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Introduction

In the contemporary political landscape of Western Europe, the evolution of social democracy has sparked renewed debates on its capacity to adapt to the dynamics of global capitalism and the post-industrial society. Against this backdrop, the emergence of the so-called Third Way represents a pivotal moment in the redefinition of the ideological boundaries of the Left. Conceived as a form of political pragmatism that seeks to transcend the binary opposition between state interventionism and market liberalism, this doctrine has profoundly reshaped the discursive strategies of centre-left parties, particularly in the United Kingdom under New Labour.

This paper aims to provide a theoretical appraisal of the Third Way as articulated within New Labour's political project. It explores how this rhetoric of “modernisation” has operated simultaneously as a mode of ideological renewal and as a communicative instrument of governance. By combining insights from political theory and discourse analysis, the study examines the rearticulation of key social democratic concepts—such as equality, efficiency, and community—within the broader context of globalisation and neoliberal hegemony.

1. Rethinking Social Democracy

Social democracy can be defined as an “ideological stance that supports a broad balance between market capitalism, on the one hand, and state intervention, on the other hand” (Heywood, 2012: 128). However, this equilibrium is rather wavering as the compromise between market and state lacks a systematic underlying theory and is intrinsically vague, according to many political observers. Social democratic parties adopted revisionism

not to abolish capitalism, but to tame it, as they recognized the potency and dynamism of the capitalist market. This led to the abandonment of planning and extensive nationalisations in favour of more modest objectives, such as the mixed economy and economic management, in an attempt to regulate capitalism to deliver sustainable growth. In this respect, Anthony Giddens, one of the architects of New Labour and the leading theorist of the Third Way, underlined the dramatic changes experienced by the British society, as well as by most Western countries, and acknowledged that: “social democratic parties no longer have a consistent ‘class bloc’ on which to rely. Since they can’t depend upon their previous identities, they have to create new ones in a socially and culturally more diverse environment”. (Giddens, 1998: 23).

New Labour was no exception in the redefinition of its political and ideological trajectory. In fact, in the late 1970s, the Labour Party sought to renew its policies and gradually repositioned its ideology to the centre-right of the political spectrum. This shift was accomplished via two significant initiatives: the rewriting of Clause IV and the adoption of the Third Way. New Labour modernisers embarked on a vast crusade of deconstructing old narratives by presenting a ‘new’ reformed version of the party’s core tenet. This new interpretation is meant to supersede the traditional association between Labour and the working class and, thus, change the points of reference in radical politics. The reformulation of the clause is a significant marker for the demise of the ‘socialist agenda’ within New Labour; and signals Blair’s new paradigms that allowed “Labour leadership to disengage from the policy positions and mindset of the past, and present Labour in a new light to the electorate” (Gamble, 2005: 432).

Indeed, most politicians agree that politics is generally defined by its cogent discourse. As many linguists and political analysts

have underlined, words have an enormous impact on moulding leaders' discourses. In this respect, rewriting Clause IV was not only an ideological shift but also an exercise of style. In retrospect, it is noteworthy that Clause IV was the 'article of faith' within Labour's constitution, but practically it was "a mere consolation prize, intended to appease the socialists" (Shaw, 1996: 6), especially the radical left militants. It was rather a myth that served as a long-term aim to unite the party's members into a cohesive block. According to Saville, "myths and illusions form an interesting and often an extraordinary part of the political behaviour of many individuals who make up the Labour movement" (Saville, 1988: 44). Concisely, socialism was an efficient and practical political option that did not shake the foundations of capitalism.

In his memoirs, 'A Journey' (2011), Blair acknowledges its symbolic function stating that: "no one believed in it, yet no one dared remove it", (it) "was not just something redundant in our constitution, but a refusal to confront reality, to change profoundly, to embrace the modern world wholeheartedly" (p.76). More relevantly, the compelling reason for the modernisers' crusade against the clause was the elimination of trade unions' influence, as well as the weakening of their representational power and their ties with the party. The overall aim of New Labour was to build a new consensus based on practice rather than outdated ideology. In this respect, the new version of the Clause was written in a loose way to include all the British social classes despite their political bias; pledging, thus, the party to "common endeavour in pursuit of the realisation of individual potential... (where) wealth and opportunity should be in the hands of the many not the few" (Driver and Martell, 2006: 14).

Contrary to the first version that endowed the party with a socialist scope, the new statement omitted reference to 'workers, equitable distribution, and common ownership of the means of

production, distribution and exchange'. The reshuffled clause also insists on interactivity between the state and the citizen by proposing a partnership between the public and private sector in an attempt to reconcile two diametrically opposed political discourses. This also signals that Left/Right distinction is no longer relevant "for understanding the major ideological and policy issues in contemporary policies and the respective stances on these issues adopted by rival political parties" (Guest, 2001: 207). According to the globalisation narrative, a new ideological basis is needed to meet the exigencies of a technologically oriented society. As such, the shift to the right operated by New Labour leaders is explained by the 'New Times' theory that transcends old ideologies to create an innovative discourse as a replacement for the old binary rhetoric.

In a nutshell, despite linguistic lucubration and vagueness of New Labour's discourse, the constitutional reform policy adopted by the modernisers has purified Labour's constitution of any socialist connotation and freed the party from the conservatism of its past. This new doctrinal basis has erased the distinction between manual or intellectual work, made no mention of state control over economic activities, and made no mention of a 'common ownership principle'. Instead, 'opportunity, responsibility, fairness and trust' have become the modern key words meant to confer more realism and pragmatism to New Labour's discourse. These semantic variations involve the power of rhetoric that massively contributes in the process of manipulation.

Van Dijk (2006) has underlined this manipulative aspect of language. In his article 'Discourse and Manipulation', he provides an exhaustive analysis on how language can influence the thinking process stating that 'manipulation as mind control involves the interference with processes of understanding, the formation biased mental models and social representations such

as knowledge and ideologies” (pp. 359-381). Mastering language was essential to Labour’s “spin doctors” to legitimate the party’s duality between Old Left and New Right. It is then noticeable that the power of rhetoric helped New Labour achieve a smooth transition from a socio-democratic discourse to a neo-liberal one, providing a more pragmatic political project.

To depart from the image that presents Labour as heavily anchored in the bitter political struggles of the past, the modernizers adopted a pro-competition agenda within a ‘knowledge-based’ economy to escape the systematic traditional identification with the working class. The absence of a conception of class conflict helped attract a modern electorate that could easily identify with Labour’s new values in the light of fast economic and social change. Hence, the party became synonymous with market economy by accepting private-sector involvement in those very areas that were traditionally relegated to the state. New Labour’s political orientation is presented as the new reflection that could meet the irreversible changes in the 1980s, and Third Way rhetoric as the new post-war consensus to reconcile political polarities.

It is important to clarify from the outset the position of the Third Way, which oscillates between Old Labour’s social democratic tradition and Thatcherite New Right. Third Way politics, then, constitutes a departure from traditional social democracy and neo-liberalism, the two political ideologies that dominated post-war British politics. New Labour modernisers have extensively utilised this concept as the ‘miraculous’ solution to all the political and economic ills because it “stands not only for social justice, but also for economic dynamism and the unleashing of creativity and innovation” (Blair, 1996, p. 108). As such, they tried to forge “coherent connections between the policies and ideas –‘enterprise’, ‘flexibility’, ‘welfare-to-work’,

social exclusion/inclusion’, ‘participation’, ‘fairness’ and so forth” (Fairclough, 2000: 4). In his book *The Global Third Way Debate*, Anthony Giddens notes that the concept refers to “a much more generic series of endeavours, common to the majority of left parties and thinkers in Europe and elsewhere, to restructure leftist doctrines” (p.2). The underlying principle of this doctrine is to establish a new mixed economy by forming a partnership between the government and various civil society agencies.

Supporters of the third way present a new social reading grid by adopting a consensual view of society, in contrast to socialism’s conflicting view. They highlight the ties that connect the different components of society rather than class differences and economic inequalities, offering “to what almost amounts to a non-dualistic world view” (Heywood, 2012: 135). As such, the third way’s welfare proposal lies outside neo-liberalism’s individualism and social democracy’s belief in state benefits. This entails a new thinking approach to the role of the state as the doctrine embraces the objective of a competitive and market state.

2. The Third Way: The New Trend in British Politics

The Third Way emerged as the dominant reference point in British politics compared with other sectarian philosophies. It is not an ideology in itself, but rather a rhetoric of newness that allows theorizing as to its adaptability as an essential norm of decision. As such, it must be assessed both in its global context as a specific response to neo-liberalism, and its interpretation by Blair and the modernisers within Labour. Likewise, behind the rhetoric of newness, it is important to consider the extent to which the party had a substantive understanding of such a vision.

In his analysis of Labour’s successive electoral defeat, Blair asserted that “the reason we have been out of power for fifteen years is simple- society changed and we refused to change with it” (Blair, 1996: 11). A new ‘hegemonic’ project had to be created

to counteract the Thatcherite New Right, and establish a new form of governance in a globalised world where capitalism has mutated into an ‘information society or knowledge economy’. New Labour leaders impregnated by the ‘philosophy’ of newness, “acted discursively to position new from old, and to present both Left and Right as outdated” (Powell, 2000: 18), on a sociological rather than ideological basis. This required a modern organising framework to assign new roles for both state and individuals to satisfy the strong desires of the party leaders to avoid the extremes, i.e. between those who claim, “Government is the enemy and those for whom the government is the answer (Giddens, 1998: 70).

Third Way is the perfect response to clarify New Labour’s approach to politics. It also serves as a sound barometer for assessing the party’s constitutional and ideological reforms. Labour’s strategy of reaching Middle England by adopting their rhetoric makes the working classes the first collateral damage, which led to a marked class dealignment. In the process of the marketization of the party, Blair claimed, “ideas need labels if they are to become popular and widely understood”, arguing that the Third Way was “the best label for the new politics which the progressive centre-left is forging in Britain and beyond” (Gamble, 2005: 430).

This explains the modernisers’ eagerness to reconcile two traditional political notions – neo-liberalism and social democracy- that are located at the end of the political spectrum, and regarded to be mutually exclusive. Third Way paradigm transcends this binary approach to the economy by proposing reconciliation between antagonistic themes such as: patriotism and internationalism; rights and responsibilities; the promotion of enterprise and the attack on poverty and discrimination.

Thereby, it unites the two notions that have been separated from each other to the detriment of progressive politics.

Third Way politics encapsulates New Labour's specific values in response to the new challenges imposed by globalisation. It offers more substantive possibilities for political reforms and constitutes a means of freeing Labour "from attachment to particular dogmas and principles, allowing them to respond to what voters actually thought was most important" (Gamble, 2005: 432). In a speech delivered in 1997, Tony Blair revealed his political agenda and Labour's new ideological orientation stating that: "our task today is not to fight old battles but to show that there is a third way, a way of marrying together an open, competitive and successful economy with a just, decent and humane society" (Driver & Martell, 2006: 2). This would be the ideal recipe if ideologically both concepts were not 'sensibly' mutually exclusive.

Reconciling two antithetical concepts i.e. economic efficiency and social justice seemed to be the perfect combination that helped New Labour maintain power for three mandates in a row. Thus, New Labour advocated a policy freed from ideological restraints where "the debate on the welfare state is shifted on to the secondary technical issues of delivery and efficiency" (Powell, 1999: 23). In practical terms, the role of the state under Old Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s has been redefined to be in accord with the global environment "in which the increasing globalisation of economies, the deconstruction of gender and identity, and the transformation of industry and technology were the new challenges" (Callinicos, 2001: 36). The 'new mixed economy' became New Labour's *catch phrase* and the new political consensus meant to counterbalance Thatcher's new right policies.

In this respect, Third Way logic sets up a modernistic and somewhat limited role for the state that of an enabling institution

that helps to set the right conditions for economic stability and business investments. In a workable way, the government provides citizens with keys to succeed such as opportunity, education and employment by equipping and empowering them to meet global challenges. In his different speeches, Blair minimises the role of the state, which should not be a player but a guarantor in economic issues. Its primary role is not ownership of industry or intervention, but the provision of an appropriate environment for private entrepreneurs who are responsible for creating wealth, generating jobs, and sustaining economic growth. The new strategy of the ‘Third Wayers’ is to forge partnerships with the private sector meant to provide public services via a strong public-private framework.

This rigorous policy of pragmatism summed up in ‘what counts is what works’ focuses attention on “technical questions rather than on issues of principle” (Powell, 2004: 14). Anthony Giddens contends that: “in a world experiencing such profound changes a certain pragmatism and readiness to experiment is necessary” (2001: 05). Pragmatism thus, seemed the seminal constituent of this new policy as “social classes can be brought together through equality of opportunity” (Ibid: 12). It was praised by the German SDP in 1998- whose slogan was the ‘Neue Mitte’- literally the new middle- and by French Socialists, whose desire was to forge a “new left” where innovation and social justice, modernisation and tradition can harmoniously cohabit.

As to New Labour, its adoption of pragmatism as a cogent policy does not imply that the party ditched traditional values. It, in fact, rejected the economic basis of socialism as well as the Keynesian-informed agenda of post-war social democracy. It favoured supply-side socialism, which aims to increase the flow, enhance the quality and improve the use of factor inputs; the primary objective being to increase productive efficiency,

reduce unit cost and, crucially, enhance Britain's international competitiveness (Thompson, 1996: 39); by all standards, this agenda is a significant ideological and paradigm change. Actually, Old Labour's blurred policies are replaced by New Labour's transparent vision, which combines economic and public service policies as part of the party's dual objectives.

To meet these constraints a new economic policy was opted for in the shape of raising the living standards and the creation of more jobs. In fact, New Labour abandoned the idea of the state as a saviour, promoted consumerism and encouraged "the mixed economy of welfare by reducing welfare dependency" (Powell, 1999: 3). As economic prosperity and expediency entail the acceptance of globalised markets better suited to "new times", New Labour embraced the neo-liberal commitment to low inflation as well as the prominent role of business circles. Tony Blair, in defence of his economic orientations, pleaded that the government's overall approach is to provide political and, mainly, economic stability by proposing new alternatives that would empower citizens and best equip them for future challenges. (Blair, 1998: 18).

This innovative tactic embraces the rhetoric of reconciliation, including a stable and competitive market, economic dynamism, social inclusion, and economic growth for all components of society. Central to the Third Way is the concept of linking economic efficiency to social justice and competitiveness. In fact, the new global economy needed flexible skilled workers as "globalisation has placed a premium on workers with skills and knowledge to adapt to advancing technology" Blair, 1999: 3). Indeed, unskilled people find it difficult to compete "in a world in which capital, raw materials and ideas are increasingly mobile, it is the skill and ability of the workforce which define the ability of a national economy to compete" (Bevir, 2005: 111).

Therefore, an effective economy could be ensured by developing a skilled, flexible workforce capable of competing in the global marketplace.

In this particular case, New Labour advocates have emulated the American model extolling “the virtues of flexible labour markets and building welfare around the needs of flexible labour workforce, with training and education to deal with job insecurity” (Martell, 1998: 50). A healthy economy depends on the high proportion of the labour force in jobs; this is evidenced by the fact that in 2006 nearly 75% of the labour force was at work in Great Britain. The government’s concentration on employment and not unemployment- that entails state-funded benefits- was central to its social policy. The target was to gradually reduce poverty by half and completely eradicate it by 2010. Under this scheme, “welfare claimants are offered four options: work experience, voluntary experience, further education or training” (McAnulla, 2006: 128); and those who reject this New Deal offer without tangible reasons “lose the whole of their benefit “ (Purdy, 2000: 187).

As a reminder, education is the number one priority on New Labour’s political agenda; it constitutes the central strategy for future economic improvement. In fact, in a modern, global, knowledge-based society, the government encourages investment in education to provide individuals with opportunities and secure employment. In Blair’s words: “higher educational standards are the key to international competitive and inclusive society for the future” (Blair, 1998: 18). For him, “education is the best economic policy there is” (Driver and Martell, 1998: 57). Hence, New Labour’s scheme offers a policy that is not based on class distinction by putting forward an all-embracing category, which focuses on community and equal opportunities for all in education and employment.

As we have seen thus far, New Labour worked hard to distance itself from Old Labour by adopting the Third Way strategy, bringing itself ever closer ideologically to the Conservative Party. This is evidenced by the government's economic policy, which kept public spending within the targets set by Thatcher's government. In fact, New Labour's policy proposals and implementation clearly reflect this rightward ideological swing, underpinned by the same token that the squad of modernisers within the party has betrayed the primary tenets of social democracy. In their attempt to be the government of the radical centre, the modernisers set aside criticisms by marketing their party as a new type of radical movement, and by presenting the Third Way as a transcendental policy that would sustain an agenda of economic, welfare and civic reform meant to go beyond the traditional left/right divisions.

By not committing to a specific ideological *modus operandi*, the Third Way is thus flexible enough to adapt to social democratic parties' revisionism, meant to reconcile the new right, social democratic and communitarian discourses. Indeed, New Labour has elaborated a distinctive version of neoliberalism that has been described as “Thatcherism with a Christian Socialist face” (Jessop, 1998: 2). Concurrently with an ideological repositioning, New Labour has, in fact, carried out a strategic renewal to form a hegemonic project and create therefore, a ‘historic bloc’. Its advocates were not ideologues driven by personal convictions, but pragmatic professionals who used mass and social media to market their policies.

3. New Labour's Project: Between Rhetoric and Reality

The radical political agenda proposed by New Labour, whose motto is the ‘inclusive middle’, aimed to transcend the politics of left and right, was not largely welcomed, as it encountered sweeping criticisms. Indeed, for many political experts, the Third Way is a vague concept that lacks distinction and coherence, failing to offer a real alternative to conservative policies. In this

respect, Stuart Hall (1998) stated that there is an important flaw within New Labour's politics, which is its ambition to be 'all-inclusive' and that the Third Way rhetoric proposes a view that does not envision any interests that cannot be reconciled. This 'utopian' approach proposes politics without adversaries and, *de facto*, is considered inconsistent with any project to transform and modernise radically a given society, without disturbing any existing interests.

New Labour's credibility was also questioned regarding its ability to put Third Way principles into practice and deliver its electoral pledges. By not ditching new right policies, criticisms gradually suggested that there was nothing really concrete in the principles on which New Labour's approach was built. However, the main criticism was that, for electoral expediency, the party has abandoned its traditional left-wing policies and its social democratic history, even though Blair and his cohort argued that their policies derive from left-wing values re-appropriated for the modern age. For Panitch and Leys (1997), the acceptance of capitalist economic management was a betrayal that calls into question the transcendental nature of New Labour's project.

For their defence, New Labour advocates claimed that the new politics of the party did not assign prevalence to the market like the Conservatives do; hence, there is no betrayal of Old Labour traditional values. In fact, New Labour's mission was to provide a modern welfare state by helping people into real jobs. Indeed, the proliferation of words related to the field of work contained in New Labour's discourse, such as 'employees', 'workfare', 'employment', and 'welfare-to-work', reveals the party's new rhetoric that discourages dependency. The new political context is thus regulated by the ethic of work and dynamic involvement in wealth production, and not by the redistribution of income to the needy.

This approach distinguishes New Labour's ideology from the neo-liberal individualistic principle based on competition within the free market, which is, in the long run, socially destructive. This is replaced by the community value, such as cooperation and mutual support, with an emphasis on individuals' responsibility to society. In economic matters, the other novelty of New Labour is its adoption of the stakeholder approach, which specifies that the company "is not only at the heart of the economy, it is at the heart of society" (Howell, 2004, 11). The recognition of companies as social corporations entails that every company is embedded in a large network of reciprocal interests of society, including employees, customers, local residents, and shareholders.

Albeit New Labour philosophy differs substantially from New Right ideology, it has nevertheless been accused of being a new version of Thatcherism as the concept of 'opportunity for all' is based on personal fulfilment rather than collective sharing of resources. The new millennium has indeed imposed a new approach to macro-economic, industrial and social policies; thereby, the Third Way 'package policy' is undoubtedly a viable strategy that combines neo-liberal and social democratic policies to depart from both old-style *dirigisme* and rampant *laissez-faire*.

Conclusion

Globalisation and New Times rhetoric has imposed a new rhythm in the conduct of policy. As such, Western social democratic parties, including the Labour Party, embarked on a vast program of revisionism to update their policies. The overall process of modernisation entailed a series of dramatic internal, organisational, and ideological changes within New Labour at both the structural and rhetorical levels. Blair and the modernisers, who wholeheartedly embraced neoliberalism as the new political paradigm, have successfully carried out the process of modernisation, which began as a response to Britain's decaying economy.

The constitutional and ideological transformation of the Labour Party represents a significant shift from left-reformist social democratic policies to neoliberal policies. In fact, if the left/right divide period was characterised by dogmatic ideological certainties, contemporary global politics has swung towards a more pragmatic era, regulated by consensual politics. This seismic shift encapsulates the very notion of the Third Way, which was meant to break the old political mould to constitute a middle ground between the Left and the Right. In this sense, it expresses a form of social democracy better suited to international capitalism.

Thus, in New Labour's rhetoric, both 'economic dynamism' and 'social justice' are presented in a symbiotic relationship; in reality, they are mutually exclusive, as social justice entails the state's power to control the economy. Many critics have underlined this inherent contradiction stating that the balance between the two lacks substance. This dichotomy between rhetoric and substance is at the heart of any cogent analysis of New Labour.

However, the specificity of the Third Way- as a policy package' lays in reconciling antagonistic themes to emerge as a third alternative between statism and liberalism. The extent to which New Labour has been successful in creating this equilibrium is assessed through its economic and political

reforms. The rhetoric of social justice and equal opportunity, while emphasising the role of free markets and individual responsibility, marked New Labour's governance during its three mandates. The Third Way, as a renewal of outdated ideology, constitutes a radical and modernising approach to building a new rhetoric to fit the new global order. It allowed New Labour to win the battle of ideas in British politics that of reconciling "the two great streams of left-of- centre thought-democratic socialism and liberalism-whose divorce this century did so much to weaken progressive politics across the West" (Blair, 1998: 191). Being a uniting element the Third Way constitutes then the new 'Commonsense' of many western social democratic parties that would enable them to create a new identity in a socially and culturally diverse environment.

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Abstract

In the 1980s, social democratic parties in Western Europe adopted revisionism to further their reformist agendas. This approach entailed distancing their political structures from the principles and commitments to traditional old-style social democracy, while adopting neo-liberal ideas and ideals that became the new rhetorical norms in a globalised world. This resulted in a modernistic ideological thesis namely the Third Way, which- for many centre-left parties such as New Labour- constitutes a transcendental politics or a surrogate form of economics to both state socialism and free-market capitalism. This article investigates the Third Way as a practical 'operational code' that helped the Labour Party to demarcate itself and propose a viable alternative to end the old ideological debate. Considering this, the questions looming are: how influential has the Third Way been since its adoption as a renewal of liberalism? Does the left/right ideological distinction still matter? What is its exact relevance within global politics when the 'Third Way' narrative has blurred the traditional ideological variance? Based upon New Labour party organisation and policy proposals, I will assess the pertinence of the party's ideological shift and the limits of its reforms. This paper also offers an appraisal of New Labour's liberal socialism where social justice and economic efficiency are not mutually exclusive but- against all odds- are rather symbiotic.

Keywords

Third Way, New Labour, social democracy, political discourse, neoliberalism, hegemony, Tony Blair, Anthony Giddens

ملخص

يقدّم هذا المقال تقييماً نظرياً لمفهوم «الطريق الثالث» كما تبلور، منذ تسعينيات القرن العشرين، بوصفه أفقاً خطابياً جديداً لدى أحزاب الديمقراطية الاجتماعية في أوروبا الغربية، ولا سيّما لدى «حزب العمال الجديد» في بريطانيا. ففي سياق إعادة تشكيل الإيديولوجيات بعد الحرب الباردة، يُعرض الطريق الثالث باعتباره مشروعاً لتجاوز الثنائيات التقليدية بين

الدولة والسوق، والجماعية والفردانية، والمساواة والنجاعة. وانطلاقاً من أعمال أنطوني غيدنز ومن التحوّلات البرنامجية للبليزية، يفحص المقال تماسك هذا المشروع مفهوماً وُجْهَةً، وآليات شرعنته، وفاعليته البلاغية بوصفه «حسّاً مشتركاً» سياسياً. كما يبرز الدور المحوري لإعادة التسمية وإعادة بناء السرد في صناعة الإجماع، ويكشف مناطق الالتباس التي تمنح الخطاب قابلية عالية للتكيف. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنّ الطريق الثالث يميل إلى وصل مرجعيات اجتماعية-ديمقراطية بعقلانية السوق دون قطيعة مع أسس الرأسمالية.

الكلمات الرئيسية

الطريق الثالث، حزب العمال الجديد، الديمقراطية الاجتماعية، الخطاب السياسي، النيوليبرالية، الهيمنة، توني بلير، أنطوني غيدنز

Résumé

Cet article propose une appréciation théorique de la « troisième voie » (Third Way) telle qu'elle s'est imposée, à partir des années 1990, comme un nouvel horizon discursif des partis sociaux-démocrates en Europe occidentale, et tout particulièrement du New Labour. Dans un contexte de recomposition idéologique post-guerre froide, la troisième voie se présente comme une solution de dépassement des oppositions traditionnelles entre État et marché, collectivisme et individualisme, égalité et efficacité. En s'appuyant sur les travaux d'Anthony Giddens et sur les inflexions programmatiques du blairisme, l'étude interroge la cohérence conceptuelle de ce projet, ses modalités de légitimation et sa performativité rhétorique comme « sens commun » politique. Elle met en évidence le rôle central de la requalification lexicale et de la réorientation narrative dans la fabrication d'un consensus, ainsi que les zones d'indétermination qui rendent le dispositif particulièrement adaptable. La conclusion montre que la troisième voie tend à articuler des référents sociaux-démocrates à une rationalité de marché, sans rompre avec les fondements du capitalisme.

Mots-clés

troisième voie, New Labour, social-démocratie, discours politique, néolibéralisme, hégémonie, Tony Blair, Anthony Giddens.