



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

SOUTH ASIA
INSTITUTE



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
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SEIT 1386

Lecture Series on Governance and Politics in South Asia

Department of Political Science

Efforts at Social Democracy and the Rise of Rightist Reaction

Insights from Kerala and Indonesia in Historical Perspective

Professor Olle Törnquist

University of Oslo

While Europe focuses on Russia's aggression and the radical right's advances, the historical dynamics are often set aside. The West won the Cold War, but why did then progressive democrats lose ground to nativist reactions? This is not just a European but a global story. The achievements as well as downsides of liberal and social democratic efforts during the second and third wave of democracy must also be considered. Focusing on the contrasting critical cases of Kerala and Indonesia, Prof. Törnquist argues that the initially successful emphasis in both contexts on citizenship and democracy as a unifying framework for various socio-economic demands was abandoned in Indonesia in the late 1950s, opening up for authoritarianism, while Kerala stood tall in spite of regressions. There were common challenges, moreover, to address the role of 'political accumulation of capital.' The setback in the South added to Brandt's and Palme's problems containing neoliberal globalization, followed by global 'structural adjustment.' This reduced the space for advances during the subsequent third wave of democracy. The drawbacks generated widespread discontent, which nourished the rise of the nationalist right. Meanwhile, the efforts at a new social democracy suffered from fragmentation and poor representation. The challenges might be overcome, however, as testified by the efforts in Kerala at participatory local development, welfare schemes, and investments in education, as well as by the brief alliance in Indonesia for a social security reform. Engaging in such attempts and related challenges is crucial to build a global democratic alliance (beyond NATO) against the current rightist counter-movement.



Professor Olle Törnquist is a Swedish global historian and Professor Emeritus of Politics and Development, University of Oslo, Norway, at Uppsala University, Sweden. He has written extensively on radical politics, development, and democratization, based on comparative field studies from a historical perspective. His main empirical focus since the 1970s has been Indonesia, India (especially Kerala), and the Philippines, with Scandinavia, South Africa, and Brazil as reference cases. Törnquist co-directed the Indonesian democracy movement's nationwide assessments of political and social reforms from the mid-1990s until the mid-2010s. He has co-edited (with John Harriss, Neera Chandhoke, and Fredrik Engelstad) *Reinventing Social Democratic Development: Insights from Indian and Scandinavian Comparisons* (2016). His latest book is *In Search of New Social Democracy: Insights from the South – Implications for the North* (2022).

Date: Monday, November 14, 2022

Time: 14:00 – 16:00, CET

Venue: CATS, Great Lecture Hall (room 010.01.05, building 4130)