

Olle Törnquist – synopsis of presentation of new ‘endbook’ at Skytteanum 18/3/22

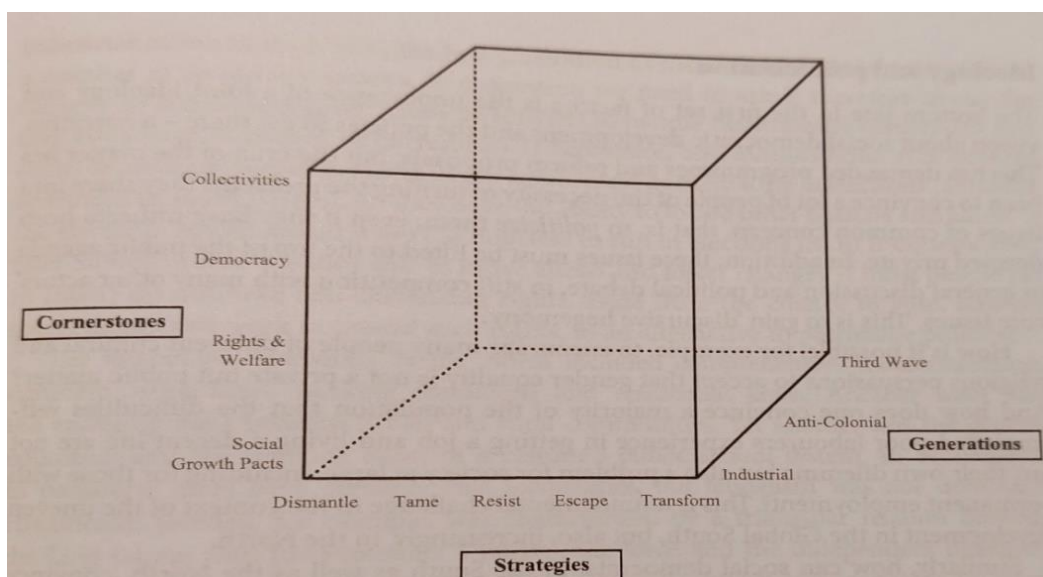
Good to be back in my alma mater. Formative years here...

In 2010 I decided to round up community work with the ‘Power and Democracy Studies’ in Indonesia to summarise my own conclusions based on that work, plus parallel comparative studies of social democratic oriented movements – ahead of retirement when there would be no more funds for field studies.

It was possible to publish books on (i) assessments of democratisation and (ii) insights about Social Democracy in India and Scandinavia. But the third step – to summarise results about soc-dem oriented movements in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, plus implications for the North – proved more than difficult.

My **question** was *whether Social Democracy had become obsolete or might be reinvented?* Göran Therborn, among many others, argued the Social Democracy would not 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. My results indicated, however, that their argument might repeat the old mistake of the modernisation school: to assume that the process of modernisation must be the same in the South as in the North. On the contrary, Social Democracy may come about in other ways, given the different conditions and contextual dynamics. *But how might one try these arguments?*

I distanced myself from specific historical and current brands of Social Democracy by returning to classical broad definition of *development (these days ‘sustainable development’) based on social justice by democratic means*. Thereafter I specified this, based on an historical review in terms of three dimensions that most theorists and historians should be able to agree on: (1) cornerstones; (2) strategies; (3) generations. This may be summarised in a three-dimensional table with 20 combinations during three generations.



There were certainly overlaps and it was not meaningful to try to fill in ‘all boxes’, but the framework worked as a guide in contextual comparative studies.

The contexts I had studied for half a decade would do as critical cases: India (especially Kerala), Indonesia, the Philippines plus Sweden; with S. Africa & Brazil as reference cases.

As the comparative methods of difference and similarity were unfeasible, I opted for Theda Skocpol’s ‘contrasting contexts’ -- inspired by Clifford Geertz and Ben Anderson.

The structure of the book was therefore:

- (1) Outline of the problem: why is Soc-Dem losing ground and can it be reinvented?
- (2) Specification of the theme: what is Social Democracy?
- (3) Cases and contextual puzzles to be ‘solved’ in the book
- (4) Empirical part one: analyses of 2nd generation of Soc-Dem in the different cases
- (5) Empirical part two: analyses of 3rd generation of Soc-Dem in the different cases
- (6) Conclusions

Yet, there was a major stumbling block: how on earth would it be possible to produce a reasonably brief, readable, exciting, and enjoyable book? I made several attempts but failed. The final solution was to return to logbooks and interviews to thus 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. Plus to not burden ‘the story’ with references but put them in the end of the book.

So, were there any new results, then, beyond previous articles and books? Yes – thanks to *revisiting and re-reading the previous analyses with the common new analytical framework in mind, as well as with questions that relate to the current challenges of Social Democracy.*

What are the general conclusions and main lessons?

The book argues that the crisis of Social Democracy is neither Swedish nor European but Global. In Sweden, for example, the problems increased in the 1970s. due to the undermining of the lynchpin since the 30s in terms of nationally confined Keynesianism with strong unions and high productivity. Because (1) USA scrapped the post-WW2 regulations of the international economy to finance its war in Vietnam; (2) OPEC increased the oil prices (without really increasing the demands for Swedish products); and (3) the authoritarian low wage industrialisation in East Asia. Even more importantly (4): because Palme and Brandt et al. failed to counter this with internationalisation of Keynesianism by way of ‘New International Economic Order’ and ‘Partnership between North and South’ – largely because of weakened partners in the South.

Hence, we need to begin by asking why the anti-colonial movement (which along with the anti-fascist resistance in Europe generated the second wave of democracy) had petered out. The critical case of especially Kerala but initially Indonesia too had proved broad unity possible based equal civil and political rights plus social rights, and to advance and even win liberal democratic elections. Kerala held on to this, but from the late 50s, Indonesia, the Philippines and most others gave up on democratisation in favour of anti-imperial and anti-feudal left-populism. Without democratisation, then, it was difficult to fight the political and often statist pathways to capitalism. The outcome in Indonesia and the Philippines, and in the Global South at large, was severe repression, ‘middle class coups’ supported by the West, and authoritarian stateism backed by the East.

From the late 1970's the hope was the third wave of democracy – but the outcome was unconvincing. The failure to internationalise Keynesianism meant that the field was wide open for the global neo-liberal ideas and economics. And Blair and Persson et al. adjusted.

Hence, democratisation in the South was not backed up by social democratic oriented industrial and welfare policies as in western Europe after WW2. This made it next to impossible to foster inclusive industrialisation, and gain a broad and strong labour movement, along with production-oriented employers, and to thus build social growth pacts. For social democrats, there must be broader alliances, beyond unionism.

Secondly, however, the attempts beyond the workplaces to build progressive alternatives by way of bottom-up polycentric social movements and CSOs have been stuck by fragmented interests and organisations. Meanwhile decentralisation has also been no panacea for local democracy, if progressives have not been strong enough, as in Kerala.

Thirdly, the liberal oriented transitions to democracy typically accommodated the powerful elites by allowing them to retain their economic resources, or to privatise the public resources that they had been in command of, and by favourable pacts on new rules of the game. So, the genuine pro-democrats had little chance to advance.

Meanwhile the attempts in the North like by Löfven from 2014 till late 2015 to reinvent the 'Swedish Model' by also fostering better international conditions capsized with the lack of an international alternative to neo-nationalism, to contain the Swedish Democrats.

Do these setbacks mean that Social Democracy is doomed?

The book identifies three openings:

- (1) When – as now – democratisation is backsliding and repression increases, one may return to the best experiences from the struggle against the ancient combination of colonial and internal suppression. In spite of repression and division based on religion and caste, it was possible, for example in Kerala, to build broad unity behind demands for universal political and public rights, not specific group rights.
- (2) More recently it has proved possible under more favourable conditions to build broad alliances in favour of equal civil, political, and social rights, *combined with* welfare reforms. The best examples include the civic rights, land reforms and recently struggle to handle Covid-19 in Kerala; and the successful struggle for the universal health reform in Indonesia. This in turn may alter the 1st generation's sequence in the North of growth pacts before welfare states, which has never been feasible in the South. In the Global South, productive oriented welfare reforms based on broad alliances may shape growth pacts.
- (3) The main problems involved are 'only' political – not structural: (i) lack of transformative reforms to follow up on, for example, the Indonesian health reform and (ii) the lack of democratic partnership governance to counter elitist democracy and populism and foster comprehensive negotiations about such reforms. Support for this would be in the best interest of Social Democracy in the North too.

For statements about the book: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/in-search-of-new-social-democracy-9780755639793/> **35% discount** on e-book for seminar participants via www.bloomsbury.com: use code GLR TW9UK