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Boekbespreking van: The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy
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Citation

Snels, B. (1998). Boekbespreking van: The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy. *Acta Politica*, 33: 1998(4), 433-435. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450587>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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Book Reviews

Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Polity Press, Cambridge 1998, ISBN 0745622674, £ 6.95

What does left-wing politics look like nowadays? Tony Blair's New Labour and Bill Clinton's New Democrats promise a new political programme for social democratic parties. A third way between socialism and neo-liberalism. Since the 1980s, political scientists have been engaged in analysing the (possible) changes in political strategies of social democratic parties. Prominent examples of publications are Adam Przeworski's *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (1985), Fritz Scharpf's *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy* (1991) and Herbert Kitschelt's *The Transformation of European Social Democracy* (1994). These publications criticize neo-liberal politics, compare the political strategies and policy choices of social democratic parties and analyse the structural societal changes affecting politics. Anthony Giddens' book *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) is part of the scientific debate about political competition in the 1990s. *The Third Way*, however, goes beyond the scientific political and sociological debate and aims at presenting an agenda for modern social democratic politics. As an important adviser to Tony Blair, Giddens wrote a book that is best characterized as a political pamphlet. The introductory chapters, in which he presents his political analysis, are more interesting than the chapters about the various policy fields. The book as a whole forms a challenging basis for discussions about political preferences.

Giddens' analysis starts with the death of socialism and the shortcomings of neo-liberalism (Chapter 1). Both themes have been discussed widely, in the scientific community as well as publicly. The economic deficiencies of western style socialism – social democratic policies regarding the welfare state – became visible in the 1970s under the influence of, as Giddens explains, globalization and technological change. The collapse of central planning ideology in the Soviet Union and the countries in Eastern Europe increased the need for social democratic parties to look for a new political philosophy. Neo-liberalism gained the upper hand in the 1980s, with Thatcher and Reagan as political leaders. Neo-liberalism, however, is not a comprehensive political ideology. According to Giddens, economic individualism in a free market is incompatible with the conservative emphasis on family values and the nation state. The inefficiency of old-style social democracy and the contradictions within the neo-liberal ideology prompted Giddens to look for a third way for social democratic politics.

In searching for this third way, Giddens identifies five dilemmas or themes that need to be confronted by social democratic political parties (chapter 2). These dilemmas concern globalization, individualism, the difference between left and right, political agency, and ecological problems. These dilemmas, which are not independent of one another, were also discussed – more profoundly – in *Beyond Left and Right*. Nevertheless, this chapter gives a concise survey of the political questions that face modern political parties.

1. With respect to globalization, Giddens stresses that economic interdependence is not the most important aspect, and he discusses the effects of modern communications and information technology in a sociological and cultural context. Furthermore, he points out the political implications of the governance problems nation states face and the growing importance of regional and local organizations and authorities.

2. Giddens also links the problems of the nation state with the trend of individualism and lifestyle diversity. For social democrats, solidarity was traditionally organized via collectivist arrangements designed and executed by the state. The problems of the welfare state ask for new ways to create solidarity, and responsibility is, according to Giddens, the key word. The communitarianism debate reverberates here in Giddens' analysis. The importance of the community is stressed in various chapters of the book.

3. Following Bobbio (*Left and Right*, 1996), Giddens discusses political strategy and the difference between left and right. He admits that it is rational for political parties, in times that they have less electoral support than their adversaries, to question the relevance of the left-right division. It is certainly true that left-wing political parties have adopted some of the views of the conservatives. It is rational for these parties to move towards the political centre, as Kitschelt already explained in his book. However, Giddens argues that centre-left is not necessarily the same as moderate left. Some political questions, of which those regarding environmental issues are the most obvious example, need radical answers. Furthermore, for many modern political issues the old left-right division does not apply. Themes such as European integration, globalization, and family politics may be politically divisive, but different views are not based upon division of economic interest. Some of these issues may also need radical answers. For the renewed social democratic parties Giddens prefers to use the term radical-centre, which is an interesting concept.

4. New political issues have changed the political game. New social movements play an important role. These movements – the green political parties are part of this movement – influence the political debates and affect the political ideas of social democratic parties. However, social movements will not replace traditional parliamentary politics. Social democratic parties need to consider how they can take the political influence of social movements, NGOs, single-issue groups, and so forth, into account. Giddens sketches the dilemma, shows confidence in social democratic parties, but has no answers for this political problem.

5. Ecological politics play a particularly important role in Giddens' work. He is influenced by the ideas of Ulrich Beck about the risk society. The question is how

governments or societies take account of modern risks, such as ecological ones. He calls for ecological modernization of social democratic parties and acknowledges that these parties find it difficult to confront the conflict between economic and ecological values.

These are the five dilemmas confronting social democratic parties. What follows, in the remaining chapters of the book (chapters 3, 4, and 5), is an outline – “and it is no more than an outline” (p.69) – of a political programme that takes these dilemmas into account. For objective social scientists these chapters are less interesting than the sketch of the societal dilemmas which may be the subject of further research. The political programme is interesting for political debates. Although Giddens states that his proposals form an integrated political programme, they are mostly rather vague and open for discussion. Nevertheless, they are discussed in a consistent way by defining different levels of political debate: the relation between the state and civil society, the role of the state in society, and the importance of the nation state in global society. Using this division, he discusses proposals for democratization, the concept of a social investment state in a mixed economy, and political aspects of international developments (for example, the European Union and the taming of international financial markets).

It is up to politicians to define concrete policy proposals, but the question is whether this book is concrete enough to be a guideline for politicians to do so, as seems to be Giddens' ambition. Looking at the differences between social democratic parties in, for example, the Netherlands, Germany, France and the UK (and consider Clinton's Democrats across the ocean), my impression is that there are many different third ways. Giddens' contribution to the political debate is his analysis of changing political and sociological circumstances. However, his policy advice to politicians is not convincing. I think that his ambition to develop one coherent third way for social democratic parties is too optimistic. Beside the societal trends Giddens describes, political pragmatism is also part of the present age.

Bart Snels

Kaare Strøm and Lars Svåsand (eds.), *Challenges to Political Parties: The Case of Norway*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1997, ISBN 0-472-10680-5, £ 39.00.

Norway, Europe's peripheral northern outpost, has produced many fine political scientists. The name of Stein Rokkan, spokesman of an earlier generation of scholars, readily comes to mind. The generation following in Rokkan's wake is no less impressive. Students of electoral politics and party politics will not hesitate to acknowledge the scholarly credentials of such researchers as Henry Valen, Knut Heidar, Kaare Strøm and Lars Svåsand. When a book is produced under the co-editorship of the latter two and offers contributions from other eminent Norwegian social scientists, expectations amongst the interested public can only be high, especially when the topic