

The Road to Social Democracy today - Defining who we are

Is the Left more a function of “carriers” of ideas that survive mainly during the life and times of the carrier? Therefore, is there a limited time bomb on ideas that follow the carrier’s death? Or do the ideas themselves manifest into political formations that last beyond the life of the carrier? The apparently obvious answer is that, if the ideas had real value and worthiness in the first place, those ideas would become programmatic and succeed considerably longer than the carrier itself or so goes the logic.

One of the great inventions of human history has been “the book.” With it, you can record past experiences which survive the carrier and help give the opportunity for the manifestation of a movement to occur.

Marx’s work

The works of Karl Marx are a good example. He provided a body of work that is still debated and considered today. His influence inspired one of the greatest political traditions of the 20th century. He helped inspire a whole temporal movement that saw its promise as a compromise between the excesses of capitalism on the right and authoritarianism on the left. This movement came to be known as “social democracy.” Marx helped provide a systemic and comprehensive

explanation for how politics and economics worked, over the sophomoric view that “capitalism and democracy are just not compatible.” From Marx’s inspiration came a movement that prioritized the work and activity of the middle and working classes, based on democracy and reforms within society itself. Prior to Karl Marx’s work, and aiding in building on his theory, liberals helped form unions as a bulwark against the monarchy. And there were in fact, nascent socialist parties which came before Marx. Sometime after Marx’s work, Eduard Bernstein came out with his “revisions.” “Socialism” needed to change and did change.

Edward Bernstein, the “revisionist”

Of course, it took Eduard Bernstein, the “revisionist,” to dash the hopes of many on the far left with his famous phrase, “The movement is everything,” and stopped short of any will or zeal to go further towards “socialism.” Bernstein saw unfortunate trends in Marx’s work. As a German Social Democrat, he realized that certain ideas about capitalism were not panning out. The middle class was not shrinking, and capitalism did not fall under its own weight. Something needed to be understood and explained. In many ways, Bernstein became a “new” Social Democrat, which has benefitted society to this day. What he meant by his famous phrase was that reforms continue and never stop, with each reform a reflection of history and experience. This is a rather fluid version of “socialism.”

If you were a young European radical of Marx's time, this was likely a tough pill to swallow. Bernstein, who saw that late 19th capitalism was becoming less harsh and distributed wealth more readily, was trying to adapt Marx's teachings to the times. He quickly realized there was no immediate solution to societal injustice; however, science and democracy should remain foundational pillars, and our efforts must continue to advance the interests of the working class. Bernstein likely observed this structure in Marx's writings.

Karl Kautsky, the "pope"

Another dimension is the underlying forces which contributed to Marx's work. Marx saw the ideas of capitalism dominate every aspect of human activity. Hence, the famous quote from Karl Kautsky, known as the Marxist "pope":

"The SPD (German Social Democrats) is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution making one. We know that our goal can only be achieved through a revolution, [and] we also know how little it is within our power to make this revolution, as little as it is possible for our opponents to hinder it."

This passage largely suggests that the revolution will eventually come to our door, and we shall know at that moment the inevitability of socialism. It was the end of World War I, and the German elite, now totally discredited, basically handed the keys over to the SPD to form a new government. While there was a German revolution, there was no sudden transformation to a "workers' state"; later, the SPD ended up,

unsuccessfully, battling both the German Left and Right, simultaneously, ending in disaster ultimately for Europe with World War II.

Lenin's interpretation, and "Socialism" must adapt

But soon, "socialism" took a dark turn. Vladimir Lenin developed the theory that only the elite through a vanguard party could lead top down and use any means necessary to accomplish the workers' state. This was followed up on by Joseph Stalin. This dark side is how the right seeks to define and link the social democratic movement; an inevitability towards communism, which we know, falsely explains who we are.

Like capitalism itself, "socialism" must adapt into a more advanced terminology. This is why the term "Social Democrat," should be preferred. The strong universal noun is present, "Democrat." It helps determine our social programs, which can help benefit the individual to be achieved through societal means and reforms. We are "Democrats" because we seek to abolish all current forms of voter suppression, including registration barriers, limitations on the number of polling sites or on voting by mail, reduction of the number of voting days, disfranchisement of felons, photo ID requirements that discriminate against people of color, etc. We seek the abolition of the Electoral College, the end of

gerrymandering, the restriction of big money in our political campaigns, the creation of an easier process for the formation of political parties, support Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), and the protection of the integrity of our electoral results, ensuring that all votes are properly counted. Our commitment to democracy is absolute. It is regarded as a fundamental element of society, with efforts aimed at its broader implementation. Democracy allows for reform work to happen that manifests into actual improvement in the lives of working and middle-class people.

Reform capitalism

Capitalism is not going away anytime soon. Nevertheless, we are concerned with capitalism in 21st century America and its undemocratic nature and the insecurity it produces. Unregulated capitalism can lead to significant disparities in wealth and poverty, often associated with economic cycles that impact workers during downturns and may contribute to environmental challenges due to ongoing growth and consumption. It corrupts our democracy due to the power it gives to the billionaire class it produces. In America, Social Democracy manifested into the reforms of the New Deal, the New Frontier, the Great Society, and the Civil Rights movement.

Who are we?

Finally, we need a politics that defines who we are. The far right call us “socialists”, implying that “communism” is next. This is a clear attempt to discredit our efforts. Our strength lies in DEMOCRACY, but we offer more than that - we are "democracy plus." We need to unite in our efforts with non-corporate moderates, liberals, progressives, and rational socialists in a democratic front to advance reforms for a just society.

Work within the Dem Party

The Democratic Party has been described as a party of groups or coalitions. And admittedly, Corporate America has also found its unfortunate place from within. In 2020, the Democratic Party successfully worked together and elected Joe Biden as President, as well as captured majorities in both the House and Senate. In 2024, those groups failed to work together for various reasons. Currently, the NYC mayoral election is playing out our divisions.

Join us!

In order to help provide a framework of agreement across groups within the Democratic Party, Social Democrats of

America hopes to play our part and stay on point in messaging by creating a political formation within the Democratic Party through which broad social democratic policy and ideas can be articulated and achieved, advancing our pillars that democracy is prime, science is our guide during national crises, (for example, COVID and the current climate crisis), and creation of social programs will benefit and favor the working and middle classes. Through this, we can achieve the broad goals of a more humane and egalitarian society. Ultimately, we hope to establish the dignity and self-worth of every individual member of our society, independent of one's age, race, creed, gender identity and economic class. If you agree with our above statements, then you too, are a carrier of social democratic ideas.

We hope you can assist us in this bold project. Any questions or comments are welcome; we encourage different opinions.



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