

Book Review: After the Third Way: The Future of Social Democracy in Europe

by Blog Admin

October 17, 2012

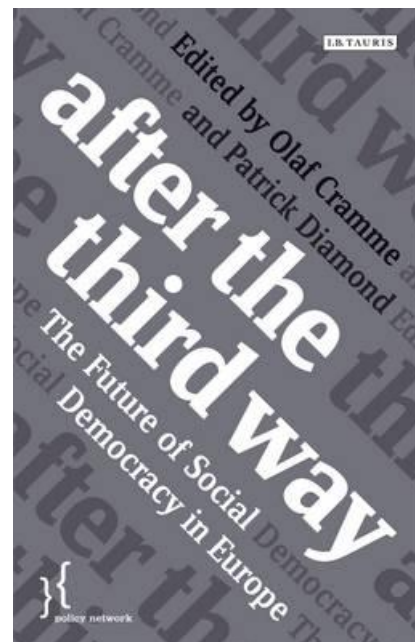
*Electorally marginalised, seemingly ideologically exhausted and often out-of-step with the contemporary zeitgeist, many commentators believe that European social democracy is currently in profound need of revision and renewal. This book marks a serious attempt to forge the intellectual backbone of a renewed social democracy fit for the twenty-first century. Bringing together leading academics, political thinkers and policy experts, it offers a new and original perspective on ideological and policy innovation and will be invaluable reading for anyone interested in the future of social democracy. Reviewed by **Eleanor Bindman**.*



After the Third Way: The Future of Social Democracy in Europe. Olaf Cramme and Patrick Diamond (eds). IB Tauris. April 2012.

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After the Third Way is a collection of essays on the future of mainstream leftwing politics in Europe put together under the aegis of [Policy Network](#), a centre-left thinktank based in the UK. It brings together pieces by leading European academic experts on leftwing politics and policy, journalists, former special advisors to the UK's previous Labour government, and from current Labour Party MP and shadow secretary for work and pensions Liam Byrne. Its contributors aim to address both the current challenges facing Europe's centre-left parties, such as the global economic crisis and European integration, and longer-term structural issues which began in the 1980s, such as the decline in class-based voting, the diminishing power of trade unions and globalisation. These changes have seen many European centre-left parties, perhaps most noticeably 'New' Labour, move increasingly away from the state towards the market.



Yet, as the editors point out, there is a general feeling that contemporary social democracy has "lost its distinctive sense of purpose and governing élan". Each chapter attempts, at least in part, to explore why this might be the case and to offer potential ways out of this stagnant situation by focusing on issues such as education, migration, the changing nature of the welfare state and the currently modish idea of the 'squeezed middle.'

In his piece on 'Global democracy in a new social era,' political sociologist and expert on New Labour [Luke Martell](#) considers some of the challenges to European social democracy posed by globalisation, including more neoliberal economic policies which have led to tax cuts, a reduction in welfare provision and weaker regulation to protect labour and wages. According to Martell, some on the centre-left have come to believe as a result that social democracy should 'modernise' in favour of markets, private provision in the public sector and deregulation, and away from redistribution and Keynesian economics. Yet he argues that this is the wrong path to take and social democrats should focus instead on regulating markets and maintaining boundaries between the state and the market.





In his contribution on the welfare state, [Peter Taylor-Gooby](#) highlights the current dominance of an unstable politics of welfare, with support for social provision waxing and waning depending on the state of the economy, with the Euro-zone crisis being a particular factor. While support for health and education provision remains strong, more obviously redistributive provisions such as unemployment benefits and social housing tend to lose widespread endorsement since they are seen to benefit a particular dependent group. At the same time, welfare provision is threatened by the 'market logic' dominant in certain liberal European countries such as Ireland and the UK which sees the state as a burden on the private sector and implies that the only way to respond to economic crisis is to cut public spending in order to contain state borrowing. Taylor-Gooby points out, however, that this policy, which has been readily adopted by the current UK Government, will lead to greater inequality and poverty. He ends by calling on social democrats to seize the opportunity such a policy position presents and find a way of linking 'investment, equality, opportunity and internationalism.'

Overall this volume offers a useful and, at 16 chapters long, relatively comprehensive overview of some of the challenges and potential opportunities modern European social democracy must contend with. The decision to cover such a breadth of issues and by so many different contributing authors does, however, mean that by necessity each contribution is relatively short and tends to give a general interpretation of the ideas it covers. Nevertheless, it certainly has use as an accessible introductory text for students and policymakers.

Eleanor Bindman is a third-year PhD researcher in Politics at the University of Glasgow. Her research focuses on the EU's human rights policy in relation to Russia, with other research interests including contemporary Russian politics, international relations and social policy. She previously studied Russian language, history and politics at the universities of Edinburgh and London and in 2010 worked as an intern for the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Prior to starting her PhD she worked as a research assistant for Human Rights Watch in Moscow and has also worked as a freelance translator for several years. [Read more reviews by Eleanor.](#)

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