



## INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

### Op-Ed

#### ***Social Democracy: A pathway for South Africa's development***

***By Dr Klaus Kotzé, Coordinator of the Inclusive Society Institute's Social Democracy project***

South Africa faces serious and innumerable challenges. Poverty, unemployment and inequality are at extreme and unacceptable levels, while corruption and poor governance are directly stalling and subverting the nation's promise. To address our varied crises and restore decisive national direction, it is crucial that we engage in robust and critical discussion. As part of its mandate, The Inclusive Society Institute organises dialogue events that bring together civil society, policy experts and the broader public to discuss policy and national development.

Recognising the need for social democratic solutions in local and global politics, the Institute recently hosted the first in its two-part international dialogue on social democracy. The aim of these discussions, as highlighted by the Institute's Chairperson, Vusi Khanyile, is to gain clarity on the conditions and policies needed to lead towards more inclusive societies around the world.

The effects of globalisation, technological advance and COVID-19, among other developments, are having a direct impact on societies and political systems globally. The changed and unstable world demands innovative social- and democratic-centred solutions. Social democracy is a political, economic and social philosophy that mobilises social interventions in the advance of equal and just societies. Through direct and indirect actions, a competent and resourced state works together with all stakeholders to advance societal equity, while respecting democratic rights and freedoms.

For social democracies to be successful in the modern world, they must clearly establish their strategic values, principles and goals.

The universal values of social democracy are freedom, solidarity, equality and justice. To social democrats, freedom has a broader foundation and purpose than the mostly negative freedoms upheld by classical liberals. Freedom has social requirements and aims. A society is only free when all in it can express and live their freedoms. By these measures, South Africa still has a long walk to freedom. Freedom entails a social responsibility or solidarity to society at large, where solidarity forms the willful recognition of others. Simply, ubuntu. Equality and justice are closely related to freedom and solidarity. A society cannot be free when all its people do not have equality of opportunity and are treated fairly. To ensure equality, a needs-based approach must be followed.

Traditionally, social democracies depend on three basic principles. They distribute. Social democracies advance human capital through targeted investments such as in education and healthcare. They redistribute. Social democracies ensure that their people benefit from the state's wealth. Not through arbitrary confiscation or capture, but transparent and systematic social interventions. Lastly, successful social democracies are those that can effectively regulate, so to ensure that people and not financial markets or other interest groups have the upper hand in the economy.

The goals which social democracies aspire towards must be clearly articulated. Goals must not be abstract or pie-in-the-sky but should be pursued after careful consideration and be based on need. A suitable environment and capable state are of critical importance in the execution of social democratic goals.

The ultimate goal of social democracy is to put people, and not profit or corporations, first. The values, pathways and goals of social democracy should all align towards a strategy that advances the society as a whole, while installing equity to those most in need. Strong, ethical politics that consider the collective of peoples are primary, as opposed to the economic focus which places individuals and their interests first.

Social democracy also recognises that social agents, not simply management-oriented technocrats, run institutions and states. By restoring people as the end of government and by keeping people responsible for their actions, recognition, competence, and trust become highlighted and restored. These features are foundational to a capable state. A state which improves the lives of people through measured policies and decisive actions. In such a state regulation is not a curse but is warranted and necessary when it is competently and strategically undertaken.

In social democracies people are not only the ends of the effective state, but also its instruments. People play an active role, entering into expanded and practical social compacts with the state. For people to willingly do so, the state needs to be effective. To quote from former anti-apartheid activist Lord Peter Hain's contribution during the recent dialogue: "To retain taxpayer's support the state needs to be efficient, effective, honest and responsive to public demand". State interventionism would not only be tolerated but would also be endorsed if the people recognise the state to be clean and capable. That its actions put the interests of people first, regardless of political affiliation, race or creed. That the state leads and tackles important questions such as land and economic development.

Social democracy presents a strategic model towards South Africa's developmental goals. It corrects the unjust practices of neoliberalism while promoting the opportunities and freedoms only possible under democracy. Social democracy allows the state to balance its policies towards having a positive impact on all in society, while preferencing those in need.

***The Inclusive Society Institute will soon host the second in its international dialogue series on social democracy where it will reflect on what preconditions are required in a country for it to advance towards a welfare state. The public is invited and encouraged to participate in this and future discussions. Visit the Institute's website and social media for more details.***

**7 February 2022**