

Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 166 pp., \$27.95, ISBN 0 7456 2267 4.

With over 30 books already on the shelves, and new ones being produced at more than one per year, rumour has it that Professor Giddens' publisher once asked him to slow down—he was swamping his own market. But Polity Press would have had no qualms about his latest contribution—the first serious attempt to outline the political philosophy known as 'the Third Way', by the man often described as 'Tony Blair's favourite intellectual'.

Within Britain, Giddens' book has come under fire from both right and left. Only weeks after its release, in September 1998, *The Economist* described it as 'awesomely, magisterially, and in some ways disturbingly vacuous'. A week later, *The Guardian* published an editorial headlined 'There is no Third Way'. Despite, or perhaps because, of its notoriety, *The Third Way* has become a best-seller in the United Kingdom.

The book throws out two challenges to those of the left (to whom the book is specifically addressed). The first is to pay greater regard to issues outside the left-right spectrum. Giddens pays lip service to Norberto Bobbio's thesis that the left-right distinction remains important, and that inequality is at the core of it. Yet he believes that many ideas outside that dichotomy have been neglected. How should we respond to global warming? Should work remain a central life value? Should we favour devolution? These questions he refers to as 'life politics'.

The second challenge Giddens casts out to social democrats is to reassess the role of the welfare state, which he argues is undemocratic, does not give sufficient space to personal liberty, and can be bureaucratic, alienating and inefficient. But unlike those on the right, he sees this not as a justification for removing the welfare state, but as a clarion call for restructuring it. He favours channelling money through non-government organisations where it is more efficient to do so, and spending it in such a way as to strengthen 'civil liberalism', recapture public space, and create a more open, cosmopolitan society.

The intellectual underpinnings of Giddens' work seem to stem in part from the writings of Amartya Sen, whose 1992 work, *Inequality Reexamined*, argued that social democrats should, instead of aiming to achieve equality of outcome, strive to ensure equality of capability. The influence of Robert Reich, Clinton's first Secretary of Labor, and Geoff Mulgan, now one of Blair's key advisers, is also palpable.

In the United Kingdom, *The Third Way* has been attacked by some for lacking theoretical consistency, and for being no more than a summary of what 'New Labour' is doing in practice; and by others for focusing too heavily on theory, and refusing to commit to concrete policy prescriptions. Certainly, in a work of just 166 pages, Giddens runs the risk of falling into both traps. The brevity of the work can also prove frustrating at times, with the author claiming to be offering no less than 'an integrated political programme covering each of the main sectors of society', yet when it comes to specifics, confessing that 'there is space here only to provide summary answers, and I won't be able to offer enough backing to convince a sceptic in any particular case'.

Ultimately, though, Giddens' book is a valuable contribution to the burgeoning discussion over what exactly constitutes the Third Way. However history views his ideas, his role in igniting debate over the future of social democracy is to be applauded.

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John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 201 pp., £12.95, ISBN 0 7456 2070 1.

Like many others, John Keane has rediscovered the concept of civil society as distinct from political society or the state. Political scientists in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom now realise that civil society is the rock upon which structure and superstructure rest. Stability, coherence, cooperation may spring from how people relate to each other in bus queues, movie theatres, public parks, churches, charities, and the like, more than political symbols or the daily business of parliamentary politics.

Keane's scope is the world, ranging from China to Tunisia, from South Africa to Eastern Europe. His conceptual apparatus arises from Gramsci. The aim is to argue that however disparate the variety

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