

## European ‘Cultural’ Social Democracy: questions of freedom\*

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**Summary:** I. Introduction.—II. European Freedom.—III. European Freedom and the Self.—IV. Histories of social liberalism.—V. Market Totalitarianism?—VI. European Cosmopolitan Social Democracy.—VII. European Social Democracy Reconsidered.

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to rethink the question of freedom in relation to the social democracy of the past, present and future. Here I argue that much contemporary debate on European social democratic Left emphasises a communitarian agenda. Despite some of its strengths it is problematic in terms of its neglect of questions of freedom and more global concerns. Here I return to the liberal socialism that emerged within Europe in the context of totalitarianism. Questions of freedom were emphasised in this context, and can be productively returned to in the new dimensions of the present. In particular I focus on the ‘cultural’ socialist writing of the 1940s and argue that thinkers like Fromm, Orwell and Roselli have something to say to us today. At this point I consider whether the neoliberalism of the present shares certain features with the authoritarian ideologies of the past. Further I seek to critically assess more recent developments in ideas related to the potential emergence of a cosmopolitan Europe. Finally in the context of the social and ecological crisis of contemporary Europe I seek to highlight how we might begin to rethink questions of freedom in ways which might help socially.

**Keywords:** Freedom, democracy, socialism, totalitarianism.

**Resumen:** *Este artículo pretende replantear el tema de la libertad en relación a la democracia social del pasado, del presente y del futuro. Argumento que gran parte del debate contemporáneo sobre la izquierda social demócrata europea pone el énfasis en una agenda comunitaria. A pesar de algunos de sus puntos fuertes este debate es problemático porque deja de lado cuestiones relativas a la libertad y temáticas de orden global. Vuelvo al liberalismo social que emergió en Europa en un contexto de totalitarismo. Los temas de la libertad se pusieron en manifiesto en este contexto, y se pueden volver a retomar de forma productiva en relación con las nuevas dimensiones del presente. Me centro, en particular, en los escritos socialistas «culturales» de 1940 y argumento que pensadores como Fromm, Orwell y Roselli tienen algo que decirnos hoy día. En este punto me pre-*

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*gunto si el neoliberalismo del presente comparte ciertas características con las ideologías autoritarias del pasado. Además intento evaluar críticamente desarrollos más recientes en ideas relacionadas con el potencial emergente de una Europa cosmopolita. Finalmente, en el contexto de crisis social y ecológica de la Europa contemporánea, se aportan sugerencias que puedan contribuir a replantear cuestiones relativas a la libertad y por consiguiente al cambio social.*

**Palabras clave:** *Libertad, democracia, socialismo, totalitarismo.*

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## I. Introduction

The idea of freedom has a long and complex association with Western notions of modernity. Indeed so central is the notion of freedom to European ideas of democracy and human rights that any civilised future seems unimaginable without it. The notion of freedom has a particular historical relevance for European social democrats. This is usually thought to be the case in at least three different ways. Firstly social democratic thought argues that the democratic state has a legitimate role to play in placing limits on the expression of economic reason and the market. How much freedom should social and cultural life have from the market, and what are the limits of this autonomy are central questions? Secondly the democratic state has a responsibility to promote equal forms of citizenship in terms of access to rights and responsibilities and also to make sure relatively equal forms of status ensure fair life-chances for citizens more generally. Finally (and this point is related to the above) a relatively equal society also offers citizens similar opportunities to participate within the polity and make their voices heard. Large divisions of wealth and power tend to favour those who are already privileged and distort democratic processes. Social democrats have historically been interested in three different (albeit overlapping) arguments in relation to freedom. We might summarise these as the rights to an autonomous life, the right to citizenship and opportunity and the right to political and public participation. Here I argue that ideas of freedom within social democratic thinking are actually a way of expanding some of the ideals that became associated with liberalism and the European Enlightenment.

## II. European Freedom

In more recent times European social democrats seem to have given up on the idea of freedom and become more concerned to defend conservative values like tradition and security. Here the argument is that under the guise of freedom capitalist driven modernity has produced a society of competitive

individualism and social breakdown more generally. If during the 1990s social democratic governments were in power in many European countries they did little to reverse the technocratic and state driven forms of politics that presided over increasingly unequal societies. This has led many on the social democratic Left to turn to a Durkheimian ethical socialism. This tradition tends to base its politics around the need to rediscover common norms and values in an age of social fragmentation and anomic individualism. While Durkheim is rarely named in these debates he seems to be the classical sociologist whose shadow is cast over these discussions. For example, Jonathan Rutherford<sup>1</sup> argues that social democracy needs to revive itself through a return to a culture of place, belonging and common values reversing the increasing trend of professional political parties to rely on technocratic elites. The need to rearticulate 'common' forms of citizenship becomes especially pressing in an age of fragmentation and uncertainty where many feel indignant or simply left behind by runaway social change. Here the assumption is that the future of social democracy is likely to be a conservative where the emphasis is placed on the common values what we share in opposition to the destructive nature of neoliberal economics. What is significant in the European context as social democracy seeks to revive itself in the context of austerity and failing capitalism, the rise of the far Right and potential environmental collapse is the lack of concern to rearticulate ideas of freedom. If like other values freedom needs to be rethought within a global age there is no reason for it to be discounted entirely. Here we need to historically trace through why the idea of freedom remains significant to social democratic ideas, but also account for its disappearance from the debate. My view is not that ideas of freedom can be unproblematically returned to in the context of the present, but that they remain an important cultural resource in need of reinvention in our troubled times.

Here part of the problem is that the term 'culture' is used more as a means to decide what we have in common than it is to describe the possibility of a critical and democratic form of everyday life. The idea of culture has however other roots being utilised to point to the importance of imagining a more participatory way of life<sup>2</sup>. John Dewey<sup>3</sup> argued for the need to bring together the ideas of democracy into the life of the community as otherwise they would simply operate as abstract notions. Democracy then is not simply a set of procedures in respect of regular elections but

<sup>1</sup> RUTHERFORD, J., "Dispossession", in MEYER, M. and RUTHERFORD, J. (eds.), *The Future of European Social Democracy*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> WILLIAMS, R., *Culture and Society*, Pelican, London, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> DEWEY, J., "Search for the Great Community", in SIDORSKY, D. (ed.), *John Dewey: The Essential Writings*, Harper and Row, New York, 1977.

has implications for the ways in which we live and construct our shared institutions. This way of life would need to be sceptical of the assurances of authorities and experts and value listening, debate and discussion. Dewey was especially concerned that democratic citizens learned to listen to the views of 'minorities' should they become misrepresented within debate and discussion and thereby allowing 'majorities' the potential of changing their minds. However it was only when these principles became embedded within the family, schools and other features of everyday life that they could enter into the life of the community. Notably Dewey's brand of liberal socialism influenced the intellectual development of American pragmatism and some of the key European intellectual currents related to democratic socialism.

More recently however more conservative trends have come to dominate cultural sociology where Jeffrey Alexander<sup>4</sup> has highlighted a renewed interest in Durkheim and the impact that this has had upon more communitarian forms of political thought. This is less the positivistic Durkheim but is more concerned with how social solidarities become constructed through complex symbolic encounters. For example, Robert Bellah et al<sup>5</sup> talk of the need to capture a politics of the common good in a culture where 'success' is increasingly seen in individualistic terms. A new politics is required that redefines achievement and aspiration in more communal terms.

While there is much to support in these debates, common to much communitarian criticism is the assumption that an over-emphasis upon ideas of freedom and liberty has both eroded more common forms of life and a shared sense of morality. It is not the case that this argument is entirely misplaced however my concern here is to recover a different social democratic tradition that was rightly concerned with freedom. Here my argument is that much of the social commentary that seems to emerge from communitarianism ends with an overly conservative set of cultural concerns. In this context, social democrats run the risk of allowing freedom to be defined by the political Right as well as neglecting much of its own critical heritage.

If we are to find an answer as to how European social democracy might reinvent itself in the context of the present it can-not afford to neglect its own Enlightenment heritage. In the context of a European debt crisis, increasing levels of unemployment and inequality, eroding welfare states and enhanced competition from the emerging economies this is no time to give up on questions of freedom. However the idea needs to be recast in our admittedly

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<sup>4</sup> ALEXANDER, J., "Introduction: Durkheimian sociology and cultural studies today", in ALEXANDER, J. (ed.), *Durkheimian sociology: cultural studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> BELLAH, R. *et al*, *Habits of the Heart*, University of California Press, California, 1996.

more challenging times. As currently looks likely many European societies are likely to experience more austere social and economic conditions in the foreseeable future. Here the spectre of social democratic governments having to manage tight budgets in our increasingly neoliberal times should be a matter of concern for progressives everywhere. Stuart Hall<sup>6</sup> has correctly identified neoliberalism as an attack on the idea that the state can become influenced by progressive ideologies such as fairness, responsibility and social solidarity all of which needs to be curtailed in favour of private and corporate interests. The attack upon those working in the public and state sectors, privatisation, cuts to public cultural provision and other features all point towards a society being remade by market capitalism. If European labour movements often provided the counter-force where more progressive values could be articulated what happens in a context of rapid commodification, inequality and unemployment? As many have commented market failure has not so much ended with criticism of capitalism (although there are elements of this) but with increasing downward pressure on the state. Even if social democratic governments are elected they are left with the possibility of having to manage long term retrenchment of the state in the context of an increasingly powerful market driven society. Not surprisingly then that many social democrats have sought to emphasise the need to reaffirm common values. Similar to Rutherford, the English Labour politician David Lammy<sup>7</sup> has emphasised the extent to which liberals have historically failed to talk about responsibility. This is particularly pressing in the context of a popular culture that celebrates materialism and personal freedom. The emphasis upon our inter-dependency is meant to question the extent to which individuals are actually social atoms whose corrosive consumerism undermines social reliance as well as recognition of our common bonds. The rights based culture of liberalism then while having played an important role in offering a sense of social entitlement to minorities (and others) now has to be rebalanced so that citizens come to lead more socially responsible lives.

Notably both Rutherford and Lammy emphasise the role of the father in the family. Rutherford<sup>8</sup> opens the question as to what is men's role in the family in the context of the decline of the family wage and many socially disadvantaged young men growing up in fatherless families. This question seems to be especially pressing in the context of the rise of the popular far Right groups across Europe and the English riots that took place in the summer of 2011. David Lammy<sup>9</sup> goes further and asks whether liberalism is

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<sup>6</sup> HALL, S., "The march of the neoliberals", *The Guardian newspaper*, 13.09.11

<sup>7</sup> LAMMY, D., *Out of Ashes: Britain after the riots*, Guardian Books, London, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> RUTHERFORD, J., *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> LAMMY, D., *op. cit.*, p. 101.

not only linked to social collapse but also undermining the responsibilities of fathers for their children? Here he argues for a rethinking of traditional masculinity that re-emphasises the importance of the disciplinary role of the father particularly within poorer families. The concern is that rights based liberalism has simply told fathers that whether they continue to support children is a 'choice' rather like others they might make. The focus on absent fathers is notable as it seemingly indicates the lack of moral authority within a culture of rampant market based liberalism. Here the only solution seems to be a re-emphasis upon a common morality around the family, work and a shared sense of place.

In the context of an increasingly market driven society Left communitarians like Rutherford and Lammy seek to point to the corrosive impact of the market on common forms of life and how liberalism has promoted an irresponsible culture of the self. Ideas of work, community and family are of course a keystone to society more generally however we need to be careful should the analysis not lapse into a form of moralism that fails to value diversity and not focus upon the social and economic forces that undermine a sense of community. Here the liberal fear is that while a sense of common values and moral standards is meant to place a break on a runaway capitalism what if it ends with attempts to curtail the freedom of our fellow citizens? Indeed what is missing from the conversation thus far is the recognition that freedom and responsibility remain deeply interconnected. Absent from the debate thus far is the recognition of the freedom to live our own lives need not lead to broken families, irresponsible consumerism or indeed a lack of concern for the well-being of others. Here I want to offer a different kind of narrative that rethinks the principles of freedom within an explicitly European setting. Further through a more explicitly cosmopolitan point of view we also need to question the nation-state centered point of view offered by social democratic communitarians. Here there is a concern that in a global age that social democrats simply end up defending a regressive nationalism in a context where global problems require more globally orientated solutions.

### III. European Freedom and the Self

In thinking about questions of freedom it matters where you start. Much of the debate in this area has been dominated by a philosophical debate between liberals and communitarians<sup>10</sup>. While these perspectives

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<sup>10</sup> SANDEL, M., "Introduction", in SANDEL, M. (ed.), *Liberalism and its Critics*, New York University Press, New York, 1984.

remain important both perspectives often fail to offer an adequate account of the self. If for communitarians our sense of our self and capacities are handed to us by the community of which we happen to be part then liberals on the other hand tend to assume the existence of a rational calculating person maximising human freedom. In discussing questions of freedom my argument is that we need to return to some of the European intellectual debates of the 1940s to look at a generation of thinkers who sought to rethink the basis of freedom after totalitarianism. Here I wish to argue that some of the liberal and socialist debate of this period remains crucial to our own understanding of freedom. These thinkers notably sought to radicalise Enlightenment understandings of the freedom of the self, but also to extend them in important ways.

The critically important work of Erich Fromm<sup>11</sup> offers a more humanistic psychodynamic understanding of the self. Fromm's major work seeks to understand the 'fear' of freedom and the responsibilities that come along with it in the context of European authoritarianism. His work is particularly interesting in the context of the liberal-communitarian debate as he both recognises the substantial gains of rights based liberalism and is alive to how this culture is threatened by contemporary capitalism and the argument that freedom has a psychological dimension. There is then a personal cost to freedom where we are compelled to defend and realise our own ideas, perspectives and standpoints that may not be shared by members of our immediate community. During the time Fromm was writing freedom was explicitly threatened by social authoritarianism, capitalism and other features that sought to undermine the capacity of the self to think critically about the world. These are all escape attempts from what Fromm<sup>12</sup> aptly describes as 'the torture of doubt'.

For Fromm we are compelled to make a choice between life and the growth of the self or its retrenchment or death. By life he means the acceptance of ambivalence, uncertainty, spontaneity and change. It is left to us to give our lives a higher meaning or a sense of purpose. There is no ultimate purpose to our lives that we can simply take from history or the wider society but that this needs to be determined by the individual self. How though do we make sure that the self makes good choices or seeks to live a good life? Many communitarian thinkers have sought to answer this question by arguing that we seek to cultivate lives of civic virtue. That is through clubs, associations and other civic organisations individuals learn the rules of the community and lead more social and communally orientated lives. It is this civic spirit

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<sup>11</sup> FROMM, E., *Escape from Freedom*, Avon Books, New York, 1941.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

that needs to be urgently revived in an age of market orientated individualism and social break down<sup>13</sup>. Erich Fromm<sup>14</sup> offers a different answer to this question when he argues we can indeed seek to persuade others to do good by issuing them with moral commands. This seems to come close to many of the assumptions made by communitarian writers where the rules of the community are simply passed down to the young. Fromm<sup>15</sup> goes on however to argue that the best way to encourage citizens to behave morally 'is to develop a taste for and a sense of well-being in doing what is good or right'. Paradoxically this is best achieved through the realisation of individuality than it is through the following of external codes. Here Fromm's argument comes close to what is called virtue ethics. The position of virtue ethics that stems from the writing of Aristotle basically holds that how we should live is less a matter of abstract norms and commands but is more a matter of practical concern. A virtuous person is someone who seeks to do 'the right thing' because you seek to live a good life<sup>16</sup>. For Fromm how we best serve the community, what we become and how we live are all best decided by the self. Here our best hope for a humane world is to encourage citizens to use their reason and to recover their sanity. Here Fromm<sup>17</sup> writes:

'I believe in freedom, in man's right to be himself, to assert himself and to fight all of those who try to prevent him from being himself'

Freedom for Fromm was not the often empty promises of market freedom, or the freedom to manipulate other people but instead was rooted in the desire to authentically become the self. In the emerging market society Fromm was deeply concerned that the project for freedom was being given up. Fromm<sup>18</sup> warned of the emergence of 'automotons' who simply conform to 'the person he is supposed to be' who lacks any sense of spontaneity and the ability to take risks. The market society imposed an understanding of what the successful life was and this most often involved the accumulation of wealth, consumerism and the living a life of dull conformity.

Fromm<sup>19</sup> also warned of people who over-identify with their roles and status groups whose own value comes from external achievements and money. Here the dangers were of citizens so invested in their roles as 'workers' or 'citizens' they had no sense of themselves apart from these performances.

<sup>13</sup> PUTNAM, R., *Bowling Alone*, Touchstone Books, New York, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> FROMM, E., *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>16</sup> HURSTHOUSE, R., *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> FROMM, E., *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> FROMM, E., *op. cit.*, p. 42.



Finally there are those who admire authoritarian leaders and banish the need to think or to experience the world for the self. This deep fear of freedom Fromm felt was particularly pressing in his own time given the rise of fascism and the cult of charismatic leaders like Hitler and Stalin. The idea of freedom concerns the ability of citizens not only to develop themselves but to become critical of their own culture, community or society. Notably such views are no longer popular within current debates with respect of social democrats who seek principled selves orientated to the rules of the community that have been handed down to them. Here there seems to be little concern with questions of individuality or freedom.

These arguments inevitably are more easily connected to the history of the European Enlightenment and the development of political liberalism. The question as to 'how we should live' then should not be directly answered by our society. However if this is inevitably an individual question posed to each of us it does have implications as to how we might best organise our community. Many social liberals have sought to argue for a community that would indeed recognise the spark of individuality of every citizen. Further that within a European context of totalitarianism, the holocaust and slavery that we should continue to mine this tradition for the riches that it can continue to supply within the present. Here I would follow Marshall Berman<sup>20</sup> and argue that the project for a society where citizens were free to become themselves within a supportive community can be traced back to the eighteenth century. However that within the twentieth century that it was the liberal emphasis upon rights and the rule of law as opposed to discriminatory cultures and traditions that best served the project of freedom. Indeed during the twentieth century it was the historical project of the labour movement to widen the appeal of freedom and to offer the possibility of living a life without oppression and servitude to include the poorest members of the community<sup>21</sup>. Freedom would no longer simply be for elites but offered lives of learning and authenticity to those who had been previously excluded. Here we need to briefly return to some of these concerns.

#### IV. Histories of Social Liberalism

That many liberal socialists took seriously the idea of freedom after totalitarianism is perhaps not surprising. There are of course disputes about the extent to which liberal socialist parties in power were able to deliver

<sup>20</sup> BERMAN, M., *The Politics of Authenticity*, Verso, London, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> BRONNER, S., *Reclaiming the Enlightenment*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004.

a programme of increased democratisation and equality, but these were undoubtedly part of the aims of Western European labour movement. If socialists gradually gave up on the idea of ending capitalism they continued to dream a radical vision of a world where capitalism had been *socialised*. The European democratic socialist model of development was often strongly contrasted with the United States that seemingly endured higher levels of inequality and many more of the social problems evident with unrestrained capitalism<sup>22</sup>. If unregulated capitalism produced a form of barbarism by producing extreme inequality, competition and commodification social democrats could present themselves as a force for civilisation. Liberal notions of socialism sought to expand the freedom of the whole community.

These ideas can be traced back to the European Enlightenment that sought to question established ideas of traditional hierarchies. In particular the Enlightenment sought to emphasise the rule of law, constraints being placed upon power and individual autonomy. The extent to which liberal versions of socialism were connected to the Enlightenment could be traced through ideas of progress. Here 'reason' was used to question authority, criticise dogmatic beliefs and promote critical reflection. If the notion of progress seems out of date after postmodernism, the holocaust and imperialism it did not seem that way to many liberal socialists of the period. As Both Bronner and Todorov<sup>23</sup> argue the critical spirit of the Enlightenment is best captured by the demand for democratic and discursive forms of inquiry than the legitimisation of totalitarianism. This tradition is better understood through a discussion of the history of liberalism rather than the shoring up of more authoritarian regimes. It was the liberal emphasis placed upon universal rights, law and of expanding freedom more generally that meant it could not be equated with totalitarian rule. For democratic socialists the liberal tradition was more than the idea that it simply legitimated the rule of elites, but instead offered the possibility of bringing similar freedoms to the down trodden working class population. For example, the Italian liberal socialist Carlo Rosselli<sup>24</sup> argues in the 1930s and 1940s that the European social democracy emerging across Europe is actually a renewed form of liberalism. This is not the Marxist struggle for a utopian society without a state, but of the attempt to build a society on a rights based citizenship that emphasises individual

<sup>22</sup> SASSOON, D., *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, Fontana Press, London, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> BRONNER, S., *op. cit.*, and TODOROV, T., *In Defence of The Enlightenment*, Atlantic Books, London, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> ROSELLI, C., *Liberal Socialism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994.

freedom. Rosselli's vision is of a society where citizens are free to develop themselves no longer 'enslaved' by the daily humiliation of poverty and inequality. For Rosselli<sup>25</sup> 'socialists postulate the end of bourgeois privilege and the effective extension of the liberties of the bourgeoisie to all'. Later Norberto Bobbio<sup>26</sup> would similarly argue for a liberal version of socialism that was built upon the rights of the individual and the democratisation of society more generally. Like Rosselli, Bobbio seeks to redefine socialism as concerned with the spread of liberty and democracy throughout society thereby offering a distinctive vision to that offered by Soviet Marxism. The Italian liberal socialism of Rosselli and Bobbio was born out of the fight against fascism while at the same time wishing to criticise ideas of direct democracy. The defining ethos of liberal socialism was the combination of the values of liberty, democracy and equality holding in check the power of elites from below through the establishment of formal democratic procedures<sup>27</sup>.

If Rosselli and Bobbio identified the Italian problem as one of allowing ordinary people the possibility of experiencing a life of liberty then similar ideas were taking root elsewhere. George Orwell's<sup>28</sup> liberal socialism can be seen as operating along these contours. The nightmare vision of a state controlled society that has eliminated memory, authenticity and dissent is issued as a warning. However Orwell's liberal socialism sought to connect liberty and justice in new ways. Like many in the liberal socialist tradition a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the role of education. A free society depends on people who are not afraid to be free. Freedom is unlikely to be experienced as a value if the education system is reduced to training for employment, but by engaging with unusual ideas individuals are offered the possibility of developing a questioning and critical life. Such democratically inspired individuals Orwell<sup>29</sup> hoped are unlikely to be satisfied with a society that was overly totalitarian or 'organised like a beehive'. Ultimately for Orwell this did not mean a perfect or utopian society but rather one where economic security and liberal freedoms could be preserved while keeping more overtly authoritarian solutions to social problems at bay. Similarly Dewey and Tawney<sup>30</sup> place a great deal

<sup>25</sup> ROSELLI, C., *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> BOBBIO, N., *The Future of Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987.

<sup>27</sup> BOBBIO, N., *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> ORWELL, G., "The Intellectual Revolt: Four Articles, Manchester Evening News" in DAVISON, P. (ed.), *Orwell and Politics*, Penguin, London, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> ORWELL, G., *op. cit.*, p. 437.

<sup>30</sup> DEWEY, J., *Democracy and Education*, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1916 and TAWNEY, R.H., *The Radical Tradition*, Penguin, London, 1961.

of emphasis upon education as the place where freedom could be learned. Freedom here is less an idea and more a learned practice that needs to be apparent in our daily lives.

The liberal socialist tradition in the context of totalitarian Europe sought to extend the idea of liberty to everyone (not simply through the formal expression of rights) but to make liberty part of everyday life, and to curb the worst excesses of capitalism. The collapse of capitalism in the 1930s and the state control of 'actually existed socialism' not surprisingly made this tradition of thinking one of the major benefactors of the post-war settlement within Europe. However this 'golden period' of Western European socialism came to end in the 1980s. Western European liberal socialism had largely been based upon the recognition by the state of working-class institutions like trade unions and the need to build a progressive public culture<sup>31</sup>. Social democratic citizenship was a compromise between capital and labour that helped support a politics that gave expression to the establishment of the welfare state and the idea that all citizens were entitled to develop the self through education. The political parties of this period were more than election winning machines and were largely based upon an alliance between the progressive middle-class and the organised working class. Of course not all of the parties and citizens of this period could be described as liberal (more conservative strains of thought were certainly evident) however my argument is that that it was an important concern within the internal debate.

Orwell<sup>32</sup> in the 1940s speculated whether intellectual freedom would ever be valued as much as job security by working class. Orwell's own first hand experiences of mass unemployment of the 1930s had taught him that working people often value security over freedom. However freedom he felt should not be confined to a minority and any society that wish to consider itself civilised had to offer young people the chance to encounter strange and unusual ideas through education. Orwell also thought that unless working-class people developed a taste for freedom then we would potentially never be free of the threat of authoritarian or fascistic politics. As Tawney<sup>33</sup> argued that if 'to lead a life worthy of human beings is confined to a minority, what is commonly called freedom would more properly be described as privilege'. It was the desire to bring freedom home for the many that drove democratic socialist politics.

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<sup>31</sup> MOSCHANOS, G., *In the Name of Social Democracy: The Great Transformation: 1945 to the Present*, Verso, London, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> ORWELL, G., *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin, London, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> TAWNEY, R.H., *TheAcquisitive Society*, Collins, London, 1961, p. 168.

## V. Market Totalitarianism?

That liberal and democratic socialist ideas valued freedom after and during the dominance of totalitarianism is not surprising. Tvetan Todorov<sup>34</sup> has argued that totalitarianism was a concerted attack on ideas of ambiguity, liberty and dissenting opinions more generally. The state's main requirement from citizens was blind obedience. More recently there has been a concern amongst some critics that the logic of totalitarianism is far from dead but can also be detected in some aspects of neoliberalism. Tony Judt<sup>35</sup> goes as far as to argue that the that the dominance of market driven solutions has a grip on the common sense of elites in a similar fashion to the way that Marxism dominated the minds of many intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s. Here Judt refers to the classic work of Polish intellectual Czeslaw Milosz *The Captive Mind*<sup>36</sup>. Milosz's<sup>37</sup> text describes how a generation of intellectuals across Europe became taken over by a 'new faith'. These intellectuals were largely motivated by a doctrine that sought to produce a perfected mankind arriving at some point in the distant future. Official state sanctioned Marxism offered an of anti-Enlightenment culture as it was driven by a desire to regulate and control thought. Here the liberal traditions of the West were dismissed as doctrinaire, evil, elitist and hostile to the needs of ordinary people. The book stands as a criticism of Left authoritarianism and has a great deal in common with the earlier warnings that Orwell made about totalitarian Marxism that knew more about doctrine than it did about truth. For Judt (2010:179) the contemporary market like authoritarian Marxism has a circle of true believers, is dogmatic and produces a blindness in terms of its short-comings. As Judt (2010:179) argues 'the thrall in which an ideology holds a people is best measured by their collective inability to imagine alternatives'. The critical component of Judt's historical thinking is quite simply to reveal that in recent times that Europeans have seen the world quite differently to that of the present where freedom could be reconciled with the state.

We might press this point further and argue that if totalitarianism marked a war against clearly defined human evils then these features were also evident in the so called war on terror. Democratic societies as we have seen require that we learn to live within freedom. The way in which we do this is to test out our ideas in public and engage in critical discussion with others. In doing this we have to accept not only that our arguments are

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<sup>34</sup> TODOROV, T., *Hope and Memory*, Atlantic Books, London, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> JUDT, T., *The Memory Chalet*, William Heinemann, London 2010.

<sup>36</sup> MILOSZ, T., *The Captive Mind*, Penguin, London, 1981.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

fallible, but that we may need to reconsider our position at a later date. A problem arises once other people's arguments and positions become an 'evil' to be defeated. As the philosopher Richard Bernstein<sup>38</sup> pointed out there are marked similarities with this view and that which pre-occupied American neo-conservatives in the war on terror. The attempt to impose 'good' through force as opposed to clearly defined 'evils' reveals an anti-democratic form of politics. Indeed in the wake of the mass demonstrations against the war there was a widespread fear that the United States were potentially abandoning an Enlightenment based politics. Here European ideals remain less a matter of philosophical abstraction but could be related to secular principles such as the rule law, human rights and of course freedom. The good society in this setting would need to be the pluralistic society where different ideas of the good can be weighed against one another. Especially important here is the idea that fallible human-beings can make mistakes and given the opportunity once justice has been seen to be done to change course

As Todorov<sup>39</sup> has more recently argued if individual ideas of freedom are the Other of the totalitarian experience then under neoliberalism it is collectivism. Whereas social liberalism sought to reconcile a number of human goods most notably liberty and community such ambiguities seem to be absent from neoliberal ideas. Under neoliberalism the state can only intervene to enhance competition and not to safe guard the security of fellow citizens. Further the assumption is often made that individuals are rational actors simply acting to maximise their market returns. This assumes that all humans are equally motivated by money and that markets are neutral mechanisms fairly distributing goods. The reduction of human-beings to a single principle of market inspired freedom ends up driving out other values. Social liberalism then sought to speak of freedom the extent to which it recognises that human-beings were social actors whose freedom depended upon social relationships rather than the market. There is then a totalitarian logic to neoliberalism the extent to which it is only able to offer a 'one-eyed' understanding of human freedom and the ways in which the state is seen as a form of evil from which human-beings need to be liberated. Such a situation however can-not be accurately described as one where freedom has triumphed over community as some of the communitarians have claimed. Here my argument is that in the European setting we could argue that any concern for the authentic freedom of the self has been abandoned to service the market. Market driven initiatives harbour

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<sup>38</sup> BERNSTEIN, R., *The Abuse of Evil*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> TODOROV, T., *The Totalitarian Experience*, Seagull Books, London, 2011, p. 56.

a view of the citizen as someone who treats human life like an economic balance sheet. Social liberalism had a more complex understanding of human freedom that recognised that the project of becoming ourselves was not only precarious, but that we would choose different values from one another within this process. Further that to secure the freedom of everyone then individual liberty would need to be balanced against other values like responsibility, equality and community. While preferable to neoliberalism, communitarianism on the other hand has a tendency to prefer community over liberty. My argument is that with good reason European social democracy needs to be concerned about freedom given the violence of the past, but also that such features avoid the overly conformist view of the self often preferred by communitarian writing.

## VI. European Cosmopolitan Social Democracy

The other feature missing from communitarianism within a European setting is its neglect of more global frames of reference. There is a general call within much communitarian writing to recover a sense of the good society and shared moral norms by reinvestigating lost traditions and political ideas. From a cosmopolitan perspective this is a deeply problematic argument. As Ulrich Beck<sup>40</sup> argues this position tends to lapse into methodological nationalism. By this he means that political identity becomes overly connected to nationalist histories and understandings and fails to appreciate the ways that power and political ideologies cut across borders. A more cosmopolitan frame of reference seeks to position states within more global co-ordinates, histories and identities. Such features have been evident in the argument thus far as I have sought to talk about *European* notions of democratic socialism. Elsewhere Beck<sup>41</sup> has argued that we have now moved into the second age of modernity and that our political compass needs to be remade in respect of a newly emerged global society. This is less a world of separate nation-states, but more one of interconnected national societies where the idea of human rights takes on a new normative power. Ours is a world of refugees, global travel, cultural inter-mixing, 24 hour news and an emergent trans-national civil society. In this reading, social democracy needs to be remade in terms of a new global society where states no longer directly define the political. Further freedom has new possibilities within such a society because as traditions become increasingly open to question through the

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<sup>40</sup> BECK, U., *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> BECK, U., "The cosmopolitan perspective: sociology of the second age of modernity", *British Journal of Sociology* no. 51(1), 2000, pp. 79-105.

flow of information they lose some of their binding force. For example, the globalisation of religion has meant that sticking to the spiritual traditions of your community is one choice amongst the many that you might make. The second modernity is an individualised modernity where we are increasingly compelled to reinvent ourselves and reconstruct our own biographies in an increasingly uncertain world.

These features have clearly been influential in helping shape Anthony Giddens's<sup>42</sup> idea of the third way. What made the third way distinctive is the argument that 'politics should take a positive attitude towards globalisation'<sup>43</sup>. While recognising that neoliberal forms of globalisation can indeed have a destructive impact we should be careful of retreating into a politics of protectionism and warring economic blocs. Third way politics not only seeks to break with old style statist social democracy and neoliberalism, but also offers a new politics of citizenship that presses 'no rights without responsibilities'<sup>44</sup>. By this Giddens is concerned that old style social democracy stressed entitlements over duties. To this degree the new communitarianism is a continuation of these arguments. However as we shall see there are also differences.

The cosmopolitanism of Beck and Giddens has been criticised for failing to adopt a critical enough language of capitalism. This seems even more evident after the financial crash. There is now a more concerted need to develop a more sceptical vision of capitalism and to try and think of a different kind of economy. Further Jonathan Rutherford<sup>45</sup> has rightly argued that considered more socially that cosmopolitanism tends to appeal to elites as well as the middle class populations rather than the marginalised. For more subordinate populations globalisation has been experienced as an attack on more traditional cultures and ways of life. The arrival of the post-industrial economy is not so much experienced as an opportunity for cosmopolitan as it is through a sense of loss and resentment. More specifically cosmopolitanism has too little to say about the increasing sense of powerlessness and disenfranchisement of more subordinate and working-class populations. Here Rutherford adds that neoliberal forms of globalisation have been accompanied across Europe by the rise of the racist Right who act as a focus for a growing sense of resentment felt amongst working-class populations. The new communitarianism begins with a sense of connection that many feel to their host communities and an increasing sense of powerlessness and resentment in the face of global social change. These

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<sup>42</sup> GIDDENS, A., *The Third Way*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> RUTHERFORD, J., *op. cit.*



are all important features and mark a significant advance over the third way which in practice tended to adopt a market friendly form of optimism and have too little to contribute on more complex cultural divisions.

The problem remains however that communitarianism's 'methodological nationalism' has too little to say about global social change. If cosmopolitanism lacks a more earthy sense of capitalism, class and social division then communitarian perspectives need to say more about how to rebuild a more progressive sense of social democracy in our global times. For example, Beck and Grande<sup>46</sup> argue that the relative success of the European project after totalitarianism can be seen in the way that it has built a relatively peaceful Europe based upon human rights and democracy. This formation has become increasingly important in the context of a faltering American empire, but that it needs a new narrative to legitimate itself to European citizens. In order to counter the widespread nationalist resentment against Europe, Beck and Grande (2007) propose a new cosmopolitan Europe based upon human rights, a democratically reformed EU, new civic initiatives and the welcoming of the Other. While these proposals are all to be welcomed what is missing is a recognition of the economic roots of the resentment against the European ideal. While the European Union may well survive the current crisis of capitalism its fate is far from certain. Missing here is a new European project that has broken with neoliberal economics and is able to deliver both freedom and prosperity for all of its citizens. Further we would also need to look more carefully as to why European social democracy has gone into decline and allowed for the rise of the racist Right. Another way of posing this question would be to ask what are the ideas and principles that could lead to a European wide social democracy becoming reconstructed? If the communitarian agenda is currently overly nationalistic and cosmopolitanism disconnected from the concerns of more 'ordinary' citizens what shape might an alternative take?

## VII. European Social Democracy Reconsidered

Despite cosmopolitan enthusiasm for the European project we would need to recognise its role in down grading European social democracy. Norman Birnbaum<sup>47</sup> has argued that in more recent times that the European Left has been put on the defensive as the European Union has admitted

<sup>46</sup> BECK, U. and GRANDE, E., "Cosmopolitanism: Europe's Way Out of the Crisis", *European Journal of Social Theory* 10(1), 2007, pp. 67-85.

<sup>47</sup> BIRNBAUM, N., "Is Social Democracy Dead? The Crisis of Capitalism in Europe", *New Labour Forum* 19(1), pp. 24-31.

the more easily exploitable labour markets of Eastern Europe thereby undermining the bargaining position of Western Europeans, and the consistent ideological attack that has been mounted on the costly welfare regimes in the age of globalisation. The global movement of capital allows 'regime shopping' and pushes the race to the bottom in terms of social standards is one part 'myth' and one part reality<sup>48</sup>. Global processes have put pressure on labour to remove employment protection, down grade welfare and subject workers to increasingly insecure forms of employment. Rather than a social Europe there has been the emergence of an increasingly low paid and insecure Europe that after the financial crash is likely to become even more so. Perhaps then it is not surprising that many have taken refuge in racist politics. However we need to be careful of the view that globalisation simply equals social retrenchment as the evidence suggests a wide variety of institutional variation amongst welfare regimes across Europe<sup>49</sup>. Further there is also a considerable evidence of resistance on the part of trade unions and other social movements against the attack on the welfare and social rights. However all of these features beg the question as to whether a new European social democracy can be reconstructed in these circumstances?

There are of course considerable grounds for pessimism. While the state is more likely to intervene into the economy than during the 1930s the socialist opposition to capitalism has been substantially reduced. If the United States remains the world's dominant power then its empire is a neoliberal one. In this respect, the power of financial institutions and corporations remain largely unchecked by the current crisis. As the sociologist Michael Mann<sup>50</sup> has commented 'power, not efficiency, rules the world'. However as I have already indicated there remains room for manoeuvre for a reinvented social democracy that takes freedom seriously. This can-not take the form of simply returning to the liberal socialism of the past, but would at least need to be guided by this spirit in new times.

Part of the answer as to what the 'new' social democracy could be would be 'cultural'. As Henning Meyer<sup>51</sup> argues the social democracy of the past

<sup>48</sup> GRAY, A., *Unsocial Europe*, Pluto Press, London 2004.

<sup>49</sup> HAY, C., "Globalization, Economic Change and the Welfare State", in SYKES, R., PALMER, B. and PRIOR, P. (eds.), *Globalization and European Welfare States*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001.

<sup>50</sup> MANN, M., *Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Conversations with John A. Hall*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> MEYER, M., "The Challenge of European Social Democracy: Communitarianism and Cosmopolitanism United", in MEYER, M. and RUTHERFORD, J. (eds.), *The Future of European Social Democracy*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2011 p. 155.

was a 'way of life' that found expression through independent education associations, newspapers and other formations outside of professional political parties. This moves the focus of social democracy beyond the centralised organisation of election winning machines by elites to consider the connections that social democratic ideas might have in relation to civil society more generally. The question here is how can social democracy become a cultural movement, and how might this be achieved? The social democracy of the past was based upon the power of trade unions and the social state. Any renewal of a social democratic project within the European setting would also be based upon these features, but would need to become a broader citizen's movement that included the horizons of the young who are being particularly affected by unemployment across Europe. Further the other main feature impacting upon the development of a new European social democracy are the long term consequences of the environment crisis and our responsibilities to future generations. The long term unsustainability of consumer capitalism and the damage that it is doing not only to the external environment but also to ourselves needs to be at the centre of the debate. If the social democracy of the past sought to offer citizens equal freedom to become what they needed to be in an unequal and unfair world we need to return to some of these features. However consumer orientated citizenship continues to speak of the need for upward mobility so that citizens can lead lives of over-consumption. Here a liberal and responsible social democracy needs to offer something beyond the democratised dream of celebrity lifestyles. This would require less 'hair-shirted' social democrats, but rather a new emphasis upon the ideas of freedom and responsibility in a fragile world. Policy proposals would need to restrict working hours, increase taxes for the very wealthy while funding public works that aimed to 'green' the economy. If the catastrophe facing European democratic societies of the 1930s was fascism, the 1980s nuclear war, then the new danger is most accurately portrayed as environmental collapse and periods of resource war. The 'greening' of social democracy becomes important in the context of peak oil, climate change and the new global economy built upon unsustainable levels of consumption.

The environmental agenda however serves both the values of responsibility as well as freedom. Much of the criticism in respect of the need to build sustainable communities has argued that it is necessary to break with capitalist modernity to enhance levels of well-being<sup>52</sup>. Here the argument is that global consumer capitalism is not only unsustainable but that it creates individualistic citizens whose lives are dominated by insecurity and

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<sup>52</sup> HAMILTON, C., *Growth Fetish*, Pluto Press, London, 2003.

unhappiness. In these terms we need to recognise that the capitalism and social democracy that built European prosperity after the defeat of fascism did so without much concern of the impact that economic growth would have on the environment. As John Urry<sup>53</sup> argues neither the American dream nor the less carbon intensive European dream is a suitable model for the rest of the planet. Here I would argue it is better to address these arguments in terms of freedom. In other words, an argument based upon freedom is more concerned with the meaningfulness of our lives rather than the need to simply conform to a consumer driven life-style of upward mobility. Further it also addresses the corresponding fear that a sustainable society would require Orwellian levels of state control in respect of the ordinary lives of citizens. This may of course be different from achieving universal happiness. As ecological educationalist David Orr<sup>54</sup> argues a more sustainable future requires citizen's not only who can think over longer periods of time, but who have also learned to be sceptical about more conventional notions of success. This is less the recovery of a new puritanism (as it is sometimes claimed) but an attempt to disconnect ideas of self-realisation from market success. The freedom to think for ourselves about our needs and identities is assaulted daily by the manufactured dreams of the economic system which promotes an unsustainable future. This is indeed markedly different from the generation of socialists who were confronted by the lure of authoritarian fascism of the past, but the need to imaginatively rethink what we mean by freedom is just as pressing. This time it needs to be done in terms of a sense of limits, fragility and of course responsibility for the citizens and living beings of the future. This will undoubtedly require a rethinking of actually existed European social democracy to consider the possibility of justice and democracy within the limits of the planet. As Tim Jackson<sup>55</sup> has argued this is not only an enormous task, but one that demands that we rethink and steadily abandon both neoliberalism and the consumer orientated society for one that values non-commodified time, community, equality and of course the opportunity to develop ourselves. We need a new narrative about who we are suitable for our times where questions of freedom and responsibility are central.

Franz Kafka<sup>56</sup> in the Berlin of the 1920s once wrote a short story called 'A Fasting Showman'. It tells the story of a performer who initially

<sup>53</sup> URRY, J., *Climate Change and Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 155.

<sup>54</sup> ORR, D., "What is education for?", in GOODLAD, S.J. (ed.), *Democracy: The Last Best Hope*, Jossey-Bass, New York 1994.

<sup>55</sup> JACKSON, T., *Prosperity Without Growth*, Eathscan, London 2009.

<sup>56</sup> KAFKA, F., 'A Fasting Showman', in *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories*, Penguin, London, 1978.

attracts the attention of audiences by fasting for 40 days at a time in a cage. However the public soon grows bored with this spectacle, and the performer joins a circus. Here he is allowed to fast for longer, but is too weak to stand and again fails to capture the imagination of the public. Lying almost dead in his cage he is asked why he had lived a life of self-denial. He answers by saying because he could never find anything he wanted to eat. A life of freedom is sometimes given up for the security of the cage. If in the past the threat to freedom came in the form of the authoritarian state today it remains under threat by both the orthodoxies of the market place and a conservative communitarianism. Liberal socialists need to demonstrate that the heritage of the European Enlightenment has a place in our hearts, public policies and common futures. Yet in bringing alive this rich tradition of thinking we need to both recover the past as well as a concern for the future at the same time.