**March of the Moderates: Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and the Rebirth of Progressive Politics**, by Richard Carr, London, Tauris, 2019, pp.320, £20.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781788317344

Academic debate over the political character and influences of so-called New Labour has offered a number of perspectives and principal arguments, ranging from early Thatcherite drivers of economic competence to (revisionist) social democratic policy instincts and outcomes to more peripheral progressive concerns on the constitution. Whatever the merits of these interpretations, much of the grounding of the analysis has remained very largely British in its focus. As well as the limits and potential exaggeration of polarised explanations, much of the debate and evaluation ignores international context, influences and dialogue. Similarly, New Labour’s perception of itself, as the architects of a contemporary “Third Way” not bound by traditional ideological parameters – “imaginative” application of “timeless values” in an “increasingly formless world” as Blair himself noted – has not received much in the way of comparative treatment despite its wider international reach and expressions..

Richard Carr has extended this framework and addressed a number of gaps and questions of its progressive roots and character with arguably the first sustained analysis of New Labour and its “Third Way” in wider international perspective. Carr’s political terrain is the “Special Relationship” and Anglo-American context of “Third Way” ideas and relationships in the respective progressive responses of Blair’s New Labour and Bill Clinton’s New Democrats. From the vantage point of our own seemingly more polarised, ideological and *staccato* politics, it tells the story of two decades in the evolution and consolidation of a more consensual brand of progressive pragmatism – or “march of the moderates” – which many now would appear to seek to return to. Despite the warnings of a dwindling band of political soothsayers and doom-mongers – and (declining) toxicity associated with the personalities of Blair and Clinton themselves – Carr’s extended treatment of the long road to progressive hegemony from the late 1980s serves as a reminder of the possibilities of shifting recent entrenchment of the political right. Political strategies and their policies change, but progressive values and their purchase in the electorate remain potentially “timeless”.

Inevitably, Iraq overshadows both Blair’s premiership and progressive credentials and Carr’s narrative. But the representative breadth and detail of the study reminds us that for every Iraq there is also a Kosovo, a policy pursued through NATO on humanitarian grounds and to achieve UN resolutions despite lack of clear UN authority, an objective compromised by strategic self-interest in international politics and Russia’s presence on the Security Council (279-80).

Away from foreign policy and the subsequent shadow of the Iraq War, Carr identifies a platform of ideas, intellectual and policy developments central to the political revival of British and American progressives following the lean years of the 1980s. Arguably necessary economic caution and resistance to arguments for targeted tax cuts to confront large budget deficits were married with reforming agendas and investment in areas such as crime, work and family-oriented policies, healthcare and education. Underpinning respective political agendas and initiatives was the common Third Way “mantra of responsibility, opportunity and community” (153). In light of claims of Third Way vacuity – of ‘centrist’ politics searching for an expedient slogan – Carr manages to convincingly suggest a common conceptual link between key policy themes and a Third Way philosophy of rights *and* responsibilities within a framework of extended opportunities.

These are viewed both in their respective national and transnational comparative contexts, in which the author traces and charts clear intimacy in links and relationships between the projects within a longer framework of revisionist left-leaning ‘transatlanticism’. Among a range of personal and political connections and exchanges driven by the election of Neil Kinnock as Labour leader, he tells us, for example, of various educational and political experiences and associated intellectual development in the US of future Brown Treasury team members such as ‘Eds’, Balls and Miliband, and Douglas Alexander. This included tutelage for Balls from leading Democrats and future Clinton Cabinet members, Larry Summers and Robert Reich (81-2).

While Carr is careful to acknowledge different global perspectives and standings informing respective interpretations of the Third Way, he concludes that the Blair generation of revisionist social democrats was confident and comfortable that a British version of the Third Way should seek to “ape the American success of Bill Clinton” (82). Carr is interesting here too on Kinnock’s role and longer political trajectory of New Labour. Not only had he undertaken his own modernisation of Labour’s platform and acted as a key mentor of New labour’s leading lights, Blair and Brown, but had encouraged the international and transatlantic connections to observe and experience how a *new* ‘centre-left’ was being shaped elsewhere. Questions remain as to what extent the New Democrats and New Labour expressed a genuinely transatlantic Third Way politics or whether they were coincidental and largely discrete expressions or products of wider trends of ideas and responses to a faltering and unmediated neoliberalism. Carr’s well-researched, comprehensive and structured dissection of the background and context of development, intellectual and political antecedents and relative policy successes and failures of Clinton and Blair very largely succeeds in emphasising commonalities of philosophy, outlook and application within their respective national (and international) contexts and mindsets.

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