



Monica Quirico, *Il socialismo davanti alla realtà. Il modello svedese (1990-2006)*, (Roma: Editori Riuniti University Press, 2007)

by Raimund Feld

Most 'Continental' Europeans have to either learn the language or rely on accounts written in English some of them written by authors with a fairly limited command of Swedish if they want to keep abreast of developments in Swedish politics and society. Not so the Italians. In addition to several recent works written or edited by Paolo Borioni, they now can resort to a book by Monica Quirico (MQ), who works at Torino University and has previously published in the area of the history of Italian and Anglo-Saxon liberalism.

Her book on the Swedish model takes its title from a collection of 'studies of social-democratic views and recent politics' written by Nils Karleby, a leading theorist of the SAP (*Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet*, Social-Democratic Workers' Party), and published after his untimely death in 1926 (N. Karleby, *Socialismen inifrån verkligheten*. Stockholm: Tiden 1926). Quirico's book is an attempt at coming to grips with recent developments of the SAP and of the 'Swedish model' that became the party's hallmark during the sixty years of electoral hegemony. The introduction focusses on the definition of the Swedish model and is followed by a historical chapter some sixty pages dealing with 'the first century of social democracy' (24). From the outset, Quirico stresses the 'strong connection' (24) between the SAP and the main blue-collar union confederation, LO, yet without losing sight of the influence that the social movements of the 2nd half of the 19th century exerted on the then infant Swedish social democracy. Subsequently, MQ relates the ideological shift whereby the SAP waved goodbye to the concept of class struggle as a pivotal political paradigm in lieu of SAP leader Per Albin Hanssons notion of *folkhem* (people's home).

A milestone was reached with the famous Saltsjbaden agreement (1938), which paved the way for a cooperative strategy. In its 1944 manifesto, the SAP turned its back to socialization for good and advocated a planned economy meant to rationalize production. The overarching goal of full employment was already stated in 1944; a more comprehensive strategy was only formulated in the next decade, when LO economists G. Rehn and R. Meidner framed a model striving to combine full employment, economic growth, equality and low inflation.

After the golden age of Swedish social democracy, the mid-70s marked the end of an era. While some important reforms were put into practice, the general elections held in 1976 were a 'point of no return of the Swedish Worker's movement and altered (...) the power relations between the social classes' (50). When the SAP again came to power in 1982, the link between growth and (mainly work not job! - related) security



was severed as welfare was now considered to be a cost factor instead as part and parcel of a 'productive social policy'. MQ then sketches the development and the basic mechanisms of the Swedish welfare state such as its 'universalism', before revisiting the debate about the relationship between growth and security.

In both the introduction and the subsequent chapters, Quirico highlights the role played by feminist actors, introduces feminist theorists, and relates the debates they triggered. This clearly sets her book apart from most accounts of Swedish social democracy: about one fourth of the book deals with (the debate about) gender. In the first chapter, she highlights the ability of the Swedish feminists to cooperate despite their ideological diversity, describes how the goal of *jmlikhet* (equality) was replaced by *jmdsteldhet* (MQ translates as 'gender equality'; it might have been appropriate to add 'actual') and introduces the reader to the work of Yvonne Hirdmann, probably the today's most influential feminist intellectual.

The 2nd chapter deals with the 1990s and considers the SAP's 'European turn', which led to Sweden joining the EU, in spite of a strong opposition inside the party, the change of tack in economic and social policy - e.g. the priority given to low inflation instead of full employment, the independence of the Central Bank, and the reform of the pension system and especially the fact that none of these decisions were preceded by a large debate within the party. MQ also describes the end of Swedish corporatism at the initiative of the employers' confederation and the debate about the sustainability of the Swedish welfare state and the increase in private provision of welfare, with the state and the local and regional authorities outsourcing its implementation. The overall picture, then, is that of a SAP on the retreat not without internal opposition, for sure.

The 3rd and last chapter takes us to the Persson years. In 1996, former Minister of Finance Gran Persson became chairman of the SAP and Prime Minister and presided over a partly successful attempt at lowering unemployment, 'greening' the SAP and Swedish policy, and especially towards the end organizing a return to work of those on sickness leave. MQ also refers to debates about the EU and new contributions to feminist debates such as the concept of 'intersectionality', stressing that asymmetrical power relations across society must not be considered separately.

In her concluding remarks, the author details the results of the last general elections (2006), which, after 12 years of social democratic rule, brought a 'bourgeois' coalition to power. She then sums up the debate on the left about the causes of this shift and the conclusions to be drawn. Here, much is made of the successful programmatic turn of the moderate party led by a youthful leader, as opposed to the patriarchal Persson. Interestingly enough, Quirico uses the expression '*maquillage*' (make-up), suggesting that this turn was mere window dressing. I wonder if '*aggiornamiento*' (update) wouldn't be more appropriate but then, I'm not Italian...

This is doubtless a very valuable contribution to the debate on the merits, the limits and the current situation of (Swedish) social democracy. The book is completed by an

impressive bibliography, and the accurate quotes suggest that Quirico actually read most if not all of the works listed.

Raimund Feld studied French and social sciences at Goethe University Frankfurt/Main and at the University Strasbourg III (France). He holds a teachers' degree and has spent many years working as a translator. He now works as a freelance social scientist specializing in French and Swedish politics . His publications include several articles in these areas as well as a book on the French CP.