

Annex to Esko Seppanen's book

'Life as an MEP': The Way Forward for the Left (October 1997)

Mankind cannot defy the law of entropy: order tends towards disorder. The world can however be changed by work, and everyone should have an opportunity to work, for it is through work that people become truly human.

In recent decades the world has become quite different from what it was, but the Left has not. It, too, should change. If it does not change it will be nothing but a labour movement project belonging to the past. Social democracy and communism are mass movements with the mark of the 20th century on them. The 21st Century is coming. When it does, the Left must not be left sitting in the past.

What does it mean to be on the Left?

The Left has always challenged old power, and has been in favour of overthrowing unjust privileges. In the past the Left has always had a concern and a responsibility for its fellow humans, it has been society's social conscience. On the Left there have often been members of both the social and the socialist tendencies, even though 'social' is quite different from 'socialist'. The latter cannot be derived from the former.

We must not be ahistorical. Thus on the basis of past experience we can now say that in socialism there have been those on the right and on the left. Being on the right means making capitalism into a religion and where necessary constructing authoritarian/totalitarian state structures to support it. Those on the right oppose the full power of the people, namely democracy. If socialists do this, they too are on the right. In fact the question of who is on the right and who is on the left depends entirely on a person's opinion on this issue.

'Socialism' is currently hard to define. In the past it was the common ownership of the means of production. Production was seen to be nationalized, thus the means of production should belong to everyone. Today production is more nationalized than ever, but it is not possible for the means of production to belong to each person. The development of science, technology and

the organization of production has burst the bounds of the old definition of socialism. The technological economic system is in essence the new supranational capitalism.

All that exists is the 'free' market and supranational capitalism. There is no longer any such thing as socialism. After the experience of 'real existing socialism', it may remain for one or two generations as an alternative to reality, lacking credibility. Before socialism comes back it must be made clear whether the market as defined in socialist terms is even possible, what is an unfree market and how it works.

It may be worth preserving socialism as a matter of faith in the vision of the Left. If new socialism is the theory of liberation from the power of money, it is not merely the ideology but also the theology of human liberation.

Being on the Left today means challenging the existing power by supporting restrictions on the logic of capitalism and being prepared to limit the freedom of capitalists. A person of the Left is one who believes that many things will be dealt with better, more economically, more fairly and more equally if they are the responsibility of the 'public authorities'. That there are progressives on the Left is something which cannot be denied.

However, being on the Left does not necessarily mean being progressive. It does not of itself mean anything. The Left is not, for example, on the side of the poor unless it sides with them every time when a question relating to them comes up.

What is progress?

It is a movement of the next millennium, equipping us for the future. The most progressive thing may be the attempt to save the world from the warming of the atmosphere. Progressives are in favour of economic growth if it is qualitative and not quantitative. Natural resources must not be wasted and therefore new economic growth must be compatible with the environment. Progressiveness also means working in favour of democracy. The Left must be synonymous with democracy. If this means transcending capitalism, so be it. Progressiveness is a high moral position and this means questioning the basic premise of capitalism, namely that some people should own the product of the work of others. Does new socialism need to be anything other than a moral ethos in favour of right and against wrong?

If socialism is defined in the old way as the prohibition of private property, it must be seen that it is not possible to prohibit all private property. If you want to ban something you have to say what you are banning. If we ban private property in banks, insurance companies and heavy industry, we must consider who will then own them and by what logic they will be administered. If the alternative is state monopoly socialism, this will not sell.

Circumventing the state and setting up 'enterprise democracy' was tried in the former Yugoslavia, where firms managed by the workers were tested over a long period. They came up against the problem that the workers who managed capital-rich means of production were in a more advantageous position than the labour-rich enterprises. In the name of enterprise democracy the workers hived off for their own benefit the yield on capital from the nationalized enterprises. This was unfair and did not promote the emergence of a shared social responsibility, though it was not this but ethnic hatred which brought Yugoslavia down. If we want 'enterprise democracy' we must know what we mean by that, and according to what logic decisions are to be taken.

One practical question is whether the Left should retain socialism in its party programme in the interests of preserving historical continuity. The word has been spattered with human blood so many times that it is perhaps not worth retaining; in any case deeds, not words are what matters. What is lasting in our ideological tradition will survive even without conservation, but the Left must build its new self-awareness with new words and topics.

On the Left we are often impatient. Those who demand changes wish to live to share in them. The quickest way to achieve change is by revolution. The key question is what happens afterwards. If stable revolutionary conditions cannot be created for the middle class, it will normally be impossible to obtain majority support for a revolution. On the other hand, if the people have 'nothing to lose but their chains' it is possible that they will overturn the existing order themselves, but in politics calling for revolution can only be a belief and a hope for tomorrow, merely a revolution of awareness. Revolutionary changes to the technological system arise only as imperatives coming from outside the system, for example, natural disasters or the destruction of the environment, or else in the form of a collapse of the system's own logic, for example through a stock market crash.

Most left-wing parties seem to approve the free market of capital as a social inevitability and to be adapting their political activity to the demands and imperatives of the market, even though this is in contradiction with their own basic objectives, i.e. the taming of market forces. Market forces are a faceless multitude rather than any individual person. Market forces are themselves the logic of capitalism. Some people earn their monthly salaries and fees from making these

forces work, and those who operate this system do not necessarily need to support the underlying values of capitalism. Being a market force can be a job, just like looking after children. Instead of children, these boys and girls are looking after other people's property.

If no revolution is coming, and no environmentally friendly socialism is on the horizon, the new problem of the Left becomes to reconcile theory and practice, to unite words with deeds. The credibility of words is seriously tested if the theory talks about democracy, equality and fairness, and the practice is its opposite, namely today's markets without borders and the EU's development into a supranational state.

The EU's free market values are in conflict with what the Left has called for in the past. The Treaty establishing the EU includes the freedom for capital to flow where it pleases. The Eurobureaucracy with its EC Court of Justice does its best to protect the freedom of the market, and independent states are unable to place obstacles or limits on the movement of capital. The EU is like a police organization to which one can denounce infringements of the freedom of movement of capital, and which must ex officio take measures to eliminate such restrictions.

The EU's legal system is governed by the logic of capitalism, according to which the unseen hand is the dictator of the system. The EU is not the brake fluid but the engine oil of market forces. This one side of the question. The other is the logic of integration: the federalist EU is becoming a supranational state.

The use of these terms is complicated by the fact that a federation can also be a form of loose cooperation and democracy, not merely the creation of a supranational state. In the former case it is described as joint activity by independent states and peoples on an equal footing. However, the word has lost its original meaning. In the EU federalism describes the attempt to achieve a supranational union state: decision-making which transcends national boundaries. As the EU federalizes, it becomes a supranational union. In the EU, in fact, 'federalists' means 'unionists': those who are creating a central power based on the inequality of nations and supranational decision-making. The work of building this federalist structure, which is not done consciously but which is emerging as the result of forces and logics tending in many different directions, can even be disguised as defending freedom. History shows examples of the paradox whereby, when you strive to achieve freedom for all, you end up by restricting the freedom of the individual.

The only possible counterweight to supranational capitalism are the nation states. To advocate

nation states is to cry for democracy: the republic and democracy go hand in hand. A social struggle must also be carried on to defend social awareness, which represents the sense and feeling of solidarity. It is a struggle to defend the public authority and the high moral ground. Many elections in 1997 showed that there is a political demand for such activity, and this demand is not for parties but for issues. We should heed the shouts of our voters and not just shout ourselves.

In Finland, democracy has developed along with the nation state, and through the nation state people have experienced the power to influence their own lives. Is democracy only possible within nation states? At any rate the EU does not provide the same feeling for people of belonging together, and has not succeeded in developing democratic forms. EU

democracy is thus simply a zero sum game: when one closes the democratic deficit in one area it opens up in another. In nation states this is not the only option, and the level of democracy can be increased at the expense of autocracy, oligarchy or faceless power.

For Finland to leave the EU would not be a solution. It would require a government in power which was hostile to the EU (as in Malta) and a majority of the people supporting its leaders. There would still be strong forces opposing such a move: our own country's opposition in favour of the EU, its political allies in other countries and European capitalism. In the face of this centralization of power, Finland's leaving the EU by a majority decision is not a real alternative. The only way to get out of the EU honourably would be as a result of a process where there were internal conflicts within the EU and where other countries left leave at the same time. In this world you need to have friends.

The same applies to EMU. Joining EMU is irrevocable. Since leaving EMU would lead to intolerable political and economic instability, we should choose a solution which maintains our alternatives. If it is easier not to join than to get out, it is worthwhile remaining outside EMU from the very start. It will be worth waiting and seeing like Sweden, Denmark and Britain. From a Finnish point of view EMU is somebody else's project and not ours. The others decided on it even before Finland joined the EU.

The Left must if necessary defend the best achievements of bourgeois liberalism. We must be naturally permissive, approving and multi-valued. We must be culturally at one with our voters. We must work towards improving people's own power for action, their independence, initiative, selfreliance and enterprise. The Left must promote and support small enterprises which the

state exploits.

The church, too, promotes other values. The Lutheran ethic starts from the relationship with one's neighbour. If the church had not existed, there would have been no individual moral restraints. If the priests are on the side of the poor, there is no need to deny the existence of God in order to break the power of the reactionary clergy.

If we want continuity and predictability in society, these arise from party structures. The parties must be democratic. In the interests of the commitment of their members, it is important that they should be involved in the process, voluntarily and not under pressure. If the EU creates for many people who are used to the idea of the nation state, a feeling of being excluded from decision-making and of increasing alienation from the growing power of the Euro-bureaucracy, new socialism is above all about participation.

Although the nation state is the main political playing field, many alternative models talk of a citizens' society instead of a state. What is a citizens' society? If it is not the power of the parties, whose power is it? If in a state society there are parliamentary democracy and political machinery, how, in a citizens' society, will laws, social organization, stability of social life and the freedom of the individual be created without the power of the state? Regular and repetitive activities must not be left entirely up to the free operation of the citizen. For example, the income transfers for social purposes linked to the redistribution of income require at least a minimum of coercion. If, even in a citizens' society, there is a need for a basic law, for police and armed forces, and if decision-makers always have to be elected, is not that an alternative, and is there then any need for an alternative to the state? In the last analysis, can the citizens' society perhaps only exist through state structures? The target of the alternative and citizens' movements are the national organizations which emerge when politics alienate people from the things they themselves regard as important. In Nordic countries the key organizations in the emergence of an opposition, the development of an awareness and the launching of changes are the trade unions. Further south they do not have the same importance.

The Greens, an ex-new force, are now in a deeper crisis than the Left. They now swear by economic growth and busy themselves with the same procedures on the same subjects as the old parties. They have no ideological basis other than as a single-issue environmental movement. They seem to approve the logic of capitalism and integration and thereby the human race's new relationship with the environment: a free-market attempt to achieve

economic growth on the basis of the consumption of non-renewable natural resources. Although the things the Greens regard as most important are more topical than ever, the movement's social opportunity has already passed.

The key position in all these changes is ultimately held by the political parties. The most important battles in society are being fought by the political parties and cooperative partnerships.

The cooperative partnership closest to the Left Alliance are the Social Democrats. It is hard for us to link up with anybody else to our right. However, there is in Finland one special phenomenon which does not exist in other countries: the Finnish Centre Party. For historical reasons it too is a partner close to the Left Alliance.

As well as a political party, those who wish to improve the world need a sense of social responsibility. They should therefore all adopt social guarantees: goods should only be allowed on to the market if the producer can guarantee that the highest level of work protection and social security provisions are complied with in their production. If the market is open, the EU must be used to improve legislation on employment, work security, environmental protection and social security. This of course means extra supranational decision-making, but in these areas this is to Finland's advantage. In our society conditions of work bear comparison with any other country.

We must rehabilitate the sense of community: caring about people. If those on the Left have lost the passion and feeling and love for the beauty of life and the arts, they will not value human resources and the diversity of living.

The Left should be a 'YES' movement for democracy. We should learn from the past that centralized government should never again become an unavoidable imperative. The Left should be synonymous with democracy. For this reason we must say YES to national independence: to the republic. This means YES to our own currency, our own defence, our own legislation and our own countryside. For the same reason this yes is a no to the EU as a supranational state and to EMU.

What is the alternative?

The alternative is a shortening of working time and redistribution of labour. Working time has not been shortened for 30 years, even though scientific and technological development is leading to the disappearance of more jobs than are being created, and although work is being organized more efficiently than ever. The reduction of working time is not the only correct model, but it must be done in different areas in different ways as appropriate. The same model does not suit all areas, but those working in all sectors must show solidarity with the unemployed. Shortening working time so that new jobs are created will succeed more quickly by initially reducing wages and then gradually bringing them back up. In return, people will get more free time. The Left needs a social action plan, aimed at the redistribution of work and the reduction of working time. In 1900 a person had to work 3200 hours each year: now, a hundred years later, 1300 hours a year might be sufficient. The remainder of working time could then be used to improve the quality of life.

The alternative is red and green. The Left can have nothing to do with constructing a throw-away society based on the limitless exploitation of natural resources. We on the left must be in favour of conserving the diversity of life and working against the self-destruction of species. If the Left is not green, will it never return? It must be red and green like a beetroot, with red roots and green leaves. It must be in favour of the diversity of life and against the chemical pollution of the environment and the commercial manipulation of genetic material. To this there is no alternative.

The alternative is democracy and equality. If it is democracy, it is not the federalization of the EU, which is linked to supranational decision-making and EMU, with others deciding our affairs for us.

Equality is a women's issue. The public authorities in the Nordic countries have freed our sisters from the yoke of the housewife society and the inevitability of the man as breadwinner. We must hold on to this. Although people are born as men or women, the demand for equality between the sexes is a socially sustainable development. Equality also means opposing racism and supporting the rights of poor nations.

The alternative can only be internationalism. The solution to the contradictions of global capitalism demands international cooperation but also the right of self-determination and self-government for nations. The objective should be, in the words of the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright, solidarity between people: 'it must transcend all barriers of nationality, race and creed so that it changes into a consciousness of global responsibility'. It must also embrace coming generations. The important challenge for the Left is to unite international and national solidarity.

We must break the gloomy unanimity of the EU period which is advantageous to capitalists. They do not want any changes to the current course of development, and they therefore represent reaction. The rest of us must be progressive and must produce a hope for better things. Although there do not seem to be any opposing forces or alternatives to supranational capitalism, they do exist. They are merely hiding from us. Our task is to

find them and force them to creep out of their holes. Where there is a will there is a way. Where there is a way there is an alternative. Let us care for others.