

Funding the Future

Article URL

Published: January 12, 2026, 6:06 pm

I read an article yesterday that asked what Labour is for. Then I had a conversation in the evening where the question of whether anyone in Labour knew what it was for was discussed. The astonishing thing is both can be asked. And it is not as if this is a question that is unique to the particular structure of Labour in the UK: social democracy is in trouble across Europe, odd exceptions apart.

So what is social democracy for? This isn't an attempt at a conclusive response. But it represents some ideas that seem relevant to me. I restricted myself to five big themes. I am sure there are plenty of others.

Social democracy suggest that people are at the heart of our society, economy and democracy. The interests of people as a whole have to come first in the structuring of each of those.

Social democracy promotes a responsible management of the economy, respecting the environment, taking into account the externalities that markets cannot price, encouraging private enterprise where (as it often is) it is the most suitable form of economic organisation to deliver goods and services and intervening to prevent monopoly, exploitation and other market failure, including no supply at all when supply is essential for the well being of society.

Social democracy upholds the right of a person to be themselves, only intervening if necessary to protect others. In doing so it respects differences and permits diversity whilst encouraging the recognition of the mutuality that always exists when people live in communities.

Social democracy ensures that can partake in society by providing universal access to essential services such as education and healthcare and by redistributing income and wealth until all have at least sufficient to partake.

Social democracy is about recognising that we can only prosper when others do as well. It is as a result internationalist in outlook, generous in its spirit of cooperation and willing to partner whenever possible because strength comes from mutual wellbeing.

In this case what is social democracy for? It is, I would suggest, for defending the values on which our society has been built.

Thoughts?