

**THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN
SOCIAL MODEL:
DECONSTRUCTING
EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ?**

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OVERVIEW

- the ambiguities of the 'European social model'
- status, contract and rights
- the unbearable lightness of social rights
- key challenges to employment rights in Europe
- post-decommodification ?
- re-inventing 'Social Europe' ?

THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE 'EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL'

- **ambiguous :**
 - social market economy ?
 - or balance of power ?
- **plural :** character of regulatory regime differs significantly across countries (or regions)
- **contested :** iconic status as abstraction, but no consensus on content
- **cosmetic :** rhetoric of 'social Europe' a disarming accompaniment to Euro-liberalism
 - *l'Europe social n'aura pas lieu ?*

STATUS, CONTRACT AND RIGHTS

- commodification versus rights: Polanyi, Marshall, Streeck, Supiot ...
- elements of decommodification
 - substantive minimum employment standards: wages, hours
 - employment protection versus hire-and-fire
 - public provision of social welfare / security
 - redistribution: modifying unequal market outcomes
 - independent workplace voice (control ?)
 - encompassing collective bargaining
 - trade unions as 'social partners': negotiated regulation

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

- where do employment rights come from?
 - intelligent design or *bricolage* ?
 - social consensus or class struggle?
- contingent historical balance of forces : rights achieved as *negotiated* accommodation, and/or concession to dampen protest
- institutionalisation of rights a major social achievement
 - but never sufficient
 - meaning constantly reconstructed and renegotiated
 - easier to erode practical effect than to abolish formal existence (Crouch, Streeck)

KEY CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS IN EUROPE

- **economic**
 - multinational financialised capital: stakeholder models ⇒ shareholder value
 - constructing Eurocapitalism : from SEA to EU 2020 (with a little help from the European Round Table)
- **political and ideological**
 - neoliberalism, eclipse of social-democratic project
 - impact of enlargement
 - market mindset as Euro-consensus: competitiveness, entrepreneurship, modernisation and flexibility
- **juridical**
 - 4 freedoms and ECJ
- **from crisis to austerity**
 - Troika and 'new economic governance'
 - TINA: Thatcher's revenge ?

POST-DECOMMODIFICATION ?

- social policy 'colonised... by the concepts and discourse of the employer sector' (Serrano Pascual and Jepson)
- social protection redefined as a 'productive factor' : commodifying decommodification
- towards OECD orthodoxy: critique of employment protections as rigidities and 'insider' privileges
- from macroeconomic regulation to supply-side adaptation
- individualisation of responsibility for socio-economic problems
- fiscal crisis \Rightarrow residual workfare state

RE-INVENTING 'SOCIAL EUROPE' ?

- a 'social progress protocol' : but what is progressive ?
 - increase wage share, reverse growth in inequalities
 - 'sustainable' macroeconomic expansion : but how ?
 - foster positive (social !) alternatives to greed and consumerism
- beyond Bismarck and Beveridge : before social Europe can be defended it must be (re-)invented
 - what social models fit needs and aspirations of workers and citizens today ?
- it is necessary to challenge the dominant paradigm, not just negotiate within it ...
 - ... creating an alternative narrative and discourse
- the future of the 'social model' demands strategic imagination !