

## What is left of the Left?

### Alternatives for a progressive social-democratic platform in Israel and Europe

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Over the past 25 years social democracy has seen dramatic cultural and historical transformations – in Israel and in Europe. The historic social ethos was egalitarian. It aimed to achieve social justice possessing two essential features: a strong working-class base and a close relationship with trade-union organizations. Nowadays all aspects of social democratic life have been transformed: the nature of the party - from mass parties to catch-all or cartel parties; from parties of the salaried workers to parties of the more affluent fractions of the middle-classes - the relationship with the unions, its electorate and, obviously, its policies and ideology.

This transformation led to a continuous electoral decline of social democracy. Social democracy's problems today are essentially of an ideological nature. The Third Way politics and its attempt at representing a 'Thatcherism with a human face' have failed. Others stress the poor performance in office of some social democratic leaders: Tony Blair and his manufacturing of an illegal war in Iraq, Gerhard Schröder's dismantling of large chunks of the German Social State, Ehud Barak's cynical abuse of the labor movement in order to consolidate his personal position, Walter Veltroni's and Massimo d'Alema's destruction of the Italian left after entering in a coalition with right-wing parties and Gordon Brown's enduring love for the financial markets. In Israel and in Europe, social democratic parties have consolidated the 'neoliberal consensus' leading to an eminent electoral decline.

Multiple global crises – e.g. the collapse of the world economy and the financial crises or the war in Syria and the refugee crises – provide social democrats with a golden opportunity to dispense with their neoliberal frame of thought and action and come up with new solutions engrained in the ideals of social justice. In these troubled times, social democracy can only recapture a sense of purpose and make a useful contribution to progressive politics, if it rediscovers its egalitarian roots and shows empathy for the underprivileged.

The Haifa Center for German and European Studies (HCGES) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Israel (FES) will hold an international conference to discuss alternatives such as the revival of the welfare state, a strong government, more state regulation and joint future perspectives. Among the discussants will be academics as well as political and social activists from the field.