

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
Wiardi Beckman Stichting
Alfred Mozer Stichting

How social democrats, after
the collapse of communism,
face the task of
constructing capitalism

Michael Dauderstädt, André Gerrits, György G. Márkus

With the on-set of regime change in East Central Europe, dozens of social-democratic groupings and parties (re)emerged. Historical parties were revived, former state parties were renamed, new movements entered the scene; all with a, more or less authentic, social-democratic label. The initial hope of a widely shared social-democratic alternative to a command economy and communist party dictatorship proved unrealistic and evaporated rapidly. The first free elections illustrated the attraction of nationalist and market liberal forces in Central Europe and the strength of re-named communist politicians in Eastern and Southern Europe.

In the meantime the picture has changed. After years of a turbulent transition process with painful economic change and sometimes inefficient and corrupt politics, many East Central European countries suffer from ailing economies and an increasingly frustrated populace. Within this context, social democracy, both as a concept and policy experience, got new chances. It adapted itself to the new circumstances and soon played a major role in various countries, based upon the paradoxical objective which it derived from the post-communist reality: to 'create' and to 'tame' capitalism at the same time.

Troubled Transition attempts to explain why social democracy has a prominent position in some countries and is a *quantité négligeable* in others; why some communist parties convincingly transformed into social-democratic ones, while others have far more difficulties; why the Czech Social Democratic Party is the exception, being the only 'historical' social-democratic party playing a significant political role.

Troubled Transition is the first book-length analysis of social democracy in East Central Europe. It is, as László Kovács, the chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Party, writes in his preface: 'the first attempt to give an insight into the situation of the democratic left in East Central Europe'. The authors attempt to understand social democracy in East Central Europe by going back to its historical origins, and to trace the continuities of its dramatic history – from the inception of the movement in the final decades of the nineteenth century, its destruction by both authoritarianism and communism, to its resurrection in the turbulent years of post-communism.

Contents

Preface László Kóvács	7
Introduction	9
1 From the beginnings of social democracy to the end of communism	15
Origins: a weak social democracy in predominantly agrarian societies	18
Interbellum: responsibility without power	24
From revolutionary enthusiasm to forced unification	31
Exile: isolated in the west and the east	35
Revisionism: between slow death and oppression	38
Reformism: self-destructing the communist system	39
Dissidence: a lonely voice	41
Post-communist transition and social democracy	42
2 Social democracy in the transition process	45
Three motives of transition: democracy, prosperity, sovereignty	47
Different transitions – different fates of social democracy	49
Economic and social transformation: from the desert into the jungle	54
Cleavages in post-communist societies	58
The weakness of party identification	60
The potential role of social democracy in the transition process	63
Actual voters of social-democratic parties: a tale of three elections	66
Three roots of social democracy in post-communist societies	69
Historical social-democratic parties: lonely revival in Prague	74
Successful successors: the dominance of reform communists	77
3 Social democracy after communism: a puzzle of identities	83
Two identities of ‘successor parties’: modernisers and nationalists	86
Identity problems of modernising successor parties	89
The fragile continuity of revived historical parties	93
4 Conclusions	97
References	107
List of abbreviations	115
Annexes	117
Country-by-country surveys of social-democratic parties, elections and parliaments	
Index	155