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The New European Left

A Socialism for the Twenty-First Century?

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For Andrew, with love

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When I began work on the book in early 2009, my late husband Redmond O'Neill was still alive. Redmond had worked with me to evolve the left realignment thesis outlined in this book's prequel – *European Communism since 1989: Towards a New European Left?* – published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2000. In the years that followed, he encouraged me to go on to analyse and account for the development of this political current in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Although the book was mostly written after Redmond's death in October 2009, it is nevertheless to a great extent the result of our political collaboration over many years.

1
Survival and Renewal: The 1990s

Almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on the occasion of the German federal elections in September 2009, the *International Herald Tribune* marked the electoral victory of the German right with the headline, 'Is socialism dying?'[1] The German Social Democratic Party or the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) took 23% of the votes – its lowest poll since the Second World War – just months after the European elections registered a poor performance from left-wing candidates across the European Union (EU). As the article went on to observe, 'Even in the midst of one of the greatest challenges to capitalism in 75 years, involving a breakdown of the financial system because of "irrational exuberance", greed and the weakness of regulatory systems, European socialists and their leftist cousins have not found a compelling response, let alone taken advantage of the failures of the right.'

There is no doubt that across Europe the failure of the social democratic parties to present a 'compelling response' to the economic crisis has led to a wave of electoral setbacks. But this is not as true of these parties' 'leftist cousins', which have in fact notched up some modest advances, continuing to make some electoral gains, intervening in mainstream politics and further developing along the left trajectory which so surprised commentators in the first decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Of course, the tally across Europe in the last ten years includes significant defeats as well as small advances; nevertheless, these experiences have generally led to a positive reappraisal of strategy and tactics rather than defeatism or dissolution. Thus the political current which emerged from the wreckage of the communist

movement in 1989 has shown itself to have considerable resilience. The German Left Party – *Die Linke* – is perhaps the most successful of the European left parties, and the *International Herald Tribune*, in remarking on the bad result of the SPD in the German federal election, might also have noted that *Die Linke* increased its number of seats in the Bundestag from 54 to 76, increasing its share of the vote by 3.2% to 11.9%, and consolidating its position as a party of the whole of Germany.

The emergence during the 1990s of electorally significant left parties, largely rooted in the communist tradition, confounded political observers and challenged the conventional wisdom that communism as a significant political current was dead. Despite expectations of the total demise of the communist movement, a number of West European communist parties, or sections thereof, survived crises and splits to evolve into viable new political forces which were able to occupy the political space to the left of social democracy. Their coherent articulation of opposition to the Maastricht Treaty, and their defence of living standards, government spending and the welfare state, ensured a credible level of parliamentary support – often up to 10% – in key countries, such as France, Spain, Italy and Germany. Internal reform and theoretical development led in many instances to the emergence of a new type of left politics – more open to different traditions, linking up with social movements, and developing and strengthening green, feminist, anti-racist and pacifist policies, as well as Marxist-based socialism. Later in the 1990s their identity evolved as part of the developing anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation movement. A key challenge confronting the most successful parties was their relationship with the larger social democratic parties to their right, with which they faced the question of coalition or cooperation. Looking back on two decades of left party development it is clear that this has remained the most significant challenge, and these parties have risen or fallen largely on the basis of the balance of their electoral and political relationships with social democracy. In the context of the current economic crisis and increasing protest in the face of government spending cuts, these parties could make significant political gains by articulating a popular social and economic alternative to the cuts agenda; it remains to be seen whether they will be able to rise to meet this political opportunity at a time when social democratic parties are failing to do so.

The political context

From the vantage point of the post-9/11 world, where 'international terrorism' has supplanted the 'Soviet threat' as the lowest common denominator fear factor and the increasingly globalised community faces new challenges such as climate change and cyber warfare, it is hard to fully comprehend the political significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union which followed just two years later. Yet those events radically and fundamentally reshaped world politics and economics and made possible everything that has happened since. The existence of the Soviet Union and its eventual conflict with the United States shaped most of the history of the twentieth century. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm put it:

> With the significant exception of the years from 1933 to 1945, the international politics of the entire Short Twentieth Century since the October revolution can best be understood as a secular struggle by the forces of the old order against social revolution, believed to be embodied in, allied with, or dependent on the fortunes of the Soviet Union and international communism.[2]

In short, capitalism was seen to have won the historic contest between the two great twentieth-century systems – a view most popularly put by Francis Fukuyama, who declared that 'the end of history' had arrived, as the very process of historical change was supposedly now concluded with the victory of capitalism. Twenty years later this assertion seems hubristic but at the time it resonated with the triumphalism of the Western elites as they saw, at last, the securing of the goal of the post-Second World War open door policy. No longer were vast swathes of the world to be excluded from the free market because of their state socialist economic framework. Indeed, in the field of economics, the monetarism and neo-liberalism pioneered as government policy by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher seemed set to sweep all before them. As the 1990s progressed, country after country opened itself, not only to the free movement of goods but also to the free movement of capital, as globalisation extended from the field of trade to that of international capital flows. The main beneficiary was the United States of America, as the post-Second World

War direction of capital flows reversed and the world's savings flowed from the poorest countries in the world to the richest.

At the same time, inequalities between and within nations reached levels never before seen in world history. By a perverse twist of logic, reversing cause and effect, the social dislocation and political upheavals which resulted from the economic squeeze upon a continent such as Africa were taken by columnists in 'serious' British newspapers to argue that the end of colonialism might itself have been a mistake. Indeed, the early 1990s were rife with attempts to rehabilitate the idea of colonialist intervention. In January 1993, Hoover Institution fellow Angelo Codevilla wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that it was 'time to rethink the Wisdom of Anti-Colonialism', promoting colonialism 'as the solution to the crisis then developing in the Balkans with the destruction of Yugoslavia'.[3] Three months later, British historian Paul Johnson wrote an article in the *New York Times* entitled 'Colonialism's back – and not a moment too soon'. Praising the US invasion of Somalia in 1992, Johnson stated, 'The basic problem is obvious but is never publicly admitted: some states are not yet fit to govern themselves. There is a moral issue here: The civilized world has a mission to go out to these desperate places and govern.'[4]

On the military plane, while the Warsaw Pact dissolved, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) announced plans not only to expand into Eastern Europe, but also to develop an increasing 'out-of-area' orientation pioneered during the first Gulf War of 1991, explicitly presenting itself as a world police force, reminiscent of nineteenth-century colonialism. For the first time since its formation, the US-led military alliance launched offensive military operations on the continent of Europe – in the former Yugoslavia, first in Bosnia and then, with the illegal 1999 bombing campaign, against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The bombing began just days after the first wave of expansion had inducted Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland into NATO's ranks. At its fiftieth anniversary summit in Washington, DC, on 24 April 1999, conducted during the onslaught on Yugoslavia, NATO took the historic decision to extend its sphere of military intervention. Two years later, in 2001, NATO began its decade-long war on Afghanistan.

But the collapse of the Soviet system also had unforeseen domestic policy consequences. In the sphere of social policy, Newt Gingrich, the leader of the Republicans in the US Congress, claimed that

extensive welfare provision and progressive taxation were artefacts of the Cold War. He argued that with the external 'threat' of communism banished, these internal concessions to the socialist threat should be dismantled.[5] The EU's 1991 Maastricht Treaty seemed to signal a similar move towards a more US-influenced model of social provision in Western Europe which the social democratic parties – generally responsible for the introduction of post-Second World War welfare states – were unable or unwilling to resist. In fact, the extent to which social democratic parties were affected by the political changes accompanying the fall of the Berlin Wall has been insufficiently appreciated.

In tandem with the view that communism was finished came the idea that socialism, as an economic, social and political perspective, which had informed – to one degree or another – the philosophy of the great majority of the European labour movement for more than a century, was also fatally damaged, and so, by association, was social democracy. What was remarkable was how rapidly this perspective was adopted by the social democratic parties themselves, as well as the speed with which they embraced the central tenets of the economic and social philosophy of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Tony Blair, the leader of the British Labour Party at that time, went further than most, implying that the very formation of the Labour Party at the turn of the twentieth century had been a mistake. He suggested that it had split Britain's progressive liberal tradition and launched his 'project' of a return to nineteenth-century Gladstonian liberalism. Writers such as Anthony Giddens set out to provide a theoretical basis for such enterprises, declaring bluntly that socialism had been dissolved and as 'Social Democracy was always linked to Socialism. What should its orientation be in a world where there are no alternatives to capitalism?'[6]

Historian Donald Sassoon wrote extensively about the shift of European social democracy to the right, concluding that 'everyone is, in some shape or other, openly or covertly, a signed-up member to the capitalist club'. Indeed, in 1999, writing about the convergence of European social democracy at a time when Lionel Jospin appeared to be on a far more radical trajectory than Tony Blair, he observed,

> All social democratic parties now concede that there are limits to the expansion of public expenditure, and that the era

> of nationalisation is over. Privatisation has become acceptable, even desirable. Indeed there are fewer differences here than commonly believed. Both Schroeder and Jospin have outdone their conservative predecessors in their privatisation programmes.'[7]

The flagship approach of social democracy, post-1989, was the Third Way of Blair and Gerhard Schroeder (Schröder), which argued that the market worked and just needed to be accompanied by a better redistribution of wealth. But this notion has collapsed as it has become clear that not only does the market not work but also that social democrats in power failed to sufficiently redistribute either to satisfy their traditional electorate or to win new voters. They have seemed unable to put forward, in a twenty-first century context, the type of vision of transformational social and economic justice – which was delivered in many respects via the welfare states – that won vast support for social democracy from the post-Second World War generation.

But what writers such as Giddens and Sassoon missed was the fact that the rightward movement of social democracy was part of a political and economic process which included the onslaughts on the living and working conditions of the working classes that were epitomised in Europe in the early 1990s by the Maastricht Treaty. Indeed, this post-1989 political process also had a significant impact on traditional West European conservative parties – the impact was by no means confined to the left. Far-right and neo-fascist parties had emerged in the EU in the 1980s, feeding on the anger and despair caused by mass unemployment and the undermining of social solidarity. This context helped generate the racism and xenophobia which bolstered far-right support, and during the 1990s these parties made further inroads into the voter bases of the conservatives. By the end of the decade, Gianfranco Fini's 'post-fascist' National Alliance in Italy had stabilised its share of the vote in national elections at around 15%. In Austria, Jorg Haider's Freedom Party regularly gained over 20% of the vote. In France, the National Front accelerated from 1,500 members in 1984 to 42,000 members before a split in 1998, but by 2002 it was sufficiently restored that its leader Jean-Marie Le Pen went on to contest the final round of the French presidential election against Jacques Chirac. So it was that in the decade after 1989, the far right – for the first time since the 1930s – established a mass political base in some major West European countries. The impact of this on

traditional conservative parties was in some cases to adopt their own forms of racist rhetoric to head off the far-right competition, and in others to consider following the example of Silvio Berlusconi in 1994, whose Forza Italia party, with 21% of the vote, had entered a coalition government which included the far-right National Alliance with 13.5% of the vote.

Yet what those such as Giddens and Sassoon also failed to comprehend was that the rightward movement of social democracy was leading to the entirely predictable result of opening up a considerable political space to its left – increased in size by the catastrophic economic and social consequences of the post-1989 broadening and deepening of the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s. This space was at least partly filled by a number of left parties, most of which had originated in a scarcely observed process of political renewal launched by the left wings of what had been communist parties in 1989.

The catalyst for left recovery

Newt Gingrich was not alone in noting the relationship between the existence of the Soviet Union and welfare systems in the West – or 'public paternalism', as the *Wall Street Journal* described it. The Japanese economist Makoto Itoh also commented on this relationship:

> In retrospect, global capitalism seemed to have been in a defensive position since the Russian Revolution. Its territory was actually much narrowed after the Second World War. East European countries, China, North Korea, Cuba, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Kampuchea and Nicaragua, for instance, opted for a socialist regime. Within capitalist countries, welfare policies, concessions to the demands of trade unions, as well as the burden of defence expenditures were regarded to be necessary costs to guard a free capitalist economic system against revolutionary socialism.[8]

1989 put 'global capitalism' very much back on the offensive. In Europe this resulted in very rapid progress towards the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in February 1992, establishing a monetarist framework for economic and monetary union. A strict limit was set on the level of total public debt, at 60% of the gross domestic product (GDP), and government budget deficits were limited to 3% of

GDP. To comply with these requirements would mean major public spending cuts in most EU states. The Treaty also ensured that key areas of economic policy were insulated from democratic accountability: the projected independent European Central Bank was given control of monetary policy in a framework which specified that price stability would take precedence over economic growth, employment and living standards. In effect, the Maastricht Treaty made Keynesian economic policies impossible, ruling out the traditional economic framework of West European social democracy.

In this context it was hardly surprising that the implementing governments found themselves on a major collision course with the labour movements of their respective countries. West European politics in the 1990s was dominated by the struggle for and against the consequences of the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty. The first crisis appeared rapidly and was actually an unforeseen spin-off of the events of 1989. Germany was the strongest economy in Europe at that time and the chief contributor to the EU budget. Its trade surplus subsidised the rest of the community, while its industry benefited from the relative exchange rate stability provided by the European monetary system. With German unification, this balance changed significantly. Indeed, the Maastricht Treaty provisions were set so rigidly because Germany had no intention of subsidising the weaker EU economies. So the European Monetary System collapsed in August 1993 because the rest of the EU could not, during the recession of the time, cope with the levels of interest rate that the German Bundesbank had set to attract the funds needed to soften the impact of unification upon East Germany. The deadline for the start of monetary union was put back from 1997 to 1999. In order to meet it, almost every EU government had already embarked on a programme of public spending cuts and labour market deregulation in a context where average EU unemployment was over 10%.

Major social democratic parties set about swingeing cuts. In June 1992, at a time when Italy was rocked with corruption scandals, the Socialist Party Prime Minister Giuliano Amato launched an austerity programme, cutting spending on health care and pensions, reducing local spending and controlling public sector pay. The Dutch Labour Party government launched a similar programme in the Netherlands, cutting subsidies for education, housing and public transport. The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*;

PSOE) government of Felipe González introduced a plan to cut unemployment benefits at a time when Spain had the highest unemployment levels in Europe. During François Mitterrand's presidency, the French Socialist Party government pursued the *franc fort* policy in the early 1990s. As the *New York Times* commented, 'French Socialists took power 11 years ago, announcing sweeping nationalizations of industry and an economic program that put jobs first. But their revolution has been of a different kind. The promised policies were quickly discarded and President François Mitterrand adopted, instead, a plan to eliminate inflation and create a franc strong enough to be the equal of the German mark.'[9]

Mitterrand linked the French and German currencies at an exchange rate which the French could not afford, in the process ensuring that unemployment never dropped below 10%. The government then went on to lose its support by trying to reduce the resulting deficit through public spending cuts. In the 1993 legislative elections Socialist Party support in the National Assembly slumped from 260 seats to 53.

The social and political consequences of the Maastricht-compliance spending cuts were dramatic. Trade unions launched the biggest wave of struggles seen in Europe since the period following May 1968. In May 1992, Germany was paralysed by a series of major strikes, starting with the public sector. A report in the *New York Times* indicated the extent of the action against Kohl's cuts: 'In a nation where order is a cardinal virtue and where social conflicts are usually avoided at all costs, the public employees' strike was an unexpected jolt. Hundreds of thousands of union members participated, stalling trains and subways, closing clinics, kindergartens and Government offices and leaving garbage uncollected and mail undelivered.'[10] In Italy, on 12 November 1994, one and a half million people demonstrated in Rome against the government's plans to cut welfare benefits and state pensions – a third of the marchers were pensioners. The French trade union protests, launched in November 1995, were the most spectacular of all. As conservative Prime Minister Alain Juppé unveiled his plans for massive government spending cuts a wave of general strikes and demonstrations commenced, lasting for more than three weeks. The scale of the protests – which brought the country's transport infrastructure to a complete halt – and the accompanying social conflict, together with the developing

social movements against the government's political and economic project which included attacks on women's rights such as abortion, forced Juppé to abandon his proposals.

Political reaction to the consequences of Maastricht began to display a pattern. Mainstream conservative parties experienced major splits in their social bases, often losing out to far-right and anti-immigration parties. Social democratic parties that had implemented cuts suffered significant losses. Following the dramatic reverses experienced by the French Socialists in 1993, the Italian Socialist Party was obliterated in 1994 and the Spanish Socialists lost power in 1996. It was in this political context that the parties which had emerged out of the crisis of communism, to the left of social democracy, arrested their decline and began to advance. The Italian Party of Communist Refoundation (*Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*; PRC) increased its vote from 5.6% in 1992 to 6% in 1994 and to 8.6% in 1996. The German Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*; German PDS) increased its vote from 2.4% in 1990 to 4.4% in 1994 and to 5.1% in 1998 on an all-Germany basis, and to over 20% in parts of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). The United Left of Spain increased its vote from 4.7% in 1986 to 9.1% in 1989, to 9.6% in 1993 and to 10.5% in 1996.

Left realignment and the emergence of the new European left

While the new European left that emerged in the early 1990s could be simply described as a converging political current of communist parties, former communist parties and other parties to the left of social democracy, the emergence was also a complex process, embracing only one part of the communist movement. Out of the wreckage of 1989, it was possible to see three trajectories which communist parties or sections thereof variously followed. Firstly, there were those who chose the path to social democracy, exemplified by the majority grouping within the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*; PCI) and often favoured by those from a Eurocommunist tradition. Secondly, there were those who failed to recognise the new political situation, or whose response to it was to dig in and defend the old traditions. In reality these parties often became nostalgic

communist sects, living in the past, tied to a disappearing electorate and in irreversible decline. Thirdly, there were those that formed the new European left and had two particularly significant characteristics. Whether or not they retained the name communist, they certainly retained a commitment to Marxist politics, to an anti-capitalist perspective, taking account of the realities of European and world politics at the end of the twentieth century. Many also showed a considerable capacity for open political debate and renewal, drawing on and opening up to feminism, environmental and anti-racist politics. But most unusually, in many cases these parties either initiated or participated in a realignment of left forces, often working with organisations that would previously have been regarded as politically hostile. This included allying with or even merging with the electorally insignificant, but very active, new left organisations – often based on a Trotskyist political orientation – which had expanded dramatically after 1968. Such groups participated in Spain's United Left, merging with the left wing of the PCI to found the PRC, were included in the electoral lists of Germany's PDS and eventually joined its successor party, Die Linke, and were invited to participate in common actions and debates initiated by the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français*; PCF).

Prior to 1989, such cooperation would have been inconceivable, but the defeat of the Soviet Union also had a significant impact on much of the mainly Trotskyist and other new left parties that had emerged from the 1968 radicalisation in Europe. Some of these drifted off to the right, but many, while being left critics of the Soviet Union, concluded that its overthrow by capitalism was a disaster and were prepared to work with communist parties and their successors in the post-Soviet world on the basis of an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist perspective. Disagreements about the Spanish Civil War seemed less pressing than the neo-liberal onslaught on the welfare state and the developing world. This approach was encapsulated by the German PDS Chair Lothar Bisky at the party's Fourth Congress held in January 1995: 'Together we want to tap and use the ideas of communists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Nikolai Bukharin, the old Leon Trotsky or Antonio Gramsci. It is undisputed that we commemorate those communists who were persecuted and killed by the fascists. Yet it is also our duty to honour those who were killed by Stalin.'[11]

The first major manifestation of this left realignment which was to forge the new European left had occurred in Spain in the 1980s. The Communist Party of Spain (*Partido Comunista de España*; PCE) had been legalised in 1977, following the end of the Franco dictatorship, against which it had been the most effective and organised opposition force, winning undoubted prestige for its courage. But it was unable to translate this prestige into electoral support and had swung to the right under the leadership of Santiago Carrillo. He embraced the new liberal democracy in Spain and did not press for concessions to the labour movement, instead accepting the restoration of the monarchy and supporting restrictive trade union legislation. He espoused Eurocommunism, which caused splits within the party, many of whom considered his concessions to the bourgeoisie – in the form of cooperation with the conservative government of Adolfo Suárez – as treasonous. Under González, the PSOE, which received funding from the German SPD and the Socialist International during the 1970s, was initially able to position itself as a more radical and popular force, winning around three times as many votes as the PCE in general elections in 1977 and 1979. One of the oldest parties in Spain, PSOE was founded in 1879 as a party to represent industrial workers and had a strong radical and Marxist tradition within it. It was banned by Franco in 1939, persecuted during the dictatorship and legalised in 1977. Despite its radical credentials, however, its leader Felipe González, from the more reformist wing of the party, worked to break PSOE from its Marxist heritage and to orient it towards a more mainstream form of social democracy, supported by other West European parties. Despite opposition and division within the party, González was successful in this goal, and by the end of 1979, the party had broken with Marxism.

The disintegration of the right led to a PSOE victory in the 1982 elections; the party won with 46.1% of the vote, gaining an absolute majority in parliament. According to Donald Sassoon, PSOE was elected 'to modernise the country, solve the economic problems and establish a welfare state'.[12] With the PCE in crisis and winning only 4% of the vote, PSOE no longer ran the risk of being outflanked on its left and became one of the first socialist parties to embrace neo-liberalism. In government it prioritised reducing inflation which was paid for by a rise in unemployment from 17% in 1982 to 22% in 1986.

This early shift to the right of the Spanish socialists in government created the political space for a left to emerge which would oppose PSOE's anti-working class policies. After its electoral disaster in 1982, the significant political divisions which existed within the PCE were forced out into the open, particularly against the rightist line pursued by Carrillo in the late 1970s. There were two main groupings within the party that opposed him. The first was a straightforward right–left split in the political direction of the party over Eurocommunism and attitudes towards the Soviet Union. The second was based on the rejection of Carrillo's authoritarian style of leadership and comprised a group of *renovadores* (renovators) who agreed with his political orientation but wished to democratise the party. Opposed from all sides, Carrillo stood down in favour of Gerardo Iglesias. The PCE then went through a process of splits which subsequent developments in many West European communist parties would closely mirror. Carrillo left to form his own group, which became the Spanish Labour Party; he received virtually no popular support, and eventually joined PSOE in 1991. Thus Carrillo moved to the right, through Eurocommunism to social democracy, like the majority of the PCI with which he had close links in the 1970s. Carrillo made his position completely clear in September 1991, saying: 'The Communist movement as such has completed its historical cycle and it makes no sense trying to prolong it.'[13] Two other organisations emerged out of the PCE crisis: to the left, a pro-Soviet split, the Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain (*Partido Comunista de los Pueblos de España*; PCPE) under the leadership of Ignacio Gallego, and to the right, the Progressive Federation (*Federación Progresista*; FP), a group of *renovadores* under the leadership of Ramon Tamames. As a result of these splits, the PCE was more politically homogeneous than before, but in urgent need of re-establishing its political role in Spanish society.

From 1984, the PCE advocated a process of convergence with other left forces, to fill the political space opened by the rightward move of PSOE, but the real opportunity to bring this about came as a result of PSOE's U-turn on NATO membership. Shortly before the 1986 general election the PCE put together a coalition called the United Left (*Izquierda Unida*; IU), born of a mass campaign during the first PSOE government on NATO membership. Before entering government, PSOE had opposed NATO membership and had promised a referendum on membership, changing its position when in government.

A broad committee, including communists, pacifists, feminists, human rights groups, Christians and the far left, with the exception of Carrillo's group which refused to participate, coordinated a vigorous campaign, which in spite of media saturation and huge pressure for a 'yes' vote, actually won 43% of the vote – nearly seven million – against NATO. Criticism was levelled at the government's phrasing of the referendum question, which asked, 'Do you consider it advisable for Spain to remain in the Atlantic Alliance?' followed by a number of provisos, including the lessening of US military presence in Spain.[14]

The term NATO was not used. One of the key leaders of PSOE at this time was of course Javier Solana, who went on to be Secretary General of NATO in 1995. It was this anti-NATO campaign which provided the basis for the founding of the IU in 1986. The main components of the IU were the PCE, the PCPE, the Socialist Action Party (*Partido de Accion Socialista;* PASOC) – left dissidents from PSOE, the Republican Left (*Izquierda Republicana*; IR) and some smaller left groupings, subsequently including members of the Trotskyist Fourth International. Although it initially made little advance on the PCE's result of 1982, it was relaunched in February 1989 after which it more than doubled its votes in the general election of October 1989 with 9.1% of the vote. According to Gillespie, it 'provided the major success story of the general election'.[15] By the general election of 1996, its support had risen to 10.5%.

The IU was the forerunner of the new European left, its early development the result of the particular conditions in Spain following the demise of Franco's dictatorship and the early collapse of the PCE as a result of the Eurocommunist policies of the late 1970s. The political composition of IU – left communists, left-social democrats and other left-wing groupings, including Trotskyists – became something of a pattern in the shaping of the new European left. One of the key examples of this pattern became evident in Italy, where the PCI had been a chief exponent, together with Carrillo, of Eurocommunism. But by November 1989, the PCI had moved through its Eurocommunist phase to the extent that its general secretary, Achille Occhetto, proposed that the PCI be dissolved and that a new 'constituent phase' be entered. This would lead to the foundation of a new party which 'would not be Communist but "socialist", "popular" (i.e. less class-oriented), "democratic" and "progressive". It would be committed to

the realisation of a left-wing alternative and would hope to be not only an integral part of the European Left but also a full member of the Socialist International'.[16]

The 'constituent phase' was entered at the PCI's Special Nineteenth Congress in March 1990, and at the Twentieth Congress in January 1991 the Democratic Party of the Left (the Italian PDS; *Partito Democratico della Sinistra*) was launched with the support of the majority of the delegates. This was accompanied, however, by the setting up of the Movement for the Refoundation of Communism (MRC), a grouping committed to the refounding of a communist party which attracted those from within the PCI who had opposed the move to social democracy. Adopting the name *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (Movement for Communist Refoundation; PRC) during 1991, PRC was also joined by *Democrazia Proletaria* (DP), a parliamentary party originating in the Italian new left of the late 1960s and early 1970s which had opposed the 'historic compromise' between the PCI and the Christian Democrats. This development added several thousand mainly young activists and working-class militants to the new party. By the end of 1991, PRC had a total membership in the region of 150,000. In the general election of 1992, PRC polled 5.6%, rising to 6% in 1994 and 8.6% in 1996.

Germany saw a unique development as the former ruling party of the GDR evolved to become a new left party across the whole of Germany, while the German Communist Party (*Deutsche Kommunistische Partei*; DKP) of the former West Germany – founded in 1968 after the original *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) was banned in 1956 – remained a marginal and isolated force. Those from the former GDR who wished to remain loyal to the tradition of Honecker founded a new Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1989 which was ideologically closer to the DKP. The German Party of Democratic Socialism (the German PDS) was formed at an emergency congress in December 1989 as the direct organisational successor to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED). In the GDR elections of March 1990, the German PDS came third behind the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and SPD with 16.4% of the vote, demonstrating that it had maintained a solid base of support. In the local elections of 6 May 1990 in the East German Länder, the German PDS won more than 10,000 seats in regional, city and local assemblies. The emergency

congress in December 1989 adopted the definition of the SED–PDS as 'a modern socialist party in the tradition of the German and international labour movement. It proclaims itself to be part of the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and of the democratic, communist, social democratic, socialist and pacifist movement'.[17]

From its foundation, the German PDS 'cast itself as a party which had purged itself of Stalinism but not of socialism'[18] and has continued to do so, throughout its subsequent iterations to today's *Die Linke*. As its chairman Gregor Gysi observed: 'We are not a communist party, but a party which includes communists', drawing together different anti-capitalist left traditions.[19] The German PDS also underwent profound changes in its internal structures and democratic procedures. Breaking with the rigid structures of the traditional communist parties, the PDS allowed the organisation of political platforms within the party, which included a social democratic platform, a Marxist forum, an Ecological Platform and – most actively – a Communist Platform, led by Sarah Wagenknecht. A young activist from Thuringia who went on to become a PDS MEP (Member of the European Parliament) and subsequently a Bundestag member for *Die Linke*, Wagenknecht did not run for the post of party vice-chair on the foundation of *Die Linke* as her perceived support for the GDR continued to be unacceptable to other party leaders. But Wagenknecht was politically dynamic and represented a clear current within the party. The Communist Platform effectively acted as an internal opposition to the majority left-socialist current – also described as the Gysi–Bisky majority, after party chair Gregor Gysi and party president, Lothar Bisky. Initially German PDS support was confined to the east, but gradually support in the west began to increase too, indicating that the PDS was not just a regional protest party, but had a distinct politics – a new left agenda to the left of the SPD – that could attract votes throughout Germany as social and economic conditions deteriorated. Standing on a platform, in 1994, of opposition to the Maastricht-instigated government spending cuts which led to the reduction in social benefits, attacks on free collective bargaining, mass unemployment and an increase in racism, the PDS won 4.4% of the vote across Germany. In the former GDR the German PDS vote was between 16% and 20% in the different Länder. The party also attracted votes on the basis of its open attitude towards its electoral list – its 'open list' policy – which included many non-PDS

members. Furthermore, the idea that the PDS was supported only by former bureaucrats and SED members was finally proved to be wrong. As Angela Klein observed, 'Around 20 per cent of young first-time voters in the east voted PDS. Those over 60 in the east voted overwhelmingly for the conservatives, the CDU.'[20] In 1998, this increased to 5.1% and PDS support continued to grow during the following decade, particularly after its merger with the dissident social democratic Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice (*Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit – Die Wahlalternative*; WASG) to form *Die Linke*, which was subsequently joined by a number of West German leftist groups.

The PCF demonstrated a different political route to a similar political perspective. Having passed through a Eurocommunist phase in the 1970s and returned to a pro-Moscow orientation by the 1980s, its defining moment was perhaps the point at which it broke with the Soviet leadership. While the PCF had supported Gorbachev's early initiatives, by the late 1980s it was distancing itself from the direction of the reforms and identifying more closely with the Portuguese and Cuban communist parties. The clear break came over the Gulf War in 1990, as it did for many parties, and helped to set the future direction of the PCF. Gorbachev supported the US operation in the Gulf, whereas the PCF was not prepared to back US imperialism. In its opposition to the war, the PCF worked in a committee – *Appel des 75* – with a range of left forces, including Trotskyists, ecologists and anarchists. David S. Bell correctly observed that this would previously have been an unthinkable alliance for communists, but saw it as 'another index of communist decline'.[21] In fact this was to indicate a new orientation of the PCF towards other left groups which was consolidated during the 1990s within the more open political practice and debate of the PCF. The departure of the PCF from democratic centralism as the organising principle of the party in 1993 was also an indication of the changes within the party which gave rise to freer debate and discussion. Its decision to structure its electoral lists for the 1999 Euro-elections with alternate male and female candidates and with the target of 50% non-party members was another indicator of this orientation.

But openness to other left groups was perhaps ultimately more successful on the theoretical and intellectual level than on the practical and grass-roots party level. In May 1998, the PCF hosted an

international symposium in Paris to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*. This event was held under the auspices of *Espaces Marx*, going under the slogan 'Explorer, confronter, innover', formerly the PCF's Institut de Recherches Marxistes, but opened, under its new title, to wider left forces. The participation of the *Trotskyist Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire* (LCR) was notable within *Espaces Marx* and was also apparent at the Manifesto symposium, where Daniel Bensaïd, a leading LCR member, spoke in the final plenary. Working with the LCR, a post-1968 new left-type organisation was no doubt intended to draw back a section of the intelligentsia into the orbit of the PCF, having lost much of its support in that sector during the 1980s. Towards the end of the 2000s, the limits of such cooperation became clear, as the LCR dissolved itself into the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste, posed against the PCF and the new *Parti de Gauche*, with which the PCF works in the *Front de Gauche*. Nevertheless, in spite of some hostility between these organisations at the grass-roots level, and the failure to achieve the type of left unity so far secured by *Die Linke*, dialogue between these different political traditions continues within *Espaces Marx* and the European journal *Transform!* for which *Espaces Marx* has significant responsibility.

The next phase of the emerging realignment occurred as a result of the radicalisation of the Scandinavian left parties, through their increased opposition to the austerity programmes initiated in order to conform to the Maastricht criteria. As Scandinavian social democracy moved to the right and began to implement cuts in the highly advanced welfare systems of these countries, the left parties moved into the breach, clarified their position on the left and were able during the 1990s to increase their electoral standing on that basis. These parties had their origins in orthodox communist parties but had begun their transition to recognisable new left positions – particularly feminism and environmentalism – up to three decades before the collapse of state socialism in 1989, starting with Aksel Larsen's split from the Danish Communist Party in 1959. Despite their previous ambivalence or even hostility towards many of the West European communist parties and their traditions, the new radicalisation brought them into a shared political framework with the parties mentioned above.

The changing shape of the East

The post-1989/1991 experience in Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe also ran counter to popular assumptions about the collapse of communism. In Russia, a small minority on the left of the former ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union reinvented itself as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). It emerged as the largest party of opposition during the 1990s and remained so throughout the 2000s, with a substantial base of popular support. This trend of communist or former communist parties gaining unexpectedly large support was replicated in many other parts of the former Soviet Union, notably Ukraine, Moldova and – in a somewhat altered political form – Belarus. In Eastern Europe the pattern was rather different, as a number of the former ruling parties – notably in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania – reformed themselves into social democratic parties. Having often failed spectacularly in the first post-1989 elections, they gained support very rapidly as the dire economic consequences of system change began to impact on the populations, and became parties of government. In other cases, notably the Czech Republic and the former GDR, the former ruling parties remained explicitly Marxist parties, but with a developing progressive agenda along the lines of those mentioned in Western Europe.

The revival of support for a communist successor party in Russia was not surprising when seen in the context of the social and economic consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reintroduction of capitalism from the end of 1991. The economic reform which began formally in Russia with price liberalisation in January 1992 produced the greatest peacetime industrial collapse of any economy in history. Moreover, the role of Western institutions in formulating the key stages of the reform process was well understood in Russia and helped shape popular attitudes towards the West. This was reinforced by the backing of Western governments for President Boris Yeltsin, even when his tanks were storming Russia's elected parliament in October 1993. The tragic effects of the economic reforms on Russian society are well-documented, although not commonly appreciated in Western society. According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report in 1997:

> The attempted 'shock therapy' reforms launched in January 1992 ushered in a period of economic decline of unprecedented proportions . . . Partial price liberalisation in January 1992 unleashed an inflationary process in which consumer and producer prices rose by over 2,500 per cent in less than a year. The resulting dislocation and fall in personal incomes were reinforced by the gradual reduction in subsidies for rent, transport, and other necessities of life.[22]

In a phenomenon characterised by the UNDP as 'hyper-stagflation', 'GDP declined continuously every year since 1990, and it declined by 20 per cent in 1994 . . . Industrial output declined 4.7 per cent in 1995, bringing the total fall to 53 per cent since 1989 . . . National Income fell by over 40 per cent between 1991 and 1996.'[23] The impact on living standards was devastating: 'In the Soviet era it was generally recognised that 10 per cent of the population were living in poverty.'[24] But by 1997 'the estimated number of people living below the poverty line has been variously estimated at around 90 per cent . . . or between 25–34 per cent on the basis of a much lower national poverty line of $50 [per month KH]'.[25] One of the reasons for this was that between 1990 and the end of 1994 the price index for paid services like housing, transport and domestic utilities rose by over 6,000%.

Indeed, the social and economic collapse resulting from the economic reform in the 1990s was so awful that it could not be conveyed by economic data alone. Huge hardship confronted the overwhelming majority of the population, including a significant decrease in life expectancy; an increase in heart, digestive and infectious diseases; the late or non-payment of wages and a dramatic increase in homelessness and unemployment. Expectations of high levels of foreign investment were not fulfilled. Indeed, between 1991 and 1998, the annual outflow of capital from Russia – much of it the illegal proceeds of the deeply criminalised privatisation process – far exceeded the total inflow of capital in the form of investment, foreign aid, International Monetary Fund (IMF) credits and other loans.

In the context of this disastrous social and economic decline, it was hardly surprising that support for the parties linked to the reformers most closely identified with the West, privatisation and shock therapy almost completely collapsed. Russia's Choice, the party set

up by Yegor Gaidar, one of the architects of price liberalisation, for example, stood at 1% in a poll conducted by the National Public Opinion Centre, on 20–25 November 1998.[26] Even right-wing politicians began to adopt a rhetoric of opposition to the free market and the West, in order to have any chance of securing election. The popular response to the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from March 1999 also consolidated anti-Western feeling, with 92% of the population opposed to the NATO aggression. In fact, there was no majority support either for Western-style capitalism or for the dismantling of the Soviet Union, even at the time when the process was initiated. As Kotz and Weir observed, 'A referendum on preserving the Union won with 76.4 per cent of the vote only nine months before the Union was dismantled.'[27] Opinion polls in Russia showed that popular support for social security, egalitarianism and collectivist social and economic values remained far more extensive within society than even votes for the communist parties would suggest. As Peter Gowan pointed out, in 1996 polls showed that an absolute majority of the population thought that big industrial enterprises should be state-owned rather than privatised.[28]

In November 1991, Yeltsin banned the Russian Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on Russian territory. After the eventual lifting of the ban by the Constitutional Court, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) was founded in February 1993 under the leadership of Gennady Zyuganov, a former member of the CPSU leadership who had been fiercely critical of glasnost and perestroika. Delegates at the founding Congress represented some 450,000 members of the local party organisations of the former Russian Communist Party who had decided to reconstitute themselves after the ban was lifted. During Yeltsin's confrontations with the Russian parliament in 1993, the CPRF became increasingly influential, participating in the National Salvation Front, a communist–nationalist alliance which wanted to stop shock therapy, reconstitute the Soviet Union and stop making concessions to the West. This grouping commanded the support of around a third of the parliamentary deputies. In the parliamentary elections of December 1993, Yeltsin's party faced a resounding defeat at the hands of the communist and nationalist opposition and an anti-neo-liberal majority – opposed to Yeltsin's economic programme – was elected to parliament.[29] But although Zyuganov

had succeeded in establishing the CPRF as the leading force on the left he had not yet managed to defeat the nationalists and secure communist leadership of the opposition. The extreme nationalist Liberal Democratic Party under the leadership of Vladimir Zhirinovsky took 23% of the vote, while the CPRF took 12% and its allies the Agrarians took 8%. By the parliamentary elections of December 1995, the CPRF had turned the tables on the extreme nationalists, due to its strong opposition to the government, its promotion of a patriotic alliance to save Russia and its backing for increasing trade union protest. The CPRF vote nearly doubled to 22%, Zhirinovsky's halved to 11% and the government party, Our Home is Russia, polled 10%. Nevertheless, the CPRF was subject to some criticism from other communist and left forces within Russia and internationally for the nationalist ideas which Zyuganov had entwined with his perspective of a patriotic alliance. For while the concept of a patriotic alliance enabled the CPRF to build a broad movement to oppose the dismantling of the Russian economy and society, the particular nationalist elements unnecessarily introduced into it also exposed some leaders of the CPRF to well-founded charges of Russian nationalism.

Perhaps the most significant moment for the CPRF in the 1990s came with the 1996 presidential election, which clearly demonstrated the extent to which Russian politics had become polarised, and the leading opposition role of the CPRF within that. In its second round, the election became a two-horse race between Yeltsin and Zyuganov and for a while it looked entirely possible that Zyuganov might win. As the presidential election approached, the financial system was on the verge of meltdown; as output collapsed, the government's income collapsed, wages went unpaid and government borrowing sent interest rates sky-high – as much as 200% on six-month bonds. Major loans were extended to Yeltsin by the West to help him pay overdue wages and pensions before the election, and television coverage was saturated with films about the horrors of communism. Nevertheless, Zyuganov came within 3% of Yeltsin in the first round. The result of the second round was that Yeltsin was returned with almost 54% of the vote, while over 40% backed Zyuganov. Around 5% voted against both candidates.

The late 1990s saw the beginnings of a shift in Russian politics. The financial crunch came in the context of the Asian financial crisis, which made investors increasingly nervous about Russia. August

1998 saw forced devaluation of the rouble and default on Russia's domestic debt. The devaluation sent the prices of food and consumer goods imports, on which Russian cities now depended, up by 40%, slashing living standards. Virtually all private banks were technically bankrupt. A major political crisis erupted, as a result of which Yeltsin was forced to appoint Yevgeny Primakov – a former head of the foreign intelligence service – as prime minister, rather than his preferred choice, Viktor Chernomyrdin. Primakov's appointment was a choice favoured by the CPRF and an indication of the party's increased political strength. The Yeltsin regime was severely weakened as a result, and the new government began to take strong action to stem the financial crisis, to break with Yeltsin's pro-Westernism and to reorient foreign policy towards a new independence and assertiveness for Russia, including developing better relations with China. It was in this context that Vladimir Putin was to emerge as the champion of a stronger and more confident Russia on the resignation of Yeltsin on 31 December 1999. The rise of Putin presented a political challenge for the CPRF, as he effectively restored the standing of Russia in the international community while the economy strengthened as a result of strong economic management and rising oil prices. Nevertheless, the CPRF has maintained its position as the largest opposition party in Russia and has come second in every presidential election since the Soviet Union was dissolved.

By the mid-1990s, former communist parties had been returned to power in most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, to the great surprise of most Western observers. In 1993, the Polish successor party – the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP) – had been elected to government, followed in 1994 by the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP). In 1996, Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic lost his parliamentary majority in a leftward shift by the voters and lost the government to the Social Democrats in 1998 – this was not a successor party but the restored pre-war Social Democratic Party; nevertheless it was indicative of a shift to the left. In the mid-years of the decade, the successor parties in Romania and Bulgaria also held governmental office. While this might have seemed a surprising development, the social and economic costs of the transition meant that the electorate turned against those parties most associated with the hardships of free-market economic reform. Most of the citizens of Eastern Europe entered the post-communist period with

the expectations of higher living standards and a consumer society, for the pledge implied in the much-vaunted 'return to Europe' was that Eastern living standards would be raised towards Western levels. They were rapidly – and brutally – disabused of this notion, however, and used their votes to register their disapproval. As Heinrich Makowski has pointed out, 'So far there have been a few winners but many, many losers in the transition. And it's the many losers who are deciding the election outcomes.'[30]

Yet while the successor parties experienced significantly improved political fortunes as the decade wore on, they were in no sense a uniform political category, despite their common political origins. Three basic patterns could be identified, largely as a result of their political evolution prior to 1989, and these determined the types of programmes and policies that they embraced during the 1990s and subsequently.

In Hungary and Poland, the regime changes were the result of managed transitions where reform communists – favourable to the reintroduction of capitalism – attempted, through playing a major role in roundtable negotiations, to strengthen their popular support and emerge as newly viable leaders for the postcommunist period. The successors to the ruling parties in Hungary and Poland rapidly transformed themselves into West European-style social democratic parties and sought membership of the Socialist International. The social democratic space was, on the whole, vacant, for apart from the example of the Czech Social Democrats, attempts to re-establish former social democratic parties had little success, despite considerable support from the Socialist International. In the former GDR of course, the parties of the Federal Republic expanded their operations into the east. Social democracy had received most support in Eastern Europe in the inter-war period in Czechoslovakia, with some support also in Hungary and Poland, but there was not an extensive tradition to revive on a region-wide basis. Indeed, the fact that the social democratic parties of Hungary and Poland had merged with the ruling communist parties in the late 1940s meant that in 1989 they were not seen as an untainted left alternative. In fact, they did not pose themselves in that light – most of the social democratic parties in Eastern Europe merely stressed the anti-communist, pro-free-market line of their West European sister parties and this did not appeal to the socialist-oriented section of the electorate.[31]

In contrast, in Czechoslovakia and the GDR, the ruling parties were not, in the late 1980s, evolving towards social democracy, and the successor parties – the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*; CPBM) and the German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) – maintained an anti-capitalist position, while undergoing considerable political renewal. Both had mass social democratic parties to their right and both consolidated a respectable share of the vote. For the PDS this amounted to up to 20% or more in the East German Länder, and for the CPBM between 10% and 15% in the Czech lands. While the CPBM retained its communist label, it shared some political features with the new left parties in Western Europe. It embraced a more radical social agenda, including ecology, anti-racism and gender issues, and adopted a more open attitude to other left forces and the inclusion of non-party members on its electoral lists. The CPBM formed the largest opposition party to Klaus's coalition in the first half of the 1990s and, although it maintained a stable level of electoral support – at 10.3% in 1996 and 11% in 1998 – it was overtaken by the re-established pre-war social democrats in 1996. Their share of the vote increased from 6.5% to 26.4% and then further in 1998, when it increased to 32.3%.

In Bulgaria and Romania, the removal of the pre-1989 communist leadership was largely the result of the actions of sections of the communist leaderships, who, while desiring reform of the political status quo, were not in favour of the introduction of capitalism. There were no significant opposition movements, and the successor parties, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and, effectively, the National Salvation Front and subsequently the Social Democratic Party of Romania, maintained positions in favour of a significant state sector and against the full introduction of a free-market economy.

In 1989–90, these successor parties faced multi-party competition in what are often described as the 'founding' elections of 1989–90 and in Central Europe saw crushing electoral defeat at the hands of the new, violently anti-communist – often dissident movement-based – electoral forces. The shock that was expressed by many Western observers in the mid-1990s, after the rapid electoral recovery of the SDRP in Poland in 1993 and the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) in Hungary in 1994, was based on the assumption that these first elections established a pattern for the future. It would be more accurate to see the first round of elections as a plebiscite against

the regimes as they had existed, rather than as a rejection of all of the values of socialism – many of which, through redistributive economic and social policies, had improved people's lives. The harsh social and economic conditions following 1989, including an increase in poverty and unemployment and a decline in living standards, saw voters turning to the former communist parties to alleviate the suffering of the transition period. As Frances Millard observed on Poland:

> A general pessimism about the economy was accompanied by a growth of negative attitudes to the private sector, and especially privatization . . . From August, 1991, onwards there was a systematic fall in the numbers regarding privatization as beneficial to the Polish economy, with the exception of small firms and retail establishments. In mid-1992, 60 per cent again believed that large industrial enterprises should be exclusively state-owned.'[32]

The electorates clearly expected the former communist parties to restore social stability and economic security, but they were to be sadly disappointed. In both Poland and Hungary, the new governments showed serious commitment to privatisation, huge public spending cuts, sweeping reforms of the welfare system and an eagerness to join the EU and NATO, justifying the description often used of 'nomenklatura capitalism'. The former communists had seamlessly moved from state socialism to a Blairite version of 'third way' social democracy based on neo-liberal economics, rejecting a more traditional Keynesian model which would without doubt have been the preferred option of their supporters in the electorate. If anything, the former communists were more effective in implementing IMF-endorsed policies than their formally more right-wing predecessors had been because they did not have to contend with a nationalist lobby within their ranks. The conservative coalition government in Hungary of 1990–1994 had actually intended to retain long-term majority state ownership of many strategic companies, which the HSP subsequently proceeded to privatise.

The pace of privatisation and economic reform was different, however, further east in Europe. In Romania, the political dominance of Ion Iliescu and the Social Democratic Party of Romania (SDPR) until 1995 prevented a rapid transition to capitalism. In Bulgaria, the dominance of the BSP for most of the post-1989 period until 1996

similarly prevented rapid structural change. Peter Gowan argued that geopolitical factors were also significant in the slow pace of change in Bulgaria – the West European states did not seek to rapidly draw Bulgaria into their sphere of influence, while preoccupation with Yugoslavia led the United States to be more concerned with political stability than with economic reform.[33] But this situation did not last. By the mid-1990s, both the BSP and the SDPR were under enormous pressure from Western financial institutions, and began to implement liberal economic policies, which greatly reduced their popularity at the polls and led the way for more pro-liberal coalitions to be elected. By the end of the 1990s, the key successors to the ruling parties in Central and Eastern Europe – with the exception of those of the GDR and the Czech Republic – had embraced social democracy, and whether willingly or not, had also accepted its third-way variant. They had all become members of the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialism and – with the exception of Poland – routinely alternated between government and opposition leadership.

There were also some political developments to the left of the successor parties in the 1990s, but these made relatively little impact on mainstream party politics. In Hungary these coalesced firstly around the Left Platform within the HSP and secondly around the Hungarian Left Alternative – an umbrella organisation drawing together a number of left groupings and individuals. This trend took its political framework from the traditions of the workers' councils movement dating from 1956, and defined itself in 1988 not as a party but as 'a social organization building a democratic society based on workers' property, self-management and self-governmental organizations'.[34] The third trend on the Hungarian left was defined through the other successor party of the former ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), which renamed itself the Hungarian Workers' Party. While it had a large membership, it was unable to translate this into a significant numbers of votes, and was excluded from the Hungarian parliament by the 5% threshold. In Poland, the left opposition which emerged out of Solidarity as the Union of Labour polled 7.3% in the 1993 elections, but was subsequently split over its attitude towards supporting the presidential candidacy of Aleksander Kwaśniewski who had been Minister of Sport during the communist period. The Union of Labour lost further support during the general election of 1997 and the local elections of 1998.

During the 1990s it was clear that the former communist parties were the electoral choice of most left-oriented voters throughout Central and Eastern Europe, notwithstanding the implementation, by a number of them, of neo-liberal economic policies, including privatisation and cuts in the welfare system. The challenge for the subsequent decade was whether they would be able to retain sufficient popular support to be electable while failing to meet the social and economic security aspirations of the voters. The only electorally significant successor parties which continued to identify as Marxist or Marxist-originated were the PDS in Germany and the CPBM in the Czech Republic. Both were to play a significant role within the new European left into the new century.

2
Regroupment: Establishing a European Movement

Establishing a cohesive European movement to articulate the shared principles and goals of the new European left parties was no easy task. While individually – and in terms of domestic and international policies – the parties that retained an anti-capitalist identity had much in common, the question of Europe and European integration was a very different matter. Indeed, European integration was one of the most divisive issues in the communist movement in Western Europe in the post-Second World War period and remains controversial on the left today. Nevertheless, it was not one that could have been avoided, once the changing dynamic of relations between the United States, Soviet Union and Western Europe in the post-war period saw the emergence of the third as a new force in global politics and economics, together with the development and consolidation of an enormous range of regional structures, treaties and processes that comprise the EU as we know it today. It was vital that communist parties addressed those changes, but they struggled to do so – in some cases contributing ultimately to their leaving the communist political framework altogether. Differing approaches to the EU and its institutions still dog the European left today, as demonstrated clearly by the debates around the formation of a Party of the European Left (PEL) in 2004.

As Richard Dunphy observes, 'For many years before 1989, the question of these parties' reaction to the processes of European integration was recognised as touching on every aspect of their strategic and conceptual orientations.' It raised the limitations of 'socialism in one country', the challenge of capitalist modernisation and

internationalisation and the question of a developing multipolarity in a hitherto bipolar world where identities and allegiances had been clear.[1]

However, the trajectory followed by most of the Western European communist parties in response to these developments brought little political success, and led many out of the left and into an increasingly right-wing social democratic framework.

The context for the development of 'Eurosocialism'

From 1948 to the mid-1960s, the post-war economic boom provided the conditions for relative stability in the relationship between West European and US capital. In the labour movement, social democratic parties tended to be the dominant force in northern Europe, and communist parties – at this time aligned with the Soviet Union – tended to dominate in southern Europe. But the end of the post-war economic boom at the end of the 1960s created the conditions which would break up this relationship. The turning point was the Vietnam War. Prior to Vietnam, the United States had been a net contributor to the West European economies, but under the strain of the war, the United States was no longer able to act as the motor of the world economy. US economic growth now took place at the expense of growth in Western Europe and Japan, and the consequences were dramatic. The West European economies had grown much more rapidly than that of the United States until the mid-1970s and their average level of unemployment was half that of the latter. From then on, West European unemployment rose to more than double the US levels.

The devaluation of the dollar in 1971, then the huge increases in oil prices in 1973 and later Ronald Reagan's policies of high interest rates all struck enormous blows against the economies of Western Europe and Japan to the benefit of the United States. By 1976, the United States had been transformed from a net exporter of capital to the rest of the world into an importer of capital. This culminated in the enormous inflows of capital into the United States, which financed Reagan's military build-up in the 1980s and transformed the country from the world's largest creditor nation into the greatest debtor nation.

Inevitably, this turnaround in economic relationships had profound political consequences. In this context, the attitudes of both

European capital and social democracy began to change towards the United States, in particular leading to attempts by some Western European leaders, notably de Gaulle, to steer a course more independent of the United States.

These shifting relationships had a direct impact upon the labour movement. For the first time since 1917, resistance to the United States was not monopolised by pro-Moscow communist parties. Under the impetus of the rise of working-class struggles after 1968, the European socialist parties made a turn to the left, which was accompanied by a gradual shift from Atlanticism towards an orientation to European integration as a means of competition with the United States. Through the 1970s and 1980s the socialist parties became the strongest backers of European economic integration in West European society, providing key leaders of the entire project such as European Commission President Jacques Delors.

From this perspective, the key to prosperity and social democratic reform could no longer be alignment with the United States – which was striking blows against the West European economies – but the pushing forward of the economic integration of the European Community. In this way, the argument ran, the European working class would ultimately benefit from the improved performance of European capital. The prospect of modernisation and integration into the European Economic Community (EEC) was particularly attractive as an alternative way forward in southern Europe, following the fall of the dictatorships. It provided the strategic cutting edge for social democracy's drive to break communist hegemony in the labour movements of Spain, Portugal, France and Italy.

Symbolised by such leaders as François Mitterrand in France, Benedetto Craxi in Italy and Felipe González in Spain, this Eurosocialism, as opposed to Atlanticism, became the dominant trend in West European social democracy. In a situation where the United States was undermining, rather than boosting, the West European economies, Eurosocialism represented the biggest strategic re-orientation of European social democracy since the First World War.

The results were spectacular: often using very radical rhetoric – including against the United States – from the end of the 1970s through the 1980s, the socialist parties overtook the communists in France, Spain, Portugal and Greece and increased their governmental

role in Italy. They were helped in this by the strategic impasse in which the communist parties found themselves. This resulted both from the decline in prestige of the Soviet Union following its intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and from the way many of them chose to respond to the new situation in Europe – the turn to Eurocommunism. In Spain and Italy, at least, this sometimes made them appear to be to the right of the socialist parties. As a result they lost ground to the socialists in the electoral and trade union fields and to the new left and the Greens among young people and the intelligentsia.

The 'Eurocommunist' response

Eurocommunism emerged as a political force from the mid-1970s, as a response to the same factors which had led to Eurosocialism, and gained ascendancy in the communist parties in Italy, Spain and, for a time, France, as well as the smaller West European parties such as the Communist Party of Great Britain. The West German Communist Party (DKP) was an exception, taking its line from the totally pro-Soviet Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic.

The Eurocommunists' key goal was to distance their parties from the Soviet leadership and thereby rehabilitate themselves in a West European political order which had kept the communists out of government for the entire period following the immediate post-war crisis. This was a cardinal point of US post-war policy, for they considered that communist parties linked to the Soviet Union and opposed to NATO were, in effect, a fifth column in Western Europe.

Eurocommunism aimed to make clear that its goal was reform, not overthrow of the capitalist order in Western Europe, by demonstrating that its first loyalty was to the existing order in its own country and not to the Soviet leadership. This meant a political, though not organisational, rapprochement with social democracy, beginning on the ideological plane with the abandonment of the goal of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. This was an attempt to break the identification of the West European communist parties with the system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The problem, however, was that the response of the voters to the Eurocommunists moving in a social democratic direction was to question the basis of their existence as distinct political parties. So by giving ground to the

Eurosocialists, the Eurocommunists tended to accelerate rather than halt their loss of political ground. Similar dilemmas exist today, albeit in a different – post-Soviet – political context, when it comes to left parties in coalition with or giving support to social democratic parties in government. Left parties tend to be punished electorally for these relationships particularly where they have condoned attacks on the living standards of working people: why would one vote for a left party to get social democratic policies?

In fact, the Eurocommunists were on a trajectory towards social democracy, and the left parties in Europe today, which have found a common position and electoral stance on Europe and the nature of its integration, usually originate in, or are the continuity of, those communists who did not pursue the logic of Eurocommunism. Today's 'left' parties are those which have chosen rather to redefine and redevelop anti-capitalist politics in the post-Soviet era.

The first public statement of principles, endorsed by more than one communist party without the agreement of the Soviet leadership, was the Joint Declaration of the Italian and Spanish Communist Parties of 12 July 1975. As well as endorsing multi-party democracy and individual and collective freedoms, the declaration stressed the importance of 'the national unity of democratic and progressive forces, isolating the socially conservative and reactionary ones', in order to find a way out of the crisis of European capitalism.[2]

The forces with which 'points of convergence and agreement' were sought, were 'socialist, social democrat, Christian democrat, Catholic, democratic and progressive'. In other words, they sought to ally themselves with what they saw as more progressive sections of the bourgeoisie in order to aid ailing Western European capitalism, and to avoid 'the attempts of certain capitalist groups to impose an openly reactionary and authoritarian solution to the crisis'. The problem soon became apparent, at least in Spain and Italy: that what the 'progressive sections of the bourgeoisie' wanted was support for policies which – by negatively affecting the living standards of the communist electorate – would cut into its vote.

The second Joint Declaration came four months later in November 1975, from the French and Italian parties, making similar points and also emphasising 'united initiatives by the popular forces and the left forces' in the European Parliament, for the 'democratization of the orientations and modes of operation of the European Economic

Community and for the progressive building of a democratic, peaceful and independent Europe'.[3]

In March 1977, a summit meeting of the French, Italian and – soon to be legalised – Spanish communist parties in Madrid seemed to indicate an increased level of convergence in the approach of the three parties, potentially leading to a coordinated policy towards the European community and the political developments that were taking place at the European level. Yet by the end of the 1970s, according to Dunphy,

> the Eurocommunist challenge was visibly receding, not only in terms of the failure of the leading Eurocommunist parties to realise their electoral goals, but significantly in terms of the ability of those parties to agree upon any transnational strategy for socialist or even democratic transformation.[4]

The failure of the project to take off electorally led to an end to the tripartite cooperation, as the PCF opted to return to a more orthodox approach and the PCI in particular headed off towards social democracy.

Ultimately, the result of the Eurocommunist phase was that it so minimised the political space between the communist parties and the socialist parties that it was no longer clear what, if any, the fundamental differences really were. Although it was an expression of independence from the politics of the Soviet leadership, as subsequent developments were to confirm, Eurocommunism did this by moving to the right towards classical social democratic politics, rather than to any left-wing critique of Soviet orthodoxy. Moreover, it meant that the major radicalisations which did develop in Western Europe, notably the anti-missiles movement, largely bypassed the communist parties.

During the early 1980s, the PCI and the PCE went on to pursue the project of a common left approach to European unification outside the communist movement, which according to Dunphy, 'saw the beginning of direct and formal contacts between the PCI and the PCE and the main socialist and social democratic parties of western Europe'.[5] All of these developments were then considerably accelerated by the collapse of state socialism in 1989. Spanish Eurocommunist Santiago Carillo joined the Spanish Socialist Party

in October 1991, finally breaking with the communist movement.[6] In the unique circumstances of the complete collapse of the Italian Socialist Party, the PCI became Italy's section of the Socialist International, changing its name to the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). This shift had been foreshadowed in the summer of 1988, as the PCI general secretary proclaimed that the party's models should be Willy Brandt and Olof Palme.[7]

But European social democracy in turn moved further to the right – embracing neo-liberal economics – as Eurocommunism merged with social democracy. Paradoxically, however, these developments also opened up the vacuum on the left wing of the European labour movement which the left parties – non-Eurocommunist parties and sections of communist parties as well as other anti-capitalist left forces – then proceeded to occupy. In fact, in redefining anti-capitalist politics in the post-Soviet era, the left parties have re-established a political orientation to the left of social democracy, superseding the rightward tendencies of Eurocommunism while achieving its goal of articulating a common left programme for a different type of united Europe.

Communists in the European Parliament

Communist participation and cooperation in the European Parliament, prior to 1989, was fraught with difficulties. When the EEC was founded by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, signed by Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, the communist parties of those countries were implacably opposed to the process of European integration as a capitalist project. The Italian Communist Party was the first to change its position on this and engage in the European parliamentary process. In March 1969, seven PCI MEPs took their seats, together with two left-wing independents. In arriving at this position, the PCI not only had changed its own position but had overcome the exclusion that had previously been imposed upon it by the Italian government because of its initial opposition to the Treaty of Rome. At this time, however, the PCF 'still maintained that its opposition to the existence of the Community was incompatible with participation in the Community's institutions'; thus communist representation was insufficient to constitute a recognised parliamentary group.[8]

However, the PCF's position changed in 1973, bringing enough representatives into the European Parliament to enable the formation of the Communists and Allies group, and they were soon thereafter joined by the Danish Socialist People's Party. However, the group's component parts maintained divergent positions on a range of fundamental issues with regard to Europe. Altiero Spinelli, for example, who entered the Parliament on the PCI electoral list in 1976, was a chief exponent of a United States of Europe – hardly a position embraced by the PCF.

In July 1989, the PCI and its integrationist allies – the PCE, the Greek Left and the Danish Socialist People's Party – broke from the Communists and Allies Group to form the Group for a Unitary European Left. Shortly afterwards, the remaining parties – the PCF, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Greek Communist Party (*Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas*; KKE) – also convened a new group, entitled Left Unity. But the new status quo did not last long. When the chief mover of the former group, the PCI, transformed itself into the PDS and joined the Socialist International and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament in January 1993, its allies chose not to do so. Unity was subsequently achieved for the new European left parties in the European Parliament in 1994, with the establishment of the United European Left group (*Gauche Unitaire Européenne*; GUE). Its founding members were the United Left of Spain (IU), the PCF, Communist Refoundation of Italy (RC), the PCP, the KKE and Synaspismos – the Greek left party. While differences remained between these parties, nevertheless, a measure of unity was now achieved, which enabled the group to be far more effective within the Parliament. The scale of debilitating differences between the PCF and PCI which had overshadowed the early years of the communist group were a thing of the past. As Andrea Volkens describes it: 'The Communist group has suffered so many transformations and splits that it is considered to be a new group.'[9]

After the enlargement of the European Union in 1995 to include the Nordic countries and Austria, a new wave of realignment took place within the Parliament. The Left Party of Sweden and the Left Alliance of Finland – both with their origins in those countries' communist parties – together with the Danish Socialist People's Party formed the Nordic Green Left (NGL) and established a formal relationship with GUE, becoming the Confederal Group of the GUE/NGL in the European Parliament.

The Constituent Declaration of the group, published in July 1994, stated: 'Notwithstanding the different approaches that its various components may choose to follow, the Confederal Group of the European United Left is firmly committed to European integration, although in a different form from the existing model.'[10] In essence, the group supports integration 'based on fully democratic institutions', with a chief commitment to secure a new model of development, strongly anti-neo-liberal in its emphasis: 'We want to see a different Europe, without the democratic deficit which the Maastricht Treaty served to confirm and free from the neo-liberal monetarist policies that go with it.' This would address what the group identifies as the most serious issues, notably, unemployment, the environment and equal rights, including for immigrants: 'Meeting the needs of those who are forced by poverty in their countries of origin (for which Europe bears a heavy responsibility) to seek their livelihood in the Union.' The idea of a socially solidaristic, anti-NATO, anti-militarist Europe is fundamental to the values and identity of the group and its component parties.[11]

The Declaration also stressed that the group is 'a forum for cooperation between its different political components, each of which retains its own independent identity and commitment to its own positions'. This guarantee was no small matter given the significant divergence historically between many of the member parties, and the differences which continued to remain, even after the founding of the Confederal Group. Indeed, this guarantee has helped enable the group to remain a functioning entity, even after the different perspectives have subsequently been enshrined in the founding of the PEL, which not all of the GUE/NGL parties have joined. It is also clear, however, according to Volkens, that while there are differences within the group on issues such as integration and national sovereignty, there are other policy areas – such as economic and social policy – where there is a high level of homogeneity, as indicated by the Declaration.[12]

Cooperation outside the European Parliament

International cooperation to establish a coherent new European left identity also developed outside the European parliamentary

framework. The first initiative took shape as the New European Left Forum (NELF) which was founded in 1991, relatively rapidly after the disorientating collapse of 1989. But while the role and remit of the European Parliamentary Group was clear, the NELF's role and identity was less so. Founded in Madrid in 1991, it was broadly defined as a grouping of democratic socialist (as opposed to social democratic) parties. Drawn from 17 countries, almost entirely communist or former communist parties, or parts thereof, the Forum was valued for its open discussion, equal cooperation and the possibilities that it presented – for example, in campaigning against unemployment – without any of the centralised constraints of previous international communist organisations.

Its early membership comprised the Left Alliance of Finland, the Swedish Left Party, the Socialist Left Party of Norway, the Socialist People's Party of Denmark, the Party of Democratic Socialism of Germany, the Democratic Labour Party of Estonia, the Green Left Party of the Netherlands, the United Left of Belgium, the French Communist Party, the Citizens Movement of France, the Swiss Labour Party, the PRC, the United Communist Movement of Italy, the Left and Progressive Party of Greece (*Synaspismos*), the Democratic Socialist Reform Movement (*Ananeotiko Demokratiko Socialistiko Kinema*; ADISOK) of Cyprus, the Progressive Party of Working People (*Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou*; AKEL) of Cyprus, Initiative for Catalonia of Spain, the United Left of Spain and the Communist Party of Austria. Its geographical reach extended gradually, throughout the 1990s. In April 1997, the PDS hosted the Twelfth NELF conference in Berlin with the theme 'For a social and democratic Europe', to which, in addition to 16 parties from Western Europe, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland and from Russia the Socialist Party of the Working People and the Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers were invited. In fact, it was opposition to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia which more fully helped to bridge the gap between the left in Western and Eastern Europe. This was reflected in the decision of NELF to invite parties such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Polish Socialist Party and the CPBM to discuss security in Europe at the Sixteenth NELF meeting in Madrid on 17 July 1999.

Towards the *appel commun*

From the mid-1990s, new initiatives took place to consolidate and further coordinate the role and identity of the European left as a cohesive and united entity, which in retrospect can be clearly seen as the development towards the founding of the PEL in 2004. In July 1996, 18 organisations from 14 countries met in Madrid for a summit meeting, hosted by Izquierda Unida (IU), called Madrid I, the most extensive and high-level meeting of the European left in many years. All the members of both NELF and GUE/NGL were invited, and in addition the newly formed Socialist Labour Party from Great Britain was also invited. The meeting stressed demands for a social Europe – against racism and xenophobia, for employment, for labour's share – as opposed to the type of economic and monetary union envisaged by the Maastricht Treaty. IU also hosted a second Madrid Conference, Madrid II, in July 1997. In June 1998, the PDS hosted a meeting of 20 European left parties, including the GUE/NGL. An exchange of views took place, including on common campaigning for a 35-hour week and a proposed common platform for the European elections in June 1999. It was this common platform which was to provide the foundation on which the PEL was eventually to be constructed. In January 1999, 13 parties gathered in Paris for the launch of an *appel commun* – hosted by the French Communist Party – calling for the construction of Europe to be put onto a new track: social and ecological, democratic, solidaristic and peaceful. They called for a 'break with neo-liberal dogma' in favour of a strategy prioritising economic growth, job creation, a tax on international capital flows, an end to privatisation of the public sector, increasing rather than reducing public spending, the reduction of the working week and changes necessary to the statutes of the European Central Bank to achieve these objectives. They also demanded urgent measures to combat racism, including fundamental revision of the Shengen Agreement which tightens the external boundaries of the EU against immigration and asylum seekers, the cancellation of third world debt and an end to NATO.

While not explicitly a common manifesto for the European elections of 1999, the level of agreement reached was the result of numerous high-level meetings over more than a year; the *appel*

commun was clearly launched to set the common political framework for these parties: 'Our aim is clear: to combine our efforts to contribute to the anchoring of Europe to the left.'[13] The *appel* spoke out against the logic of a Europe united on the neo-liberal terms of Maastricht, with its unemployment and poverty. It claimed that 'the myth of triumphant capitalism is dispelled', and argued for a new orientation, towards the extension of democratic rights, equality of opportunity, an end to racism and prejudice and sustainable development as well as against the domination of the United States and the international financial institutions. As the declaration observed: 'The disastrous effects of the global financial crisis on the peoples of the "emerging countries" has revealed the incapacity of the neo-liberal system to respond to the needs of humanity.'

Against a neo-liberal constitution for Europe

Renewed opportunities for effective campaigning on favourable terrain emerged in December 2001. Campaigning against the 1992 Maastricht Treaty had been the key factor in restoring the political salience and electoral fortunes of the left parties in Western Europe after 1989. When EU leaders established a constitutional Convention to draft a European Constitution, the left was up in arms at both the national and supranational level, seeing it as an attempt to constitutionalise neo-liberalism. As a European Parliamentary group, GUE/NGL played some part in the Convention process, which culminated in the publication of a draft constitution in July 2003. GUE/NGL provided four members for the Convention, working primarily on social policy issues. But the fundamental issue was that GUE/NGL opposed the constitution, basically on the same grounds that the left parties had opposed all EU treaties. None of the constituent parties were willing to accept a constitution which enshrined not only neo-liberalism but also NATO and militarism, and left out key areas of social and employment rights. Francis Wurtz, President of the GUE/NGL group and a PCF MEP, expressed the position of the group in September 2003 in a speech entitled 'The hidden face of the draft constitution':

> We have before us, in addition to a reform of the institutional system, the institutionalisation of the model of liberal Europe.

> Thus, from Article 3, we learn that 'the Union gives (!) to its citizens (...) a single market where competition is free and not distorted'. Thereafter, four times, the liberal leitmotiv returns of 'the open market economy where competition is free'. But it is precisely against this obsession of competition at all costs, this tendency to want to commercialise all social life, that an increasing number of our fellow-citizens have mobilised and risen up![14]

Beyond that basic opposition to the draft, however, there were differences between the GUE/NGL parties. Some took the view that a constitution could be acceptable if it had a different political and economic perspective and vision – of a different, socially solidaristic Europe. Others, such as the KKE which was as ever unremittingly hostile to the European project, were opposed to any constitutional arrangements. When it came to the vote on the draft constitution in the European Parliament, the majority of GUE/NGL members opposed it, some abstained and three voted in favour. Two were from the Party of Italian Communists together with Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann from the German PDS who had been a member of the Convention, involved in its social policy working group. Kaufmann subsequently served as a vice-president of the European Parliament and joined the German SPD in 2009.

Most notable, however, was the work in the referenda campaigns, which were led by left parties in many countries across Europe, popularising opposition to the constitution and encouraging widespread public engagement with the issues. The most significant of these was held in France where the PCF campaigned vigorously for a 'No' vote. The French Socialist Party itself was split on the question, although there was a majority, in a membership vote, in favour. The referendum, which took place in May 2005, resulted in a 'No' victory with 55%. The Netherlands also voted 'No', and the Constitution was abandoned. Subsequently a modified version of some elements of the Constitution – the Lisbon Treaty – was agreed to in 2009, having initially failed to get through in 2008, following a 'No' vote in the first Irish referendum.

Towards a party of the European left

It was at the launch of the *appel commun* in January 1999 that PDS Chairman Lothar Bisky expressed the view that it was time 'to think

beyond the pre-existing forms of parliamentary cooperation within the European Parliament and the Forum of the New European Left'. He observed that 'there was no reason why the European Left should not have formed a common European party'.[15]

Following further discussions which took place during NELF meetings in Copenhagen and Paris in 2002 and at meetings organised by the initiating group in 2003, work was done to prepare a Basic Political Document, together with proposed structures and statutes. In January 2004, a meeting took place in Berlin, which launched the initiative for the PEL, calling on all interested parties to respond. The PDS Chair, Lothar Bisky, set out the basic principles for the new party, which he described as 'simple and cognizable for everyone:

- We are clearly against war, violence and armament – however this might be justified. The European left will not support participation in war.
- We clearly support equal rights and realisation of a society of solidarity. The European left, however, will strongly resist to the destruction of social welfare.
- We consequently stand up for democracy, equality, and ecological responsibility and for cosmopolitanism'.[16]

Eleven parties responded and others indicated that they wished to observe the process. At a meeting the following month in Athens, it was agreed to hold the founding Congress in Rome in May 2004. The core group of parties which drove the project forward comprised the Greek Synaspismos, the German PDS, the Italian Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) and the communist parties of France, Austria and Spain. While only a relatively small section of the NELF and GUE/NGL parties opted to join the PEL, even so it contained within itself a wide range of views about the nature of the new party's formation. As Patrick Theuret has observed:

> Among the most committed forces (whether parties or trends) some wished to move towards a real supranational Party with its own ideological profile and individual members while others aimed at a co-ordination of sovereign parties round a common

> platform. The most critical trends regret the moderation of its programme and also would prefer a forum rather than a Party, covering a more pan-European [profile rather] than that of the EU.[17]

The thinking of the various parties on this question was expressed openly during the foundation debates. Those that backed the PEL initiative brought different elements to the table: while Lothar Bisky of the PDS and Marie-George Buffet of the PCF spoke essentially of maximising their forces against neo-liberalism, Fausto Bertinotti of PRC and Gaspar Llamazares of *Izquierda Unida* (IU), the Spanish United Left, spoke of the more innovatory politics of the social movements that were very active in the context of the world social forum movement that sprang to prominence in the early part of the decade. According to Bertinotti,

> The movement of movements . . . is the way that a new generation has encountered politics and is encountering it every day. It is the place where new individual and collective practices are produced. Its horizon is our horizon. In the movement and with the movement we believe that another world is possible . . . Only the alternative left can build another Europe in the movement and with the movement. We are beginning today.[18]

Particular criticisms of the PEL project were articulated by the KKE and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) – both consistently eurosceptic in their positions, hostile to the 'institutionalisation' of 'European Parties' in the EU treaties and concerned about identity and party sovereignty. As the PCP stated:

> The Central Committee of the Portuguese Communist Party expresses serious concerns about the orientation taken by the process of creating a "European Political Party" and the harm that such a process may cause to the necessary cooperation between forces which, in spite of important differences, have worked together in the GUE and in other multilateral initiatives.[19]

Many of the Scandinavian left parties – markedly more eurosceptic than the PEL founders – also stayed outside the new formation, founding their own new coordination on 1 February 2004, the NGL Alliance, comprising the Danish Socialist People's Party, the Finnish Left Alliance, the Norwegian Socialist Left Party, the Swedish Left Party and the Left–Green Movement in Iceland.[20] The Alliance emphasises internationalism rather than regionalism in its platform: 'We are a Nordic alliance, but it does not mean that we are regionalists. On the contrary, internationalism is a basic foundation of our parties, and international solidarity one of our main philosophies and activities.'[21]

According to Theuret,

> Their points of view are fairly close to those of most of the communist parties that are critical of it – from whom, otherwise, the NGLA would tend to distance itself more than does the ELP. The Scandinavian coordination maintains links with all the other left parties, be they in or outside the ELP, in the framework of the GUE/NGL Group of the European Parliament.[22]

Significant emphasis was put – and agreed to by all parties – on the need to work openly and transparently, and on the objective that members and supporters should be involved in the process of building the new party. Sovereignty and independence of the parties involved was also a key issue – described by the party as 'sensitive', because of previous experience of domination by ruling state parties during the Cold War. The basic features of the new party's programme were in close synchronisation with the perspectives of the core founding group, and also with the wider new European left orientation. Describing itself as demanding 'another Europe', the PEL seeks a Europe that is against war and militarisation; that defends welfare states and the redistribution of wealth, power and influence; that embraces diverse cultures and is open to the world; that rejects historical revisionism and critically deals with its own history; that resists capitalist globalisation, is anti-capitalist and seeks to transform societies beyond capitalism; and that wants to democratise politics, make it accountable and participatory.[23]

Nevertheless, many parties in Europe that exactly shared that perspective chose not to join the PEL, considering it to implicitly endorse

the European Union by participating within its structures. The key issue was whether the founding of the PEL would exacerbate the differences that existed within GUE/NGL and NELF and ultimately make the relative unity of the new European left, post-1991, untenable. However, a measure of unity and common identity, around anti-neo-liberal, anti-war and socially solidaristic positions has clearly been achieved, and the challenge since the PEL's foundation has been whether this can be retained.

3
The Party of the European Left

The foundation of the Party of the European Left (PEL) on 8 and 9 May 2004, in Rome, was a significant step for the left in Europe. As Luke March observes, it was 'a major step forward, when the far left joined the other major European party families in having a transnational party (TNP) to coordinate its European election manifestos and policy formulation'.[1] But of course the purpose of PEL was much more than this – to be an effective political force, further unifying the left and overcoming its differences in order to achieve its vision of another Europe. As the PEL itself puts it:

> The Left in Europe consists of diverse, and in part opposing, political and social formations, programs and worldviews, which differ in their backgrounds and regional origins, experiences, and attitudes toward the EU.
>
> Precisely for this reason, the Left, if it wants to channel its resistance against the demolition of the social state and of democracy into political alternatives, has to express itself as united at the European level and develop necessary concrete and alternative proposals for a different EU, and a different Europe together.[2]

Thus a new political formation was added to the already existing frameworks for left cooperation, namely, the New European Left Forum which comprised 20 organisations; the United European Left/Nordic Green Left Group (GUE/NGL) in the European Parliament; a similar but more widely drawn group in the Council of

Europe which includes members of parliament from outside the EU, notably Russia; and the Nordic Green Left Alliance. Extreme left parties from the Trotskyist and other revolutionary left traditions also formed a European coordination in 2000 – the European Anti-Capitalist Left.

The basic programme of the PEL highlighted the common ground of the left parties which formed it:

- a Europe that says no to war and militarisation. The European Left is an anti-war Left
- a Europe that defends the social state, and renews it, as well as redistributes wealth, power and influence
- a Europe of diverse cultures, of freedom of spirit and open to the world. The European Left is a cultural Left, which refuses historical revisionism, because it is capable of dealing with its own history critically and respectfully
- a Europe open to a world that resists capitalist globalisation. The European Left is critical of capitalism: it is anti-capitalist and aims at a transformation of societies beyond the rule of capitalism
- a democratic Europe. The European Left wants to get politics out of the backrooms of power and back into society, onto the squares and streets, into the debates of citizens, men and women of all ages. Politics is a part of movements and it forms parties; the parties act in parliaments and in governments, in initiatives and in extra-parliamentary protests; it is counter-power and a designing force. It is ready to be held accountable, which is what distinguishes parties in the broad social discourse.

But these were the easy points on which to agree. The more controversial issues that kept key parties outside the PEL included attitudes towards national sovereignty and European integration and whether forming a European party was in some way a tacit acceptance of integration; the institutionalisation of EU-based parties, including EU funding; and alternatively too much and too little communist domination within the group. The extent to which criticisms of the communist past should be made was contentious. The preamble to the PEL constitution referred to 'the values and traditions of the socialist, communist and labour movement', as well as feminism, environmentalism, peace, human rights and other progressive

traditions in shaping the PEL. But the preamble went further on the subject of the communist tradition:

> We defend this legacy of our movement which inspired and contributed to securing the social certainties of millions of people. We keep the memory of these struggles alive including the sacrifices and the sufferings in the course of these struggles. We do this in unreserved disputation with undemocratic, stalinist practices and crimes, which were in absolute contradiction to socialist and communist ideals.[3]

One of the parties most antipathetic to this approach was the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM), the successor party to the ruling Czechoslovak Communist Party in the Czech Republic. As it stated in a resolution in response to the constitution in 2004:

> The character of the European Left Party (ELP) must be pan-European and no Left organisation must be excluded. The history of the communist movement in the 20th century cannot be written off as negative and it is necessary to learn lessons from mistakes that were made and to continue to develop everything positive which had happened.
>
> In the preamble 'Stalinist' evokes a variety of interpretations and reminiscences from the past. There is no generally accepted definition of what 'Stalinist' is. It is an artificial and propagandist label. It will hardly be possible and acceptable to avoid certain parties just because they are labelled as 'Stalinist'. The word 'Stalinist' can be replaced by other words – e.g. 'undemocratic'.[4]

A list of 26 parties was attached to the resolution, which the CPBM proposed should be invited to join the PEL. The CPBM itself decided to have observer status rather than full membership.

The Portuguese Communist Party, which chose neither to join PEL nor to observe, indicated its 'serious concerns about the orientation taken' in the process of setting up the PEL, feeling that it might cause problems between parties which while having differences had, nevertheless, worked together in the GUE and other multilateral initiatives. It took a strong stance on the question of communist identity:

> In the present circumstances . . . the communist and revolutionary movement cannot entirely be separated from a wider context of cooperation between progressive and revolutionary forces. But this cannot mean loss or dilution of identity. The relations of friendship, cooperation and solidarity between Communist parties, forces with affinities of history, ideology and long term project, are indispensable to affirm and restart the values and the project of socialism and communism.[5]

But despite the differences of perspective, and the decision of a number of key parties not to participate, a start had nevertheless been made. By the beginning of 2005, the PEL had member parties from 12 countries: the Austrian Communist Party, the Czech Party of Democratic Socialism, the Left of Estonia, the French Communist Party, the German Party of Democratic Socialism, *Synaspismos* of Greece, the Hungarian Workers' Party, Communist Refoundation of Italy, Communist Refoundation of San Marino, the Socialist Alliance Party of Romania, the United Left of Spain, the Communist Party of Spain, the United and Alternative Left (Catalunya), the Swiss Party of Labour, the Left Bloc of Portugal and the Belgian Communist Party. A further category of 'observers' extended the remit of the party: the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, AKEL (*Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú*) of Cyprus, Red–Green Alliance of Denmark, the German Communist Party, the Italian Party of Communists, the Left of Luxembourg, the Slovak Communist Party, the Party for Freedom and Solidarity of Turkey, the Communist Party of Finland, and the Renewing Communist Ecological Left (AKOA) – a group linked to *Synaspismos*. Many parties in GUE/NGL have not joined the PEL for the above-mentioned reasons, but a number of small parties from outside of the EU have found a common home within the PEL.

Following the founding congress in Rome in 2004, the PEL held its first congress in Athens in October 2005, resulting in the Athens Declaration. This acknowledged 'that the crisis currently afflicting Europe has no borders, and that the neo-liberal policies decided upon in Brussels and by the national governments are to blame for it. These choices have been made over a period of many years, and the result is in front of our eyes, now'. The Declaration appealed for unity of the left and highlighted the importance of working with social movements, trade unions and other political forces,

against neo-liberalism and war, especially in the Fourth European Social Forum to be held in Athens. It also specified the priorities of campaigning against unemployment and social exclusion; to defend and rebuild welfare systems; for the improvement of working conditions; for a re-orientation of the EU budget and monetary policy, emphasising the bankruptcy of the Fortress Europe approach; in favour of a European peace policy; and for the abolition of NATO.[6]

The PEL's second congress was held in Prague in November 2007, under the main slogan of 'Building Alternatives'. The Political Theses for the Congress were developed by a working group from early 2007 and arrived at by consensus of the group members. Setting out the general political lines for the PEL along which its member parties want 'to get active', it presents the same broadly anti-neo-liberal and progressive platform as subscribed to by the European left for many years but it also elaborates more on the role of the PEL. Speaking of the importance of struggles such as the constitutional No vote, and anti-globalisation and other movements working to make another Europe possible, the document reflects on the role of the PEL in the context of these developments:

> Most of these struggles do not automatically unite (themselves) or establish connections with forms of political representation. Many demands arising from the new generations and concerning working life, life in general, interpersonal relationships as influenced by the gender issue, cannot automatically transform themselves into a hegemonic culture as Antonio Gramsci called it. This set of demands can only turn into an alternative project of society, if they interact with a culture of transformation and an adequate political structure capable of bringing together both protesters and promoters of social change.
>
> This is the role of the EL.[7]

As well as this 'transformational role', envisaged by the PEL, the Theses also include a section entitled 'Fields in which the European left will actively contribute to change'. This includes two very detailed policy sections on 'Capitalist globalisation and Europe' and 'European left against war', where the document moves beyond

high-minded statements, providing an in-depth framework for parliamentary and extra-parliamentary campaigning at both national and regional levels.

Capitalist globalisation and Europe

Identifying the time in which we live as one of flawed, limited and unsustainable capitalist globalisation, the PEL asserts that this is a time of 'irreversible new realities and potential effects linked to the development on worldwide scale of the exchange of knowledge'.[8] It believes that the extreme and worsening contradiction between the disastrous effects of capitalism and the potential for human emancipation makes the development of a vision of transformation all the more urgent. It notes the increasing concentration of power in the hands of capitalist institutions and the willingness of the governments of powerful states to shield these organisations from any democratic control. A considerable emphasis is put upon analysing knowledge as a 'non-material monopoly' in addition to the material monopoly of globalised finance capitalism:

> The tools for understanding reality and for the production of the necessary goods are in the hands of a few people . . . However there is an essential difference in the nature of these goods and material ones, the basic feature of non-material goods is that their usage by one 'consumer' does not prevent the usage by others. Today the fundamental aim of the left must be to assert that knowledge is a public good and to fight for the implementation of this principle.

Adequate measures are required to assure free access to knowledge and to protect the production of knowledge from the laws of the market.

The Theses identify the continuity of approach by European capital in its attempt to compete in the global market by reducing labour costs, delocalising production, wage controls, reducing workers' rights, reducing the public role in the economy and wreaking havoc in the global south. The Maastricht criteria are considered to remain the basis of economic policy, supplemented in their limiting role by the stability pact and 'the rigid monetarist criteria of the European Central Bank'.

Five main principles are outlined to underpin the PEL's 'socio-economic-ecological' proposal for Europe: full, qualified and secure employment; a leading role for public financial intervention; a sustainable economic model; defence of the public sector and public services; and guaranteed secure incomes and pensions at a level ensuring human dignity. To achieve these goals, the PEL therefore backs an integrated strategy for sustainability and solidarity to include 'economic, socio-cultural, ecological and institutional dimensions'. Such a strategy requires 'binding targets at EU level, action programs and measures, a common regulatory framework in all relevant policy areas such as scientific research or regional policies, interlinking by the EU and its member states'. A central plank is the reform of the current system of economic and monetary union. A key feature of this is placing the European Central Bank under democratic control, ending the current growth and stability pact and its focus on controlling inflation as well as altering the Bank's statutes to require it to increase the levels of employment and environmental sustainability. Tax is also addressed, with a proposal to move to a Europe wide progressive, redistributive system based on individual income: 'from the present one that reduces the taxation on the profits of capital and puts the main burden on the workers' salaries to a progressive one able to produce a redistribution of created wealth'. PEL also backs a Tobin Tax – the taxation of speculative financial transactions.

The document also addresses how this can possibly be achieved given the obvious hostility of those currently holding power. The answer remains the communist answer: mass mobilisation, from the left, the trade unions and the social movements. But the elaboration of how this can be done stresses debate and discussion rather than industrial or other forms of militancy. The need for mobilisation is why the PEL 'wants to initiate a broader debate about an alternative and about fostering movements and coalitions for change'. Debates are sought within the European Social Forum, the trade unions and other social and democratic initiatives.

European Left against war

The left in Europe, and particularly the communist movement, has a strong tradition of peace and anti-war campaigning. Indeed, the communist movement originated in the opposition to the First World

War, breaking with the pro-war positions of the majority of the Second International. The Theses for the Prague Congress identify a strong theme of activity where the left in Europe has generally done well in terms of articulating a popular sentiment and playing a positive leading role:

> Social initiatives and social forums, trade unions, left-wing parties and critics of globalisation are finding more and more common ground in their actions against war, violence, armament and militarization. Those in Europe who say no to war could become the majority: this is an important insight, and starting point for the policies of the European Left.[9]

In analysing international developments since 9/11, the PEL identifies a new imperialist partitioning and conflicts over economic markets and pipeline routes as being the motivator for US and NATO wars, rather than human rights and democracy. Written at the tail end of the Bush administration, the Theses describe the US neo-conservative strategy of solving conflicts by military means as having reached an 'impasse', failing internationally and losing support within the United States itself. The document notes the danger of increased European involvement in such wars and regrets that Europe does not act internationally as a force for peace.

Calling for an alternative to war, based on the rule of law and economic justice, the PEL stresses the need for an immediate end to the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan; that there was no military solution to the nuclear dispute with Iran; its concern about the oppression of pro-democracy forces in Iran; its concern about Turkish government intervention in the Iraqi–Kurdish autonomous zone; the need for the EU and its member states to take a stance independent of the United States to contribute to the development of peace and stability in the region, including the possibility of a permanent Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)-type body for the Middle East; and the need for a comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian question involving all regional players, including Lebanon and Syria, and support for dialogue and unity between Palestinian and Israeli left forces.

In terms of the EU itself, the PEL opposes the militarisation of the EU's foreign and security policy and the development of Europe – or its individual member states – as an interventionist power. It opposes

a European Rapid Reaction Force and the European Arms Agency, and demands a reduction in military expenditure. It supports an alternative to the Common Foreign and Security Policy and rejects the role of the EU as an 'integrated arm of NATO'. More broadly it seeks to challenge the European military industrial complex, the culture of militarism and its shaping of industrial and development policies, instead backing the conversion of war industries for peaceful production. The PEL opposes all US military bases in Europe and any plans for building new ones or rearmament. It specifically mentions the US base in Vicenza in Italy, and the proposed US missile defence bases in the Czech Republic and Poland, or such bases in other parts of Eastern Europe, whether specifically US bases or ostensibly NATO facilities.

The PEL is also strongly anti-nuclear, opposing the continuing presence of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, under the auspices of NATO. It supports the call for nuclear weapons-free zones in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and all other parts of the world and insists that all states with nuclear weapons should be compelled to disarm. It also calls for an international agreement on abandoning nuclear first strike – a policy which Europe is bound to, via NATO's nuclear policy – and against the use of nuclear weapons against countries which don't have them, the so-called 'negative security assurances'. Active campaigning in this area is important for the PEL and many rank and file members of its member parties engage in anti-war and peace activism, often dating back to the anti-cruise and Pershing campaigning of the 1980s, which was a formative period for many on the left. The PEL member parties have also been centrally involved in Europe-wide cooperation: 'The European Left is willing to cooperate with all peace movements and other political forces which are putting the issue of disarmament and the striving for conversion at the core of the political agenda.' Member parties of the PEL have been actively involved in campaigning against the siting of US missile defence bases in Central Europe, giving support to the campaign that developed in the Czech Republic – *Ne Základnám* – in particular. There has also been active involvement in the No to NATO campaign, a Europe-wide initiative, led by anti-war and anti-nuclear groups, to protest first at the NATO sixtieth anniversary summit in Strasbourg in 2009 and subsequently at the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 where its new Strategic Concept was launched. The underlying

principle of the PEL towards conflict resolution is that it should be based on dialogue and peaceful methods.

In fact, the PEL 'declines the use of force for conflict solution', and advocates a common European policy based on a 'multi faceted non-military security concept'. It also backs the OSCE and favours the improvement of relations with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, stressing the importance of building good relations across the whole of Europe. Indeed, the PEL operates in the former Soviet republics, understanding 'Europe' as wider than the European Union alone. In July 2010, the three-day European Left Summer University, entitled 'The crisis and the balance of powers', was held in Chişinău, Moldova – where the Communist Party is a member of PEL – attended by youth from a number of European left parties. Grigore Petrenco, international secretary of the Communist Party of Moldova, addressed the event, and 'emphasized the importance of realizing this event in Chişinău, where the Constitution and the democratic values are being attacked by a government that does not represent the majority of the country'.[10] The PEL has worked to support the Moldovan Communist Party in its recent conflicts with the Moldovan government and it is here that the benefit of a trans-regional party with weight at the European level is made clear.

The ruling Liberal Democrat coalition in Moldova has attempted to ban the communist name and symbols in a context where the Communist Party is the only opposition party in the parliament, and is also the largest political party in Moldova. In June 2010 the PEL expressed

> its deep concern about the anti-democratic activities of the ruling Liberal Democratic coalition in Moldova. The government's attempts to ban the name "communist" and any symbol representing the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova are not acceptable. These attempts run counter to the European Social Charter and all international standards and raise legitimate questions about the willingness and capability of the current Moldovan government to recognize European law and standards as a precondition for any serious treatment of the country's application for EU membership.[11]

The question of the European Union's international relations is also important as the PEL wants the EU to actively promote a multilateral

system based on the independence and self-determination of nations, together with their right to determine their own socio-economic development. This is highlighted particularly with regard to the countries of the global south: 'This approach must be a basis for the EU's relationship with countries in Latin America, in Africa, with China, India and other Asian countries'.

An Ecological Europe for peace and global justice

The environment is a significant area for parties which are primarily green–left in their political identification. The PEL's Political Theses take the view that capitalism exacerbates the global environmental crisis: 'A model based on the obsessional and exclusive search for maximum profit at the lowest social and environmental costs in the shortest possible time can only destroy our planet.'[12] The PEL advocates a major role for Europe in exceeding the post-Kyoto goals, stressing the need for an alternative model to the 'capitalist productivist' one. Specific policy proposals include the equality of emissions per capita; cooperation and technology transfer; a carbon tax; the promotion of energy-saving and alternative sources; the radical change of energy consumption; investment in renewables; and the reduction of waste and relocalisation of production to reduce transportation. Common goods, described as 'water, energy, health, education, transport and communications', must be in the public domain and protected from privatisation:

> One of the major stakes of the political action of the left, in order to change Europe, is to defend public services, to let them develop, to create the conditions for social and democratic control of the most important sectors that are essential to life, and environmental protection.

The Congress itself adopted a motion entitled 'The Need to Define a New Energy and Climate Policy for Europe and the World',[13] which elaborated on many aspects of the general policy. Emphasis was laid upon equality of access to energy, not only within countries, but globally across developed and developing countries. Affordable energy prices were seen as a matter of social justice; so access and affordability were twinned as demands.

For a qualitative shift

Yet not all discussion at the Congress focused on the detail of policy and practical campaigning goals. A key intervention on the transformative role of the PEL was made by Fausto Bertinotti, former leader of the Italian PRC, and first president of the PEL. Bertinotti, who during his leadership of PRC had orientated towards the radical social movements, argued for the urgency of a qualitative shift in the politics of the left in Europe. Faced with capitalist globalisation, political leadership was necessary as well as protest and an increased level of practical struggle. The Congress, he argued, 'must readdress the challenge of interpreting the malaise, the criticism and the opposition of the peoples of Europe who, like the protest movements, if they do not find a political entity capable of offering a strategy, risk becoming frustrated and imploding'.[14] Bertinotti drew attention to the important political events that PEL member parties had been involved in: the French struggle against the European constitution, the emergence of *Die Linke* in Germany and European-level campaigning against the Bolkstein directive. But it had not proved possible to create unified struggles even where the issues faced at a national level were the same – for example, attacks on welfare or the reduction in the real value of wages. Protest action had taken place at a national level in many countries but had not been translated into political advance:

> In this panorama there is evidence that the increase in struggles is accompanied by a crisis of politics, so it can easily happen that there may be populations engaged in struggle and at the same time neo-liberal or liberal-social policies are carried forward; and is there no capability to create an alternative?[15]

In the new and brutal phase of capitalism in which we are operating, Bertinotti argued that 'unless the big question of the contestation and the transformation of the existing capitalist order is reopened, these great struggles too risk going nowhere. This is our task. This is where we need that quality leap'.[16] He went on to make the case for a new basic programme for the anti-capitalist, alternative left which would present itself as a convincing alternative to existing forms of government and society and have the potential to succeed in this goal. Without this, the left could be 'cancelled' from

European politics which could be reduced simply to the alternation between different bourgeois alliances in government, and no alternative politics and society would be possible. Referring to the teachings of Antonio Gramsci, and his continuing influence on left politics in Italy, Bertinotti stated his view that

> the question of hegemony is once again becoming the big question in politics, hegemony not as the triumph of an ideology but hegemony as formation of peoples' common sense, hegemony as the coming and harbinger of a different society that's possible, hegemony as the ability to call into question the rigid schema of compatibilities within which even struggles are imprisoned, even the most important and generous of them.[17]

In closing the conference, the new PEL president, Lothar Bisky of the German *Die Linke*, took a more pragmatic approach, speaking of the common goals of the constituent parties in the PEL, highlighting again the frequency and scale of mobilisations against the ravages of capitalism and its attacks on the social state. While referring to the contribution of Bertinotti, he did not engage with his sense of urgency about the qualitative shift needed in the Left's approach, responding rather by reiterating the diversity of the existing components:

> I would also like to assure him that we will remain an open party . . . We have no need to fear that our left-wing alternative will lack an identity. When we are at the press festival of *l'humanité* or singing the song of the Revolt of the Carnations, when we experience the work of Mikis Theodorakis in Athens, we are taking what are regarded as solemn occasions as the basis for the EL's work, namely our identity as open to new experiences, cultures and solutions.[18]

The *Transform* network and journal

However, other elements within the PEL take a more proactive approach to the idea of a transformational political role being played by the PEL and actively work to generate a new shared theoretical culture. In September 2007, the *Transform! European network of alternative thinking and political dialogue* began a joint project in cooperation

with the PEL, and this was backed by the European Commission. *Transform*'s twice-yearly journal, published in seven languages, is now the journal of the PEL. According to Elisabeth Gauthier, from *Espaces Marx*:

> *Transform* is the political educational Foundation of the European Left Party and the journal is its publication. We existed before the European Left Party and when the ELP was founded we were active in this founding process and while we have members from other countries too we also with the permission of the European Commission became the Foundation of the ELP.[19]

Although the journal editor and coordinator of the *Transform* Europe network is Vienna-based economist Walter Baier, the key player in the project is *Espaces Marx*, the theoretical institute of the French Communist Party, which works in both the French and the European space, with its *Transform* partners. While *Transform* worked initially with a subvention from the PCF, that has steadily reduced, giving way to a broader range of financial support.

Espaces Marx and the *Transform* network have cooperated in organising the PEL Summer Universities – mostly recently in Moldova – and have also organised joint events at the European Social Forum, the *Fete de l'Humanite* in France and a range of other conferences and seminars on political, economic and cultural issues across Europe.

Transform was founded at the first World Social Forum (WSF) in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as a range of left theoretical and educational bodies began to relate to each other via the social forum process in Europe and elsewhere. The relationship between *Transform* and the WSF continued, and in 2006, *Transform* was admitted to the WSF's International Council.[20] According to *Transform* editor Walter Baier, 'the Social Forum became an incubation space for the emergence of new structures', and the nature of and challenges in the development of the European Social Forum (ESF) from its first event in Florence in 2002 was a significant factor in the development of the Party of the European Left.

Transform comprises a network of 'European NGOs, foundations, institutes, and individuals dealing with political education and critical societal analysis'. It has 16 member organisations: *Transform* Austria, the *Association Culturelle Joseph Jacquemotte* (Belgium), the Society for European Dialogue (Czech Republic), Left Forum

(Finland), *Espaces Marx* (France), *Fondation Copernic* (France), *Fondation Gabriel Peri* (France), the journal *Sozialismus* (Germany), Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Germany), Nicos Poulantzas Institute (Greece), *Transform* Italy, *Transform* Luxembourg, Manifesto Foundation (Norway), Cultures of Labour and Socialism (Portugal), Foundation for Marxist Studies (Spain) and the Centre for Marxist Social Studies (Sweden).[21] Some of these such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation – the theoretical and educational institute of *Die Linke* – are well-funded by the state, as are all comparable German parliamentary party institutions such as the SPD's Friedrich Eburt Foundation. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation employs many staff and has offices worldwide for the advance of political education. Others, while pivotal to the project, like *Espaces Marx* in France which employs a small number of staff, do not receive state funding. In other countries, such as Italy, where there is no comparable institution, the initiative to develop a *Transform* group has been taken by individual academics or intellectuals; in the Italian case, by Marco Berlinguer – son of the PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer – who was originally in PRC.

The type of political and theoretical initiatives that *Transform* undertakes is evident from its intervention at the European Social Forum in Istanbul in July 2010. Seminars – hosted together with the PEL – included 'Which political answer to the crisis?'; 'Analysis of the car industry crisis: what kind of social and ecological reconversion do we need?'; 'What can be a left perspective of ecology?'; 'The gender question in the economic crisis'; 'The neo-liberal reform of higher education: student struggles of the last period'; 'After the social and political "Greek crisis", how to build another Europe?'; 'Economy and Democracy: How the lack of democracy causes the crisis of economy'; and 'Anti-crisis programs of left and social movements: a comparative analysis'. *Transform's* platforms include party political representatives, trade unionists, academics and movement activists.[22] Gauthier sees part of *Transform*'s role as working with both parties and social movements linked to both, and this is clearly expressed in the balance of their seminars and conferences. The emphasis is on shared analytical development which will then underpin campaigning.

But while PEL/*Transform* had a strong profile at the Istanbul ESF, the Forum itself was poorly attended, indicating the diminishing support for the social forum movement, in Europe at least. There was a clear recognition that the future and direction of the ESF itself

had to be discussed and assessed. Nevertheless, the PEL's reporting of the event was positive, calling for participation, solidarity and resistance, together with a Europe-wide appeal for a general strike on 29 September 2010: 'In a time of a social, ecological and economic crisis as we're witnessing today there is no more time for fragmentation and the answers from the Left should be visible and united.'[23] The PEL/*Transform* seminars emphasised that the ongoing crisis has to be seen not only as a danger, but also as an opportunity, and that the eventual outcome would depend on 'the mobilization and capacity to fight and find solutions against the capitalist system and the banks'.

The *Transform* journal seeks to advance left analysis and support strategic development, and addresses the question of 'transformative' politics. It often revisits theoretical debates and attempts to reinterpret them for the current moment. Again, Antonio Gramsci is frequently a point of reference. Baier, in considering the attitude of left parties towards the state and how to bring about change in society, observed:

> Antonio Gramsci analysed two sides of the state: political power and hegemony. If we accept this point of view the two sides of the state correspond to two logics of political action: the struggle for power, which requires the ability for strategic action, for bringing about a relative political unity and making decisions, would be one such logic; achieving cultural hegemony on the level of argument, with the Aufhebung [simultaneous retention and transcendence] of difference, and at the level of communication would be the other. There is no formula for determining the right combination of these two dimensions of politics, which is true for all situations. Rather, what is clear is that politics must always consist of both these elements.[24]

It is tempting to understand the relationship between PEL and *Transform* as a means of combining these two dimensions of politics, not least through their intellectual and analytical interventions in the social forum process, the summer universities and other sites of potential theoretical and strategic development. The extent to which the PEL's member parties buy into the hegemonic as well as political power dimension no doubt varies considerably. The key driving

force for many participants has been the development of a common platform for European parliamentary elections – as seen from the late 1990s – and this was first tested in the European elections of 2009. PEL held an Electoral Conference in Berlin on 29 November 2008 and adopted a Common Platform entitled 'Together for Change in Europe! 21st Century Europe Needs Peace, Democracy, Social Justice and Solidarity'.

The Platform represents continuity in the position of the PEL and its member parties and articulates the priorities of the Political Theses of the PEL's Second Congress. There is no discernible difference in approach to the positions taken by the left parties in the European Parliament prior to the establishment of the PEL. The Platform sets its positions in the context of the global economic crisis, its manifestation in Europe and the PEL's analysis of it and response to it: 'Everywhere in the European Union the shock is tremendous. The crisis is caused by the globalisation of hazardous neo-liberal capitalism, which is namely being pushed ahead by irresponsible elites in charge of politics and economics. The price for this irresponsibility will have to be paid by the people.'[25]

The Platform also asserts that the crisis is not only economic but political, reaffirming its opposition to the Lisbon Treaty and its opposition to the militarisation of EU foreign policy linked to NATO, as well as its anti-neo-liberal position.

In terms of the election results, overall there was no major shift. Those PEL member and observer parties which took seats were AKEL (Cyprus), two seats; Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (the Czech Republic), four seats; *Front de Gauche* (France), five seats; *Die Linke* (Germany), eight seats; SYRIZA or *Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás* (Greece), one seat; *Bloco de Esquerda* (Portugal), three seats; and *Izquierda Unida, Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds-Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (IU–ICV–EUiA) (Spain), two seats. This totals 25. In 2004, the total for the PEL member and observer parties was AKEL, two; CPBM, six; PCF, three; PDS, seven; *Synaspismos*, one; PRC and *Partito dei Comunisti Italiani* (PdCI) (Italy), seven; *Bloco de Esquerda*, one; and Spain's IU coalition, one, totalling 28. The German PDS had become Die Linke in the intervening period and had increased its seats by one, and the PCF had become part of the *Front de Gauche* with the new *Parti de Gauche*, increasing its seats by two. The major change was the catastrophic collapse of the communist vote in Italy,

primarily as a result of the PRC's support for sending Italian troops to Afghanistan. For a party that had been built up on its basis in the social movements – including the Italian anti-war movement – this was an extraordinary development for which it paid the political price in both the European and Italian parliaments. The position taken by PRC was against the position on Afghanistan adopted by the PEL – for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

Of course the PEL total is not the same as the total for the GUE/NGL group in the Parliament which includes those left parties not involved in the PEL. In 2004, the GUE/NGL total was 41 out of 785 seats; in 2009 it was 33 out of 736. There were losses of individual seats in a number of countries, but no indication of a major difference in performance between the PEL and non-PEL left parties in either a positive or a negative direction. Again, the most significant impact on the total number of seats was the Italian collapse. A reallocation of seats had taken place between the two elections which may well have had an impact on the number of seats won. This was linked to the further expansion of the EU to include two new member states: Bulgaria and Romania. The Romanian Communist Party was a founding member of the PEL under its previous name the Socialist Alliance Party (*Partidul Alianţa Socialistă*; PAS), which was changed in July 2010. The Bulgarian Left is an applicant party for PEL membership. Neither party won a seat in the European elections.

In January 2010, the PEL Executive Board and Council of Chairpersons agreed that the Third Congress should take place in Paris in December 2010. Held from 3 to 5 December, the Congress elected Pierre Laurent, Secretary General of the PCF, as the PEL President and modified the constitution so that the vice-presidency now comprises four vice-chairs – Alexis Tsipras (President of *Synaspismos*, Greece), Marisa Matias (MEP, Left Bloc, Portugal), Grigori Petrenco (Member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova) and Maite Mola (Head of International Relations of the Spanish Communist Party). The new Treasurer was Diether Dehm (*Die Linke*, Germany). The purpose of the expansion of leadership posts was to ensure more adequate geographical representation across Europe and 'more active and dynamic management'. A number of new parties were accepted into membership of the PEL on the first day of the congress: the Belarusian Party of the Left 'Just World', the Bulgarian Left, the Red–Green Alliance (Denmark), the

Left Alliance of Finland, the Communist Party of Finland, the *Parti de Gauche* (France) and United Left (France).[26] The PEL now has 27 full members, and 11 observers, from 24 different countries. The Paris Congress also agreed to and published a Political Action Programme for 2011–2013, entitled 'Agenda for a social Europe: Joint Action Platform for resistance and alternatives in Europe'. The Platform noted the 'unbearable sacrifices' being imposed on the European people in the form of austerity measures, public spending cuts and the liberalisation of public services and the labour market. These policies, it observed,

> are presented as a necessary response to the financial and economic crisis. But this is a crisis of capitalism, and of its current globalised and financial form. This crisis also impacts on the environment, energy, food, cultural and moral values. Therefore this crisis finds expression at all political levels and in all societies marked by the ruling capitalist mode of production and similarly at the EU level with its recent orientations, neoliberal policies and institutions.[27]

Linking the PEL's opposition to these neo-liberal policies to that of the rest of what it termed the 'plural left' in Europe – other socialist, communist and red–green parties and organisations – the Platform stressed the need to set out alternatives at a time when 'new resistance is developing across Europe'. The intention is to encourage the resistance and shape from it a movement for an alternative vision of Europe. The Platform posed a number of proposals, which it indicated were intended to evolve in open debate among European peoples and movements:

- It is time for a radical democratisation of European politics
- We are not paying for your crisis
- Fight the crisis effectively – now!
- Action plan against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion
- For a new Development Model

The Platform essentially reiterates the general approach of the PEL in a thoughtful and detailed fashion, but while stressing the urgency of the need for action, the Platform has an aspirational quality which verges on the abstract and discursive. It breaks out of this to some

extent in the section entitled 'Fight the crisis effectively – now!' where it becomes more concrete in terms of action:

> We want to lead the campaign for a global tax on financial transactions, for higher incomes, more protected and good jobs and humane working hours, secure pensions and better public infrastructure. We will do this together with trade unionists, social forums, women's, environmental and youth movements, migrant organisations and local authorities. We want to lead this campaign in our countries, and at the European level.[28]

There is clearly a precedent for these parties leading mass protest on these issues in the form of the anti-Maastricht protests of the early to mid-1990s, which put this political current back on the mainstream agenda. The KKE, which is not a member of the PEL but participates in GUE/NGL in the European Parliament, has already played a major role in the militant protests in Greece and other left parties are also well-placed if they can work rapidly to harness the dynamism of the newly radicalised younger generation, as well as their more traditional allies in the trade union movements.

4
Diverse Trends: An Overview

Whereas the 1990s were an unexpectedly positive, albeit often fraught, political experience for many of the communist and former communist parties, the first decade of the twenty-first century saw few of them really able to build on what they had achieved. Two parties stand out as particularly successful – *Die Linke* in Germany and the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) in Cyprus. *Die Linke* emerged as an alternative left party for the whole of Germany with a steadily improving electoral performance (see Chapter 5), and AKEL not only became the largest single party in the Cypriot elections but also secured the presidency in a constitutional context where the president has significant political powers (see below).

Of the other parties in the new European left framework, the French Communist Party (PCF) went from great success at the end of the 1990s as one of the shapers of Jospin's plural left government to catastrophic performance after its period in office, primarily owing to its failure to withdraw from the government when Jospin made his neo-liberal turn. Since then, the PCF has made significant attempts to rethink its approach to political and electoral alliances and has formed a common front with the new Parti de Gauche of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former Socialist Party senator. The parallels with the experience of the PDS and WASG in forming *Die Linke* are clear (see Chapter 7). The situation of Communist Refoundation in Italy (PRC) is most starkly disastrous, given its success in the 1990s and its role on the European and even global stage because of its prominence in the social movements – most notably the anti-war movement. It was PRC's departure from its anti-war stance which

most notably contributed to its catastrophic result in the elections of 2008, to the extent that Italy's communists have no representation whatsoever in the Italian parliament (see Chapter 6).

Spain's United Left

In Spain, the political and electoral fortunes of Izquierda Unida (IU) have been in decline over the past decade, following a positive showing in the 1990s. IU's best-ever election result was in May 1996, when it took 10.54% of the vote and 21 seats. However, the right-wing Popular Party (PP) of José Maria Aznar defeated the ruling Socialists (PSOE) by 38.8% to 37.6%. This defeat, which led to the first right-wing government in Spain since 1982, provoked a crisis within the IU about its relations with PSOE, particularly regarding its policy of 'sorpasso' – overtaking PSOE – which had led both to hostility towards PSOE and to political attacks upon it, which may well have contributed to its defeat. The debates focused on the basis on which alliances with PSOE might be forged. A minority within IU, which had previously supported the Maastricht Treaty, argued for alliance with PSOE without pressing for any political change. The leadership position was that it was not in principle opposed to forging an alliance with PSOE to form a new left majority, but the alliance had to be on the right political terms. The IU leadership wished to use an alliance to push PSOE to the left and on this basis IU went into the 2000 general election having signed an agreement with PSOE but both parties did very badly – PSOE on 34.16% and IU on 5.45%. Aznar's PP was again victorious with 44.52% of the vote. As Luis Ramiro-Fernández observed, writing prior to the 2004 election, 'The competition for left-wing votes is nowadays more difficult, since the Socialists are in opposition to the centre-right government. Some messages of IU's discourse are likely to be adopted by its main competitor.'[1]

In fact, there were two particular factors which led to a victory for PSOE over the PP in 2004. Firstly, the opposition of PSOE's leader José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero to the Iraq war, which had been backed by Aznar. According to Joan Guitart,

> When on March 16 Aznar joined the "Azores three" alongside Bush and Blair, a month after the huge mobilisations of

> February 15 against the war, the rejection was very large, but it expressed more a "public opinion" than a social movement. In these conditions, it was easy for the PSOE to be its "political expression" and the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq became the major issue for Zapatero at the general elections of March 2004.[2]

Secondly, the way in which the PP had tried to manipulate the tragic Madrid Bombings – which took place three days before the election – to their own ends. PP claimed it was an *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) bombing when in fact evidence suggested it was a militant Islamic attack, possibly linked to the Spanish government's backing for the Iraq war. The result was that PSOE polled 43.3%, PP 38.3% and IU 4.96%. Zapatero proceeded to form a minority government and both IU and the Republican Left of Catalonia gave their backing, giving Zapatero's government an effective majority. PSOE won again in 2008, while IU, in coalition with Initiative for Catalonia-Greens (ICV), lost three of its seats, was reduced to two seats and polled 3.77% of the vote.

The issue of the IU's own political identity and its relationship to PSOE remains crucial to its future development. As Jaime Pastor – a member of the IU leadership from the Fourth International current, *Espacio Alternativo* – observed after the IU's poor performance in the European elections of 2004,

> Undoubtedly, the crisis of IU started a long time age, but for that reason we should not underestimate the fact that of late the image that this formation offers to a large sector of the electorate is that of being a left complement to the PSOE, rather than an anti-capitalist and alternative left with an autonomous project.[3]

In November 2008, *Espacio Alternativo* renamed itself *Izquierda Anticapitalista* or Anticapitalist Left (IA), and decided to constitute itself as a party to contest the June 2009 European elections as part of a European left bloc, together with the New Anti-capitalist Party of Olivier Besancenot, in France. Although IA secured well over the 15,000 signatures necessary to form a legally recognised party, nevertheless, its vote was poor, at 19,880 votes, or 0.13% of votes cast.

Under its new leader, Cayo Lara Moya, elected in 2008 after the election disaster, IU has pursued a path that is strongly critical of the measures taken by the PSOE government to deal with the economic crisis – massive public spending cuts have had a devastating impact on the living standards of working people and the increasing number of unemployed. As Cayo Lara stated on 31 December 2010, 'The PP and PSOE defend the same neoliberal model. The alternative left to the savage neoliberalism is the task that lies ahead.'[4]

The Communist Party of Greece

While most of the key players in Western Europe opted to join the Party of the European Left in 2004 (see Chapter 3), a smaller number of significant parties, while participating in the GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament, chose not to do so. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) stayed out of the PEL altogether, having made their political reasons absolutely clear, including their resistance to what they considered to be excessive criticism of the communist tradition from some in the PEL framework. Both parties have been consistently eurosceptic in their positions, expressing their hostility to the 'institutionalisation' of 'European Parties' in the EU treaties and concerned about identity and party sovereignty which could be impaired as a result of participation in a supranational party. Both parties now face electoral challenge on the left from parties within the PEL. The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) in Cyprus, without question Europe's most successful communist party, opted to become an observer of the PEL rather than a member. All three parties participate in the annual International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, initiated in 1998 by the KKE. The meetings have a very wide international participation, comprising parties that continue to identify as Marxist-Leninist.

The KKE was outlawed in Greece following the Civil War and it existed in very difficult circumstances of persecution, jail or exile. The military junta which operated from 1967 to 1974 exacerbated these problems and it was during this period, in 1968, that a split occurred within the party and those who took issue with the KKE's strongly pro-Soviet line – particularly at the time of the Soviet intervention in

Czechoslovakia in 1968 – formed the KKE (Interior). This new party orientated towards parties embracing Eurocommunism in the 1970s. It subsequently split in 1986, and a part of it formed the Greek Left which went on to play a key role in forming Synaspismos – the Coalition of Left and Progress – in the late 1980s.

The KKE was legalised in 1974 and began to participate in Greek electoral politics, taking 9.47% in a united left coalition in 1974, then approximating 9% or 10% in each election until June 1989, when it participated in forming *Synaspismos* with the Greek Left; *Synaspismos's* vote rose to 13.1%. *Synaspismos*, which had come in third place, then joined a short-lived government coalition with the right-wing New Democracy party of Konstantinos Karamanlis in the context of economic scandals levelled at the previous centre–left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) government of Andreas Papandreou. Later that year it also participated in a short-lived government with both New Democracy and PASOK. In 1991, the KKE left *Synaspismos* and entered a period of reassessment and reconsolidation as an explicitly communist party. According to KKE leader Aleka Papariga,

> The KKE went through its own internal crisis early in the 1990s, during which our country's bourgeois forces intervened actively. They openly supported that group of party cadres, particularly the members of the CC, whose aim was to dissolve the KKE and to merge it in a leftist form of collaboration that celebrated the defeat of the forces of socialism. Then it appeared possible that, by marginalising or dissolving the KKE, the view that socialism is utopian would prevail, and therefore that the main and basic issue was to humanise capitalism . . .
>
> In 1991 the KKE was obliged to take a stand against unbridled anticommunism, against a series of attacks on it that bore some features of political intrigue. It was obliged, under conditions of retreat and the reduction of its forces, to stand on its own, to respond without delay to the need to organise resistance by the labour and popular movement to the first wave of privatisations, to the revocation of gains that had begun with the New Democracy government, and to the war that broke out in the Balkans.[5]

In 1993, standing independently, the KKE took 4.54% of the vote, to 2.94% for *Synaspismos*. In elections since then, the share of votes for the KKE and *Synaspismos* and SYRIZA (*Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás*) – the coalition under which it has contested elections since 2004 – have approximated 2:1 in favour of the KKE. Both parties reached their highest point since 1989, in 2007, with the KKE on 8.15% and SYRIZA on 5.04%. Yet expectations that their votes might increase in 2009, in the context of the financial crisis which was giving rise to major protests in Greece, were not met: both saw a slight reduction in votes with the KKE on 7.54% and SYRIZA on 4.6%.

The KKE continues in its sharp criticism of the Synaspismos political current, and of the PEL. On 1 December 2010, the KKE wrote an open letter to communist and workers' parties of Europe – which it plays an active role in coordinating – condemning the decision by the PEL to hold its Third Congress at the same time as that of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties being held in South Africa. The letter stated,

> As is well-known the KKE took a clear position from the beginning against the possible establishment of a 'European Party'. Other parties which in the past had followed in Europe the so-called eurocommunist current and were in opposition to the USSR and the other socialist countries of Europe, played a leading role in its foundation. A series of parties which had given up any reference to communist ideals also supported its establishment, such as the SYNASPISMOS party from Greece which plays a consistent anti-communist role, as well as the DIE LINKE party from Germany . . . today we are of the opinion that our assessments have been confirmed, if we evaluate the activity, theses and all the experience of the ELP's existence. In its programmatic documents (constitution and programme) the ELP rejects anything communist, the revolutionary traditions; it is hostile to scientific socialism, class struggle and socialist revolution. In its constitution it accepts as part of the EU institutional framework that the capitalist EU is eternal, and a basic condition for its existence is its acceptance that it will not question the framework of the EU.[6]

Subsequently on 28 December 2010, the Central Committee of the KKE published a statement accusing Die Linke of having a 'love that

dare not speak its name', following Wikileak revelations which suggested that *Die Linke* was soft on German membership of NATO. It was reported that Gregor Gysi had attempted to 'appease' the US Ambassador to Germany on the subject of Die Linke's opposition to NATO by suggesting that a general demand for the dissolution of NATO was a soft demand compared to calling for German withdrawal, as countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France would never agree to dissolution. Gysi put this down to an error in translation. But in the opinion of the KKE, this was further evidence that 'the so-called ELP does not call the capitalist system and the imperialist organizations into question'.[7]

The Portuguese Communist Party

The PCP had also experienced illegality and dictatorship, being outlawed between the late 1920s and the revolution of 1974 and playing a major role in the opposition to Salazar's dictatorship. After the restoration of parliamentary democracy, the PCP ranged between 15% and 20% in the national elections and performed strongly in local elections, having substantial bases of regional support. With the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989, the PCP held an Extraordinary Thirteenth Congress in May 1990 at which sharp debates over the future of the party took place. Nevertheless, the majority of the PCP opted to maintain its identity as a revolutionary party under the leadership of the historic figure Álvaro Cunhal. As the PCP itself puts it, 'Facing a full ideological onslaught the Party reaffirms its communist identity and ideal.'[8] During the 1990s, however, the party, participating in the Democratic Unity Coalition with the Greens, experienced electoral decline, dropping below 10% and polling only 6.94% of the vote by 2002. Although the PCP's subsequent results improved slightly, it was now facing a challenge on the left from the Left Block (*Bloco de Esquerda*; BE) founded in 1999. BE originated in far left former communist, Maoist and Trotskyist political circles and draws together a number of small leftist parties. It includes in its leadership figures such as Francisco Louçã who was formerly leader of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialist Party, now a component part of BE, and Fernando Rosas, a communist party militant who left the PCP in 1968 and subsequently engaged in anti-war and anti-colonial movements. According to Louçã,

> We defined ourselves as socialists shortly after our foundation, in a double sense: initially, by rejecting "real socialism" (Stalinism, the experiences of the USSR, Eastern Europe or China), then by identifying ourselves with the anti-capitalist struggle, against the social-democratic experience and its current social-liberal version.[9]

In 1999, BE won 2.4% in the general election, rising to 2.7% in 2002. By 2005 support had risen to 6.35%, entitling them to eight MPs. In the 2009 general election they took 9.81%, overtaking the PCP's Democratic Unity Coalition, which polled 7.86%. BE participates in the PEL but is of a more radical or ultra-leftist composition than many parties within that grouping. In fact, BE was a founding member of the European Anti-capitalist Left (EACL), founded in Lisbon in March 2000. EACL has the unusual distinction of having four UK member parties: the Socialist Workers' Party, the Respect Party, the Socialist Party and the Scottish Socialist Party. The PEL has no UK members. When asked about the relations of BE with the PCP, Francisco Louçã, who is now a member of the Portuguese parliament, observed that BE was built not only in opposition to liberal policies but also in opposition to the PCP:

> We represent a third force, alternative by its programme and its capacity for initiative. Our strategic goal is to reconstruct the relationship of forces within the Left and in society as a whole. In Portugal, the Communist Party, as in some other countries, represents a form of organization in the Stalinist tradition, in which it is the party that directs the trade unions, in which there are movements to organize women and young people.[10]

Rejecting what he considered to be the top-down approach of the PCP, Louçã observed that the European communist parties are divided, and those that participate in the PEL, along with BE, have transformed to varying degrees and have 'a non-Stalinist conception, a conception of opening out, of being a network, not a Comintern-style conception'. Noting the PCP's attempts to develop a parallel process with other like-minded communist parties, Louçã described the PEL as a 'network of collaboration that depends on the positions of the national parties'.[11]

The emergence of BE has certainly been a challenge for the PCP, since the former overtook the PCP at the polls in September 2009. This situation was reversed, however, in June 2011, when the PCP vote remained stable at 7.9% and 16 seats and the BE vote crashed to 5.2% of the vote and eight seats. The PCP still has a significant capacity to mobilise, apparent recently during the anti-NATO protests in Lisbon during the NATO summit in November 2010. A demonstration of 30,000 was primarily organised by the PCP-associated peace movement, and the general strike on 24 November 2010, strongly backed by the PCP, mobilised three million workers. As the party's statement expressed, making clear its political position,

> The PCP was always with this General Strike, because it is with the workers' struggle, because it is committed to the demand for higher wages, for the development of the productive apparatus, for investments and public services. The PCP was and is on the side of the workers' struggle, because their struggle is a struggle for a country of progress, social justice, for a sovereign and independent Portugal. Renewing its permanent commitment to this struggle, the PCP reaffirms to the Portuguese workers and people that they can always count upon the PCP.[12]

Together, the PCP and the BE have over 13% of the vote in Portugal and the capacity for major political and social mobilisation. It would seem likely that they would be more effective in achieving their goals, which are very similar in terms of approach to neo-liberal policies and the government's handling of the financial crisis, if they were to work together rather than in their current very separate states.

Cyprus – the great success story

The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) originated as the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK) in 1926. Given Cyprus's colonial status at that time, within the British Empire, the KKK had a twin function, both as movement for social, economic and political emancipation and as a national liberation movement. As Giorgos Charalambous observes, 'The KKK's twin targets were the social liberation of the working class via a struggle against capitalist exploitation, and national liberation.'[13] This latter role may well

have contributed to the lasting and strong support for AKEL within Cyprus – currently the president is a member of AKEL – as support for communist parties is strong in many countries where the party has historically played a significant role in the national liberation struggle. The KKK was outlawed by the British in 1931 and AKEL was founded in 1941 as an anti-fascist organisation. In 1944 the two organisations merged, and AKEL rapidly became a mass movement, including the development of a powerful trade union movement, the Pan-Cypriot Federation of Labour (*Pankypria Ergatiki Omospondia*; PEO). From this point forward, however, while AKEL's strength and roots were in the working class, it worked to extend its appeal beyond that base. According to Charalambous,

> Despite the clear dominance of workers in the supporters and activists of AKEL . . . the role and significance given to alliances with sections of the middle class was central to the politics and strategy of the left after the 1930s and especially in the 1990s, when the party's share of the vote reached its peak.[14]

In this sense it transcended the role solely of a working-class movement to one which saw itself as representing the interests of the Cypriot people as a whole. In AKEL's own words,

> In the struggle for freedom and the reunification of Cyprus and a just end of its struggle, AKEL pursues a patriotic policy that defends the interests of the whole people . . . Various strata of our people, that do not belong in the ideological-political sense to the traditional Left, today feel that AKEL expresses and accommodates them.[15]

In the struggles over the next few decades it prioritised mass action in the form of civil disobedience, strikes and demonstrations, rejecting the armed struggle path of *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* (EOKA) in the 1950s, and working in alliance with centre forces where necessary.

Notwithstanding its tactical flexibility, however, AKEL was loyal to the Soviet Union – in fact it continues to emphasise that it is guided by Marxist-Leninist theory – but dissident elements emerged during the 1980s to challenge this approach. On the death of the

party's long-standing general secretary Ezekias Papaioannou in 1988, two candidates offered different directions for AKEL. The reformist Pavlos Diglis was defeated by Dimitris Christofias – who is now President of Cyprus. Diglis then left the party, together with a number of other reformists, to form the Democratic Socialists (ADISOK). The crisis had been provoked by a fall of 4% to 5% in AKEL's support in the 1985 elections and the reformists argued for a wholesale reform of the party and its policies, identifying with Gorbachev and his policies of perestroika. Opening the Seventeenth AKEL Congress in October 1990, Christofias used the analogy of AKEL as a boat in a storm to describe the divisions within the party over the collapse of state socialism:

> Certain, fortunately very few, members of the crew and some captains raised their own flag and demanded the dismantling of the boat to its component parts, because according to them it was rotten . . . The largest part, however, the workers, employees, peasants, intellectuals, the middle strata, the crew and passengers, but also other friends who have been for years sailing alongside our boat, the 30 per cent of people as a whole said no.[16]

In fact, only 200 out of a membership of 15,000 left the party. The opinion of the voters on this split was made clear at the general election in 1991: AKEL polled 30.63% of the vote, coming in second place behind Democratic Rally, and ADISOK took 2.40%. In 1996, AKEL again came in second place to Democratic Rally on 33%, but the situation subsequently reversed. In 2001, AKEL came first on 34.7% and again first in 2006 with 31.1%.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)

The CPRF made significant advances in the 1990s, especially in the context of having been banned in the early part of the decade. But while in the first decade of the twenty-first century it has continued to hold the position of the largest opposition party in Russia, it has nevertheless failed to again reach the levels of support that it achieved in the presidential election of 1996, when Gennady Zyuganov of the CPRF took 40.3% of the vote to Boris Yeltsin's 53.8%. Indeed, it has experienced significant electoral decline. Subsequent

presidential election results have been as follows – 2000: Putin, 52.94% and Zyuganov, 29.21%; 2004: Putin, 71.31% and Nikolay Kharitonov of the CPRF, 13.69%; 2008: Medvedev, 70.28% and Zyuganov, 17.72%. Putin's success at projecting a strong Russia in global affairs and the improving economic situation contributed to a reduction in support for the CPRF. Putin emerged on the Russian stage towards the end of 1999 as Yeltsin was increasingly weakened and became unpopular. The political tide had been turning towards the Fatherland–All Russia front, under the leadership of Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov and the former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, who had emerged as a strong figure towards the end of Yeltsin's period in office and had secured some backing from the CPRF. But Primakov had been dismissed by Yeltsin in May 1999 and instead, at the last minute – or so it seemed – Yeltsin sprang a new figure on the scene as his successor: Vladimir Putin. Putin, who was popular amongst the Russian electorate for his hard-line approach to dealing with the problems in Chechnya, indicated his support for Unity, a new 'inter-regional movement', supported by dozens of Russian governors and specifically designed to defeat Primakov's Fatherland–All Russia front. According to Richard Sakwa, 'A hastily organized body called Unity (Yedinstvo) was organized by the Kremlin elite from September 1999 to act as the "party of power".'[17]

The election result of December 1999 gave first place to the CPRF with 24.29% of the vote, with Unity extremely close in second place on 23.32%. Zyuganov had sought to modernise the image of the party, frequently stating, 'We are not a revanchist party – we are the party of the future.'[18] Yet the elements of nationalism which the party had embraced under his leadership rather undermined his case. Not only did the party generally alienate more orthodox communists, but specific instances also worked against the party's image. In the autumn of 1998 communist deputy Al'bert Makashov had made anti-Semitic remarks which Zyuganov had failed to condemn adequately, leading to a host of demands for the CPRF to be banned. Indeed, the CPRF and Zyuganov received intense criticism from other left forces within Russia, including from Boris Kagarlitsky, who attacked the CPRF leadership for being a 'loyal opposition' to Yeltsin – enabling 'anti-social' budgets to be passed on communist votes and while talking left, in fact rejecting Lenin in their embrace of nationalism:

> In his theoretical works Zyuganov defended the achievements of far right-wing anti-communist ideologues from Ivan Purishkevich to Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama. In the language of the party elite, all this went by the name of 'state patriotism'.[19]

According to Sakwa, the CPRF found itself in a 'multifaceted crisis': ideological, political, organisational, electoral and demographic.[20] In any case, the CPRF failed to break through into new levels of electoral support, and the order-bringing strongman Putin's appearance on the political scene severely undermined Zyuganov's attempts to generate real, wide support for a popular patriotic movement. In January 2000, the CPRF made a coalition agreement with Unity which lasted for two years. In December 2001, Unity and Fatherland–All Russia merged to form the United Russia party, which subsequently served as an electoral juggernaut in support of the Putin/Medvedev administration of the next decade. In 2003, United Russia took 37.57% of the votes and 223 seats. The CPRF's share declined to 12.61% of the votes and 52 seats. In the context of continuing economic improvement, United Russia surged forward to a massive landslide victory in the Duma elections in 2007 with 64.3% of the vote, with the CPRF a very distant second at 11.6%. There was criticism of the elections both nationally and internationally and according to observers from the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, the election 'was not fair and failed to meet many OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections'. The suggestion has not been that the votes weren't actually cast but that the polls 'took place in an atmosphere which seriously limited political competition' and that 'there was not a level political playing field'.[21]

Since the 2007 elections the Russian economy has been significantly affected by the global crisis. According to Anders Aslund et al.,

> The economic and financial crisis that raged across the globe in 2008–09 hit the Russian economy hard. Hailed as an economic miracle until 2008, the country saw its GDP tumble by 8 percent in 2009 and the stock market plunge by 80 percent from May to October 2008. A sharp decline in the price of oil and other

> commodities as well as capital outflows put the economy in a tailspin.[22]

The state budget is massively over-dependent on energy prices, and falling state revenues – responding to a global decline in energy demand – caused a major problem and ended the rapid income growth of the early twenty-first century. This may well have been one factor that impacted negatively on the support for Putin's party in the December 2011 elections. The results were controversial and highly contested as protestors accused the ruling party of ballot-rigging. The official results were 49.32% for United Russia – down 77 seats, and 19.19% for the CPRF – up 35 seats. The increase in support for the CPRF was no doubt in part due to the high inflation and rising unemployment faced by the population. For the CPRF to take full advantage of the changed economic, political and social context, however, it will have to be united and clear about what it stands for ideologically and in policy terms, and about how it will take Russia forward, rather than dwelling on the achievements of the Soviet past. It will also have to get past the reported near-stranglehold of the Russian administration on media outlets.

Central and Eastern Europe

In Central and Eastern Europe, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM) continues to perform well electorally with a stable base of support and a strong and distinctive profile (see Chapter 8). At the other end of the post-1989 spectrum, the former communist parties of Central and Eastern Europe that opted for social democracy have had varying degrees of success, depending to some extent on whether they have been in or out of power during the economic crisis. There is little to differentiate their economic policies from those of their more right-wing rivals as they have embraced neo-liberalism and the prescriptions of the international financial institutions.

Having governed from 1994 to 1998, the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) then ousted the right-wing Fidesz party of Viktor Orban in 2002, going on to win two elections in succession. This left the HSP in control of the country during the major economic crisis in the post-2006 election period, during which Hungary was one of the EU

members that was hardest hit. In 2009, Hungary's GDP shrank by 7% and the government's approach was a massive austerity programme. The HSP was fully committed to keeping the deficit within the limit of 3.5% of GDP set by the IMF. The huge cuts hit public sector pay and social spending particularly hard. The HSP was not expected to win the 2010 election[23] but few expected the defeat to be so catastrophic. Fidesz came back to power on a landslide overall majority of 52.73% of the vote, while the HSP took 19.3%. Particularly worrying was the high poll of the new far-right nationalist party JOBBIK (Movement for a Better Hungary), led by Gabor Vona, at 16.67%. The other successor party, the Hungarian Communist Workers' Party, polled 0.11%.

In 1999, the Polish successor party, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland, which had led Poland from 1993 to 1997, transformed itself, along with other members of the Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*; SLD) electoral coalition, into a unified political party. In 2001, the SLD came back to power, under the leadership of Leszek Miller with 41% of the vote. Its nearest rival, Civic Platform, took 12.7%. The following election saw a massive victory for Civic Platform and its fellow right-wing party Law and Justice. Together they took 51.1% to SLD's 11.3% in fourth place. The SLD had been severely affected by accusations of high-level political scandals in 2004, related to accusations of corruption. Leszek Miller stood down as prime minister in 2004 and a breakaway party, the centre–left Social Democratic Party of Poland, was set up by leading SLD members. By the election of 2007, the two right-wing parties took 73.6% of the vote between them, and the SLD, in third place, took a slightly improved 13.2%, although it lost two seats overall.

The current Social Democratic Party of Romania (PSD) has, although previously called the Party of Social Democracy in Romania, governed Romania from 1992 to 1996, 2000 to 2004 and 2004 to 2008, when it was very narrowly defeated by the Democratic Liberal Party. In the presidential elections of 2009, the PSD candidate Mircea Geoană lost by less than 1% to Traian Băsescu. The predecessor parties of the PSD had won the presidency three times since 1990. Romania faces an ongoing financial crisis; the Democratic Liberal government launched an austerity budget and harsh measures to meet the IMF's demands for stringent economies to secure a massive 20 billion euro aid package in March 2009. To meet IMF demands,

the government opted to make swingeing pension and public sector wage cuts – the public sector employs a third of the workforce – which resulted in mass protests during 2010. In May 2010, around 50,000 workers protested in Bucharest, calling on the government 'to apply austerity measures in a differentiated manner, rather than spreading the burden across the entire population – including retired people – without taking account of low incomes'. However, 'under pressure from the IMF, the government promised to slash state wages by 25% and pensions by 15% as part of efforts to secure the release of the next tranche of loans'.[24]

This plan to cut seriously backfired in September 2010, as the interior minister resigned, amid opposition demands for the prime minister's resignation too, following the chaos resulting from police protests against the 25% wage cut. Around 6,000 officers marched to the presidential palace and threw eggs at it. According to the *Boston Globe*,

> The chaos reflected social fallout from the sharp wage cuts, tax hikes, and other austerity measures the government has taken to fight its budget deficit amid a deep recession. President Traian Băsescu's government had been unable to pay wages and pensions without a $26 billion bailout loan last year from the International Monetary Fund and other lenders, and the IMF is now demanding strong action to trim Romania's national debt.[25]

Since 1990, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) has had two periods in office. The first, from 1995 to 1996, under the leadership of Zhan Videnov, was marked by hyperinflation, mass demonstrations and a general strike, following an agreement with the IMF which led to a wave of shock therapy economic policies that resulted in popular dissatisfaction with the BSP government. Divisions within the party came to a head over the conflict with the IMF over the implementation of reforms and structural adjustment and the section of the party which most embraced the neo-liberal requirements of the international financial institutions departed to form the Euro-Left. The BSP was then out of government for two terms until 2005, when its electoral coalition, Coalition for Bulgaria, came first with 31% of the vote and formed a coalition government led by Sergei Stanishev, with the National Movement Simeon II, a liberal party led by the former King

of Bulgaria, at 19.9% and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, also a liberal party based in the Turkish minority, at 12.8%. Bulgaria had a fairly stable economy, experiencing over 6% growth from 1996 to 2008, to a considerable extent due to foreign direct investment. The BSP government increased state salaries and pensions while not challenging the general economic framework that it had inherited and that was widely regarded as fiscally responsible. However, the global economic crisis began to hit towards the end of 2008, with a decline in economic growth and employment. At the beginning of 2009, Bulgaria suffered from cuts to its gas supplies during the Russia–Ukraine gas dispute, and industrial output was negatively affected, as were public services. In 2009, GDP contracted by around 5%.[26] In the July 2009 elections the BSP lost catastrophically to GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), a centre–right party founded in 2006 and led by Boyko Borisov. One of its stated priorities was achieving energy independence. GERB took 39.72% of the vote and the BSP took 17.7%.

5
A Successful Model? *Die Linke* (the Left Party – Germany)

Die Linke is the direct successor to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the former German Democratic Republic. It has undergone a significant political transformation, firstly as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), embracing the democratic red, green, feminist and pacifist politics typical of the new European left in the 1990s. Under the leadership of Gregor Gysi and Lothar Bisky it established itself as a significant political force in the eastern states of Germany, often in coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in regional government. In 2005, the PDS joined with WASG, a left split from the SPD under the leadership of Oskar Lafontaine, to form an electoral alliance to contest that year's general election. The alliance won 8.7% of the vote and 54 seats in the Bundestag, emerging as the fourth largest party in Germany, with electoral support across east and west. In 2007, the WASG and the PDS joined together to form *Die Linke*. In the federal elections of September 2009 it made a significant advance on its previous performance, increasing its number of seats in the Bundestag from 54 to 76, and its share of the vote by 3.2% to 11.9%, and consolidated its position as a party of the whole of Germany.

Founded as the SED/PDS at an extraordinary congress on 17 December 1989, the new party identity emerged from a debate about whether the SED should disband itself completely or whether it should reform itself in an attempt, according to Hough et al., 'to act as a bridge of continuity between the "old" GDR and the "new" GDR that many believed was developing'.[1] The composite name was a compromise solution, as the congress was more or less

equally divided over whether to abandon the 'SED' label or not. But a definitive shift took place very soon after, due, not least, to the strong purpose of Gregor Gysi, who emerged as the outstanding and indefatigable leader of the reformed party. At the party's Executive meeting on 4 February 1990 the party lost its SED prefix and became the PDS. That was the beginning of the long but ultimately fairly successful road to recognition as a new left party of the contemporary political mainstream, critical of negative elements of its own past but defending its positive values and redefining them in a new era.

The following month, in the last GDR elections to the People's Chamber, the PDS argued for a more democratic independent GDR and strongly opposed German unification.[2] The party won 16.4% of the vote, but the grand coalition of the SPD and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) that emerged rapidly negotiated unification with the Kohl government in Bonn. The unification of Germany was declared on 3 October 1990 and the PDS vote subsequently declined in the first elections to the Bundestag in December 1990. Campaigning on a Left List/PDS alliance in the western Länder, featuring non-PDS members on the electoral list, the PDS won only 0.3% of votes. In the east it won around 11% of votes, in total 2.43% overall. This entitled the PDS to 17 deputies, as the 5% threshold was applied on a one-off basis separately to either western or eastern Germany.[3]

This decline of the PDS vote was to be dramatically reversed, however, in the Bundestag and Länder elections in 1994, as the real social and economic impact of the unification was felt. As the PDS pointed out in its assessment of five years of unification, by 1995, 3.4 million of the 9.6 million jobs that had existed at the time of union had been made redundant. This comprised two million in manufacturing and more than 600,000 in agriculture, and 75% of East Germans had lost the job they had before unification. Older members of the workforce were particularly badly hit, for of those who were between 52 and 63 in 1990, only one in ten was in employment by 1995. The PDS also argued that official unemployment figures concealed the scale of the problem:

> The number of people registered as unemployed is put at 1.2 million although another 2 million people are looking for jobs whilst receiving money from the state, either as participants in temporary job-creation schemes or retraining courses, or as people receiving

> transitional benefits until they reach retirement age and can claim their old age pensions.[4]

Women also suffered particularly badly in the jobs market – of the 4.9 million women working in the GDR in 1989, by 1995 more than 2 million had lost their jobs, with women comprising over 50% of the unemployed.[5]

In the PDS's view, these disastrous developments were not a 'direct and logical result of the errors and omissions of the GDR and its "moribund economy" ';[6] they occurred because Kohl's government was unwilling to integrate the GDR into the Federal Republic as a distinctive entity – it wished rather to force the new states into the mould of the old, leaving no differences between the two. As Patricia Hogwood has observed,

> The West-German CDU-led government had determined on a course of action leading to a rapid, irreversible German unification which would preserve the constitutional *acquis* of the FRG. Article 23 of the Basic Law was called into play to allow an expansion of the pre-existing constitutional framework to incorporate the territory of the former GDR. This was the basis of the "transfer paradigm" of the unification process, characterized by the extension of the FRG's established forms of political organisation and political representation to the former GDR.[7]

Nothing was learned from the positive experiences of the GDR, and there was certainly no room for economic competition. The First State Treaty on Currency, Economic and Social Union, of July 1990, replaced the GDR's economic order with that of the FRG. The GDR had been a major exporter of industrial products, notably tools and machines, but by 1995 the new Länder contributed only 2% of Germany's total exports of manufactured goods.

While in the short term after unification, the population of eastern Germany benefited from increasing purchasing power due to the favourable conditions of economic union and the increase in domestic demand within the new Länder, by 1992 the serious nature of the economic problems in the former GDR was recognised and the PDS, which spoke out nationally about the social and economic crisis in the new Länder, began to receive increased popular support. Many

people within the former GDR felt that the culture of solidarity and communal support that had existed under state socialism had been positive, as had the many welfare and social benefits that had existed at an advanced level of provision. Indeed, as Betz and Welsh point out, a 1993 survey showed 'that large numbers of eastern Germans believed that compared to West Germany, the GDR had been more advanced with respect to employment security, child care, social security and social justice, protection from crime, human relations, education, and gender equality'.[8]

Germany, in common with other EU countries, also entered the Maastricht Treaty process after 1991, which resulted in the reduction of social benefits, attacks on free collective bargaining, mass unemployment and an increase in racism. These problems particularly affected eastern Germany. In this context it was not surprising that PDS results in the 'super-election' year – European, local, federal and regional – of 1994 were a major advance over those of the federal elections in 1990. In the June 1994 European elections, the PDS campaigned on the basis of 'Europe sure, but not with the Maastricht Treaty', arguing the case for left representation:

> A consistent representation of left policy is indispensable for effective resistance to the democratic and social decline, militarism, the destruction of the environment, racism and Euro-chauvinism.[9]

The PDS won 4.7% of the vote, a significant advance on the 2.9% of 1990, although observers pointed out that as the turnout was low, at 63%, this only represented a slight increase in votes. But the Bundestag elections of October 1994 really did represent a major advance. The PDS won 4.4% in a turnout of 79.1%, taking 2,067,387 votes, an increase of half a million over the European result. In the former GDR the PDS vote was between 16% and 20% in the different Länder. Although its overall vote didn't cross the electoral threshold of 5%, the PDS was still eligible to take up seats in the Bundestag because the electoral law specifies that parties may do so if they win three or more of the directly elected seats. The PDS won four of the five seats in East Berlin, where it polled over 30% of the votes, and narrowly missed further direct victories in Berlin-Köpenick and Rostock.[10]

PDS support also increased in the west to 369,038 votes, reaching 5.4% in the west Berlin constituency of Kreuzberg-Schöneberg, 3.4%

in Hamburg Centre and 2% to 2.6% in constituencies in Cologne and Frankfurt. Although small in overall terms, these results did give the impression that the PDS was not only a regional protest party, but had distinct politics – a new left agenda to the left of the SPD – that could potentially attract votes throughout Germany as social and economic conditions deteriorated.

The elections of 27 September 1998 brought 16 years of conservative government to an end, and saw the SPD emerge as the largest single party in the Bundestag and an overall majority – including the PDS and Alliance 90/The Greens – for a change of policy away from Kohl's neo-liberal policies, the dismantling of the welfare state and mass unemployment. The PDS took half a million more votes than its previous best, emerging with 5.1%. This score was the great achievement that the PDS had been fighting for – to pass the 5% threshold throughout Germany, entitling it to normal participatory rights in the Bundestag with 35 seats and parliamentary fraction rights. The party took 30% of the vote in east Berlin, directly winning four constituencies, 2.7% in west Berlin and 13.5% across Berlin as a whole. The vote was very slightly down on the 1994 result, but as Joanna McKay points out,

> This may be attributable to the "Schröder effect" and voters' desire to remove Helmut Kohl from office, since it is noticeable that the SPD's proportion of the second votes (which ultimately determine the composition of the Bundestag), rose in every east Berlin constituency without exception.[11]

Despite some modest advances in the west, the PDS emerged from its first decade as a significant player in the eastern states of Germany, but as yet unable to establish itself as a Germany-wide party. Failure to build a credible level of support in the west led some to conclude that the PDS would have to opt for being a regional social democratic party, which would have meant abandoning the goal of establishing an all-German democratic socialist party. Nevertheless, despite the weaknesses at the national level, the strong showing in the eastern Länder meant that the PDS had to face the challenges of regional power and weigh very carefully the nature and extent of its cooperation with the SPD. A misjudgement on that front could have spelled the elimination of the PDS as a significant political player.

What form of cooperation with the SPD?

The relationship with the SPD was of fundamental importance for the PDS. The internal debates during the 1990s about the role of the PDS in German politics concluded that while it was an absolutely anti-capitalist party in opposition to the dominant social conditions (Fourth Congress), nevertheless, the PDS did not see the SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens as enemies and recognised that the necessary social transformation could not take place without the SPD: 'They are political competitors, with whom we may have had disputes, but with whom we will remain ready to cooperate.'[12]

But the basis on which the PDS should cooperate in government with other parties, or give support to governments, remained a central and controversial question within the PDS. In 1994, the PDS had tolerated a minority government of the SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens in Saxony-Anhalt. This provoked a ferocious response from the CDU as they realised that such arrangements could make it very difficult for the CDU to form a government in the eastern states. And while the SPD federal leadership retained a position of hostility to the PDS, at the regional level in the east, SPD leaders were more concerned to change this blanket policy to open up the possibility for 'majority of the left' coalitions. At the end of 1996 it was agreed by federal SPD leaders that regional leaders could choose appropriate coalition partners after the 1998 elections.

At PDS party congresses in 1996 and 1997, according to Olsen, 'the overriding issue was whether the PDS should continue its fundamental "system opposition" or seek to govern at all levels: communal, state, even national'.[13] By 1997, the vast majority of party delegates supported cooperation and possible coalition with the SPD and Greens, advocated by party chair Lothar Bisky. In fact, this position was reinforced at the PDS congress the following year, and was put to the test almost immediately, following the 1998 elections. The outcome of the Bundestag elections with the PDS at 5.1% forced other parties to recognise that it wasn't a temporary blip on the political landscape. Regional elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania saw the SPD in the lead, with PDS in third place, after the CDU, with 24.4%.

At the national level, the SPD opted for a coalition with Alliance 90/The Greens. In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania the SPD and PDS

formed a coalition government. The intention of the PDS was, as PDS vice-chair Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufman put it, to 'put pressure on from the left for real change'.[14] It was possible to secure this because the two parties agreed to a coalition treaty in advance which would determine the government's policies. Therefore the PDS ensured the inclusion of key issues such as education policy, measures to combat unemployment and fiscal policy. The PDS took the position that they had indeed shifted politics to the left in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. In the view of Hough et al., Mecklenburg-West Pomerania 'remains a bastion of pragmatic reformism with party leaders and the rank and file concerned much more with concrete policy outcomes than larger, abstract political gestures'.[15] This experience has helped consolidate the identity of the PDS (and subsequently *Die Linke*) as a responsible governing party.

The more controversial case of coalition government has been in Berlin, where the so-called 'red–red' coalition with the SPD has been in place since 2001. According to Hough et al., it is here, if anywhere, that the PDS has gone down the route of institutionalisation followed by the Greens: 'This is in terms of de-radicalising its ideology, risking the wrath of the part of the electorate that is "hard left", warming to ideas of shaping rather than opposing policy.'[16] The controversy arose because the PDS's response to dealing with the massive economic and debt problems faced by the city was to propose reform policies not normally associated with socialist politics, for example, 'its demands for a reduction in weekly working hours in the public services *and* a commensurate drop in wages', although it did secure agreement that cuts would not 'endanger the social fabric of Berlin society',[17] and would not be applied to education, culture or science. Criticisms of the Berlin party are considerable, however, notably from Oskar Lafontaine, who described their policies as 'an aberration'.[18] While it may help to advance the project of those in *Die Linke* who wish to see it recognised as a party of government, there are other radical left sections within the party, and its supporters, who will be alienated by cooperation which is seen to advance neo-liberal policies. Such a view was expressed by Duroyan Ferti, writing in *Links*: 'In Berlin . . . *Die Linke* has been involved in implementing a number of the same neoliberal policies it claims to oppose.'[19] Ferti also drew attention to the fact that Klaus Lederer, *Die Linke*'s leader in Berlin, had spoken at a rally in support of Israel's recent war on

Gaza – against the party's official position. Indeed, *Die Linke* ministers in Berlin also abstained on the vote on Berlin's support for the EU constitution, which the party as a whole rejected, and have taken contradictory positions on recent industrial disputes. According to Ferti, the party has been accused of following an electoralist strategy at the expense of building the social and union movements. Some, he observes, ascribe these policies to the more socially conservative members of the former PDS, for which there was very significant support in Berlin.

Hartz, WASG and the new party

But whatever the regional specificities, as the real impact of the SPD/Green coalition at the national level became clear, political support for the PDS – and subsequently *Die Linke* – increased as a result of the clear differentiation between their positions and those of the SPD on key issues. Initially, popular rejection of neo-liberal policies and their social and economic consequences primarily impacted against the right-wing parties in Europe – in Germany the CDU – leading to a wave of electoral success for social democracy in the mid- to late 1990s for the SPD in 1998. But the social democrats did not fulfil expectations, on the contrary, as Fulberth observes: 'They did not fundamentally challenge deregulation and privatization, and even partly pushed these developments further.'[20] Thus the policy record of the SPD/Green coalition from 1998 served to increase the potential support for the PDS, by alienating sections of the coalition parties' traditional supporters. The most significant factor was that it was not only party supporters or even individual rank and file members that were alienated. As mentioned above, one of the party's leading figures, former SPD Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine, broke with the SPD over its economic policies, resigning in 1999. With the development of this dissatisfaction within the SPD, a framework for an alternative social democratic politics began to emerge. Nevertheless, despite this developing opposition, the SPD had a narrow victory in the 2002 federal elections, and the PDS took a major knockback, polling only 4% of the vote and thereby falling below the 5% threshold and being reduced to only two directly elected seats in the Bundestag. A number of factors were responsible for

this deterioration in addition to internal tensions within the PDS; according to Hough et al.,

> The party's pacifist credentials were undermined by Gerhard Schröder's anti-Iraq War rhetoric in the summer of 2002 and the floods in significant parts of eastern Germany gifted the then Chancellor an opportunity to look dynamic and in touch with an area of the country where the PDS has traditionally polled very strongly.[21]

Nevertheless, the PDS, once again under the leadership of Lothar Bisky, was able to recover by the federal elections of September 2005 to get its best result since unification, 8.7% of the vote and 54 seats, not least because of its developing relationship with new political forces in the west of the country. Two alternative left political groupings in western Germany emerged around the left of the social democrats in response to the Hartz reforms, put forward after the 2002 federal elections. The Hartz reforms were named after Volkswagen (VW) Chairman Peter Hartz, who was invited by Chancellor Schröder to lead a Commission for proposing changes to Germany's labour market laws and welfare system. The most unpopular section of the reforms – Hartz IV – was that which proposed reducing the duration of full unemployment benefit and cutting the amount received.

The two new groupings which arose independently of each other were the northwest German *Wahlalternative* (electoral alternative) and the Bavarian Initiative *Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit* (Work and Social Justice Initiative), which subsequently merged into the WASG (Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice), holding their first conference in June 2004. According to Olsen, 'The WASG was a direct result of the so-called Hartz reforms',[22] which gave it a particular social and political composition. As Ingar Solty has observed, the WASG's weakness was that 'it drew on a specific and comparatively homogeneous spectrum with clearly limited outreach . . . a mixture of classical left trade-unionists and people disillusioned with the SPD',[23] and that it was cut off from sectors such as the unemployed and the 'precariously employed'. The PDS appealed to different sectors of support than the WASG, and clearly in many respects they could both

bring something different to a common table. What was impossible – from an electoral numbers point of view – was that they could both succeed separately. The eventual merger in 2007 maximised the strengths of both and offset their weaknesses. By mid-June 2005, the PDS and WASG had agreed on cooperation for the forthcoming federal election. According to David F. Patton,

> They agreed that the PDS would rename itself the Left Party.PDS and open its party lists to members of the WASG. In the eastern states the party chose to run as the Left Party.PDS, whereas in most western states it ran simply as the Left Party – the suffix PDS was widely regarded as a liability in the old Federal Republic.[24]

The subsequent success of the new merged party has been of considerable significance, not least with regard to left politics in western Germany. Since the ban on the KPD (pre-war German Communist Party), no left party had ever got over the 5% hurdle. The DKP (German Communist Party, founded in 1968) never got more than 3.1% regionally in the 1970s. *Demokratische Sozialisten*, a left split from the SPD in the early 1980s, focusing primarily around peace issues – particularly opposition to the siting of cruise and Pershing missiles in Germany – also failed to break through the 5% barrier. The historic significance, therefore, of *Die Linke*'s achievement of this goal, on an all-German basis, is enormous. Furthermore, as Peter Thompson points out, it has roots not only amongst the educated public-sector middle class, as the Greens had in the 1980s, but also increasingly 'in the organised working class and amongst the unemployed, intellectuals and pensioners'.[25]

Electoral support from the German working class has fallen for the SPD, and has increased significantly for the PDS/*Die Linke*, as Nachtwey and Spier show. Between 1990 and 2005, support for the PDS/*Die Linke* amongst workers in the west increased from 1% to 8% and in the east from 5% to 28%. In terms of unemployed votes, support in the west moved from 2% in 1994 to 14% in 2005, and in the east from 9% in 1990 to 42% in 2005.[26] Thus in 2005, according to Olsen, 'an enormous wave of public enthusiasm and intra-party good will carried the Left Party to a tremendous election result in the 2005 federal election'.[27] *Die Linke* achieved 8.7% of the vote, with 1.3 million of their votes coming from previous SPD

voters. According to voter surveys, the main reasons given were issues of unemployment and social justice.[28]

Popular policies challenging the SPD's move to the right – opposing war and militarism

The ruling Red–Green coalition, which came to power in Germany in 1998, was part of a wider swing to the centre–left in Europe, but it disappointed those who anticipated a strengthening of social democratic values and a rolling back of neo-liberalism. Notwithstanding Oskar Lafontaine's re-regulation of the financial markets – at that time he was Minister of Finance – the SPD/Green coalition took a number of policy steps which fundamentally challenged its traditional voting base.

Foreign policy was one of these. In 1999, Germany participated in the illegal NATO attack on Yugoslavia, contravening the German Basic Law, which outlaws waging a war of aggression. As Solty pointed out, this was a change that would have been unthinkable for a conservative government –

> for which the Red–Green coalition traded on the credibility of their individual anti-fascist biographies, and diverted the new social movement's human-rights discourse towards human-rights militarism.[29]

The coalition subsequently opposed the war on Iraq, allowing Schröder to pose as the anti-war candidate in the 2002 elections, taking votes from the PDS with its record of opposing German militarism. But the coalition's subsequent support for the war on Afghanistan was in sync with with the Yugoslav intervention.

Thus, Solty observed, the Greens' original radical pacifism gave way to 'human rights interventionism' justified by the notion that because of the Holocaust Germany had a particular responsibility to prevent further holocausts. This has been used to displace the previous principle that because of its role in the Second World War, Germany should never again be responsible for war. This argument may have convinced those who wanted an excuse to take such actions, but many were not convinced, including the delegates to the Green Party convention in September 2007, who rejected their leadership's Afghanistan policy.

This was an area where the policies of the PDS and subsequently *Die Linke* were significantly more in tune with the pacifist orientations within German society. Towards the end of 1998, when the PDS held its first national conference, which drew together over 400 members from all over Germany, the conference discussed the new government's policies. It was particularly critical of its foreign and security policy, especially German participation in a NATO intervention in Kosovo without a UN mandate. The PDS described such an intervention as 'a grotesque travesty of international law'.[30]

This orientation has remained consistent in *Die Linke*, notwithstanding the fact that the WASG party programme focused primarily on economic issues, reflecting, as Hough et al. observe, 'its fairly narrow orientation towards a clientele of disaffected SPD supporters and union members'.[31] But the unification of the two parties embraced the wider social and policy agenda of the PDS. Polls suggest that *Die Linke*'s anti-war position is widely popular.

In the autumn of 2008, polls indicated that between 60% and 80% of the population opposed German participation in the Afghanistan mission. In September 2008, as the CDU/SPD coalition planned to send a further 1,000 troops to Afghanistan, increasing its total to 4,500, an alliance of 250 groups organised protest demonstrations in Berlin and Stuttgart. *Die Linke* was much in evidence, and Christine Buchholz from the party's Executive Board commented:

> The demonstrations of the peace movement in Berlin and Stuttgart clearly sent out a signal against extending the Afghanistan mission.[32]

Indeed, Oskar Lafontaine has categorically stated the party's opposition to the war, within the Bundestag:

> The government must withdraw the Bundeswehr out of Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs no soldiers but rather negotiators, civilian helpers for rebuilding it and functioning state institutions such as police, judiciary and administration.[33]

Throughout 2008, party pronouncements clearly indicated a strong anti-militarist perspective on a range of issues in addition to the Afghan war – notably against aggressive nuclear policies and for

nuclear disarmament, against the US missile defence system and against the increasing militarization of the Balkans. As *Die Linke* Chair, Lothar Bisky, stated in his address at the conference of the Greek left party Synaspismos:

> We reject war as a means of politics. We resist further militarisation of international relations. We endorse the protests of people in the Czech Republic and Poland against the planned US missile defence systems. We show solidarity with all those who are opposed to a growing militarization in the Balkans.[34]

Shaping European politics

European coordination has been an important aspect of the evolution of the left parties in Europe post-1989, and the PDS has always played a role within that, whether in the early New European Left Forum (NELF) founded in 1991, or in the United European Left–Nordic Green Left Group in the European Parliament founded in 1995, or indeed in the founding of the Party of the European Left in May 2004. By the late 1990s it was clear that the increasing political coherence and success of the big players within the new left framework were driving them towards a more coherent electoral EU-wide organisation. Support was there, and relative success was there. The question was how to make the new European left more effective. The PDS was one of the parties that concluded that greater political integration was part of the answer.

In April 1997, the PDS hosted the Twelfth NELF conference in Berlin, with the theme 'For a social and democratic Europe', to which, in addition to 16 parties from Western Europe, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland and from Russia the Socialist Party of the Working People and the Committee of the Soldiers' Mothers were invited. Building on this, in June 1998, the PDS hosted a meeting of 20 European left parties, including the left in the European Parliament. An exchange of views took place, including on common campaigning for a 35-hour week and a proposed common platform for the 1999 European elections. It was this common platform which was to provide the foundation on which the Party of the European Left was eventually to be constructed. In January 1999, 13 parties gathered in Paris for the launch of an

appel commun – hosted by the French Communist Party – calling for the construction of Europe to be put on a new track: social and ecological, democratic, solidaristic and peaceful.

It was at this meeting that PDS Chairman Lothar Bisky expressed the view that it was time 'to think beyond the pre-existing forms of parliamentary cooperation within the European Parliament and the Forum of the New European Left'. He observed that 'there was no reason why the European Left should not have formed a common European party'.[35] During 2002 and 2003, following further discussion, work was done to prepare a Basic Political Document, together with proposed structures and statutes. In January 2004, a meeting took place in Berlin, which launched the initiative for the Party of the European Left (PEL).

The basic features of the new party's programme were in close synchronisation with the perspective of the PDS. Since party unification, *Die Linke* has continued to pursue the PEL project and seeks to expand the influence of its politics in Europe. Of course *Die Linke*'s success has been welcomed enthusiastically by many on the left and the question of the extent to which it can be a model for European left development is widely discussed. Indeed, Oskar Lafontaine spoke at the launch of French *Parti de Gauche* on 29 November 2008 and appealed for the development of left parties across Europe:

> If you want changes, comrades, it is necessary to reconstruct the left – in Germany, in France, all over Europe. The German experience shows us that a European left, reorganised and strong, can change the choices and force the other parties to react. Let us build this new left together, a left that refuses rotten compromises![36]

He also spoke of three criteria for success for a new left party – external social and political conditions favourable to the project – in Germany an empty space on the left, the union of anti-capitalist forces and a clear and discernible political profile. While all of these have been met in Germany it is not so clear that they can all be met elsewhere. An example of this is the differences that exist between the two new left parties in France. One of the challenges facing *Die Linke* is how to deal with having these forces within one party, for since the recent party merger it has attracted thousands of more radical

members, including militant trade unionists, far left groups and radical socialists. Indeed, observers have commented on the potential incompatibility of the different forces within *Die Linke*. According to Markus Deggerich and Christoph Scheuermann, writing in *Der Spiegel* after the 2009 federal elections,

> The Left Party is two – or even two and a half – parties. There is the pragmatic mainstream party that is in power in the east. That is party number one. Then there is party number two: the splinter party, full of dissenters from other parties, more common in the west. And then there's the Lafontaine Party, in the state of Saarland. Parties one and two are tangled up in a row as to which of them is actually the Left Party. The western leftists think that the easterners are too careful, cowardly and spoiled through their participation in governments in the eastern states or by their desire to participate. The eastern leftists, on the other hand, think that the westerners are stubborn ideologists – and even enemies of the German constitution in some of the more radical cases.[37]

But if the party can keep its political balance – in particular retaining and developing coalition governments without making 'rotten compromises' – then the opportunities are there, particularly in the current economic climate. Unemployment is rising, as are poverty levels, and the SPD's traditional supporters are suffering from the policies of the CDU/SPD coalition. *Die Linke*'s major increase in support at the federal elections in September 2009 was clearly an indication of the scope of support that exists for a left party in Germany. The party's results in other elections of that year also bear out its rising success: it took 7.5% in the vote for the European Parliament, continuing an upwards trajectory; in Länder elections it won seats for the first time in Schleswig-Holstein and increased its votes in Thuringia and Hesse; in Lafontaine's state of Saarland in the former West Germany, *Die Linke* took 19.2% of the vote, in third place ahead of the Greens and the Free Democrats. However, the party has faced a major blow since those electoral successes, when Oskar Lafontaine, who had been co-chair of *Die Linke* with Lothar Bisky since 2007, indicated in January 2010 that he was retiring from politics owing to health problems.

Die Linke, together with other left parties, clearly has a vision of an alternative solidaristic Europe which has considerable appeal at a time of increasing disaffection with the established political order. Indeed, there are substantial opportunities for left political forces at a time when populations are suffering from the consequences of the collapse of neo-liberalism, espoused and advanced both by conservative and by social democratic parties. How successful *Die Linke* will be cannot be predicted, but the last two decades indicate that it is a resilient and effective political force.

6

How Have the Mighty Fallen: *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (Party of Communist Refoundation – Italy)

Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) was founded in 1991 as the smaller of the two successor parties to the former Italian Communist Party. It was noted for its anti-capitalist and grass-roots approach to politics and its commitment to breaking with the Italian left's previous tradition of the 'historic compromise'. During the 1990s it demonstrated a significant capacity for mass mobilisation on social issues and established itself as an important political force, often playing a pivotal role in sustaining centre-left governments in power. Under the leadership of Fausto Bertinotti, PRC adopted a 'movementist' orientation, embracing diverse radical social and political currents, most notably in the anti-globalisation movement, and after 2001, the anti-war movement and the social forum movement, in both of which it was pivotal in Europe. However, after 2006, PRC decided to participate in the centre–left coalition government of Romano Prodi, a decision which attracted criticism both within Italy and in the wider European left. Most controversially, it voted to back Italian military participation in Afghanistan and to send troops to Lebanon. These departures from its radical anti-war position, on which its electoral support was largely built, contributed to a catastrophic election result in 2008, due to which Italy's communists have no representation in parliament for the first time in decades. PRC is now in a state of political crisis.

By 1989, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had passed through its Eurocommunist phase, exemplified by the 'Historic Compromise',

where, as Tobias Abse put it, 'the Christian Democrats made the history, the Communists made the compromise'.[1] Perry Anderson has put it differently: 'After 1948, the spoils of the Liberation were divided. Power fell to the DC; culture to the PCI. Christian Democracy controlled the levers of the state, Communism attracted the talents of civil society.'[2] Yet while the PCI was, as Anderson observes, enormously successful in polarising Italian intellectual life around itself, it nevertheless failed to translate this into political power at the national level and remained in opposition for 40 years. The evolution from communism to social democracy was more or less complete by 1989 and as Donald Sassoon pointed out, 'to all intents and purposes, the PCI had become a mainstream social-democratic party before the collapse of the Berlin Wall'.[3] At its Twentieth Congress in February 1991, this process was institutionalised and the PCI relaunched itself as a new party – the Democratic Party of the Left (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*; PDS), politically orientated towards the Socialist International. This change, as Newell and Bull have observed, was the PCI's 'final renunciation of the desire to achieve any change, however mild, of a structural or irreversible kind, and a removal of any ambiguity surrounding the "anti-system" orientation of the main party of the left'.[4] Presumably it hoped that it would now be acceptable as a party of government.

A minority of the delegates opposed this social democratisation of the PCI, and from these opponents – around the orthodox communist Armando Cossutta – came the call to set up the Movement for Communist Refoundation (MRC). This broad grouping, founded with the sole purpose of forming a new communist party, had around 150,000 supporters, including orthodox pro-Soviet communists around Cossutta, militant younger activists who had been supporters of the more radical wing of the PCI under the influence of Pietro Ingrao as well as the Magri and Castellini current in the PCI. Magri and Castellini had been members of the new left *Partito di Unita Proletaria* (PDUP), founded in 1972, which after a number of twists and turns had merged into the PCI in 1984.

In May 1991, the MRC held a conference which elected a leadership, with Sergio Garavini as national secretary and Cossutta as president, and embarked on the process of forming a party – the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) – describing itself in its statutes as 'a free political organisation of the working class . . . of all those

inspired by socialist values and marxist thought'.[5] This broad appeal was genuinely intended, for in June 1991 the PRC was also joined by Proletarian Democracy (*Democrazia Proletaria*; DP), one of the largest of the extreme left groupings with its origins in the radicalism of the late 1960s and influenced by Maoism and Trotskyism. DP had 9,000 members and 1.7% of the vote in the 1987 elections, and brought a core of militant activists from a different left tradition to the PRC, including libertarians, ecologists and feminists, ensuring that although initiated by orthodox communists – both Cossutta and Garavini had been supporters of Berlinguer and the 'Historic Compromise' – the PRC was to develop as a much more heterogeneous and radical party than might have been anticipated. As Vassilis Fouskas has observed,

> The political and ideological roots of Rifondazione . . . can be traced back to Pietro Ingrao's and Rossana Rossanda's communism in the 1960s and 1970s. This can be seen as an attempt to pool class struggle with the new social movements (youth, women, greens), Catholic activism, as well as part of socialist Italian *operaismo*.[6]

According to Newell and Bull, 'In effect, the collapse of communism (and the sudden irrelevance of differing interpretations of the nature of the Soviet Union, which had once been the source of implacable hostility between the DP and parts of the PCI) brought rapprochement on the left.'[7]

Identity and orientation

The PRC also had a strong base in the trade union movement, particularly but not exclusively within the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), the trade union confederation traditionally associated with the PCI. General Secretary Garavini had himself been deputy leader of the CGIL during the 1970s. The drawing together of diverse political forces into the PRC was undoubtedly a positive step forward for building a new anti-capitalist left in Italy. Its identity was clear: it was a party for those who, despite the defeats and failures of state socialism, did not accept capitalism as unavoidable and were still advocating communism and a class struggle orientation. Because of its openness and militancy, the PRC did

not seem merely like 'a meeting of nostalgics', and in its first two years of existence placed strong emphasis on building its organisation at every level of politics – not only in the towns and cities but also in the villages. The PRC appeared therefore to be 'a political formation with a mass audience defending the interests and the demands of the most disadvantaged sectors of Italian society, and which had some electoral significance'.[8]

But there were tensions within PRC about what type of communism was being refounded and how. From the first PRC Congress in December 1991, it became clear that there was a conflict between Cossutta and Garavini over the nature of the refoundation. Cosssutta had combined extreme pro-Sovietism with full support for cooperation with Christian Democracy (DC) in the 1970s and had no inclination to reflect on the reasons for the collapse of state socialism or question traditional communist forms of organisation. Garavini, on the other hand, argued that the PRC should be an 'area of influence' rather than an organised political party. This view failed to gain majority support in the PRC leadership and so Garavini resigned as national secretary in June 1993. At the PRC's Second Congress six months later, in January 1994, he was replaced by another CGIL militant – Fausto Bertinotti – who went on to shape the party into a dynamic and powerful political force, and to raise the profile and standing of PRC at the Italian and European level, before casting them down catastrophically.

At the same time as these changes were taking place within the communist movement and the PRC was attempting to consolidate the communist electoral and industrial base, massive systemic changes were also taking place in Italian political life which profoundly altered the terrain on which the PRC was operating. In 1992, a series of investigations known as *Mani Pulite* – 'clean hands' – led to the exposure of huge payments by companies to political parties in exchange for public works contracts. These escalating and constantly unfolding revelations, known as *Tangentopoli* – 'Bribe City' – had a huge impact on Italian politics, not only because of public disgust at these revelations, but also because it financially weakened or in some cases bankrupted parties who had relied on these deals for their funding. By the end of 1993, the former governing parties, DC and the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*; PSI), had been fragmented and destroyed.

At the same time, new structures were being created through changes in the electoral laws which were leading to the construction of a new electoral system. This meant that three quarters of both houses of parliament were now elected in single-member constituencies on a first-past-the-post basis, and the rest were elected by proportional representation in multi-member constituencies. The electoral threshold for parliamentary representation was 4%. The impact of the new system was to push parties to cooperate or form electoral alliances to secure enough votes to win seats. The new system was first tested in the local elections of December 1993 which resulted in a victory for the left. Standing as the Progressive Alliance the PDS led a coalition of forces which included the PRC, the Greens, the new Democratic Alliance and *La Rete* (the Network) – a Catholic left and liberal grouping that had emerged from the wreckage of DC. The PDS took 103 of the 221 mayoral posts, while the DC took 9, dissolving itself in January 1994.

At its Second Congress in January 1994, the PRC decided that it would contest the March 1994 general election again as part of the Progressive Alliance. But the previous victory was not to be repeated as a new force had arisen on the right of Italian politics, stepping into the space vacated by DC. Media mogul Silvio Berlusconi created the rapidly growing *Forza Italia*, putting it in a right-wing alliance with the Northern League (*Lega Nord*; LN) of Umberto Bossi, and the neo-fascist National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*; AN) of Gianfranco Fini in the south of the country. Berlusconi's alliance took 46% of the vote in 1994, winning an overall majority in the lower house and comprising the largest block in the upper. The PDS polled 20.4% and the PRC polled 6%.

Following the election, the gap widened between the PDS and the PRC. On analysing the results, the PDS concluded that they should have moved further into the centre ground of politics, whereas the PRC, under the leadership of Bertinotti, radicalised its orientation and became a strongly oppositional party with a clearly defined role in Italian politics. In the conflict that followed, as Berlusconi embarked on a programme of massive public spending cuts in order to fulfil the Maastricht criteria, the PRC played a significant role. The key conflict arose as Berlusconi attempted to reduce government spending on pensions which amounted to almost half of social expenditure. Pension levels were amongst the highest in Europe and were index-linked to the cost of living to maintain their real value.

They were also seen as a real benefit to the working class which had to be defended. Berlusconi's proposals for the 1995 budget included massive cuts in welfare spending, including attacks on the pension system. On 12 October 1994, the month after the announcement of the proposals, ten million workers went on a four-hour general strike in protest, and in November one million demonstrated against the cuts in Rome. Berlusconi was completely opposed to negotiating with the unions but was eventually forced to do so on the eve of a second planned general strike on 2 December. An agreement was reached and the strike was called off, but Berlusconi now faced opposition from within his own coalition and resigned from office, to be succeeded by Lamberto Dini, his former finance minister.

Dini formed a so-called 'technical' cabinet – without deputies – which governed for 15 months with the specific goal of introducing pension reform. Eventually he succeeded in negotiating a modified version of the previous proposal with the support of LN and the Italian Popular Party – a successor to DC. But Dini also had support from the PDS which was trying to capture the centre ground that had been alienated by Berlusconi's extremism. The PRC, on the other hand, was hostile to the Dini government, seeing the modified reform as just a more gradual process towards the goal which Berlusconi had set out. But this position was by no means automatic within PRC. In fact it caused a split. About a quarter of PRC's leadership, 16 out of its 57 parliamentarians and 2 of its 5 MEPs, left the PRC and formed a new party – the United Communists (*Comunisti Unitari*; CU). But the split did not really impact on the activists and was primarily a top-level issue: only around 400 members left. The parliamentarians that left PRC did so because they supported the vote of confidence for Dini's centre–right government, in spite of its attacks on pensions and social spending, as it was under attack from the more right-wing forces of AN and *Forza Italia*. CU subsequently moved closer to the PDS, supporting the project of its leader Massimo D'Alema to constitute the PDS as a single federated party of the left. Indeed, in the following elections of 1996, CU ran within the Olive Tree centre–left coalition (*Ulivo*) led by the PDS, and two of its eight deputies were elected on the PDS–European Left list in the proportional representation section.

PRC proceeded to build up its influence and its capacity to mobilise. It was also able to build upon its standing as the only party of the left prepared to defend working-class living standards,

although its position of abstentionism in parliament allowed the Dini government to survive a no-confidence vote. PRC went into the general election of April 1996 on the platform of 'class struggle' under the slogan 'Rinasca la speranza' – 'hope is reborn'. The PRC's programme differed from that of the Olive Tree coalition on every major issue: economic policy, institutional reform, foreign policy, education and so on. Key policies included full employment based on a 35-hour week with no loss of earnings; the linking of wages to a cost-of-living index; progressive changes to the tax system; the economic development of southern Italy; an end to privatisation and a commitment to public ownership; defence of pensions and the health service; defence of state education; public sector dominance of television; defence of the environment; the maintenance and increase of public sector housing; the extension of democracy, including in the workplace; and an international policy of peace and coexistence, including the cancellation of third world debt.

PRC's strategy was to push a government of the 'moderate-left' – in other words one dominated by the PDS – further to the left by the strength of its own position. As PRC's election handbook for party activists observed:

> Restarting from the left also means giving back to the moderate left a space for political and social initiatives linked to the representation of popular demands. But the moderate left will be forced to choose this the stronger Communist Refoundation is. A vote for the communists is therefore doubly useful: it is useful in beating the right and to give direction and spirit to an alternative strategy.[9]

While PRC rejected any idea of participating within the Olive Tree coalition, the feeling was pretty mutual and the Olive Tree definitely did not wish to have PRC on board. It was far more interested in carving out its new space in the centre ground of Italian politics, getting on board the Greens, the PPI and Dini's new Italian Renewal party (*Rinnovamento Italiano*; RI). However, PRC did engage in a mutually beneficial stand-down arrangement with the coalition. PRC was able to contest 27 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 17 in the Senate, without competition from the centre–left, in exchange for not standing against Olive Tree candidates in other constituencies. As a result, the left/centre–left vote would not be split, allowing right-wing gains. As a result, and because LN ran alone outside the right-wing alliance,

the centre–left won the election. The tactics of alliance politics were vital to success in Italian elections.

This arrangement suited the PRC because at this point it did not wish to participate in government or in a parliamentary majority but they were willing for Romano Prodi of the Olive Tree coalition to become prime minister, and they would vote on each individual issue as they saw politically fit. The PRC took 35 seats and 8.6% of the vote – a million more votes than their previous general election performance of 5.6%, and their highest ever vote to date. The balance of seats within the Chamber of Deputies meant that the government had to rely on PRC votes, and thus PRC came to play a politically decisive role. The result was a change of orientation within its leadership. In June 1996, the PRC abandoned its more oppositional stance and declared that it was now part of the parliamentary majority. It stated that it was engaged in a policy of 'critical support' for the government, sustaining it in power, while 'slowing down privatisation, forcing more taxation and less social spending cuts, protecting pensions and so on'.[10] This position resulted in intense criticism being levelled at the PRC leadership from a small minority within the party, particularly those grouped around the Trotskyist Livio Maitan, who felt that excessive compromise was being made with the Prodi government.

The issue was debated at the party's Third Congress in December 1996. Bertinotti defended the positions both of opposition to the Dini government and of critical support for the Prodi government to keep the right out of power. He described this approach as a 'unity-radicality pairing' which prevented the PRC from being 'either an appendage of the PDS or a ghettoised minority bereft of any political project'.[11] Bertinotti argued that PRC had been able to influence the government over the budget – that it didn't touch health spending or pensions, and that instead of public spending cuts, a progressive income tax had been introduced and measures taken against tax evasion. It was not enough, argued Bertinotti, but these were steps on the path away from neo-liberalism. The opposition argued that the Prodi government intended to complete the process of inserting Italy into the Maastricht framework and that the forthcoming budget would be a massive attack on working people. They took the view that PRC should go back to opposition and resistance, representing the interests of the workers, young people, old people and the population of

the underdeveloped south of Italy. Bertinotti's position won with a majority of 85%. But the issue continued to be debated during the following months until Bertinotti shifted his position in the autumn of 1998, withdrawing support from the Prodi government over the budget proposals for 1999 which included massive government spending cuts, including welfare cuts particularly targeted at the pension system. Prodi resigned but shortly afterwards PRC reversed its position, having accepted a government commitment to introduce a 35-hour week in 2001 and a modification of the cuts in the pension system. As a result, Prodi was reinstated.

Re-orientation and the turn to the movements

This incident demonstrated the contradiction within PRC's position and led to increased division and eventual polarisation within the party's leadership in 1998. The key divide was between Cossutta and Bertinotti, the latter expressing increasing concern over PRC's support for the government. In the summer of 1998, Bertinotti launched an offensive within the leadership, insisting that the PRC should demand a turn by the government on socioeconomic issues. If such a turn did not take place, Bertinotti argued that PRC should break with the government. Although the leadership agreed with this position, a sharp debate rapidly emerged between supporters of Cossutta who did not wish to leave the government majority and the supporters of Bertinotti who were readying themselves to break with the Olive Tree government. Cossutta recognised in principle that with a centre–left government in power a communist party should be in opposition, but he stated that the overwhelming consideration was to avoid the return to power of Berlusconi.[12] When the moment came in October 1998 to vote down the budget and the government, Cossutta and the majority of PRC deputies refused to do it, describing Bertinotti as 'irresponsible' and 'adventurist'.[13]

The result was a split. On 18 October, Cossutta and his supporters held the founding meeting of the Party of Italian Communists. Although many PRC deputies supported Cossutta's position, it was not particularly popular with the grass roots of the party. Only around 3,000 of the party's 125,000 members opted to go with Cossutta, who declared that the political and ideological basis of the new party was continuity with the traditions of Togliatti and the

PCI and criticised Bertinotti for deviating from that approach, despite the fact that the Historic Compromise had relegated the PCI to permanent opposition. He was also critical of Bertinotti's cooperation with Maitan and the Italian section of the Trotskyist Fourth International which was now inside the PRC. The support of Cossutta and his followers meant that the Olive Tree coalition was able to remain in power, but the result within the PRC was a radical break with the past. As Maitan observed:

> What Cossutta used to call, quite rightly, the 'Togliatti culture' – the approaches and conceptions inspired by a moderate gradualism of the traditional social democratic type, favouring institutional action and blurring class division – will have lost, following the split, most – if not all – of its supporters.[14]

The PRC now increased its orientation towards strengthening its links with the grass-roots and social movements. As Bertinotti had stated in 1996, 'The opening up of the party to the movements, to the living realities of the country, isn't tactical cunning, but a crucial component of our project.'[15] The PRC also worked towards rebuilding the militant left within CGIL and towards winning a contest with the PDS for a new hegemony on the left which, according to Bertinotti, 'will be won by whoever is able to give the most effective answer to the social crisis'.[16]

However, in the general election of May 2001, PRC's support declined to 5.03% of the vote and Silvio Berlusconi's centre–right coalition narrowly defeated the Olive Tree coalition. Berlusconi returned to power with 45.4% to the Olive Tree's 43.5%. In spite of the narrowness of the majority, Berlusconi remained in power for the full five-year term of office, overseeing two governments, the first of which – running until 2005 – was notable for being the longest-running one in the post-Second World War period. It was that government which took Italy into the war on Iraq, notwithstanding the intense opposition within the country to such a course of action.

Despite its reduced electoral support, PRC became a leading player within the anti-globalisation movement and the developing social forum movement at the European level as well as and the pre-eminent player within Italy. In July 2001, these campaigns shot to global prominence. When the G8 met in Genoa in that month, they

faced massive protests, not only from anti-globalisation activists, but also from a much wider social mobilisation. As Bruno Steri, a member of PRC's National Political Committee, observed, as well as including a PRC mobilisation and student protestors,

> The Genoa demonstrations against the G8 summit . . . showed in action a vast and composite front of voluntary associations with a preponderance of groups of ethico-solidarity inspiration, of groups engaged in international cooperation, and the various components of the ecological galaxy. But, there was alongside the presence of independent unions (COBAS etc.) the highly significant participation of FIOM-CGIL [*Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*] (the metalworkers' union – the largest Italian union [Federazione Impiegati Operati Metallurgici]).[17]

The Genoa protests were marred by the tragic death of Carlo Giuliani, a young protestor shot dead by the Italian police. In the days that followed, hundreds of thousands of people protested on the streets of the major Italian cities. Steri analysed the nature of this mobilisation and the impact of the protests of that time:

> This time it was all the 'people of the left' who came out in revolt, expressing its concrete support for the 'people of Genoa'. It was not simply young people of 20 to 30, not just the generations of the 'new movement' but the many facets (more or less politically committed, more or less politically disappointed) of democratic Italy. There remains, in this country, alongside a definite 'silent majority' with a 'populist' tendency, a vast democratic and progressive public opinion, which the drift of the old left (in particular of the PCI–PDS–DS) and its neo-liberal mutation of the last decade had managed to disperse and disorient. The development of mass movements of young people, from Seattle to Genoa has acted as a catalyst to politically revive the less young and help give the young the taste for political commitment.[18]

What form such a political revival would take was open to debate however, as the social forum movement had many and varied chaotic expressions, not least in Italy, and the more conflict-oriented and street-confrontational 'disobedienti' groups were inspired by the

ideas of Negri and Hardt. Antonio Negri epitomised the development of a very different type of left than that of the mainstream communist tradition in Italy. As Perry Anderson has observed: 'At the crossroads of the late 1960s', he advocated 'not a compact for modernity between capital and organised labour under the aegis of the PCI, but an escalation of conflict between unorganised – or unemployed – labour and the state, towards armed struggle and civil war.'[19] Negri's championing of the *Autonomia Operaia* or autonomous workers' movement in the 1970s gave way in the early twenty-first century to his heroisation of the 'multitude', a non-specific, immanent, revolutionary social subject, a nebulous notion temporarily attractive to a wave of activists around the social forum movement, but wholly negative in its condoning of violence.

But a new and more concrete focus was forced on the movement by external events, namely, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, and the development of a massive anti-war movement within which the organised far left was to play by far the most significant role, parallel to the role played by the nascent communist movement in the anti-war movements of the First World War. The first major expression of the scale of Italian anti-war sentiment took place a week after the bombing of Afghanistan began. The traditional peace movement's annual Perugia-to-Assisi march attracted up to 400,000 people and mobilisations continued in the months that followed on both anti-war and other social and economic issues such as immigration and privatisation. On 10 November 2001, 120,000 marched in Rome against war; on 16 November over 100,000 metal workers marched in Rome against an unacceptably low wage offer. In spite of this upsurge of militancy, the Berlusconi government moved to abolish Article 18 of the Italian Workers' Charter which obliges firms to re-employ workers fired 'without just cause'. On 23 March, three million people protested in Rome against this step, followed a few days later by a general strike which brought Italy to a stand still. Repeated mobilisations took place in the following months in defence of workers' rights and against the threat of war, and PRC collected 500,000 signatures – required under the Italian constitution – calling for a referendum to extend the cover of Article 18, rather than abolishing it. Not surprisingly, PRC interpreted these events favourably, seeing them as a 'working class awakening': 'After a long period of toning down struggles, a new generation of workers had risen.'[20]

Soon after, the labour movement and the 'new movements', as Steri called them, coalesced through the first Europe Social Forum (ESF), held in Florence in November 2002, to accelerate the anti-war movement to global prominence. The ESF was the first Europe-wide event organised by the social forum movement founded in Porto Alegre in 2001, and was organised on the theme 'Against neo-liberalism, racism and war' and attended by 50,000 to 60,000 people from all over Europe. During the course of the Forum, anti-war activists established an International Anti-War Coordination, at which it was decided to call the global day of action on 15 February 2003, which was to result in massive mobilisations throughout the world – the largest of which was in Rome with three million participants. The Forum itself culminated in a demonstration of a million people against the possibility of war on Iraq. According to Chris Nineham, participating on behalf of the British Stop the War Coalition,

> Peace flags flew from thousands of windows, and trains were rescheduled to serve the huge crowds. Although the demo had many slogans, it was noticeable anti-war chants dominated. The next morning thousands of activists crammed into the final assembly singing and chanting. In this electric atmosphere we launched the call for 15 February as a Europe-wide day of action against war.[21]

This subsequently went on to become a global call. But as Nineham went on to observe, there was not, initially, unanimity on the war being central to the agenda of the social forum movement.

> At the final preparation meeting for Florence in October 2002 a number of activists from France strongly opposed the idea, arguing the proposal was too controversial and that it might alienate the unions in France.[22]

According to Nineham, leading Italian activists helped swing the decision in favour of the global day of action, and of course the rest is history. Yet despite the powerful role that the PRC played within the movements in Italy and in the wider European arena, and the resurgence in the early twenty-first century of industrial militancy,

this did not translate into electoral success for PRC and it has never since achieved the level of support it had reached in 1996.

Down and out

In April 2006, the general election resulted in a very narrow victory for the centre–left alliance under Romano Prodi, leading by just 0.7% over the incumbent Berlusconi. PRC took 5.84% of the vote and joined Prodi's cabinet, with PRC member Paolo Ferrero becoming Minister of Social Solidarity. Bertinotti was elected President of the Chamber of Deputies and Franco Giordano became the new party secretary in place of Bertinotti. PRC was faced with the continuing and principal challenge, identified clearly by Flavia d'Angeli from the Critical Left current within PRC: 'How to block the road to social-liberalism, without, however, in any way helping Berlusconi to get back into power.'[23] The Critical Left advocated appropriate voting support for Prodi's government without actually being in it so that Berlusconi's return could be prevented while a strong anti-capitalist left could be built simultaneously by PRC: 'This support "from the outside" would set Prodi on the only road that could give him a broad social base of support: the road of a clean break from the neo-liberal and warlike policies of preceding governments.'[24]

But the PRC leadership chose to join Prodi in government and during this period PRC took a number of decisions which were completely unacceptable to its voter base. Most notably, it voted in favour of renewed finance to keep the Italian military in Afghanistan and to send Italian troops to Lebanon. An anti-war resolution put to the PRC national leadership by Critical Left members in July 2006 was defeated, with the majority opting to support Prodi. Widespread concern was expressed by the anti-war left internationally – both Tariq Ali from the United Kingdom and Noam Chomsky from the United States wrote to Bertinotti, urging him to change the PRC line. Describing himself as an old friend of *Rifondazione*, Ali stated: 'For *Rifondazione* to vote in favour would be a tragedy for the European Left and I fear can only lead to disasters both in Afghanistan and in terms of creating an alternative in Italy.'[25] When the vote took place in the Italian parliament, only four deputies – from the PRC minority position – voted against the wars, with two leaving the chamber.

One of the PRC deputies who voted against – Salvatore Cannavo – explained his thinking thus:

> We do not see any contradiction between [Ingrao's] refusal of the Gulf War in the 1990s and our "No" today: because there is a continuity between these two facts, and it is not true that the question of Afghanistan is particular or minor. Like the case of Kosovo, it represents on the contrary the emblem of the "humanitarian" and multilateral war which constitutes the guiding light of Europe's foreign policy. Not to contest it fundamentally is to become an accomplice, not only to what is happening in Kabul, but also to a dynamic of an international policy that can lead to fresh disasters.[26]

Backing these wars was an astonishing step for a party which was so closely linked to the European anti-war movement and had renewed itself on the basis of its social movement credentials. Many left PRC as a result and there were a number of organisational splits, including the Communist Workers' Party, the Critical Left and the Communist Alternative Party, all originating in Trotskyist currents within PRC. The PRC was now losing the standing it had gained for uniting formerly different wings of the post-1989 anti-capitalist left.

But foreign policy was not the only area where PRC faced problems. Within the government, the PRC had insisted on the need for immediate economic redistribution in favour of the less well-off, but the majority in the government opted to put national finances in order before taking any such redistributive steps. In fact, in the summer of 2007, the government moved to reform the pension system. The swingeing cuts made by the previous centre–right government were reversed, but nevertheless there was a reduction in the total size of the pension protection fund. The PRC attempted to mobilise the trade unions to oppose the government majority but eventually the unions backed the government's compromise proposals, subsequently endorsed by a favourable referendum from the workforce. This was a considerable humiliation for PRC and raised serious questions about the value of its participation in the government. According to Mimmo Porcaro, their position could have been salvaged because Prodi was planning to introduce a redistributive policy, 'based on the considerable successes that had been achieved

in combating the export of capital for purposes of tax evasion'.[27] Unfortunately, the Prodi government fell before the policy could take effect.

In the meantime, the centre–left had been regrouping, as the identity of DS (Democrats of the Left) continued to evolve following the 2006 victory. The Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), which had been founded in 1991, had become Democrats of the Left (DS) in 1998. In 2007, it merged with Democracy Is Freedom – The Daisy (a centrist party including former Christian Democrats) and other smaller groupings, to form the Democratic Party. At the DS's final congress in April 2007, around 75% of its members voted in favour of the merger. In May 2007, those who did not wish to participate formed Democratic Left (*Sinistra Democratica*; SD), with the intention of uniting the Italian left, including PRC. They entered the 2008 elections as the Rainbow Left (*Sinistro Arcobaleno*), including SD, PRC, the Party of Italian Communists and the Greens, with the intention of acting as a left alliance, counter to the Democratic Party centre–left regroupment.

The 2008 elections were a catastrophe for the Italian left. Berlusconi and the centre–right alliance took 46.8%, and the Democratic Party-led centre–left alliance took 37.5% of the vote. The parties on the Rainbow Left list took only 3.1% of the vote, failing to cross the electoral threshold of 4%. As Porcaro observed, writing in 2009, 'For the first time in the history of the Italian Republic there is no party in parliament that expressly identifies with socialism or communism.'[28] In Porcaro's view, the first cause of the collapse was the participation of the radical left in Prodi's centre–left government, elected in 2006, which 'was seen by most Italians as a fiasco'.[29]

Crisis erupted within the PRC and in April 2008 a group of former Bertinotti supporters originating from Proletarian Democracy, led by Paolo Ferrero and supported by other left groups within the PRC, forced Giordano to resign. At the PRC Congress in July of that year, supporters of Ferrero defeated those of Bertinotti, and Ferrero was elected as party secretary. But he received only 53% of the vote, indicating a deeply divided party. Indeed, in January 2009, supporters of Bertinotti, including Giordano, left the PRC and founded a new party, Movement for the Left, which aimed to unite with other left-wing groups, including SD.

As Perry Anderson observed of the Italian left in March 2009,

> Putting behind it the dangerous tools of the carpenter and the farmer, the Italian left has adopted one symbol after another from the vegetable kingdom, or thin air – the rose, the oak, the olive, the daisy, the rainbow. Without some glint of metallurgy, it seems unlikely to make much headway.[30]

Whether PRC can contribute to providing the glint of metallurgy necessary to assist the revival of the Italian left is an open question. With the Berlusconi government facing potential breakdown in late 2010, resulting from the economic crisis, major social and industrial conflict and serious problems within his coalition, opportunities to present an alternative exist for the left. But as the Democratic Party backs Berlusconi's austerity measures, and the parties to its left continue in chaos and fragmentation, it is hard to see who will pose credible alternatives in party political terms, even against a background of rising industrial militancy and social protest.

7

Back from the Brink: French Communism (*Parti Communiste Français*) Re-orientates

The French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français*; PCF) survived the crisis of 1989 and by 1999 had consolidated a stable level of support, based on its continuity as a Marxist party based on the working class. It played a major role in the protests against Maastricht in the mid-1990s and made a considerable contribution to forging the left alliance which defeated the right in the French general elections of 1997, participating – as a result – in the 'plural left' government of Lionel Jospin until 2002. It also contributed to building new left cooperation on a Europe-wide basis – a crucial element for the left in the massively destabilising post-1989 period. However, it faced catastrophic electoral collapse in 2002 and again in 2007, which has led to contentious internal restructuring and analysis and a rejection of the strategy which led it to remain in the Jospin government after it had taken a neo-liberal turn. In 2009, the PCF entered into the *Front de Gauche* – with the new *Parti de Gauche* (PG) – to contest the European elections, meeting with modest success.

Having survived the collapse of the Soviet Union under the continuing leadership of Georges Marchais, the PCF continued, in the early 1990s, to emphasise its communist identity while allowing some relaxation of traditional party structures and statutes. At its celebration of the 1917 Russian Revolution in 1991, 'the party declared Leninism "un ideal toujours moderne" '.[1] Performing reasonably in the regional elections in March 1992 – achieving 8% of the vote – the party was able to demonstrate that it had survived the supposed terminal crisis of communism. But the national referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in September 1992 presented the PCF with the

opportunity to do better than just survive – it was able to make a significant political comeback. The Maastricht Treaty set out a strictly monetarist framework for economic and monetary union of Europe, establishing strict limits on the levels of total public debt and government budget deficits. The achievement of these, at 60% of GDP and 3% of GDP, respectively, would require major public spending cuts in most EU states.

The potential of the anti-Maastricht campaign to reach broadly across French society was enormous. With a committed and well-organised membership – in the region of 134,000 – popular campaigning was something that enabled the PCF to draw on its strengths. The party turned with enthusiasm to exposing the neo-liberal nature of the Maastricht Treaty and opposing the social and economic hardship that would inevitably follow. The campaign also enabled the PCF to clarify its position in post-1989 French politics: to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of class-based politics and show the clear difference between the politics of the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) – the social democratic party which had, under the leadership of François Mitterrand, overtaken the PCF in the 1970s – and that of the PCF. In the event, the referendum was narrowly lost, but it was a turning point for the PCF. It had renewed its militant image, and demonstrated – through its key role in such an important struggle – that it had continuing relevance within French society.

The verdict of the voters on the PS and its support for Maastricht was harsh, but it gave new opportunities to the PCF to advance its 'strategic aim of "re-balancing" the French left'.[2] In the legislative elections of March 1993, the PS vote collapsed from 36% in 1988 to 19% in 1993. The PCF vote, however, was consolidated at over 9%, indicating an endorsement of the party's attempts to build a new left space, working more widely with other left and progressive organisations than had often been the case. The results restored the PCF to a competitive position which it had not occupied for many years. Its electoral platform in 1993 included its traditional demands, such as greater taxation on speculation and capital export, a higher minimum wage and a 35-hour week. But it also included a rejection of any regressive reform of the nationality laws and urged the extension of immigrants' voting rights. Of particular significance was the changed approach to the electoral process, outlined by Marchais. According to Stephen Hopkins,

> A vote for the PCF should no longer be viewed as an expression of absolute ideological identification; rather, the party should put itself at the service of all those seeking a broad rapprochement of progressive forces, whatever their diverse affiliations.[3]

Changes were also undertaken within the PCF. Democratic centralism as the internal organising principle was abandoned, allowing freer discussion and debate within the party, and greater decentralisation was introduced. In December 1994, George Marchais stood down and was succeeded as general secretary by his preferred candidate, Robert Hue, from the Val d'Oise who had joined the Central Committee in 1987 and the political bureau in 1990. The other possible candidate was Francis Wurtz, aged 42, an MEP from the Bas-Rhin federation, who had joined the central committee in 1979 and was to become the party's high-profile International Secretary.

Towards the 'plural left' government

Over the next three years, under Hue's leadership, the PCF played a pivotal role in forging a left alliance which was ultimately to bring the PS to power under the leadership of Lionel Jospin in 1997 and the PCF into government with it. Nevertheless, Hue's record as party leader is highly contentious and the electoral fortunes of the PCF appear to have nosedived as a result of the PCF's political record while in government. Hue was clear from the outset as general secretary that he was going to consolidate and develop the emerging orientation of the party, initiated under Marchais' leadership. While he clearly wanted the party to remain rooted in the broad labour movement, the emphasis was now more on 'broad', departing from the more workerist perspective of previous times. He also wanted a more flexible and pragmatic party. An example of this approach came in 1995, at the time of the presidential elections. Jospin, Chirac and Balladur fought a three-cornered contest, eventually won by Chirac – although Jospin had made it into the second round, finishing with a creditable 47%. Chirac had based his campaign on opposition to the ultra-liberal policies of Balladur, speaking about healing the social fractures within the country. Hue took the position that if Chirac carried out the policies he had put forward during the election campaign and opposed liberal policies, then the PCF would engage in

constructive rather than hostile opposition. In fact, Chirac made an immediate about-turn and adopted the policies he had so strongly opposed during the election campaign. But there was considerable opposition to Hue's approach from within the PCF.

Nevertheless, Hue moved forward with some dynamism to help rebuild the left, initiating an Appeal to launch a series of forums of the left. The aim was to formulate a new strategy in the run-up to the next legislative elections which were expected in 1998. Every part of the left was invited to participate in these events, without any preconditions, to discuss the way forward for the left. The Appeal was launched in autumn 1995 and the first forums were held in early 1996. In total, around 200 forums were held across the country, generally on a regional or departmental basis. Two were held in Paris, the larger of which – billed as a national event – was attended by several thousand people. The usual line-up was the PCF, PS, Greens, Radicals, *Mouvement des Citoyens* (a left split from the Socialists) and often the Trotskyist *Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire* (LCR) – the French section of the Fourth International. *Lutte Ouvriere* (LO), the other long-standing ultra-left grouping, associated with Arlette Laguiller, refused to participate in the forums.

The inclusive approach without preconditions gave the forums a chance of success, but what really tipped the balance in their favour was the direction of the French government. Juppé began to implement ultra-liberal policies, and Chirac reneged on his election pledges. Juppé planned to implement cost-cutting reforms of the social security system, to widespread popular opposition. So people were looking for ways in which to organise against the government and its cuts. The PCF's forum initiative provided that framework and its launch coincided with a wave of mass demonstrations against the government in autumn 1995, continuing into the winter, in almost every town and city. As many as two million people mobilised on the streets at the peak of the protests. This wave of protest, and popular desire to channel the protest into an alternative, forced the PS into participating in the forums – it could not afford politically to be left outside, failing to benefit from the anti-government sentiment. The forums took place during the first two-thirds of 1996, after which the PCF launched a further initiative – the *Rassemblements Populaires* (popular meetings) – specifically focusing on collaborative working to win a left victory in the legislative elections, expected in early

1998. However, Chirac called the elections early, bringing them forward to May/June 1997, presumably hoping to take advantage of a chaotic and disorganised left. The PS and PCF immediately concluded their discussions on an electoral platform, and just a week after Chirac's announcement, on 29 April 1997, the parties announced the Déclaration Commune. Both parties agreed that the key issue on which to fight was opposition to unemployment and ultra-liberal economic policies. Setting aside their major differences on the EU and Maastricht, they were able to give political expression to the popular opposition to government cuts and harness the energy expressed over the preceding months. Both parties endorsed a 35-hour week, tax reforms, the creation of 700,000 jobs for young people, a halt to privatisation and a review of immigration legislation. The elections were a victory for the left, and the PCF, PS, Radicals and Greens all increased their vote – the PCF to 9.9%. However, the PS did not have an absolute majority and needed the support of the other left parties to govern.

The PCF now had to decide the basis on which it would work with the PS. Hue, amongst others, favoured entering the government, but some deputies thought that they should stay outside, rather choosing to grant support to the government on the basis of each individual measure. This was the approach taken at that time by the Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy, in relation to the Olive Tree coalition government. Given that this was a controversial issue, following negative experiences in government in the early 1980s, the PCF leadership conducted a consultation process with its activists. In the 1970s, the PS, PCF and Radicals had formed the Union of the Left based on the Common Programme. While the PCF initially entered the government, Mitterrand in power did not adhere to the agreed programme, and the PCF left the government in 1983. After Mitterrand was re-elected in 1988 on a much-reduced vote, the PCF backed the government only on an issue-by-issue basis. But there were a number of differences from the balance of forces in the Mitterrand period: in the early 1980s the PS had an absolute majority, whereas in 1997 there was a combined left victory, which should have provided sufficient leverage for the PCF and other left forces to impact significantly on the government's trajectory. After all, the PCF's forum initiative had played a large part in the victory, and the Déclaration Commune would now provide the basis for the

new government. In the event, the PCF agreed to enter the government with three posts – transport, tourism, and youth and sports, the latter post being held by Marie-George Buffet who was subsequently to become national secretary of the PCF following Hue's resignation in 2001.

The record in government and the electoral fallout

Entering the new *Gauche Plurielle* ('plural left') government was a significant victory for the PCF, so soon after it had been consigned by most observers to the dustbin of history. Its purpose in government was to bring leftward pressure to bear on the PS, as March describes it, 'to steer the governmental centre of gravity to the left',[4] and following the elections its strategy was to emphasise the importance of extra-parliamentary struggle. This activity would ensure that the government would stick to the policy approach agreed during the election, not veer off to the right again once it had secured its victory. In the view of the PCF, it was the action of the mass movement that would keep the new government on track politically. For a period of time, these aspirations appeared to be met. According to Patrice Bessac, now in the leadership of the PCF, responsible for party 'transformation' and its relationship with the *Front de Gauche*, but at that time a young new member:

> This was a time of great hope for many activists and members of the party. In the first two years of our government we managed to have the 35 hour working week put in place, we had a tremendous youth job scheme, coupled with economic growth.[5]

But the record of the Jospin government was mixed. In some areas it delivered advances for working people and met the goals of the left. In July 1999, the government introduced *Couverture maladie universelle* – a universal healthcare cover, which entitled all those with legal residence in France for over three moths to have their healthcare expenses reimbursed. It also entitled those on low incomes to additional support, and illegal immigrants to state medical aid. In February 2000, the Minister of Labour, Martine Aubry, secured the introduction of the 35-hour working week, down from 39 hours – a long-standing demand of the left. Socially progressive attitudes

were also enshrined in law: in November 1999, same-sex civil partnerships were legalised, in the form of the *pacte civil de solidarité*. The greater representation of women in politics was also promoted, and several women served in the government. In December 2000, the *Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbain* law – solidarity and urban renewal law – ensured that each commune would have a 20% quota of social or low-income housing. In May 2001, the Taubira law was introduced, which recognised slavery as a crime against humanity.

However, not all of the government's legislative record pleased the left. In June 1998, the Guigou law was passed, creating a national DNA database. Intended in particular to prevent sexually related crimes, the database also came under attack – as it was rapidly expanded – as an infringement of personal freedom. Even more controversial were the privatisations of France Telecom, GAN, Thomson Multimedia, Air France, Eramet, Aerospatiale and Autoroutes du Sud de la France, which appalled much of the left within the Gauche Plurielle, which was deeply hostile to the sale of state-owned enterprises. They also deplored the lowering of the rates of value-added tax (VAT), income tax and company tax, and attacked the finance ministers Dominique Strauss-Khan and his successor Laurent Fabius for their neo-liberalism. In their view, these policies were those of a right-wing, pro-business government, not one of the left. But this policy shift was not confined to social democracy in France. Writing rather triumphantly in 1999, of social democratic advances in Western Europe, Donald Sassoon identified a common policy platform, identifying Blair's 'Third Way' with Schröder's *Neue Mitte* and Jospin's *gauche plurielle*. Amongst other developments, he observed,

> There has been a further common shift in the traditional debate on the relationship between the public and private sectors. All social democratic parties now concede that there are limits to the expansion of public expenditure, and that the era of nationalisation is over. Privatisation has become acceptable, even desirable . . . Both Schroeder and Jospin have outdone their conservative predecessors in their privatisation programmes.[6]

But privatisation was neither acceptable nor desirable to the left in France, yet the Hue leadership failed to act against this shift to the right. According to Bessac:

> Our participation in government took a wrong turn when Jospin began to bring France further into line with the European framework. This corresponded to an economic downturn and meanwhile the government was privatising in many sectors. It seemed like there was a greater push for conformity with neo-liberal ideas. At that time the PCF under Hue's leadership chose the strategy of remaining in the government and the historic low moment for Hue was when he ordered party members to participate in a key vote on social security which turned many people against the communist party, in particular the hospital workers. This was a significant moment and many people began to see communist participation in the government as something that was merely aligning the PCF with the neo-liberals.[7]

The concern of many members, as expressed by Bessac, was that participating in the government was a strategy in itself and that the PCF was going on in its own little bubble separated from the rest of the population. While the party leadership appeared to be seeking to become more respectable and more modern, these were not the questions that were exercising the party members and activists. Rather, they were worried about what purpose they had for being in the Jospin government and they weren't given clear answers.

So the unity of the left began to unravel. In 2000, Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement, formerly of the PS, who in 1993 had founded the *Mouvement des citoyens*, resigned over the government's decision to give increased autonomy to Corsica. In 2002 he would stand as a presidential candidate representing the Republican Pole – for 'Republicans of left and right' – against what he described as the Chirac/Jospin duo. Thus began the road to disaster in the 2002 presidential election, where each one of the five parties in the Gauche Plurielle government fielded a candidate. Jospin failed to reach the second round and Chirac faced Le Pen for the presidency. Looking at the figures for the first round clearly shows the danger of disunity on the left. Chirac polled 19.88%, Le Pen 16.86% and Jospin 16.18%. Arlette Laguiller from LO (not in *Gauche Plurielle*) polled 5.72%; Chevènement polled 5.33%; Noël Mamère from the Greens polled 5.25%; Olivier Besancenot from the LCR (not in the *Gauche Plurielle*) 4.25%; Robert Hue polled 3.37% and Christiane Taubira of the Radicals 2.32%. So the combined vote for the *Gauche Plurielle*

parties was another 16% on top of Jospin's vote, plus 11% for the ultra-left parties – more than double Chirac's vote in the first round. Yet in the second round French voters could only choose Chirac or Le Pen. The outcome was a landslide for Chirac. On a turnout of almost 80% – up from 71.6% in the first round – Chirac took over 82% of the vote. Clearly those on the left who couldn't bring themselves to vote for Jospin in the first round brought themselves to vote for Chirac in the second. The PS Senator Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who later founded PG, blamed 'those within the party who went on playing the music of the right' – the pro-free market wing, and he urged the PS to move left to win back much of the left vote that had swung to the ultra left and other left forces.[8]

Within the wider disastrous framework, the PCF did particularly badly. The PCF candidate, party general secretary Robert Hue, took a mere 3.4% of the vote, achieving – for the first time – fewer votes than its two left-wing rivals. These were Arlette Laguiller, a long-standing competitor from LO, and Olivier Besancenot from the *Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire* (LCR), both Trotskyist groups that had traditionally trailed behind the Communists. But it was not only in the presidential elections that support flagged badly. The PCF saw a steady downward trajectory in its electoral performance in the two decades since 1989, no longer able to rely on a large base of loyal working-class support. Indeed, voter judgement on the party's political choices post-1989 is clear from their electoral fortunes. The PCF's average vote between 1980 and 1989 was 12.4%; between 1990 and 1999 it was 9.5%; and between 2000 and 2008 it was 4.6%. Post-1989, its highest vote was 9.9% in 1997,[9] after its anti-Maastricht campaigning, and its lowest vote was 4.3% in 2007. While increased support for its militant role in the anti-Maastricht campaign helped propel it into the Jospin government from 1997 to 2002, the PCF leadership faced criticism from both within and outside the party for cooperating with the socialist-led government in neo-liberal economic policies. According to D.S. Bell, writing in 2003,

> For the French Communist Party the 2002 elections were another stage in its relentless decline. Defining a purpose is now imperative as 'indignation at misery' is an inadequate basis for future revival. In an opinion poll in the autumn of 2002 less than one-third of the respondents had a 'good opinion' of the PCF and more than

> half thought that it had no future . . . The Hue leadership failed to find a way of differentiating the party from the PS and implicitly accepted that the defeat was caused by this strategy.[10]

New leader, new direction

Following this controversial period in office it lost 5.1% of its votes between 1997 and 2002,[11] when it polled 4.8% of the vote and won 21 seats. Its membership also suffered, dropping from over 200,000 members in 1998 to 138,000 in 2001. Robert Hue, who had led the PCF since 1994, and backed the project of the *Gauche Plurielle* bringing Jospin to power, resigned in 2001, assuming the title of president of the party. He had also taken the party through la mutation – a process of internal restructuring which not only was unpopular with many members but failed to attract new members or reverse the party's decline. According to Bessac,

> la mutation was supposed to bring great changes, to change everything, to bring us forward into the twenty-first century. But as the years went by many people began to feel that la mutation was actually more destructive than it was constructive. Many people came to believe that we were only *talking* about the future of communism in France and a number of our activists felt that the party had lost its goals and that they had been abandoned. Many people were working and having new thoughts and ideas to renew the party but there was no realisation of it. No coherent dynamic was going on that would enable us really to move forward. The communist party was left with very many questions and no clear idea of where it was going.[12]

Hue was succeeded as national secretary by Marie-George Buffet, a popular figure who had been Minister of Youth and Sports in the Jospin government. She went on to reverse a number of the steps taken by Hue during *la mutation*, entering a new phase of reconstruction. Whereas Hue had focused on developing networks to work on issues, thus weakening the party structures while simultaneously centralising power around his own post, Buffet restored campaigning *as a party*, not just through networks. This was very popular with the members who had come to feel directionless under Hue's

leadership. Thus despite the many problems facing the party, Buffet re-dynamised the PCF and sustained a very strong level of political support from the membership during her eight years in office, despite a number of very poor election performances. In fact, the greatest challenge the party faced was the disastrous election result of 2002, which led to a major financial crisis within the party, as it failed to meet the 5% threshold for reimbursement of its campaign expenses. As Paul Webster commented in *The Observer* after the election: 'With only 952,000 votes (3.4 per cent of the poll) in the presidential election, the Communist Party has had to launch a collection to pay for its campaign and to stave off bankruptcy.'[13] Hue resigned the party presidency and the post was discontinued.

Marie-George Buffet proceeded to re-orientate the PCF. According to PCF activist Jimmy Jancovich, at the Thirty-second Congress, immediately after the disastrous 2002 elections, 'she put forward the programme of Popular Unity against the right instead of just electorally tailing behind the Socialist Party'. Breaking with the line of Robert Hue, whose leadership effectively backed Jospin's neo-liberal economic policies while part of the 'plural left' government, Buffet sought a new role for the PCF, rebuilding 'its influence on the basis of broad popular mass work, mobilising people against the neoliberal reforms of the right wing governments that have been in power ever since the 2002 Presidential elections'.[14]

In 2005, the PCF participated in the successful 'No' campaign against the European Constitution – the only left party to call for a No vote. This improved its profile, as did its success with other left groups in 2006 in defeating Chirac's new employment contract. Yet once again, in the elections of 2007, the PCF performed very badly, in both the presidential and legislative elections. In the former, party secretary Marie-George Buffet had participated in 2006 in an initiative to field a common candidate from the PCF and the anti-globalisation and radical left, based on the cooperation of the No campaign. But little seemed to have been learned from 2002, and this initiative foundered. Buffet stood as PCF candidate alone, not only competing with Arlette Laguiller, Olivier Besancenot and José Bové from the radical left, but – not surprisingly – also facing the possibility of tactical voting for the Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal by otherwise communist supporters. The result was disastrous – she received 1.93% of the vote, the lowest vote ever for a communist

presidential candidate in France. In the legislative elections, matters were scarcely better. The PCF gained 15 seats, five less than the number required to form its own parliamentary group, going on to form the Democratic and Republican Left group together with greens and other left-wing MPs. This was the first time since 1962 that the PCF did not have sufficient seats to form its own group.

The left party which gained most from the drop in support for the PCF was the LCR, whose presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot picked up some popular support. However, support for the PCF improved in the municipal elections of 2008 where it won some new towns and kept most of its existing large towns. But in December 2008, following on from what was a fairly catastrophic run of elections, the PCF held an extraordinary party congress to assess the reasons for its devastating drop in support, including its participation in government, the movement around the 2005 referendum and the presidential candidacies.

New political formations

The winter of 2008–09 saw the emergence of new forces on the French left. In November 2008, the Left Party or PG was initiated by Senator Jean-Luc Mélenchon, formerly of the Socialist Party or PS, together with Deputy Marc Dolez and other former PS members, who had resigned from the party only days earlier after losing a key vote at the PS Congress in Reims. As Mélenchon himself observed, writing of the direction of the PS just prior to leaving the PS and founding PG,

> The numbing of the left in France can lead to worse things, including an Italian-style collapse. The 'democratic' line, at first developed by Clinton then Blair, is progressively spreading to all of the socialist left. Its essential principles are clearly identifiable: First, to reject the frontal opposition between left and right. Then to reject the strategy of gathering together the left – to the benefit instead of a political rapprochement with the 'centre'. Finally, to relativise the question of sharing the wealth as an essential issue of the social and political arena.[15]

In 2005, Mélenchon had been one of the leading figures within the PS to reject the Constitution Treaty. According to Cornelia

Hildebrandt, Mélenchon and Dolez saw – in the context of the crisis of capitalism and the failure of social democracy in Europe – 'the need for a new party that would be "firmly anchored in the left-wing camp" and represent democratic and republican values without concessions to the Right" '.[16]

The concept of the party appears to some extent to have been inspired by the success of *Die Linke* in Germany. As Mélenchon has stated,

> The German experience of Die LINKE, as well as the Latin American experiences of reinvention of the left, can permit the sketching out of axes to bring alive this proposal of a new force. Socialists, communists, Trotskyists, ecologists, republicans and altermondialistes – today we have the responsibility of opening up a path other than that of the disavowal which threatens the extinction of the left.[17]

Indeed, Oskar Lafontaine spoke at the launch of PG on 29 November 2008, at a meeting attended by 3,000 people. He appealed for the development of left parties across Europe:

> If you want changes, comrades, it is necessary to reconstruct the left – in Germany, in France, all over Europe. The German experience shows us that a European left, reorganised and strong, can change the choices and force the other parties to react. Let us build this new left together, a left that refuses rotten compromises![18]

By early 2009, PG had around 7,000 members and sympathisers, many of whom were disaffected former members of the PS, but support was also drawn from communists and those campaigning for civil rights. At the PG's launch, Lafontaine also spoke of three criteria for success for a new left party – external social and political conditions favourable to the project – in Germany an empty space on the left; the union of anti-capitalist forces; and a clear and discernible political profile. But while all have these have been met in Germany, it is far from clear that any of them can be met in France.

But how was the PCF going to respond to the development of the PG, given that it was clearly on much the same political territory? Its

Thirty-fourth Congress met in December 2008, facing a crisis situation. Despite Buffet's disastrous performance in the 2007 presidential election, she was re-elected as national secretary with 67.7% of the vote. Marie-Pierre Vieu, representing the 'Communistes unitaires' tendency which backs a union with the PG, took second place with 16.4%. This group, under the leadership of former *l'Humanite* editor Pierre Zarka, did not put a resolution to the Congress, instead organising a fringe meeting entitled 'Those who resemble each other, gather together'. Two other candidates took almost 16% between them, and around 7% abstained. The main resolution adopted by the Congress was entitled 'To want a new world, To build it daily'.[19] The resolution called for change and rejuvenation of the PCF, while stopping short of calling for a 'metamorphosis' of the party. According to Dubois and Mabut, 'Buffet proposed to "initiate profound transformations" of the party, but rejected the idea of "constituting another party with blurred limits".' Concluding the conference, which was attended by the representatives of organisations and parties from across the left, Buffet spoke of the need for a 'progressive front for the defence of liberties and democracy', and called for the left 'to come together at the point of struggles'.[20] In the case of the PCF this was to manifest itself in an electoral agreement with the PG to contest the 2009 European elections as the *Front de Gauche*.

The New Anti-capitalist Party, or *Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste* (NPA), was founded on 7 February 2009 by the LCR, the French section of the Trotskyist Fourth International. Notwithstanding its origins however, the NPA does not see itself as a Trotskyist party; rather, its founding principles refer to twenty-first century socialism, opposing all forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination. Its vision of Europe is one of equality, solidarity with the peoples of the global south and peace – backing withdrawal from Afghanistan and from NATO itself. But rather than opposing European unity, it supports instead the idea of 'a free federation of the united socialist states of Europe'.[21] The NPA attracts the French radical left and is also influenced by *Die Linke*, which includes many from western German Trotskyist groups as well as from the communist tradition in the east. As well as former LCR members, the NPA also includes representatives from LO, and a number of other radical left groups, as well as environmental and anti-globalisation activists. Nevertheless, many in its leadership were previously members of

the LCR, so it will be interesting to see to what extent it can be something qualitatively new, or whether it will just be the LCR writ larger.

Its most significant figure is Olivier Besancenot, who was the LCR candidate in the 2007 French presidential elections, attracting 4.08% of the vote, or almost 1.5 million votes. In fact it was this result which led the LCR to call for the formation of the NPA. 'NPA committees were launched, 9,000 people joined them, and on the eve of the party's founding conference the LCR dissolved itself into this new organisation.'[22] The NPA refuses categorically to participate in a centre–left government, committing itself to an absolute break with capitalism, non-cooperation with the PCF and total independence from the PS. Such an option is not, however, excluded by the PG, subject to acceptable terms.

Alain Krivine, one of the founders of the LCR, has also spoken of three factors leading to an 'exceptional political opportunity': firstly, the crisis of capitalism; secondly, the emergence of a new generation that wants to resist; and, thirdly, the discrediting of the reformist left in the eyes of this new generation, 'to sum it up briefly, the social-liberalisation of social-democracy and a Communist party that's crumbling and following the Socialists' lead'.[23]

According to Mélenchon, the PG's strategy is 'revolution through elections'[24] and the first test of electoral support was to come in the European elections of 2009. In order to maximise support for the left, the PG formed an electoral front – the *Front de Gauche* – in November 2008, with the PCF and the Convention for a Progressive Alternative, while each party retained its own political identity. According to Hildebrandt, 'In the long term the idea is to develop a further-reaching left alliance to achieve left-wing majorities for political change, which – according to Mélenchon – are not possible in France without the Socialist Party.'[25] The NPA refused to participate in the Front, aiming instead to unite anti-capitalists across Europe and internationally. In the event, *Front de Gauche* secured four seats, while the NPA failed to cross the threshold, with the votes of the two organisations totalling around 10% of the vote. This electoral front was repeated at the regional elections in 2010, with continued success.

The Thirty-fifth PCF Congress in June 2010 officially endorsed the left front strategy, confirming the re-orientation of the party

under the leadership of Marie-George Buffet, whose term as national secretary ended at the Congress. As Jancovich observes,

> Since the Left Front had not even existed at the time of the previous Congress . . . it was essential that the party as a whole should decide its long-term strategy: was it to give priority to the Left Front as its strategic ally or cling on to its old policy of giving priority to electoral alliances with the Socialist Party.[26]

Not only did the Congress enthusiastically endorse the left front policy, it looked beyond the existing component parties to all those prepared 'to struggle against the neoliberal policies of the government and of the European Union. The emphasis was on the struggle, not electoral bargaining, with the aim of eventually creating a broad Popular Front that could win a political majority capable of transforming society'.[27] Ambitious plans indeed.

8

Communism Renewed and Supported: The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (the Czech Republic)

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM) was founded in March 1990 as an autonomous national organisation for the Czech lands, within the Czechoslovak Communist Party (CCP). The decision to found the CPBM was taken at the extraordinary congress of the CCP in December 1989, and thus it finally carried out one of the key reform demands of the Prague Spring of 1968 – the federalisation of the CCP.[1] It became an independent party in October 1990 and when the country was divided in 1992 into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the CPBM became the successor to the former ruling party in the Czech Republic and the Party of the Democratic Left became the successor party in Slovakia. After its foundation, it underwent a political renewal similar to that of the PDS in Germany, undertaking internal democratisation, and while retaining an explicitly communist and anti-capitalist identity, embracing a measure of more radical left politics – ecology, anti-racism, anti-war and gender issues, along the lines more widely embraced by the new European left in the 1990s. Its renewal has been an effective one – according to Sean Hanley, 'It is one of the most successful and well supported radical left groupings in the EU25.'[2] In that process it has been remarkably consistent in its adherence to its stated goal, to 'transform itself into a modern left party, which could answer to the voters on questions of both the present and the future, while not diverging from the ideals and programmatic goals of the era when it was founded'.[3]

As Hanley puts it, the CPBM 'sought to renew and develop a communist identity after 1989 rather than undergoing "social

democratisation" or turning to wholesale "chauvino-communist" nationalism'.[4] Indeed, since its foundation, the CPBM has been characterised by the flexible maintenance of ideological continuity as a communist party, while undertaking sufficient internal restructuring and programmatic change to enable it to operate effectively in the current political context. An analysis of its programmatic documents reveals, according to Hanley,

> a relatively coherent, if eclectic, ideology centring on resistance to capitalist restoration and foreign influence; an etatistic vision of a market economy with a dominant public sector; rejection of Czech membership of NATO and a highly sceptical view of accession to the EU; and a limited and ambiguous critique of the period of communist one-party rule.[5]

In spite of its euroscepticism, its flexibility has enabled its participation in Europe-wide structures, both at an EU institutional level and at the level of left cooperation. Unlike other parties which have retained a strongly communist identity, such as the communist parties of Greece and Portugal, the CPBM has interacted with the Party of the European Left, maintaining observer party status. Luke March describes the CPBM as a 'reform' communist party, as distinct from 'conservative' communist parties such as those of Greece or Russia. 'Reform' communists, he states,

> are increasingly divergent and eclectic. They have discarded aspects of the Soviet model (for example Leninism and democratic centralism in the case of Italy, France and the Czech Republic) . . . and have adopted, or at least paid lip service to, elements of the post-1968 'new left' agenda (feminism, environmentalism, grass-roots democracy, and so on).[6]

However, the CPBM is notable for its stronger defence of the communist past than either the French or Italian communists, and it was primarily this perspective which resulted in the CPBM refusing to take full PEL membership, objecting to the use of the term 'stalinist' in the PEL constitution. The CPBM's sense of history is an important factor in its development and its self-identity. According to one party activist, talking about the communist period in 1995,

> We say that those 40 years were the most successful years in the development of Czechoslovakia. We are analysing the mistakes that we made in the past. But the positive things are more than the negative.[7]

This stance, which has remained the dominant ethos within the CPBM has, nevertheless, been the subject of internal debate and conflict, particularly in the early years after party establishment. According to Vladimir Handl, in the immediate period after party establishment there was some support for a break with communism in a social democratic direction from the top of the party:

> Both leaders of the party in the immediate post-1990 period – Vasil Morohita (1990) and Jiří Svoboda (1990–1993) – sought, more or less consistently, to open the party up to non-communist modernization.[8]

But this was only ever a minority taste and the overwhelming preference of the still very sizeable membership was a communist – albeit reformed – continuity. As a result, some small splits did subsequently take place on either side of the spectrum but nothing on a debilitating scale. According to Miroslav Mareš: 'In the first half of the 1990s, two significant waves of reformists emerged and intended vehemently to change the party's profile, but their vision failed and they formed insignificant separatist parties.'[9] The key issues of contestation were the party's name and the party's assessment of the communist period. A reformist platform within the CPBM, called the Democratic Left, sought to change the name, resulting in a party referendum which took place in 1992. Over 75% of the membership voted to retain 'communist' in the name.[10] Eventually the question of a name change was dropped from the agenda, even for reformists within the party. By 2005, Mareš wrote,

> The name has already become such a strong symbol of identity that the party would lose its face if it were replaced. Moreover, such step would be decided by the will of the membership, which is most likely still opposed to it.[11]

Many Democratic Left supporters left the party after its Second Congress in 1992, joining with other left groups to found the

short-lived Democratic Labour Party, and some subsequently joined the Czech Social Democratic Party – the re-established pre-war social democratic party. Some of these groups eventually formed the Party of Democratic Socialism in 1997; this party is politically marginal in Czech politics but was a founding member of the Party of the European Left and cooperates with the CPBM in some areas of political work. On the other wing of the CPBM, more hard-line forces attempted to assert themselves but they had little support, and some left the CPBM forming a breakaway which became the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. There is no cooperation between the two parties. The majority reform communist trend around Miroslav Grebeníček prevailed at the Third Congress of the CPBM. The basis of this position is to maintain the communist identity while realising 'that the Leninist thesis of the formation of a suitable revolutionary situation and assumption of power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat is either outdated or unrealistic in the long term'.[12] A spectrum of political perspectives remains within the party, but there are no initiatives to change the fundamental structure and principles of the party and a functioning rapprochement has prevailed. Effective working within the existing political system has become the priority. While its goal is the eventual replacement of capitalism with socialism, as Handl points out,

> the KSČM [CPBM] has subsequently managed to pull off the trick of simultaneously remaining a party wedded to a seemingly clear ideology, while being pragmatic enough to participate – where the opportunities arise – in sharing power at sub-national levels.[13]

The CPBM has adopted a more open attitude to other left forces and has been open to electoral cooperation with other parties, as well as to the inclusion of non-party members on its electoral lists. In the 1992 elections, it formed the Left Bloc coalition with a small group called the Democratic Left (a different group to the internal party reformists), winning 14.5% of the vote. In fact, in the first half of the 1990s, the CPBM formed the largest opposition party to Václav Klaus's governing coalition and was seen as a defender of ordinary people's living standards in the face of government spending cuts, but it didn't manage to retain that position, for while it sought to represent a broad electorate, according to Hanley, 'its support

was considerably more narrow strongly skewed towards older and retired voters, residents of rural areas and small towns, groups such as the police and army and localities with historic traditions of Communist voting'.[14] Moving beyond this sector of support has been a key challenge for the CPBM. In 1996, it was overtaken by the re-established pre-war Social Democrats which had 'absorbed political elites and voters from a variety of failed centre-left groupings (social liberals, ecologists, Moravian regionalists, reformist breakaways from KSCM)'[15] and whose share of the vote rose from 6.5% to 26.4%. But, nevertheless, the CPBM maintained electoral support of around 10%.

Sufficiently 'normal' to govern?

For some years, the CPBM was unable to break out of a primarily oppositional role because a key dynamic in Czech politics has been the refusal of the Social Democrats to work in alliance with the CPBM. In 1995 the Social Democrats passed the Bohumin Resolution, in which they specified that they would not work with communist or communist-successor parties. This meant that to hold government office they were compelled to rely on centre–right parties. Between 1998 and 2002 this took the form of an 'opposition agreement', entitled an 'Agreement on creating a stable political environment in the Czech Republic', with the centre–right Civic Democrats, under the leadership of Václav Klaus, to sustain a minority social democrat administration. In fact, they would have been just short of an absolute majority in parliament if they had gone into coalition with the CPBM. But the situation was far more marked in 2002, when the Social Democrats took 70 seats and the CPBM took 41, in a chamber of 200. So a large absolute majority was there for the taking, but in the event the Social Democrats, under the leadership of Vladimir Špidla, opted for a coalition with two small centre–right parties, the Christian Democrats and the Freedom Union–Democratic Union. This ensured that conservative forces maintained a prominence in Czech politics that their electoral performance did not merit, where there was actually a majority for the left.

Nevertheless, by the late 1990s, it was clear that the CPBM was a stable fixture on the political spectrum, and the party secretary Miroslav Grebeníček took the view in January 1999 that the party

had completed its consolidation and could now move onwards to extending its influence. Indeed, according to Hanley, since 1999 there had been 'a number of indications that the Czech Communists might in fact be overcoming their earlier isolation and marginality and partially fulfilling this scenario'.[16] He identifies these indicators as increasing national electoral support, growing recognition of the CPBM as a 'normal' party and increased access to political office.[17] From 1998–99 into the early years of the twenty-first century, polls showed a surge in popularity for the CPBM. In October 1999 the CPBM took the lead in the opinion polls. In an article entitled 'Completing the circle? A communist come-back ten years after the revolution', Jan Čulík observed:

> According to the IVVM polling organisation, 23 per cent of Czechs would now vote for the Czech Communist Party and 21 percent would support Václav Klaus's pseudo-right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The ruling Social Democrats are supported by 17.5 per cent of the population. IVVM says that the margin of error is more than two per cent. This means that either Klaus or the Communists could win if an election was to take place today.[18]

In Čulík's view, however, this was not an indication that Czechs wished to return to the pre-1989 period; rather, he saw it as a protest vote in response to the economic problems facing ordinary Czech people:

> Prague may be doing relatively well, but the overall unemployment rate in the Czech Republic has reached 9 percent and in many regions, especially in northern Moravia and in northern Bohemia unemployment is serious, reaching as much as 17 percent in some districts. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that people wish to vote for the Communists.[19]

There is no doubt that much of the population was disillusioned by the failure of Václav Klaus's right-wing governments – dominant for much of the 1990s – to bring economic prosperity to the Czech Republic, and the CPBM's message of protection and support for ordinary people against the rigours of the market now had greater resonance with much of the population. In 1997, the Czech Republic was rocked by political and financial crises, including a currency crisis

in May of that year and a current account deficit of almost 8% of GDP. The government introduced austerity measures to cut government spending but this resulted in a drop in economic growth. According to Karen Henderson, Klaus's government 'was held responsible for the fact that the once buoyant Czech economy had stalled when banks began to collapse less than a year after the previous elections – "the sad end of 'the Czech miracle' ", as the Communists' election manifesto put it'.[20] So the standing of the left – including the social democrats – shot up in the popular estimation. This was marked in 1998, but the most significant advance for the Communist Party was in 2002 when voter dissatisfaction with the Social Democrats increased during its coalition with the Civic Democrats, and many social democrat voters turned to the CPBM. As Stanislav Holubec has commented, referring to the years of social democratic government between 1998 and 2006, 'During this period, the KSCM has easily been able to distinguish itself as the left opposition, which has won it the support of many disappointed CSSD voters.'[21] While the Czech Republic experienced economic recovery in the early years of the twenty-first century, backed particularly by growth in exports to the EU, especially Germany, the Social Democrat-led coalition undertook policies that were unpopular with much of its voter base. In 2004 it increased VAT (value-added tax) and narrowed the eligibility criteria for claiming social benefits. Its purpose was to reduce government debt, but taken together with further privatisation and restructuring of state-owned enterprise and further plans to reform pensions and healthcare, the Social Democrats began to lose popularity as a result.

The clear public indication of a major shift of attitude on centre–left/left cooperation came in 2005, when voter preferences indicated a more or less even split between left and right parties with the CPBM as the third largest party. A Czech Television poll found 'that more and more Czechs are warming to the Communists and four out of ten would actually not be against them taking a bigger part in the decision-making process'. Thirty-eight per cent of those polled indicated that they would not oppose the CPBM being part of a governing coalition, which prompted Christian Democrat leader Miroslav Kalousek to say: 'Have we already forgotten what this country went through just fifteen years ago?' The head of the polling company, Jan Hartl, contributed to the subsequent debate, however, by taking the view that the 38% – of which more than half were

supporters of the Social Democrats – weren't backing a return to power of a communist government, rather that

> surveys, especially qualitative surveys, among left wing voters recently showed that a typical attitude of the people was that the Communists were not banned in the early 1990s and stayed in parliament, so we should be practical about it and give them some responsibility. In this way they will not be able to criticise everything easily.[22]

This would suggest that the CPBM is increasingly seen as a part of the normal political process – according to Communist Party deputy leader Jiří Dolejš*:* 'The days when the Communists were considered the bogey-men of the country are over.' However, Czech social democrat prime minister Jiří Paroubek indicated that he was in the majority against communist participation in government, citing the Bohumin resolution in support of his position: 'The Bohumin resolution stands and it is clear, so a direct coalition partnership with the Communists is out of the question.' But he was willing to be sustained in office by the CPBM in the event of a minority social democrat government: 'I can imagine this government will look for support across the whole political spectrum, which includes the Communists.' According to Holubec, there are some clear issues of policy and principle that would have to be addressed before the Social Democrats would accept a coalition with the CPBM, and their requirements would be unacceptable to the latter: 'The CSSD sees a coalition with the KSCM as impossible until the KSCM deals critically with its past, apologises for its crimes, and accepts private property and Czech membership in NATO. However, these demands have been unacceptable for the KSCM to date.'[23] It is the case that some within the CPBM have proposed making substantial changes to the party to make more extensive political cooperation with the Social Democrats possible, but this has been roundly rejected by the membership. Prior to the party's Sixth Congress in 2004, the reformist deputy party chairman Miloslav Ransdorf appealed to the party – against the position of the party chairman Grebeníček – to adopt such changes, but got nowhere.[24] The key question is really whether the CPBM would actually wish to participate in a national government coalition, and if the issue ever presents itself it will no doubt be the

subject of considerable further inner-party controversy and debate. The party has actively sought regional government responsibility but is less clear about its position on the national level. As Holubec has observed:

> Within the KSCM, the opinion predominates that the party would rapidly lose its voter base if it were to participate in government. Its official position is that the KSCM would only want to participate in a government in which the realisation of its party programme were possible. The party itself prefers the option of toleration of a Social-Democratic minority government.[25]

The CPBM has identified the crucial question.

Stabilisation and increasing support

Support in this century continued to grow, both at the regional and at the national level. In the regional elections of 2000, the CPBM took 21.1% of the vote, outstripping the Social Democrats on 14.7%. National support increased significantly in the 2002 elections, where it received 18.5%, becoming the third largest party in Parliament with 41 deputies. Its election programme had focused almost entirely on economic and social issues, appealing to many who had previously voted for the Social Democrats but were now disenchanted with their record in government. Hanley argues that although the CPBM vote may have been boosted by voter disillusionment with the mainstream parties giving rise to a low turnout at 58%, the CPBM's actual level of support increased by over 200,000 votes. Following the 2002 election, the normalisation of the CPBM accelerated:

> The Communists were for the first time treated like other parties in being allocated parliamentary posts in proportion to their parliamentary representation and nominations to public bodies, where party political representation is the norm.[26]

As a result, they took the chair of three parliamentary committees, one deputy speaker position and positions on public bodies such as the Council of Czech Television which would have been inconceivable a few years earlier. Following the election of Václav Klaus as

President in 2003, CPBM representatives have been included in all-party presidential consultations. This was not so surprising given the role that the CPBM played in securing Klaus's election. At that time, Klaus's Civic Democratic Party was in opposition and the ruling Social Democrat coalition had – in theory – just enough votes to elect their own candidate. However, according to Petr Just,

> A split in the major coalition party ČSSD [Social Democrats], and support given to Klaus by the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), brought the Honorary Chairman of the ODS, Václav Klaus, to the Presidential office.[27]

Notwithstanding improved relations between the President and the CPBM, however, that détente did not extend to relations between the Civic Democrats and the CPBM itself. The Civic Democrats have 'maintained a strict policy of non-cooperation with the KSCM at all levels of government, consistently deregistering local party branches which violate this policy'.[28]

The year 2002 also saw some developments in social democrat–communist cooperation on different political levels: a number of local agreements were made between the two to support each other's candidates against the right in the second Senate run-off elections; and in some areas cooperation brought in communist mayors.[29]

Integration into the EU has not constituted a setback for the CPBM and its approach towards the EU is essentially the same as that of other European left parties – opposing the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty and rejecting the neo-liberal framework of the EU. In the party's 1998 election manifesto it warned against 'entering the European Union under conditions which place our Republic in the situation of a colony regarded by stronger countries only as a market open for their surpluses and a source of cheap labour'.[30] Yet even though its stance has tended to be eurosceptic, being more oriented towards the nation-state/sovereignty arguments of the communist parties of Greece and Portugal, it is less unequivocal in its approach. As Holubec observes:

> In the 2003 referendum over Czech membership in the EU, the KSCM was the only parliamentary party to reject membership.

> However, its 'no' was a 'weak no', not a 'strong no'; i.e., the KSCM also noted the advantages of membership.[31]

In fact, some senior party leaders such as Miloslav Ransdorf, subsequently first on the CPBM list for the European parliamentary elections, and the deputy leader Jiří Dolejš indicated that they planned to vote 'yes'. Dolejš is reported to have said that Czech membership of the EU is 'the only sensible option', but ordinary party members overwhelmingly opposed EU membership.[32] As Henderson points out, their 1998 manifesto was also 'supportive of those parts of EU policy supporting citizens' social rights, such as the Social Charter, and cited "European practice" or "European development" on issues where this could be used to legitimate policies such as a reduction of the working week to 35 hours'.[33] In 2004, it came second in the European Parliamentary elections with six out of 24 seats.

The radar and the knife-edge parliament

In the general election of June 2006, under the leadership of Vojtěch Filip, the CPBM's support reduced but remained above the 1990s level at 12.8% with 26 seats. Its campaign stressed 'traditional themes of: fighting social inequality, expanding welfare and public services and defending the Czech Republic against US and German influence'.[34] The election produced an exceptionally difficult result for Czech politics. In a 200-seat chamber, the social democrats took 74 seats and the CPBM took 26, comprising exactly half of the total. The two conservative parties – the Christian Democrats and the Civic Democrats – took 94 between them, with the Green Party taking six. After months of uncertainty, this was resolved in January 2007 by a right–green coalition, supported where necessary by a couple of social democratic votes. But this was clearly an inherently unstable situation, particularly as Czech political life gradually came to be dominated by massive public opposition to a proposed US missile defence radar base to be situated in Brdy, in the countryside outside of Prague. About 70% of the population opposed the base, and grass-roots sentiment was very effectively mobilised by a new organisation – the League of Czech Mayors – some of whom represented villages of about 100 residents, holding village referenda overwhelmingly against the radar base. The social democrats and communists were absolutely

opposed to the radar base and so the coalition government strenuously attempted to avoid the issue's coming to parliament, as there was a possibility that one or two of the Green MPs would break ranks and vote with the opposition against the base.

In October 2008, the issue of social democratic–communist coalitions moved rapidly up the political agenda. Regional elections resulted in a huge shift towards the social democrats, with all governments in all 13 regions in the Czech Republic – with the exception of Prague where no regional elections were held – coming under social democrat control. In two of these regions, Karlovy Vary and North Moravia, the CPBM and the Social Democrats formed coalition governments. In four regions, the CPBM tolerated a Social Democrat minority government. In seven other regions the Social Democrats opted for other coalition partners – in five of these with Civic Democrats – and the Communists remained in opposition.[35] Indeed, the reality of cooperation with the CPBM is not something that all social democrats welcome. Political analyst Petr Just commented on the different political experience in former communist countries, referring to the fact that only in the Czech Republic has a pre-war social democratic party reassumed that mantle in national politics. In other countries in the region – such as Poland and Hungary – former communist parties have occupied the social democratic space:

> We have to take into account that the Czech Social Democratic party is not a post-communist political party, as other such parties in central and eastern Europe, and there are therefore many within this party who believe that the unreformed communist party is unacceptable as a possible coalition partner. That's the reason why I think that there are still some regions where Social Democrat leaders and negotiators are still trying to find other alternatives than going for the communists.[36]

But at that time there was some expectation, given the popularity of the social democrats in the regional elections and subsequent opinion polls prior to the 2010 general election that the CPBM might well find itself in national government as a junior partner. Certainly there was a feeling amongst the communists themselves that participation in regional government could provide a stepping stone to

greater acceptance, support and eventual national-level participation. Between March 2009 and the elections in May 2010, the country was run by a caretaker government of experts nominated by the main parties, as prime minister Topolánek had lost a no-confidence vote put forward by the social democrats – the issue of the radar base played a key role in the political complexities at the time. This situation plus favourable poll showings for the Social Democrats led to high hopes for a strong left showing in which the CPBM would be a key player. However, these hopes were not to be fulfilled, for while the communist vote remained stable in the 2010 elections, both the Social Democrats and the main centre-right party, the Civic Democrats, lost ground, and new right-wing forces appeared on the political scene.

The Social Democrats campaigned under the slogan 'Change and Hope', proposing an end to the Republic's flat rate tax system and a return to the progressive tax system of previous years. A strongly integrationist party, they also strongly backed Euro-entry, presenting 2015–16 as a target date, although it is likely that they lost some of their traditional votes as a result, as Social Democrat supporters tend to be anti-Euro.

But they won strong support from this voter base during the election campaign for their redistributive approach to welfare, notably the promised cancellation of the medical regulation fee and an additional pension payment funded by profits from the main, primarily state-owned, electricity company. The Civic Democrats' campaign was entitled Vision 2020, based on fiscal restraint and the reduction of public debt, including the adoption of a constitutional law to ensure budgetary responsibility, the retention of the flat rate tax system, reductions in ministerial spending and voluntary pension contributions. It backed the retention of medical regulation fees and the introduction of private payments for a higher level of healthcare, but did not support a private-only health system. The Christian Democrats, who had formed part of the previous ruling coalition with the Civic Democrats and the Greens, stuck to their traditional emphasis on promoting family values, including tax reductions for married couples – increasing for couples with children, anti-gambling legislation and greater Internet regulation.

The CPBM's electoral programme was strongly oriented to the welfare of ordinary Czech citizens, including regulation of water and energy prices, zero-interest loans on housing for newly married

couples, a minimum monthly wage of 14,000 Czech crowns, an increase in the minimum pension to 10,000 Czech crowns, the reduction of VAT to 5% on basic goods and its abolition on food and medicine as well as a tax increase on dividends and legal entities. The new right-wing forces on the political scene comprised Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) and Public Affairs. TOP 09's electoral case was based on an extreme austerity programme, including reductions in public sector wages, reductions in state funding for political parties as well as reductions in state benefits and in the real value of pensions. Public Affairs' electoral programme included a reduction in state sector employment, pension reform and constitutional reform to introduce direct election for the president, regional governors and mayors.[37]

The new right-wing government and the economic crisis

The Social Democrats emerged as the largest single party but their seats were cut from 74 to 56 in the 2010 elections. The Civic Democrats dropped from 81 to 53 and the Christian Democrats, which had been the second party in the previous conservative coalition, lost all of its 13 seats. The CPBM was stable at 26 seats, but dropped in ranking from third to fourth place for the first time. It was overtaken by TOP 09 which took 41 seats. The other new party, Public Affairs, took 24 seats. The Green Party lost all six seats. The governmental outcome, after weeks of negotiation, was a Civic Democrat–TOP 09–Public Affairs austerity coalition, committed to major government spending cuts, with Civic Democrat leader Petr Nečas as the prime minister. The spectre of a massive financial crisis and the perceived need to reduce the government deficit was a clear factor in the election. As Nečas himself commented on the result: 'It is great news that will allow the Czech Republic to avoid a repeat of the Greek scenario.'[38] In actual fact, the likelihood of such a scenario was more perceived than real. The Czech economy had been performing well in the mid-years of the decade, growing at over 6% a year from 2005 to 2007 and into 2008. Its financial system was more stable than that of many others, not least due to the problems it had faced in the late 1990s and the measures that had been taken at that time to overcome them. Nevertheless, Czech economic growth dropped towards the end of 2008 largely because of a major fall in West European demand for Czech exports – a major factor in what

is an export-driven economy. In 2009, the Czech economy shrank by more than 4%, primarily as a result of the external economic environment rather than internal problems. Yet as Jaroslav Plesl, a commentator at the Czech business newspaper *Hospodárske Noviny* observed, 'fears that the Czech Republic could become a "Central European Greece" had undermined the performance of the Socialists, who pledged during the campaign to increase spending and social benefits. "The Greek crisis was decisive in this campaign by fanning fears that the Socialists' profligacy would turn the Czech Republic into another Greece".'[39]

Given the Social Democrats' record on privatisation and economic restructuring after the Klaus-led economic crisis of the late 1990s, accusations of profligacy do not seem to be accurate, and are perhaps indicative of an effective media campaign to discredit the Social Democrats, who had been performing extremely well in the opinion polls. No doubt the Social Democrat pledges to raise taxes on business and wealth to expand social provision provided the impetus for the scaremongering which eventually undermined the Social Democrats' support. In fact, Czech public debt – around 35% of annual economic output – was only about half the EU average, leading some economists to say that 'invoking Greece or warning of bankruptcy may be overblown'.[40] The key economic goal of the right-wing coalition appears to be wholesale reform of the pensions, healthcare and the remaining social welfare and benefits system. Given the substantial parliamentary majority now sustaining the right-wing coalition government, such reforms may well be introduced, devastating what remains of the Czech welfare state. In that context, increased support for parties of the left seems likely, although the CPBM may potentially lose out on votes to the Social Democrats if the latter is seen to be the only party which can viably form an alternative government, as austerity makes inroads into Czech living standards.

9
The Scandinavian Left

Left parties in Scandinavia mostly originated in orthodox communist parties, but began their transition to new left positions as long ago as 30 years before 1989 – some decades before equivalent changes in their sister parties in Western Europe. They embraced more radical left and social movement politics – particularly feminism and environmentalism. Not surprisingly therefore, the Scandinavian left was less affected by the collapse of communism in 1989 than those still primarily identifying as communist and with strong links to the CPSU. The catalyst which put these parties back into a more militant anti-capitalist framework and back into cooperation with parties they had previously intended to dissociate from was the Maastricht Treaty. As Scandinavian social democracy moved to the right and began to implement cuts in the highly advanced welfare systems of these countries, the left parties moved to occupy the vacated political space, clarified their position on the left and were able to increase their electoral standing on this basis. These left parties have a small but stable social base in Scandinavia, and since the early 1990s – particularly motivated around opposition to the Maastricht Treaty – they have cooperated with the new European left parties, notably within the GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament (since 1995). When the Party of the European Left was formed, however, many of the Scandinavian left parties – markedly more eurosceptic than the PEL's founders – chose to stay outside the new formation, founding their own new coordination on 1 February 2004: the Nordic Green Left Alliance, comprising the Danish Socialist People's Party, the Finnish Left Alliance, the Norwegian Socialist Left Party, the Swedish Left

Party and the Left–Green Movement in Iceland. While they have had some experience in government – or in support of minority governments – reflecting their role in Scandinavian society, this has nevertheless led to some electoral setbacks.

The political evolution of the Scandinavian left began with Aksel Larsen's split from the Danish Communist Party in 1959 – a majority split away to form the Danish Socialist People's Party. Although these parties had their own distinctive national characteristics, nevertheless, as Stuart Wilks has observed, by the mid-1960s, 'a distinctive Scandinavian new left had already emerged'[1] which offered an alternative to both orthodox communism and social democracy. In 1960, a section of the Norwegian Labour Party split away to form the Norwegian Socialist People's Party (SPP). In 1975, the Norwegian SPP renamed itself the Socialist Left Party. Both the Danish SPP and the Norwegian Socialist Left Party (SLP) rapidly displaced the communist parties as the main force to the left of social democracy. They are both green socialist parties, committed to feminism, anti-racism and social justice, and emphasise both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activity. While Norway remains outside the EU, the Norwegian Socialist Left Party nevertheless maintains close relations with the European organisations which link the Scandinavian left parties with other new left forces.

The Swedish Left Party

In Sweden, the Communist Party modernised itself during the 1960s, drawing closer to feminism and environmentalism in the 1970s, remaining the main left party. It renamed itself the Left Party Communists in 1967 and the Left Party at its Twenty-ninth Congress in May 1990. According to David Arter, a congress motion stated, 'Communists we are no longer, Social Democrats we never can be, so let us be Left Socialists', and this goal was enshrined in the name after that congress.[2] In the early 1990s, the Left Party faced substantial challenges, not least an aging membership and the likelihood of dropping below the 4% parliamentary threshold. In this context the party underwent an extreme makeover, led by party chairwoman Gudrun Schyman, which rebranded the party as socialist and strongly feminist. According to party vice-chair Johan Lönnroth, it is

'a party standing on four legs – socialist, internationalist, green and feminist'.[3] Its programme, adopted in 1996, states, 'The Left Party strives for the abolition of capitalism. We fight against the division of society into ruling upper classes and oppressed lower classes.'[4] It also makes a commitment to fighting racism. The Left Party is also opposed to Swedish membership of NATO and NATO expansion. While participating in the European Parliament, the Left Party is against Swedish membership of the European Union and works for its withdrawal, arguing for a referendum on EU membership. Its manifesto for the 1998 general election highlighted opposition to privatisation, a commitment to full employment, a 35-hour week with no reduction in wages, increased public sector investment and environmental protection. It also made a clear argument for strengthening the Left Party electorally, to help it shift Swedish politics towards the left: 'To fight right-wing politics whether carried on by the Conservatives or the Social Democrats.'[5] At a time when the Swedish Social Democrats had made significant moves to the right – described by Arter as 'the neo-liberalization of the ruling Social Democrats'[6], and by Lönnroth as 'Blairification' – this was clearly a compelling argument with a section of the electorate: in the parliamentary elections of 1998, the Left Party gained 12% of the vote, making it the third largest party in parliament, and support for the Social Democrats fell from 45.3% to 36.6%, rendering them unable to govern alone. Thus the Left Party, together with the Greens, entered into a relationship of support with the minority Social Democratic government until 2006. In 2002 it lost 3% of its vote to the Social Democrats, dropping to 5.8% support in 2006, when the Social Democrats and their allies were defeated.

According to Henning Sussner, 'This marked the end of an epoch in Swedish party politics and the transition to a bipolar party system.'[7] Sussner argues that for 70 years, the Social Democrats had dominated Swedish political life, sometimes ruling as a majority party, sometimes with the support of centrist parties, sometimes of the left. But while not tying itself specifically to any particular ally, it managed to keep the right out of government. On a number of occasions – notably in the 1970s – the Left Party could have brought down a Social Democratic government, but refrained from doing so, in order to keep a right-wing coalition out of government. Knowledge of this support

> enabled Social Democratic governments to reach political compromises with Liberals and Centrists on major issues, such as getting structural economic reforms through parliament. At the same time the SAP government [social democrats] could rely on obtaining the support of the Left Party on important issues where no agreement with the political Centre was possible.[8]

That situation collapsed in 2006, when the right narrowly gained power.

Despite the fact that Left Party support had reduced in 2002, following the example of the Green Party – which had more leverage with the Social Democrats owing to its willingness to negotiate with centre–right forces – it secured a formal and unprecedented cooperation agreement with the Social Democrats for the duration of the parliament. Both Left Party and Greens had a strengthened position in the ministries and each secured a regional governorship. The Left Party was now in a far stronger position to influence the work of the government even though there was no possibility of agreement on the EU and fundamental economic issues. Yet while the left and centre–left forged a greater level of structured cooperation than previously, the right and centre–right was also working to achieve a coherent electoral alliance with which to effectively challenge the social democratic hegemony at the 2006 general election. In the event, the four centre–right/right parties in alliance were successful, knocking the Social Democrats out of power and reducing the Left Party to the level of support it had in the early 1990s.

The formation of the conservative electoral alliance was fundamental to the right-wing victory. In fact, the Social Democrats had retained the biggest single party vote, with 130 seats, and the Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*), which achieved its best election result since 1928, took 97 seats. The clinching factor was the amount of support for each of the main parties' alliance partners. In total, the left alliance secured 46% of the vote and 171 seats, as opposed to 48% and 178 seats for the conservative alliance.

The Left Party's internal analysis of what had gone wrong blamed its unfocused and half-hearted election campaign, its failure to get its core platform across in the media and its failure to reach out effectively to voters.[9] However, this is a limited explanation of events which fails to consider the impact of the Left Party's cooperation

with the Social Democrats and voter judgement on the government's record. The Left Party's electoral performance cannot be understood in isolation from that. The Social Democrats had, according to Anders Svensson, pursued a privatising, cost-cutting and generally neo-liberal agenda, although 'carefully and slow'.[10] During its period in office, the Swedish unemployment rate had grown to be one of the highest in Europe, far outstripping those in other Scandinavian countries, an issue stressed by the conservative alliance during the election. As Svensson observes,

> The deprivation of resources to the public domain including hospitals etc. by the Social-democrats together with the Greens and the Left Party created a paved road for the Conservative alliance to follow. Thus the neo-liberal policies of the Social-democratic government made it possible for the Conservative alliance to win the election with an even worse neo-liberal agenda.[11]

Left Party support for neo-liberal economic policies such as privatisation have meant that there has been no left alternative for the Swedish working class, increasing numbers of which voted for the Conservative Party and some of which turned to support for the racist so-called Swedish Democrats at the election.

In 2007, the Left Party set up a group entitled The Art of Party Building; the group was charged with seeking lessons from left parties elsewhere in Europe that would help it to strengthen and revitalise its membership and structures. Simultaneously, its Programme Commission was given the task of reforming the party's programme. The key political aim was to work for unity of the parliamentary opposition to ensure the defeat of the conservative alliance in the 2010 general election and usher in a red–green coalition government. By autumn 2008, the situation was looking unfavourable for the Left Party, as the Social Democrats and Greens announced a cooperation agreement in October that excluded the Left Party. Mona Sahlin, Social Democrat Chair, blamed the Left Party's 'fundamentalist attitude' towards financial discipline.[12] Sahlin was forced into a U-turn by others in both leadership and rank and file of her own party, as well as by trade union leaders. Thus, in December 2008, the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party announced that they were going to contest the 2010 elections on a joint platform.

According to Sussner, their model has been the Left Coalition, in government in Norway since 2005, where the industrial trade unions had pressed the social democrats into a joint electoral platform with the left party:

> To this end, as in Norway, inter-party working groups were formed in January 2009, to work out the key points of this election platform. As in Norway, an attempt was made to create a favourable negotiating atmosphere by making the party's programme more specific and eliminating outdated political jargon.[13]

It remains to be seen whether attempts to renew the party structure and membership will solve the problem of the party's electoral decline. Ultimately, it is not just a question of how parties present themselves that determines their support. It is a question of what their policies are and what they do when they are in government. This is the challenge facing the Swedish Left Party, no less than any other party.

The Finnish Left Alliance

Coalition government has been a strong theme in Finnish politics, at least since the 1930s, when, according to Hynynen and Striethorst, 'the so-called Red-Earth Coalition between Social Democrats (SDP) and Agrarians . . . stabilised Finnish democracy against the danger from the Right in 1937'.[14] This coalition returned to government after the war until 1948, supplemented by the People's Democratic League of Finland, comprising communists and left-social democrats, in what was known as the Popular Front government. The Red-Earth Coalition returned to power in 1966, including communists in the government – unusual at that time in Western Europe, but the proximity to the Soviet Union meant that good relations with that country were of considerable importance. However, majority opposition within the communist party to the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, together with internal debates over government policy, subsequently debilitated the communist party.[15]

By the mid-1980s, cooperation between the SDP and the Agrarians (now known as the Centre Party, or KESK) had become less viable, and both the SDP and KESK opted for forming coalitions with the

right-wing National Coalition Party (KOK). The first KOK–SDP government was formed in 1987. In 1995, SDP Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen formed a 'rainbow coalition', while KESK went into opposition. The coalition included not only the SDP and KOK, but also the Finnish Left Alliance, founded in 1990 as successor to the Finnish People's Democratic League, the former electoral front for the Finnish Communist Party. The Left Alliance has described itself as representing 'the so-called Third left, which tries to combine labour movement traditions with the ideas of postindustrial democratic movements. Ideologically the party is a pluralist one: it gathers political left wing humanists, socialists, Marxists, feminists and ecologists – and simply leftwinger people'.[16]

The basic goal of the party is described as a socially and economically just and environmentally sustainable society, and while the Left Alliance does not define itself as a traditional socialist party, its aim is to limit 'societal power based on capital ownership'. The Left Alliance has also played a strong role in developing wider regional cooperation. It formed the Nordic Green Left group in the European Parliament with the Swedish Left Party and the Danish Socialist People's Party, which cooperates with the United European Left group. In 1991, it was one of the initiators of the New European Left Forum.

From 1995 to 2003, the Left Alliance had three ministers in the Lipponen government, a decision that was not without its critics. As Arter observed, writing in 2002, the Left Alliance 'has become increasingly viewed as part of the governing Establishment and, in cooperating with the Conservatives in the Social Democratic prime minister Paavo Lipponen's so-called "rainbow coalition" since 1995, it has forfeited much of its credibility as a reformist force'.[17] In 2003, KESK narrowly emerged as the largest single party, and the SDP reverted to the Red-Earth Coalition, forming a government with KESK. As coalition partners they chose a small party, Swedish People's Party of Finland (*Svenska folkpartiet i Finland*; SFP), which represented the Swedish-speaking minority, rather than choosing the Greens or Left Alliance. Thus the Left Alliance found itself in 'rainbow opposition' with KOK, the Christian Democrats and the Greens. Although the Left Alliance found itself out of government, its vote held up reasonably well, with 9.9% of the vote – down only 1% on its 1999 result – and 19 seats in the parliament. Since the election of 2007 it

currently has 17 MPs in the Finnish Parliament – slightly down on previous elections.

In assessing the reasons for its exclusion from the new coalition government, some within the Left Alliance identified its left policies as the cause. According to Hynynen and Striethorst,

> The parties who had formed the coalition, it was said, had gone on the defensive against the legitimate and loud demands of the Left Alliance which, for example, had not joined in the populist campaign waged by all the other parties for tax cuts and instead championed the cause of those who had to live on the lowest incomes.[18]

However, others in the party, including some of its parliamentary deputies, had criticised the party leadership for allowing the Left Alliance to become 'a mere handmaiden of the SDP, thus making their defeat inevitable'.[19] Responding to these criticisms, Alliance chairwoman Suvi-Anne Siimes – who had been Minister of Finance and considered that she had defended the Finnish welfare system – and her supporters in the trade union wing of the Alliance argued that disunity within the government itself had been responsible for its breakdown.

In fact, external factors were also at play, as business interests were now working towards the removal of the SDP from government altogether. While in 2003, small business interests had called for a KOK–KESK government, big business had still favoured the SDP in coalition.[20] However, in 2007, this situation had changed and the pre-election debates were much more explicitly pro-neo-liberal from the right and from the business community, and the SDP waged a much more 'left' campaign than on previous occasions. In the general election of March 2007, the SDP lost the argument, and a KOK–KESK coalition came to power, including the SFP and the Greens. Much to the disappointment of the SDP, their fortunes were not restored in the local elections in October 2008. KOK emerged in first place, with the SDP in second place with just over 20% of the vote. KESK dropped to third, having lost some of its support to the right-wing populists True Finn Party. The Left Alliance fell to fifth place below the Greens.

Not surprisingly, this series of electoral defeats has prompted major internal debates about the political direction of the SDP – primarily

along the lines of whether it should orientate towards a more 'third way' approach, or towards the more traditional labour movement. As Hynynen and Striethorst put it, 'There is an unstable balance between the temptation of the "Third Way" and the working-class movement.'[21] Some see the political centre shifting to the right and believe that the SDP should occupy the new centre space, rather than persisting on the left. Parallels with the British Labour Party and other social democratic parties post-1989 are obvious, albeit taking place at a delayed pace, owing no doubt to the relative economic strength of the Nordic economies and the stability and popularity of their welfare systems. Tensions also exist within the Left Alliance, which has not benefitted electorally from the drop in support for the SDP, possibly because of its perceived political closeness to it and lack of clear left identity. As Arter has observed, the Left Alliance 'must be one of the least radical of all the West European post-communist parties'.[22] A strong communist orientation exists within the Alliance – including within the parliamentary party – and many former Finnish Communist Party members have joined, notwithstanding the continued existence of a separate communist party. This section of the Alliance – perhaps one-third – is opposed to the closeness of the leadership to the SDP, and former leader Suvi-Anne Siimes, who had brought a new image to the Alliance, left amid recriminations about the obstructive nature of many of the Left Alliance parliamentarians, in particular their anti-EU positions. The new leadership, under Martti Korhonen, is faced with the challenge of carving out a left space that is distinct from the SDP, part of which currently includes a stronger involvement in radical 'movement' or 'post-materialist' politics.

The Norwegian Socialist Left Party

The dominant social democratic force in Norwegian politics has, since the 1920s, been the Labour Party which has also dominated Norwegian politics since the Second World War. In 1961, the Socialist People's Party (SPP) was founded, according to Dag Seierstad, 'mainly by Labour party members who opposed Norwegian membership in NATO and the nuclear arms race'.[23] In 1973, the SPP joined an electoral coalition called the Socialist Electoral League, with the Norwegian Communist Party, the Democratic Socialists and

independent socialists, feminists and environmental activists. In the 1973 general election, the League took 11.2% of the vote and 16 seats in parliament. In 1975 the coalition members, with the exception of the Communist Party, turned themselves into a political party – the Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti*; SV) – largely on foreign policy grounds, primarily against both EU and NATO membership. A minority of Communist Party members opted to join the SV. However, the SV's electoral support plummeted in the subsequent elections, ranging from 4.2% in 1977 to 5.5% in 1985, then recovering in 1989 to 10.1% and peaking at 12.5% in 2001. Notwithstanding its varying electoral fortunes, however, the SV parliamentary group has on a number of occasions sustained a minority Labour government in office, before entering into a formal Red–Green government coalition agreement with Labour and the Centre Party in 2005.

In terms of its political identity, the SV describes itself as Red–Green:

> The red symbolises that we want a society without class differences and social injustice. The green symbolises our work for an ecological sustainable society for the generations to come.[24]

The extent to which SV is understood to be genuinely green in its policies and orientation is indicated by the level of support for the Norwegian Green Party; in 2005 it polled 3,652 votes (0.1%) and in 2009 polled 9,286 votes (0.3%). According to Seierstad,

> The main reason for the absence of a green party comparable to those in the rest of Europe is that the SV, like the Socialist People's Party in Denmark, has been spearheading environmental policies since the early 1970s. Both parties have since then presented themselves as red-and-green parties.[25]

There is little competition from other parties to the left of Labour either. The Norwegian Communist Party polled 697 votes in 2009, and *Rodt* (Red), an alliance of Maoist origins, took 1.3% of the vote.

The predominant message from SV is one of social and economic justice:

> 'Change the world, it needs it', was the appeal from Bertold Brecht. SV works for a fundamental change of the society. The differences between the richest and the poorest in the world are enormous.

> We live in a world where the 500 biggest companies own more than the 50 poorest countries. We live in a world where over a thousand million people have to survive on less than a dollar per day. Norway is one of the richest countries in the world. Still we have poverty. Still we experience that schools and other public services are declining. Furthermore, the global environmental challenges are huge. We know that the greenhouse effect can lead to big, negative changes in the world's climate and environment. If we are to prevent this, we have to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, especially in the richest part of the world. SV is working for solid and just solutions on these challenges.[26]

During the 1990s, discussion began to take place about the basis on which the SV would cooperate with or support the Labour Party in government, and on how to arrive at a situation where SV could have a real impact on the orientation of the government rather than appearing to be used by the Labour Party to keep it in power. As Seierstad observes,

> Several Labour minority governments sought support from the SV on social issues, and support from the right when it came to neoliberal structural projects (deregulation, privatisation etc.) The party leadership – and gradually the rank and file – realised that this situation could only be solved by drawing the Labour Party into an alliance in which forces from outside Labour could push back its neoliberal tendencies.[27]

Erik Solheim, SV leader from 1987 to 1997, sought cooperation with Labour and the Centre Party, but was criticised from both within and outside the party for blurring the distinction between Labour and the SV and taking the SV too far into the centre ground of Norwegian politics. Conflict within the party, between left and right, led to his resignation in 1997, and Kristin Halvorsen became the new leader.

Halvorsen did much to popularise the party – it has considerable support from voters in their twenties. As Labour moved steadily to the centre in the late 1990s, engaging in large-scale privatisation of state-owned assets, SV stressed the importance of education, polling high amongst students. With clear ground between the parties, in 2001, SV achieved its highest-ever vote with 12.5% as Labour

slumped to 24.3%. The result was a minority centre–right government, but also the opportunity to build for a left victory in 2005 on a new basis – an aspiration shared not only by the SV but also by many on the left of the Labour Party. The 2001 election defeat was also a wake-up call for the Norwegian trade union movement. Not only had Labour lost, it was also – in its pursuit of privatisation – failing to represent the interests of the working people. Thus the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions decided to articulate a new political and electoral strategy for the left, which it did in the autumn of 2004, by declaring its goal of a majority left coalition government of Labour and the SV. The following spring, Labour and the SV, together with the Centre Party, all announced that they would pursue such a coalition government.

In September 2005, their goal was achieved. Labour polled 32%, SV 8.8% and the Centre Party 6.5%, totalling 87 seats as against 82 for other parties. This was a narrow victory but, nevertheless, it resulted in a coalition government based on an extensive and highly detailed agreement, often taking positions to the left of Labour's own programme, on foreign, economic, regional and social issues. From a 19-member cabinet, Labour took ten places, the SV took five and the Centre Party four. Although in some areas, notably Norwegian membership of NATO and the European Economic Area, the SV has had to accept policy compromises, in others the Labour Party was clearly pushed to the left, including on fundamental issues such as neo-liberal economic policies. Writing during the 2005–09 coalition government, Seierstad has observed,

> Since 2005, the SV and the trade unions have been able to force the Labour Party to adopt more progressive policies. For instance, the party has proclaimed a break with its previous policies of privatisation and of introducing market competition into the health and social services. In several areas, the new government has reversed policies that had been pursued by all Norwegian governments, including the Labour Party governments that continued the neoliberal policy that the right-wing government had abruptly adopted in 1981.[28]

In 2009 the electorate made their judgement on the record of the Red–Green coalition. Labour polled 35.4%, SV 6.2% and the Centre

Party 6.2%. The total number of seats taken by the coalition parties was 86. In other words the total result for the three parties was broadly similar to that in 2005, but the balance within the total shifted slightly in favour of Labour, primarily away from the SV. This would suggest general approval for the coalition with increased approval for Labour, probably because of its shift to the left and its role as coalition leader.

Denmark

The Socialist People's Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti*; SF) has been the largest party to the left of social democracy in Denmark since its foundation in 1959. Identifying politically as a red–green party, it sits with the Greens/European Free Alliance Group in the European Parliament, rather than with GUE/NGL as do comparable parties from the other Nordic countries. In its own words:

> SF strives to establish Socialist changes in society to secure more economic, social and political equality and justice, and to create an alternative to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital. SF is convinced that another world is possible – a world of equality and sustainable environment.[29]

It was founded by Aksel Larsen, who was chairman of the Communist Party of Denmark (*Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti*; DKP) from 1932 to 1958. Sympathetic to the Yugoslavs, and critical of the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956, he stated that the Danish Communists should not 'slavishly' follow Soviet direction. Expelled from the DKP in 1958, he founded the Danish Socialist People's Party, oriented towards a 'third way' socialism, between social democracy and Soviet communism.[30] As the SF itself describes it:

> Socialist People's Party (SF) was founded in 1959 following a disruption of the Danish Communist Party (DKP). The break-up was among other [things] a consequence of the different views concerning a political and ideological relationship to the Soviet Union. SF was from its very beginning in opposition to the regime in the Soviet Union, and the party defended in a consistent

> manner the view that Socialism is supposed to mean an extension of democracy, not the opposite.[31]

A majority of DKP members went with Larsen into the new party. At its first electoral test in 1960, SF won strong support, taking 11 seats and driving the Communist Party – which had held six seats – out of parliament entirely. The SF has continued to have parliamentary representation ever since. The political orientation of the SF became a source of conflict within the party in the 1960s. While being an activist party with an emphasis on both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work, the extent to which it should work with the Social Democratic Party was a controversial matter. In 1966, the Social Democrats took 38.2% of the vote, with 69 seats – a loss of seven. SF took 10.9% and 20 seats – a gain of ten. In combination, the two parties had a majority in parliament and while negotiations to form a coalition were unsuccessful, owing to significant policy differences, notably on foreign and defence policy, SF supported a social democrat minority government for a year. The result was a left split from the SF – the Left Socialists (*Venstresocialisterne*; VS). The following year, the SF lost nine seats and VS took four. Soon afterwards Larsen stood down as party leader.

Describing itself as 'a child of the "new left" in Europe, born during the student uprisings in 1968', VS took the view that the Larsen leadership had disregarded majority opinion within the SF in pursuing close cooperation with the social democrats, and had a 'predisposition for dropping some important SF positions. These developments caused a natural fear, that the party was adopting social democratic positions, and was in the process of being swallowed by exactly the system it had been founded to fight'.[32] While periodically taking seats in parliament, VS never really made a significant break from the political margins. Thus in 1989 it formed the Red–Green Alliance (RGA) with the DKP and the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, subsequently joined by former Maoists. Two years later it turned itself into a membership organisation and its membership increased beyond the sum of its parts. According to Inger V. Johansen, 'The Red–Green Alliance has experienced a doubling of its membership in recent years. In 2008, it had around 4,300 members, half of them in Copenhagen; 45 percent of the members are women.'[33] It was first elected to parliament in 1994 when it took six seats. In 2007 it took

2.2% of the vote and four seats. While strongly against European integration, nevertheless, RGA participates in Europe-wide organisations, notably the European Anti-Capitalist Left, NELF, and is an observer with the PEL.

The 1970s and 1980s were a period of wavering electoral fortunes for the SF. Two themes stand out: firstly, the moves by the party to reorientate itself politically away from a more class-based party towards the new social movements, gender and environmental politics; secondly, its anti-EEC/EU campaigning. In 1972, SF led the referendum campaign against Denmark's membership of the EU. They lost narrowly and Denmark joined the EEC. Again, during the referendum in 1986 on the Single European Act, the SF played a strong role in the No campaign, working with the Social Democrats and the Social Liberal Party. Again, they narrowly lost but won voter approval as a result: in the 1987 general election, SF received its highest ever vote, taking 27 seats.

In 1992 the SF campaigned hard – and successfully – for a No vote in the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty. Following the concessions made to Denmark in the subsequent Edinburgh Agreement which included opt-outs on European Monetary Union and European Security and Defence Policy, and a shifting position in the SF away from its traditional hostility to the EU, the SF backed a Yes vote in the second referendum in 1993. Between 1993 and 2001, the Social Democrats, under the leadership of Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, formed a minority government with the Social Liberals, supported by the SF. Again, during this period the SF led the charge on two EU issues: in 1998 it unsuccessfully campaigned against the Treaty of Amsterdam and in 2000 it successfully won a No vote in the referendum on the euro.

In the parliamentary election of 2001, a sea change took place in Danish politics. For the first time since 1924, the Social Democrats were not the largest single party in the Danish Parliament. The centre-right Liberal Party (*Venstre*) of Anders Fogh Rasmussen took the largest number of seats, and formed a minority coalition with the Conservative People's Party, supported in parliament by the Danish People's Party. This pattern was repeated at the two subsequent elections in 2005 and 2007. These three consecutive elections have broken with the previous political trend in much of Denmark's recent history of social democratic government.

Yet the voting has been on a knife-edge, with the gap between the Liberals and the Social Democrats very narrow indeed. In 2007 the Liberals took 26.2% of the vote and 46 seats and the Social Democrats took 25.5% of the vote and 45 seats. The SF took fourth place with 13% of the vote and 23 seats – an increase of 7% and 12 seats over the previous election. There is now close cooperation between the Social Democrats and the SF to overturn the centre–right coalition and introduce a centre–left coalition after the next election. This has been interpreted by some observers as a shift to the right by the SF and a distancing from other left forces. According to Johansen,

> This close cooperation between the SF and the Social Democrats has meant that the SF has adapted to Social Democratic and centrist positions in Danish politics. Whereas previously in the Danish Parliament SF would often present questions to the ministers and propose debates together with the RGA, this is no longer the case.[34]

Clearly, the positions of the RGA differ from those of the SF and the Social Democrats on a number of issues – the extent of opposition to neo-liberalism and privatisation, for example, and the RGA was the only party to oppose the government's crisis support packages for Danish banks. Nevertheless, while refusing to actually participate in government they would generally give support on a range of issues to a social democratic government. Thus in the event of a narrow margin of victory for a centre–left coalition at the next general election, the RGA will no doubt allow its seats to be counted alongside those of the Social Democrats and the SF to secure the foundation of the new government.

10
The European Left and the Global Left: 1999–2009

During the 1990s, the new European left had a strong anti-neo-liberal globalisation focus, expressed regionally via its campaigning against Maastricht in Western Europe, and in its opposition to privatisation and the destruction of the welfare states in Eastern Europe. During the late 1990s, this orientation developed a more global and radical manifestation at events such as the global economic summits and world trade meetings, engaging vast numbers of activists, in particular representing the global south. Major political developments, such as the Sao Paolo Forum in Latin America during the 1990s, and the emerging WS F movement in the early 2000s, provided space for dialogue and strategic development for the global left. The European left parties played a role in this process at both European and international levels and the anti-war issue was the predominant theme in the first half of the decade. The first ESF was held in 2002 in Florence, primarily backed by *Rifondazione Comunista* (PRC), and had a very strong anti-war emphasis. It was at this event that the call was made for a day of action against war on Iraq on 15 February 2003, which was an unprecedented success, mobilising tens of millions across the world. European left participation in both WSF and ESF has enabled the parties both to articulate their values and renewed vision of communism/socialism on a global stage and to work for their vision of a different model of integrated Europe – an anti-war, anti-neo-liberal, anti-racist and 'socially solidaristic' Europe, which works for equal trade relationships and foreign policies based on peace and justice.

Origins

International working-class solidarity has always been a fundamental principle of the communist movement, originating in Marx and Engels' statement in the *Communist Manifesto*,

> Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things... Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite![1]

Essentially, communists see workers as having a bond with class not nation, and therefore their allegiance and interest lies with international proletarian solidarity and not with support for their national bourgeoisies. The origins of the communist movement were to be found in defence of this principle against the majority of the workers' movement in the context of the First World War. During the years of the Second International, founded in 1889, all kinds of debates had developed, around reform and revolution, around participation of working-class parties in bourgeois governments – not an abstract debate given the rise of the massive Marxist-based Social Democratic Party in Germany. But by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, after a wave of increasing radicalisation which included the 1905 Russian Revolution and general strikes in Western Europe for universal suffrage, divisions began to emerge within the Second International. The declaration of war on 14 August 1914 finally separated the revolutionaries, such as V.I. Lenin in Russia and Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany from revisionists such as Karl Kautsky.

The Second International tradition had been anti-militarist and internationalist, opposing the workers being cannon fodder for bourgeois governments. In the run-up to the war there had been massive opposition to it within the movement, including a unanimous declaration of the Socialist International in 1911, called the *Basle Manifesto*, that they would oppose such a war and use it to bring about the downfall of capitalism. But within hours of its start, almost all socialist parties had backed their own national war efforts. There were exceptions to this, in the Balkans and Russia, and amongst tiny minorities in other countries. But the French Socialists and the

German SPD backed the war, even voting for war credits. The revolutionary wing of the movement began to organise itself. In September 1915, following a wave of working-class protests against the war, the Zimmerwald Conference convened in Switzerland where the left from the Socialist International agreed to a position of opposition to the war, although Lenin did not win his position for turning the war into a civil war.

In 1915, Lenin wrote and published the pamphlet *Socialism and War*, distributing it to delegates at Zimmerwald, outlining the arguments and exposing the 'social chauvinists' as he called those socialists that backed the war.

> The social-chauvinists are pursuing an anti-proletarian bourgeois policy, for they are actually championing, not "defence of the fatherland" in the sense of combating foreign oppression, but the "right" of one or other of the "Great" Powers to plunder colonies and to oppress other nations. The social-chauvinists reiterate the bourgeois deception of the people that the war is being waged to protect the freedom and existence of nations, thereby taking sides with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.[2]

In 1916, the Socialist International was dissolved. In March 1919, the Third, or Communist, International was formed, to organise revolutionary anti-imperialist forces internationally. As its founding *Manifesto* stated:

> Our task is to generalise the revolutionary experience of the working class, to purge the movement of the corroding admixture of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world.[3]

The Socialist International, of which the Labour Party and European social democratic parties are members, was reformed in 1923.

It was in the context of these developments that the communist movement came to play a significant role in the development of, and support for, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles throughout the twentieth century, and international solidarity with national

liberation struggles was a lynchpin of communist theory and practice and can be seen to continue within communist and other anti-capitalist left parties today. Again, this position had its foundations in the works of Marx and Engels. In *Das Capital* Marx exposed the nature of the colonial policy of capitalism and wrote that the emancipation of the working class was inseparable from that of the enslaved colonial peoples. As he wrote in 1870, speaking of the British in Ireland, 'Any people which oppresses another people forges its own chains.'[4] Both Marx and Engels urged the working class to oppose every form of colonial expansion and oppression. The work of Lenin built upon this analysis, most notably with *Imperialism – The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in 1916, which explained how the economic growth of the industrialised countries led to their exporting capital to expand their development and profits, and annexing other countries and subjugating millions of people in order to do so. Lenin's theory was particularly attractive because it gave a proper explanation for the existence of the colonies, and exposed the political and economic system under which people were exploited. It rejected all explanations of imperialism based on racist ideas and notions of the so-called white man's burden, hanging over from the Victorian pseudo-justification for imperialism. In particular, Lenin's experience and writings on the organisation of the revolutionary struggle and how to build alliances and with whom were helpful in developing an effective movement to win independence. The Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe gave extensive support in numerous diverse ways to many national liberation movements, and to post-colonial states, until the collapse of the system.

Structural adjustment and the roots of opposition

However, the liberation of the former colonies in the post-Second World War period did not free them from subordination to Western powers. Neo-colonial economic policies that led to underdevelopment and even economic catastrophe were imposed, primarily through the IMF and the World Bank, to open up their markets to Western exploitation. This process was described by the left as economic imperialism, whether it was attempts to smash import substitution industrialisation in the early post-liberation years, or the introduction of structural adjustment policies (SAPs)

particularly – but not exclusively – in Africa and Latin America, following the debt crisis of the early 1980s. Essentially, SAPs were the conditions that the IMF or the World Bank put on loans sought by indebted, primarily third world countries, or on the renegotiation of existing loans. The price for loans was the imposition of neo-liberal policies of privatisation, ending subsidies on food and welfare spending, eliminating all protective tariffs for developing industries and driving down wages. In other words, in order to get loans, countries with economic problems were forced to destroy their state provision and protection and open themselves to market forces controlled by powerful economies. The result was falling living standards and economic decline. Very often this compelled developing economies to concentrate on primary production in a context where commodity prices were controlled by Western interests. The negative impact of these policies has been devastating. As Bonny Ibhawoh observes,

> In Tanzania, the devaluation of the shilling by 26 percent in 1984; the desubsidization of the staple maize meal; the increase in produce prices by more than 45 percent; and the relaxation of import regulations in line with IMF conditionalities all spelt disastrous consequences for the living conditions of the vast population of rural and urban poor.[5]

The negative impacts on health and education provision were also reported on and criticised by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in its 1987 report *Adjustment with a Human Face*. It was particularly in the opposition to these neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes that the roots of the anti-globalisation movement of the 1990s were to be found.

Protests against the impact of SAPs were significant, affecting many countries and involving millions: for instance in 1985, in Bolivia where a general strike of trade unions with agricultural workers against price rises forced the government to concede a four-fold increase in the minimum wage plus other wage increases; in Jamaica where there were countrywide protests against fuel price increases; and in Zaire where students protested against cuts in the higher education budget. In 1986, there were student protests in Nigeria, leading to many deaths at the hands of the security forces. In 1987 in Ecuador there were student protests and a general strike; in Sudan there were

mass demonstrations and a student occupation which led to the closure of the University of Khartoum; and in Zambia food price riots in the copper mining district eventually led to the suspension of the programme. In 1988 in Algeria more than 200 people were killed in rioting against high prices and unemployment, and in Nigeria students at 33 universities protested against fuel price increases; in 1989 in Benin there were protests by students and teachers over non-payment of grants and wages and 50% wage reductions; in Jordan there were riots against increased food prices and five protestors were killed by police; in Nigeria dozens were killed in riots and strikes in the major cities, forcing the government to introduce concessions, including a welfare programme, a People's Bank and a review of the minimum wage; in Venezuela around 600 people were killed and over 1,000 injured during riots against steep rises in fuel and public transport prices; in 1990 in Niger students were killed and wounded during peaceful demonstrations against reductions in education funding; in Nigeria students protested against university restructuring resulting in armed assaults and hundreds of arrests and expulsions; in Trinidad protestors took the president hostage, followed by rioting and 50 deaths; in Uganda two students were killed by police following protests against educational cuts; in 1992 in Nigeria students and young people were killed during protests against rising transport prices and the deterioration of educational facilities and programmes; in Venezuela, middle-ranking army officers – widely supported by the population – failed in an attempt to overthrow the government and end Venezuela's SAP; in 1993 in Russia a coalition of parties opposed to Yeltsin's IMF-backed neo-liberal reform programme won a majority in parliamentary elections; in 1994 in Mexico the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*; EZLN) began its uprising in the Chiapas region, against the policies of the Mexican government; and in 1996 in Jordan there were urban protests against a tripling of bread prices and increases in school fees.[6]

The collapse of the Soviet system in 1989–91 presented the West with the long-awaited opportunity to achieve its aim of a global free market. From 1991, large parts of the globe which had previously been closed to Western markets were open not only to the free movement of goods but also to the free movement of capital. With a few exceptions, neo-liberal globalisation was now unrestrained, and

the economies of Russia and Eastern Europe were devastated, with disastrous social consequences (see Chapter 1). Following 1991 it was possible to force the extension of neo-liberal policies on a vast scale, not just in the developing world via SAPs, but through mechanisms such as the Maastricht Treaty, the purpose of which was to establish European union on a neo-liberal basis. Its criteria were enforced during the same time period as the neo-liberalisation of the former Soviet bloc. As we have seen, the Maastricht criteria enforcement gave rise to huge social protest and the re-emergence of the communist and left movement in Western Europe, and while they were not directly anti-SAP protests, nevertheless they were all part of the gathering momentum against neo-liberal globalisation and the posing of alternatives to it. Thus, according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'An alternative globalization was gradually constructed – alternative to neo-liberal globalization, a counter-hegemonic globalization, a globalization from below.'[7]

Sub comandante Marcos and the Zapatistas

One of the most notable stages in the development of this process was the Zapatista uprising of 1994, followed by the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1996. The Zapatista uprising was significant for a number of reasons, partly because it targeted the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but also because it aimed 'to articulate different scales of struggle, from local to national to global, from the Chiapas mountains to Mexico City to the solidary world, resorting to new discursive and political strategies, and to the new information and communication technologies available'.[8] The picture seen around the world at the time of the uprising was Sub comandante Marcos – thought to be Rafael Guillén, university-educated and trained in guerrilla warfare in Cuba[9] – sitting in the jungle with his laptop, making use of the information revolution for the benefit of the oppressed, communicating with all parts of the world, bringing local–global linkages to life. Marcos's own analysis of the situation, expressed in 2001, was that neo-liberalism and globalisation constituted the Fourth World War – the Third had been the Cold War. The new bomb, in his view, is the financial bomb which creates devastation through its policies. Marcos also took up the struggle of the

indigenous peoples, believing that neo-liberal globalisation destroys diverse cultures through its homogenising nature.

On 1 January 1994, the day that NAFTA came into force, the EZLN commenced an uprising in Chiapas to protest against NAFTA and the impoverishment it would bring to Mexican farmers through flooding the Mexican market with cheap US imports, and to fight for the basic rights and recognition of the indigenous peoples. With an ideology drawing from libertarian socialism, anarchism and Marxism, a key part of the Zapatista struggle was not only the aim to end economic inequalities but also that to secure recognition and equality for citizens on the basis of diversity of race, ethnicity and gender. The war which the EZLN declared against the Mexican state had an initial military phase but the Zapatistas were rapidly defeated and turned back to the jungle from where they continued their campaign. The struggle since then has been primarily non-violent, aimed at extending the influence of its ideas both within Mexico and internationally via its Internet campaign, and gradually, since the end of 1994, a number of autonomous Zapatista municipalities have been formed, outside the framework of state control.

The First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism was held in Chiapas, Mexico, from 27th July to 3rd August 1996. About 3,000 people participated, including – according to one of the Irish delegates, Andrew Flood,

> Participants in the December strikes in France, the mothers of the disappeared of Argentina, exiles from Iran, squatters from Berlin, ex-guerrillas from Latin America, social centre activists from Italy, students from Japan, community activists from the USA, the sons and daughters of those who fled Pinochet in the 70's, university professors from Spain, trade unionists from Brazil and even superheroes from Mexico City.[10]

The Zapatistas issued a statement at the end of the Chiapas encounter, which, in Paul Kingsnorth's opinion, was the closest they ever got to a manifesto:

> On the one side is neo-liberalism, with all its repressive power and all its machinery of death; on the other side is the human being. There are those who resign themselves to being one more number

> in the huge exchange of power . . . But there are those who do not resign themselves . . . In any place in the world, anytime, any man or woman rebels to the point of tearing off the clothes resignation has woven for them and cynicism has died grey. Any man or woman, of whatever colour, in whatever tongue, speaks and says to himself or to herself: Enough is enough! Ya basta![11]

From Chiapas came the call to build the international of hope against 'the international of terror represented by neoliberalism'.[12]

The Zapatista encounters, according to Peter Waterman, 'gave rise, or shape, to a new wave of internationalism'. It occurred in a style unfamiliar to the mainstream communist-originated left – the attachment to 'horizontal' methods of organisation, but nevertheless it was an inspirational turn of events. As Waterman observed

> An international Left, battered, bruised and disoriented by: the downscaling of the welfare state; the downsizing of the working class; the halting of the forward march of labour; the collapse of Eastern Communist and Southern Populist states; and the crisis of the international movements identified with such. Zapatista encounters also inspired at least two significant emanations of the movement, People's Global Action (PGA) and the WSF itself.[13]

The Venezuelan alternative

While much of the opposition to neo-liberalism was movement-based and oriented towards new methods of protest, linkages and communication, there were also some significant state-level developments during the 1990s. The neo-liberal policies advocated by the IMF led to economic disaster not only in many African countries but amongst some with greater economic clout, such as some in South East Asia, Russia, Brazil and Argentina. In a number of cases, such as Russia and Argentina, the IMF path was abandoned and they went on to achieve significant economic growth. In Venezuela, as noted above, a coup was attempted in 1992 against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez which was carrying out SAPs, following the collapse of world oil prices and the consequent devastation of the Venezuelan oil-based economy. As a result, social cleavages deepened

and living standards plummeted for the majority of the population. According to Baburkin et al.,

> Crime increased and security problems aggravated living conditions for the lower and middle class sectors, already affected by inflation and the curtailment of public spending. Increased social conflict, coupled with general mistrust for politicians and political parties, created an atmosphere of political crisis.[14]

When the government introduced social spending cuts and withdrew price controls on basic goods in February 1989, there was a massive explosion of outrage and anger from Venezuela's impoverished majority, in the form of the Caracazo riots. The coup attempt, led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, was inspired by the nineteenth-century Venezuelan military and political leader, Simón Bolívar, known throughout Latin America as the Liberator for his role in leading many Latin American states to freedom from European colonialism. Although the 1992 attempt failed, Chávez became famous for asserting on television that the coup had only failed 'por ahora', – for now.

After two years in prison, Chávez turned to the political path to power, with the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement deciding that it would contest the 1998 elections with the aim of achieving power. According to Chávez, the fight for power in Venezuela 'would be between two poles: the "patriotic pole" led by the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, and the "pole of national destruction", led by the old political parties'.[15] In 1997 the Movement, which included serving military officers, founded a new fully civilian political organisation, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), to contest the 1998 elections. The name was designed to indicate that Venezuela – which was currently in its Fourth Republic – needed a new Republic and a break with the past. MVR, Chávez stated, would have 'a national and popular character', founded on the ideas of Bolívar: 'Its mission is to secure the well-being of the national community, to satisfy the individual and collective aspirations of the Venezuelan people, and to guarantee a state of optimum prosperity for the fatherland.'[16] MVR formed an electoral alliance, known as the Polo Patriotico, with a number of long-standing but small left-wing organisations and parties, overcoming previous differences and fielding a single

candidate in each state. Chávez's vision for a new Venezuela, for redistribution of wealth to the poor and for the genuine extension of rights to all and the full inclusion of the indigenous peoples in the political process was enormously popular with the country's impoverished masses. In the presidential election of December 1998, Chávez received 56.2% of the vote. As Richard Gott observed, 'Within four years, he had come from prison to the gates of the presidential palace. The old political system lay in ruins all about him. An entirely new era was about to begin.'[17]

As Chávez and the MVR began to undertake the process of major social and economic transformation in Venezuela – some of it such as the introduction of health provision directly into the barrios seemingly little short of miraculous – it was hard to overestimate the enthusiasm with which the new government was received by left and progressive parties and movements across the world. A major and explicit defeat had been inflicted on neo-liberalism. While some had reservations about what was described as Chávez's 'populist' style and chaotic approach to government, the overwhelming response was that the new Venezuela was inspiring and provided hope that an alternative could be achieved, practically and concretely. Chávez's vision of unity for Latin America on a progressive basis, challenging US political and economic control, was also hugely popular, not only on the continent itself but worldwide, particularly as left-wing parties and movements in other Latin American countries strengthened and came to power. The economic strength of Venezuela, derived from its oil revenues, gave clout to Chávez's foreign and domestic policies, giving him greater independence vis-à-vis the United States. This progressive development on a state basis gave confidence to left parties, and many were to develop positive relations with Venezuela and work with solidarity campaigns to counter the impact of anti-Chávez propaganda over the subsequent years.

Civil society organises and protests

Another victory in 1998 was the defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). MAI was an OECD initiative supposedly meant to ensure that states had a uniform approach to the government of international investment. It drew widespread criticism from developing countries and civil society organisations as it became clear that

MAI would make it more difficult to regulate foreign investors. The anti-MAI campaign operated on a global scale in many powerful and innovative ways and exemplified the campaigning use of new communications. The text of the treaty was leaked, according to Paul Kingsnorth, to a group of Canadian activists:

> The agreement, which would have given multinational investors the power to sue national governments and gut democratic control over foreign investment, was sent around the world to websites and email lists in a matter of minutes. A rapid mobilisation began, and before even many government ministers knew what was in the treaty, a worldwide campaign was in progress against it.[18]

As a result, in October 1998, France announced that it would not support the agreement, and as the OECD operated on the basis of consensus agreements, the treaty fell.

According to Walden Bello, one of the foremost thinkers of the movement against neo-liberal globalisation,

> During the 1990s, resistance to neo-liberalism was widespread throughout the South and the North. In few places, however, they were able to become a sufficiently critical mass at a national level to decisively reverse neoliberal policies. But although they were not a critical mass nationally, they could become a critical mass globally when they came together at certain crucial events. This was what happened in Seattle in December 1999, when massive mobilisations contributed to bringing down the Third Ministerial of the WTO.[19]

Seattle was a pivotal moment in the development of the movement, and the point at which the movement hit public consciousness on a worldwide scale – because the protest had been taken to the locus of power. As Roland Bleiker observed, the battle for Seattle 'was located at the heart of the industrialised world, and thus immediately turned into a global media spectacle'.[20]

Seattle became the symbolic – and in some cases actual – coming together of the forces raised by the Zapatistas' call for a new intercontinental network of resistance against neo-liberalism. While

mobilisations against meetings of international financial institutions had taken place on previous occasions – notably against the meetings of the IMF and World Bank in West Berlin in 1988, in Madrid in 1994 – none had managed to significantly disrupt the meetings. On 30 November 1999, however, protestors blocked the entry of delegates into the World Trade Organization meetings, forcing the organisers to cancel the opening ceremonies. Protests continued throughout the meeting until 3 December. A variety of forms of protest took place, including a major march by the largest US trade union confederation, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which organises around 11 million workers, but many other groups also participated, up to 50,000 in all, including, according to Kingsnorth,

> unions, farmers opposed to genetically modified crops, anarchists, environmentalists dressed as sea turtles, priests, militant taxi drivers, a coalition of radical greens and steel workers, longshoremen, Zapatista solidarity groups, Colombian tribespeople fighting the destruction of their forests, Ecuadorian anti-dam protestors, Chinese democracy campaigners and thousands more took to the streets.[21]

When the peaceful protestors refused to disperse, police fired tear gas, over 600 were arrested and many were injured. A number of so-called 'black bloc' anarchists were reported to have attacked shops and businesses associated with well-known corporations and the authorities then temporarily introduced martial law.[22]

The WSF: the movement and its critics

From Seattle, similar protests proliferated, from the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2000, through Bangkok (Thailand), Bolivia, Argentina, Prague, Australia, India, Indonesia and Genoa, Italy, in July 2001, where 23-year-old protestor Carlo Giuliani tragically died as a result of police violence. The list of protests seemed endless, drawn from countries and cities across the world. Within a year, a new focus emerged, drawing together protests and initiatives into the WSF. According to Francisco Whitaker, who was one of the founders of the WSF, 'the idea for the WSF was struck among a bunch

of Brazilians', who wished to resist neo-liberalism but to go beyond protests and rallies.[23]

> The idea was, with the participation of all the organizations that were already networking in the mass protests, to arrange another kind of meeting on a world scale – the World Social Forum – directed to social concerns. So as to give a symbolic dimension to the start of this new period, the meeting would take place on the same day as the powerful of the world were to meet in Davos.[24]

Whitaker, together with Oded Grajew, a Brazilian third-sector entrepreneur, proposed the idea to Bernard Cassen, president of Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens' Action (*Association pour la taxation des transactions financières et pour l'action citoyenne*; ATTAC) – a powerful pro-Tobin tax campaign – and editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Cassen was enthusiastic and it was he apparently who proposed that the WSF should take place in Brazil, in the city of Porto Alegre; the city was already famed in left-wing circles for its progressive reforms since 1989 – under the leadership of the democratic socialist Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*; PT) – and introduction of a 'participatory budgeting' scheme, designed to help overcome severe inequalities, where residents participate in deciding spending priorities. A Brazilian Organizing Committee (OC) was set up comprising the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, ATTAC-Brazil, the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission, the Brazilian Association of Entrepreneurs for Citizenship, the Central Trade Union Federation, the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies, the Centre for Global Justice and the Landless Movement.[25] When a parallel summit to the UN 'Copenhagen plus 5' took place in Geneva in June 2001, the Brazilian OC went there to outline its proposals, which were received positively, and an International Council (IC) to support the WSF was set up. The rest is history.

But what exactly was the WSF? On one level, certainly at the beginning, it was a single event, according to Jai Sen, 'predominantly a challenge to Davos as a symbol of economic globalisation, and through that to economic globalisation itself'.[26] The intention of the organisers was also to engage with the protest that had been going on, however it might be described – referred to by some as

the 'anti-globalisation movement', by others as the 'global justice and solidarity movement' and by others yet as the 'alternative globalisation (or alter-globalisation) movement'.[27] But the complexity of the WSF and its almost nebulous quality were spelled out in the WSF Charter of Principles, published in April 2001. A revised version was published in June 2001, after wider discussion. The key defining features are as follows:

(1) The WSF is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth.

(2) The WSF at Porto Alegre was an event localised in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that 'Another World Is Possible!' it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.

(3) The WSF is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.[28]

Two main points were clarified in the second version. Firstly, the question of political party representation at the WSF: the April version was vague about participation of 'those in positions of political responsibility', whereas the June version stated clearly that party representatives could not participate in the Forum. However, 'Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited in a personal capacity.'[29] In fact, both a parliamentary forum and a local government forum ran in conjunction with world or regional forums at various times. The second issue was about armed struggle. The April version explicitly excluded from the WSF those organisations 'that seek to take people's lives as a method of political action'.[30] The June version excluded military organisations. It was on the basis of the earlier version (and it seems that in some countries the earlier version was at times used in

error when it had already been superseded) that tensions emerged in the movement in India, as this was seen to be a ban on militant or armed groups that may otherwise have wished to participate, and may have contributed to the holding of the Mumbai Resistance counter-summit during the WSF in India in 2004. It was reportedly also the case that because of this earlier version, the Zapatistas chose to stay away in spite of their near-iconic status in the movement, and that some Basque organisations had their registration cancelled when it was thought that they might be supporters of armed struggle.[31]

Notwithstanding these issues, the social forums, whether at the international or continental level, were absolutely extraordinary events, attracting 100,000 people or more at their height – in Porto Alegre, Mumbai, Caracas, Bamako, Karachi, Nairobi, the Amazon – reflecting every element of the people's lives in those countries, every movement for rights, every oppressed group, every self-help organisation, women's groups, indigenous groups, landless people's groups, workers' organisations, unemployed workers' organisations and cultural groups. That was the source of the dynamism and unique essence of the forums outside the West, or the global north as it was more generally described. Of course, global inequalities were apparent within the forum process too. Criticisms were levelled that the decision-making tended to be opaque and controlled by older men of European origin and that the intellectual and political elites of the forum tended to live the high life in third world countries – a kind of movement tourism which middle-class Westerners could indulge in.

But one of the most serious criticisms came to be one about the role of the NGOs in the forum process, which eventually helped to clarify the differences in goals and aspirations which existed amongst the forum participants and which ultimately contributed to the weakening of the forum as a catalyst for change. Arundhati Roy, radical writer and human rights activist, and one of the most acclaimed figures of the global movement, wrote of the social forum process in 2004:

> [the WSF] was the first formal coming together of an exciting, anarchic, unindoctrinated, energetic, new kind of "public power". The rallying cry of the WSF is "Another World Is Possible". The forum has become a platform where hundreds of conversations, debates, and seminars have helped to hone and refine a vision of what kind of world it should be . . . But now the WSF is threatened

> by its own success. The safe, open, festive atmosphere of the forum has allowed politicians and nongovernmental organizations that are imbricated in the political and economic systems that the forum opposes to participate and make themselves heard.[32]

Observing that most large well-funded NGOs are financially backed by Western governments and international financial institutions, Roy asserts that they are 'certainly part of the same loose political formation that oversees the neoliberal project and demands the slash in government spending in the first place'.[33] She points out that NGOs give the impression that they are filling the space left by a retreating state, but, she says

> their real contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right. They alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance. NGOs form a sort of buffer between the sarkar [government] and public. Between the Empire and its subjects. They have become the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators of the discourse.[34]

A damning indictment indeed and one which was particularly shared when the WSF took place in Nairobi, where there were many complaints that the poor were excluded. According to South African activist David Ntseng, who went to Nairobi with a rural network and was inspired to feel part of a movement that believes neo-liberal globalisation can be overthrown

> It also made me realize that every time the organized poor start speaking for themselves it creates a serious crisis. NGOs overtly and/or covertly try by all means to undermine movements of the poor. Some South African NGOs would literally compete for space and activities with the movements of the poor . . . In the final analysis, I say, WSF is indeed a space for struggles . . . It is an awkward space where there is always a ferocious clash of fundamentals, between right and left, but more increasingly between the NGO left and the grassroots left.[35]

Inevitably, given the vast numbers of people who participated, and the diverse traditions – or none – from which those involved hailed,

there were many different interests and perspectives for change expressed. While everyone was opposed to neo-liberal globalisation, what it should be replaced by was quite a different matter. Some wanted a revolutionary transformation of society in the Marxist framework; others wanted a more radical and postmodern levelling; others wanted reform of the system along fairer, perhaps Keynesian lines. Waterman outlines various ways in which sympathetic theorists have tried to draw up typologies of participants: Christophe Aguiton identifies three 'poles' – radical internationalist, nationalist and neo-reformist; Alex Callinicos proposes reactionary, bourgeois, localist, reformist, autonomist and socialist – with a subcategory of revolutionary; and Mario Pianta suggests supporters of current arrangements, reformists, radical critics favouring another globalisation, alternatives outside the mainstream and nationalist rejectionists.[36]

Within this diverse context, and in the light of the exclusion of political participation by parties, this was an unusual framework for the communist and left parties to work within. Many parties chose to get involved through individual participation, campaigns, trade union involvement, theoretical institutes such as *Espaces Marx* and journal representation, for example, through *Transform!* from the Party of the European Left. Others, like PRC, not only participated in the aforementioned ways, but embraced movementist politics to a high degree and played a significant role in shaping the ESF in particular. Bertinotti was a prominent and highly regarded figure on the leftist end of the WSF political spectrum and his standing in Italian politics was much enhanced by this role, until his support for the war on Afghanistan and the collapse of support for PRC. Some, such as the KKE refused to participate, rejecting the reformist, anarchist and anti-class approach of much of the movement. When the fourth ESF was hosted in Athens in May 2006, the KKE ignored it, and it was primarily shaped by Synaspismos, sympathetic trade unions, social movements and the ultra-left.

Empire and *Multitude* and their critics

Perhaps the most well-known theorists of the social and political changes of the time – although by no means universally popular – were Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, authors of *Empire* (2000) and

Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire (2004). Negri and Hardt argued that with the end of colonial regimes and the Soviet system 'we have witnessed an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges. Along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule – in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world'.[37] They point to the decline in sovereignty of nation-states, but do not believe that sovereignty itself has declined. Rather, they take the view that sovereignty has taken a new form comprising 'a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire'.[38] But by Empire, they do not mean imperialism, which in their view was really an extension of the European nation-states beyond their own borders.

> In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.[39]

This of course for many raised the question, how can it be opposed? How can Empire be overthrown? The political task, argued Negri and Hardt, for the 'multitude' was not simply to resist the processes of globalisation but to reorganise and redirect them towards different ends.

> The creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire are also capable of autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges. The struggle to contest and subvert Empire, as well as those to construct a real alternative, will thus take place on the imperial terrain itself – indeed, such new struggles have already begun to emerge. Through these struggles and many more like them, the multitude will have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day take us through and beyond Empire.[40]

The critics were many. Ellen Meiksins Wood points out that while *Empire* has been read as an optimistic work, the message is actually a counsel of surrender:

> For all its insistence on the possibilities of insurrection and the power of the 'multitude', it is much less persuasive as a call to opposition than as an argument for the futility of oppositional politics; and it has rather more to say about the irrelevance of old oppositional struggles and forces than about the possibilities of new ones.[41]

Negri and Hardt describe Empire as a smooth space, an *outopia*, a *non-place*; there is no place of power, they assert, because power is everywhere and nowhere. Thus, they argue, it can be attacked from any point, but as Meiksins Wood points out, it is hard to see what sort of opposition is possible, 'apart from spontaneous gestures on the part of an inchoate "multitude", which, instead of resisting the processes of globalization, can somehow reorganize them toward new ends – though by what means and to what effect (apart from creating new "subjectivities") remains a mystery'.[42]

And what of class? The message of *Empire,* according to Gopal Balakrishnan, is that the global multitude, which includes everyone who works, or is poor, whatever their employment or location, 'forms a class that, in its very quotidian mode of existence, is somehow revolutionary'.[43] Balakrishnan asserts that Negri, whose political background was as the theoretician of the Italian Autonomia movement with its espousal of political violence, came to the view that the proletariat was no longer the agent of social revolution in the 1970s, seeing a key role instead for the dispossessed and disaffected. The result of this political evolution was Negri's apparent view that in the age of Empire, revolutionaries 'can now rely on a pervasive, if diffuse, popular desire for liberation and an episodic intuition of friend and enemy'.[44] Such class-rejectionist utopianism was unpopular with many on the Marxist left, but events in the real world overtook the debates.

The anti-war movement in global context

Following the appalling attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, the world moved rapidly towards war, supposedly against

a new, unquantifiable enemy 'terror', but in fact, first against Afghanistan and then against Iraq. The anti-war movement, which overlapped with but was neither a subset nor more than partially a development of the anti-globalisation movement, burst on to the world stage. It was organised, it was structured, in many instances, it was anti-imperialist, and it counted as allies many nation-states across the world that also opposed the war drive of the United States, the United Kingdom and their 'coalition of the willing'. Now it became clear that war and neo-liberalism were two sides of the same coin – the coin of US domination – and that those who were non-compliant with the US neo-liberal drive could be made to comply militarily. As Arundhati Roy observed,

> Empire has a range of calling cards. It uses different weapons to break open different markets. There isn't a country on God's earth that is not caught in the cross hairs of the US cruise missile and the IMF checkbook.[45]

The process had already been undertaken by NATO in 1999 in its war against Yugoslavia. It was a precursor to the Iraq War, in that it was an illegal intervention against a sovereign state that had taken no offensive action against NATO. Although it was labelled a NATO attack, in fact it was overwhelmingly a US effort. As Peter Gowan described,

> The US flew over 80 per cent of the strike sorties, over 90 per cent of the electronic warfare missions, fired over 80 per cent of the guided air weapons and launched over 95 per cent of the cruise missiles.[46]

The United States had bypassed the UN Security Council because it did not support the war, and took action through NATO instead, claiming it was bombing in accordance with humanitarian principles. But no such legal justification existed. In reality, the United States wished to expand and consolidate its interests in the Balkans and remove what remained of Yugoslavia, which was still resisting the introduction of a full free market into what was the strongest economy in the Balkans. The war on Yugoslavia also took place in the context of NATO expansion – in March 1999, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, all former members of the Warsaw Pact,

became full members of NATO. At the fiftieth anniversary meeting of NATO the following month, a new 'Strategic Concept' was agreed. Drafted by the United States, this committed NATO to 'out of area' or offensive operations in a geographical area extending far beyond the borders of the military alliance's member states. It stated that the future field of NATO operations would extend to the whole of Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This was a major challenge not only to Russia and other former Soviet republics, but also to the authority of the UN.

The reality was that although the United States had 'won' the Cold War and entered the 1990s as the only remaining global superpower, it was also facing serious economic problems as evidenced by its massive balance of payments deficit. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, these economic problems – including massive structural weaknesses – were clear for all to see and had contributed to a global financial crisis. But ten years earlier, appearing in some senses to be at the height of its powers, this was less obvious, and part of the ideological claims of neo-liberal proponents in the 1990s was that capitalism had entered a new phase of unprecedented economic growth. In fact, the international capitalist economy had suffered a series of profound crises over 30 years from the oil price crisis and the devastation of Africa in the 1970s, the IMF SAPs and the crises in Latin America in the 1980s, the disastrous collapse of Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the problems in Western Europe in the 1990s resulting from the enforcement of the Maastricht criteria and the economic crisis in South East Asia in the 1990s. None of these developments suggested a strong, successful and stable world capitalist system despite the spin.

For an economically weakened United States, with massive military capacity and increased military hegemony since the end of the Cold War, pursuing its interests by military means seemed the best option. In the early part of the twenty-first century, this became apparent in a number of contexts: in Iraq, through military intervention, the United States not only gained control of Iraqi oil for US corporations but disadvantaged its competitors there, namely, China, Russia and France, all of whom had opposed the war and were therefore excluded from the spoils; in Central Asia, the United States established military bases in former Soviet republics assisting its goal of gaining control of the region's oil supplies, helped by

directing oil pipelines through US allies such as Turkey and Georgia; in Eastern Europe, the United States sought to further develop its military control and influence by further NATO expansion and by locating US national missile defence facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic; in Latin America, the United States sought to exert military dominance to counter political advances on the left, including building seven new bases in Colombia and re-establishing the US Fourth Fleet in Latin American waters.

However, the United States certainly did not go unchallenged as it pursued its interventionist and expansionist agenda. From 2001, the United States and its allies – notably the United Kingdom – faced massive opposition to their war aims and military strategies and the European left parties played a very significant role in those struggles and movements. In a sense it was on more familiar ground than with the social forum process – there were very specific and attainable goals and outcomes, and of course opposing imperialist war was second nature to these parties; after all, that was where their political tradition had emerged on the global stage during the First World War. The development of the anti-war movement also strengthened what might loosely be termed the anti-imperialist left within the social forum process, including both left parties and parties and organisations from the radical and ultra left. This also brought more sharply into relief the diverging concerns between those who sought a dynamic framework to ameliorate social conditions in the developing world, bringing pressure to bear on governments through the mass, high-profile appeal of the forum movement, and those who saw it as a mass movement with the potential for mass, system-changing action. For a while there was a remarkable creative tension, manifested at the first ESF in Florence at the end of 2002, the slogan of which was 'Against war, racism and neo-liberalism' – although some activists had tried to prevent the war from becoming central to the movement's agenda.[47] By this time, Bush and Blair's determination to go to war on Iraq was absolutely clear, and despite a wide range of subjects under discussion, the question of war dominated the event, most notably the closing anti-war demonstration through Florence with around one million participants. The importance of the WSF Charter provision – that participants could indeed deliberate on and agree on actions during forums – became clear during the ESF in Florence. The key process by which this took place was the Assembly

of the Social Movements, which took place after the forum itself had concluded. On this occasion, the International Anti-War Coordination – drawing together the campaigning groups – proposed a global day of action of 15 February 2003. It was agreed to with acclaim and went on to be an astounding success, worldwide.

European left parties have also played a central role in other movements and campaigns against the US military expansionist agenda and there has been an increasing tendency to develop Europe-wide campaigns – not initiated by parties, but by the major national peace and anti-war campaigns together with local single issue-based campaigns. A key example of this which met with considerable success was the Czech No Bases campaign – *Ne Základnám*, a broad coalition of Czech groups, set up in June 2006 specifically to oppose the siting of a radar for missile defence at Brdy, in the Czech Republic. Its founding conference in Prague was attended by activists from across Europe, both from the east, such as from the Polish *Stop Wojnie* group which was working to oppose the siting of US interceptor missiles in Poland, and from the west, including from long-standing peace organisations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament from the United Kingdom and *Le movement de la paix* from France. There was also participation by *Die Linke*, and support from the GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament, whose policy was positioned in opposition to the missile defence proposals. One of the outstanding features of the campaign was the Czech League of Mayors against the radar, initiated by Jan Neoral, mayor of the tiny village Trokavec. Hundreds of mayors joined the campaign, organising referenda in their towns and villages, overwhelmingly against the radar and against the stationing of foreign troops on Czech soil. Around 70% of the population opposed the radar and the issue eventually brought down the Czech government. When Obama came to power in the United States he suspended the plans and eventually opted for another version of missile defence in collaboration with NATO, which did not include a radar in the Czech Republic.

A Europe-wide campaign has also developed against NATO, with the involvement not only of peace and anti-war organisations but with the support of left parties, which have traditionally been strong opponents of NATO, again most notably *Die Linke*. The No to War–No to NATO coordination evolved prior to the NATO summit in Strasbourg in the spring of 2009 and was responsible for organising

the largest demonstration against NATO for three decades, together with a counter-summit that drew together a wide range of activists. The same grouping also organised a counter-summit in Lisbon in November 2010, when the NATO states gathered to discuss Afghanistan and launch their new strategic concept. The Third Congress of the Party of the European Left made its position clear in its No to NATO–No to War motion, opposing missile defence, NATO enlargement and the strengthening of military ties between NATO and the European Union. It also expressed opposition to nuclear weapons and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Its assessment of the new NATO strategy was that it continues to follow 'the path of militarization and interventionism in order to further promote neoliberal globalization'.[48]

The fading of the social forum movement

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the social forum movement, while still continuing with fairly widespread participation, had lost much of the impetus and dynamism which had characterised its early years. Although the discussions had been stimulating and empowering for many groups and causes, the limits of the movement had also become clear. As Louis Weber observed, in an issue of *Transform* dedicated to assessing the social forum movement ten years on, the social forums and the alter-globalisation movement had made a considerable contribution on two fronts – analysing and delegitimising neo-liberalism and developing international networks that can take action. But, he went on to question,

> What has been the real impact of the alter-globalisation movement on the economic and social situation in the countries of the world, while the [global financial – KH] crisis considerably increased injustice and inequalities? In other words, is it sufficient today to organise debates and discussions, as stated by the Charter of Porto Alegre, when it might be necessary to act and lean on the alter-globalisation movement to fulfil its goals.[49]

A world transformation was not going to come as a result of the gatherings, and Negri's 'multitude' was understood to require a greater level of cohesion and organisation as 'Empire' was revealed, largely

through US military interventions, to be more than a 'smooth space'. Events in Latin America contributed to this shift in emphasis as, following the victory of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, left victories in a number of other Latin American countries restored confidence in the capacity of parties and movements to effect change through the political process within nation-states. Weber also questioned the sense of maintaining 'a strict separation from political parties and governments', particularly so in Latin America where governments have acted on alter-globalisation agendas.[50] In January 2006, Caracas – the capital of Venezuela and centre of radical social transformation – was home to one of the three WSFs of that year. The enthusiasm for the Bolivarian revolution was enormous and the interrelationship between movement, party, society and social progress became apparent. The high-profile cooperation between Chávez and Fidel Castro – politically, but also on the direct benefits to the impoverished of Venezuela through healthcare – helped to overcome some of the residual barriers that existed in the movement with regard to Cuba. All these developments helped build an understanding of a continent fighting back against neo-liberalism and US imperialism, and the increasing US military intervention in the continent served to reinforce the widespread understanding of the new balance of forces: the United States could be challenged, but cooperation was needed at a state level and this would only happen after new political forces had been brought to power with the help of social and political mobilisation of the masses.

The rapid and successful economic development of China, bringing it to global prominence and eventually dominance, has re-raised the question of how to relate to China for the left in Europe, and also internationally. This has been a controversial issue for many decades, firstly, because of the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s leading to a global – and enormously destructive – rift in the communist movement; secondly, because the economic reforms of the last 30 years, while leading to massive economic success, have led many critics to suggest that China has adopted the capitalist road; and, thirdly, because the continuing one-party political model has reported human rights abuses and questions about workplace rights, which have given rise to a democratic deficit critique. Nevertheless, despite major inequalities in wealth distribution, the fact that the living standards of China overall have seen massive advances, that

China has a constructive attitude towards the ecological agenda and a generally peaceful approach to global events leads many to have an increasingly positive attitude towards the developments there. In September 2008, the PEL sent a high-level delegation to China, following the participation of a Chinese Communist Party delegation at the party's Second Congress in Prague in November 2007. PEL's statement following the visit was

> it was important on the one hand to learn about the socialist market economy and China's recent developments in accordance to the political decisions taken in the last 30 years, on the other hand to discuss issues such as workers' rights, education and social protection that are part of the European Left's agenda. Recent developments of the international situation, the struggle for peace and aspects related to globalization and worldwide challenges for the left forces were another focus.[51]

China has also participated for the last three years in the annual international conferences of communist and workers' parties, initiated by the KKE. For two years prior to that, it had attended with observer status.

The left in the twenty-first century

At the end of the second decade since the collapse of the Soviet system, it is clear that globally, communist and Marxist-inspired left ideas have considerable resonance. The economic alternative that they continue to present remains the only fundamental alternative to capitalism particularly as the environmental implications of unrestrained capitalism become apparent. A global economy regulated for ecological sustainability and equal and just human development is increasingly understood to be the only real option facing the world. Economic conditions have worsened for the vast majority of people, as the thirty-year series of capitalist crises has now reached catastrophic proportions, with the 2008–09 financial crisis and the 'great recession'. Far fewer people now accept the late twentieth century package of western-style political democracy with neo-liberal market economics. Dissatisfaction with the political model has gone hand in hand with an increasing desire for economic democracy – a basic of

the socialist alternative which the left has failed sufficiently to promote in recent decades as free market rhetoric has seemed to sweep all before it. The widespread and angry popular protests against government spending cuts and austerity measures have indicated the public frustration with existing arrangements. The ability of the left to respond and initiate adequately and convincingly is key to their having a viable and relevant future.

The recent incidence of left social democratic parties' splits to join with left parties indicates the attraction that a stronger left agenda holds. It also shows the inadequacy of the social democratic parties' responses to the challenges of the global economic crisis and the failure of the free market mantras that they have embraced. However, left party cooperation with social democratic parties has to be approached with extreme caution to ensure they exercise a left influence on social democracy and do not get dragged onto their right-wing, pro-market agenda. This would lead the left parties to disaster, as almost happened in the case of the PCF and the French Socialist Party after the experience of the Jospin plural left government.

The left parties in Europe occupy an interesting space. They are unequivocally anti-capitalist and fight for an alternative Europe, but many of them are also actually or potentially parties of government, albeit coalition, and so their policies are framed towards institutional change. Appropriately so, for such change is absolutely necessary to bring about the socially solidaristic Europe which they seek. But will their measured approach be widely attractive in the radicalised moment that Europe is experiencing in the context of the global financial crisis and the deepening Eurozone crisis, together with the rise of new movements that have accompanied it, such as the *indignados* and the Occupy protests? That must be a key challenge for the European left – to be at the leading edge, providing concrete left alternatives and a socialist way out of the current crisis, with a dynamism and confidence that nevertheless provides more than the sloganising of some of the militant left groups. It is also particularly important for these parties to strengthen their position at this time of global economic crisis, ensuring they can increase their popular support, rather than giving ground to far right currents, which may profit from popular insecurity, exploiting racism and xenophobia to build political support.

It appears to remain the case that the fundamental support for the left parties lies in their championing of the living standards of ordinary people and also in their espousal of certain key values, notably justice and peace, as has always been the case with communist and left parties since their inception as a political current during the First World War as the key opponents to that war. Far from being abstract concepts, these principles have been shown to have major political and electoral significance, not least in the disastrous performance of PRC in the Italian elections, following its backing for Italian participation in the war on Afghanistan. The increased support for these parties during the anti-Maastricht campaigns in the early 1990s, together with the anti-capitalist, anti-war wave of the early twenty-first century, bears out this analysis. The challenge for these parties in the new global context is to learn from the successes and failures of the last two decades to realise that they do stand for political and economic alternatives, which can provide the answers to current problems at European and global levels, and that they can indeed be very popular.

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