

Editor's Page

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On the third anniversary of the launch of Democratiya, Dissent co-editor Michael Walzer writes on the 'two commitments' that 'give shape to the Democratiya project.'

'The first,' he writes, 'is to defend and promote a left politics that is liberal, democratic, egalitarian, and internationalist. Those four adjectives should routinely characterize left politics, but we all know that they don't.' Hence the importance of Democratiya's second commitment: 'to defend and promote a form of political argument that is nuanced, probing, and concrete, principled but open to disagreement: no slogans, no jargon, no unexamined assumptions, no party line.'

Democratiya is a broadly 'social democratic' project. Its purpose is to understand – and offer an alternative to – two existential threats to the social democratic imaginary and identity.

The first threat comes from the reactionary left or 'post-left.' Under the banner 'Down with Us!' this left wages a war of sorts on the West. It has ideas and élan. Its high theory and low sensibility are increasingly important in the mass media, the arts, the academy and in what we might call graduate-popular-culture. And it uses these institutions as a trelliswork to wrap western political culture, and the Western mind, in thickets of Occidentalism, Anti-Americanism, Anti-Israelism, Anti-Liberalism, cultural relativism, conspiratorial manias, and self-loathing.

This reactionary left does nothing less than invert the historic identity and imaginary of the social democratic left.

The social democratic left inherited the glorious promise of the 18th century liberal democratic, or 'bourgeois,' revolutions in the West. Our goal was the realisation for everyone of the promise of those revolutions: equality, liberty and fraternity; life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And yes, everyone meant everyone, even 'the poorest he' (and she). So we insisted, whether we were revolutionaries or reformists, that the liberal democratic revolution must be extended to the economic and social spheres at home (democracy must become 'social,' hence our name), and to the rest of the world (hence our claim to internationalism).

The reactionary left, by contrast, offers a toxic mix of anti-westernism ('Down with Us!' 'Who are we to lecture anyone?') and a tolerance, or worse, for reactionary political forces who are redefined as 'the resistance' to 'the Empire.' ('My enemy's enemy is my friend.')

The social democratic left believed democratic internationalism would 'unite the human race.' The reactionary left believes 'We are all Hezbollah Now.'

The second existential threat faced by social democracy is this: the radical failure of state economic planning, and the incontrovertible necessity of regulated markets for both prosperity and democracy, has shaken our confidence that social democratic ends – democracy, equality, liberty, internationalism – can be yoked to social democratic means in a viable governing philosophy and programme.

The necessary adaptation of social democracy to that radical failure carries with it the risk that we will enter so far into the magnetic field of our opponents that 'there will come a time when the notion of the left will denote no more than the void,' as the philosopher Jean Vogel warns.

Walzer's essay helpfully reminds us of the need to address both the Scylla of reactionary leftism – a radically false 'foreign' policy – and the Charybdis of an over-adaptation to the logic of the global market – a radically false 'domestic' policy.

But we social democrats 'have our own internal critical work to do,' Walzer reminds us, 'directed at inequality and illiberalism in the contemporary West.' And just as the critique of communism was our internationalist task in the past, so today is 'the critique of Third World authoritarianism, Muslim radicalism, and global inequality.' In short, we must be 'local and universal critics of all the forces that set themselves against democracy, even when they pretend to speak for the "people."'

Of course, critique must do more than criticise; it must reconstruct. And here we face a problem. There is no longer a ready-made and adequate philosophy and programme we can call 'Social Democracy.' In face of that uncertainty we need a bold experimentalism in theory and practice. We would do well to see the ideas and the governments of the 'third way' as a kind of Popperian 'bold conjecture' – a series of experiments from which we must learn much, especially about those parts of third way thinking that, having been refuted by experience, must now be reformulated.

There are signs that this is happening.

In major speeches Gordon Brown and David Miliband have proposed, respectively, 'the global society' and 'the democratic imperative' as the twin foundations of a renewed global social democracy. They, and others, have begun to explore these ideas across the registers of political philosophy, political history and practical policy. They are probing for ways to reform or create global institutions, and movements (Miliband, for instance, talks of the 'civilian surge') to realise these ideas in practice. These are just beginnings. The discussion will proceed by disagreement and controversy, errors and wrong-turns. But has there ever been any other way?

Democratia exists to help this conversation. Each piece in the issue takes up, in one form or another, the work of 'local and universal criticism' of forces that oppose democracy. Without a party line in sight, indeed with sharp disagreement obvious at every turn, each contributor, guided their own lights, reaches for a global society marked by democracy,

equality, liberalism and internationalism.

And each piece in the next issue of Democratiya will do likewise. Irving Howe's 'steady work' is still ours.

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Robert Reich's important critique of 'supercapitalism' is showcased in the issue. We offer the introduction to his new book and an extended interview with Reich himself. Anne-Marie Slaughter reviews Cullen Murphy's entertaining comparison of the Roman Empire and the current state of the US Republic, while Mark Major reviews Michael J. Thompson's historical survey of the place of economic inequality in American political thought. Reich, Slaughter, and Thompson each warn that the acceptance, even celebration, of untrammelled corporate power and rising economic inequality risks the decline of civic engagement, the erosion of political life, and the shattering of the public sphere.

A 'foreign policy' that seeks to be democratic, egalitarian, liberal and internationalist is explored in several contributions. Elisabeth Porter explores the prospects for building global feminist movements, David Lowe reviews Natan Sharansky's call for us to recognise that identity, far from being a foe, is a friend to democracy, while Eric Litwack looks at recent efforts in philosophy to tackle the difficult question of collective apology and moral responsibility.

The challenge of political Islamism is the subject of Max Dunbar's analysis of the ideas of Tariq Ramadan, and Tom Gallagher's disturbing account of the relationship of Nationalists and Islamists in Scotland.

We carry five views on the Russian invasion (now occupation) of Georgia. David Miliband's points out that 'The sight of Russian tanks in a neighbouring country on the fortieth anniversary of the crushing of the Prague Spring has shown that the temptations of power politics remain.' Fittingly then, from the archives we carry Denis Healey's 1952 essay on 'The Labour Party and Power Politics.' Eric Lee looks at the reasons for the relative silence of western global labour, which he contrasts to its robust response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Georgia in 1921. Martin Shaw takes a very different approach, indicting the West as responsible, in good measure, for the war, and criticising David Miliband for slavishly following US policy. David Clarke maps the response to the invasion of the liberal-left commentariat and finds it wanting.

The Western left's treatment of Israel is again the subject of dispute. Martin Shaw and David Hirsh debate the relation between anti-Semitism and the proposal to boycott Israeli (and only Israeli) academia. In the letters page Patrick O'Donnell and Lyn Julius disagree about Walt and Mearsheimer's book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Ben Gidley offers a penetrating critique of Jacqueline Rose's treatment of Israel, Zionism, and the figure of the 'non-Jewish Jew' in her book *The Last Resistance*.

We have three letters from correspondents. Larry Haas goes in search of Barack Obama and

assesses the Illinois Senator's chances to win the Presidency in November, Cathy Lowy reports from Hungary on the ugly resurgence of the far right, and Gary Kent finds hope in the 'Iraqi surge' as he travels from Baghdad to Blaydon.

We are delighted to welcome Denis MacShane MP, a former Europe minister under Tony Blair, and one of the most creative thinkers on the European democratic left, to the Advisory Editorial Board. In a recent survey of the crisis of the European left, Denis complained that 'the democratic left has given up on culture' noting that 'a love and embrace of culture, including high culture of the most difficult and challenging sort, is what marks out the big-thinking politician from just the average political plumber who knows how to get the drains cleaned again in the government system.' We agree. In this issue David Adler explores 'Jazzocracy,' the relationship between Jazz and Democracy in US culture, Michael Weiss reviews the first English translation of Victor Serge's last novel, *Unforgiving Years*, and we are delighted to welcome the first of many contributions from the award-winning Irish poet Kevin Higgins.