

Socialism via Social Democracy?

The December 1993 edition of the South African Labour Bulletin carried a substantial debate on the topic “Social Democracy or Democratic Socialism?”

A key contributor to this debate, Australian political scientist Winton Higgins, pointed to the political practices in Sweden during the 20th Century as a useful example of how Social Democracy as a political system could be used pro-actively to promote the goal of Democratic Socialism. Higgins suggested that certain similarities between Sweden and South Africa, especially in respect of the “social movement” character of their labour movements, meant that the Swedish approach to, and use of Social Democracy was well worth considering as South African socialists strategised for the future.

In this edition, **Liv Tørres**, herself a Scandinavian, takes issue with Higgins, pointing to the differences between Scandinavian societies and South African society, and questioning the extent to which the Swedish socialists quoted by Higgins ever represented, or still now represent, the main thrust of Swedish Social Democracy which now – rather than advancing towards Democratic Socialism – appears to be in retreat.

A further contribution by **Winton Higgins** in this edition, focussing on his home ground, examines the importance of an Industrial Policy from a socialist perspective, and analyses the success of Australian trade unions’ attempts to hold the governing Australian Labour Party to an agreed Industrial Reconstruction plan.

To provide context to the Australian comparison, economist **Frank Stillwell** charts the progress of the Australian Government -Trade Union Accord over the last 10 years, the Accord being the forum through which national Wage Policy Agreements have been arrived at.

Responding to the foreign contributors, SALB Guest Editor **Mike Murphy** attempts to isolate the important common lesson for trade unions in the here-and-now of post-election South Africa, arguing that a focus on Social Contracts (or Government/Labour Accords) and Social Democratic “statecraft” to the neglect of a revived and sustained involvement of members in their own trade unions will result in an empty-shell “House of Labour” which can aspire neither to Socialism, nor Social Democracy, nor meaningful trade unionism.