “Can the idea of Social Democracy be Rescued” in e.g., *Kerala Economy* 4:2 (2023); and Törnquist, Olle and Bye, Vegard (eds) *Hvor ble det av solidariteten? Gjennomreisning av det Globale Felleskapet*. Forthcoming, Oslo, 2024.

more inclusive democratic rules of the game, unification of the progressive forces. The question is whether and how this can be achieved?

My own research along with colleagues shows that it is possible to build fronts with progressive politicians and different movements when they focus on demands for more democracy to promote coherent reforms to counter economic and social insecurity, corruption and climate change.

A recent European example is that the Spanish social democrats and their leftist allies' successful decision in the 2023 national elections to stand up for progressive policies – rather than adjusting to the right-wing nationalist trends as their Swedish and other sister parties.

In the South, a prime example was the broad alliance in Indonesia around 2010 (with the support of international Social Democracy) for a universal healthcare reform. The problem was the lack of follow-up reforms and a democratic negotiation system for action groups, unions, employers, and politicians. Kerala, however, has then proved how reforms can be followed up. The cooperation there since the 90s between municipalities and civil society has been institutionalised and was supplemented by state-level health *and* welfare programs in the fight against the pandemic, followed by the setting out of a knowledge-based development strategy. As a result, the left was victorious in the elections. Narendra Modi's right-wing nationalism didn't stand a chance.

In Chile, a similar broad alliance for democratic reform and social rights recently paved the way for the Left Front. In Colombia there is the front for peace and Social Democracy. In Brazil, Lula built a broad coalition against right-wing nationalism and is trying to combine social rights reforms and the broadening of popular participation beyond the local level with the fight against climate change.

The challenges are myriad, including outlining transformative reforms and democratic negotiation systems between politicians, action groups, unions, and employers. But these are matters that we have experience of in Western Europe and especially Scandinavia. And there is the potential for collaboration to secure socio-economically fair and sustainable development.

At least *such issues* may be linked to non-alignment and promoted by an ecumenical left-democratic network with roots among European and North American progressives and, most importantly, in the South – with the movements in Chile, Brazil, Colombia, and Kerala in the forefront. If so, dissidents argue, the internationalisation of broadly defined Social Democracy can resume, and perhaps also contribute to peace in Ukraine on more democratic grounds than, for example, the current proposals by the BRICS countries.

