

Part IV

The discourse and strategy of the Third Way

Introduction

The Third Way, particularly in its New Labour form, is often presented as a triumph of style over substance and the product *par excellence* of a soundbite political culture. Far from dismissing the discourse of the Third Way, however, the contributions that comprise Part IV start from the position that discourse plays a key role in developing substantial political objectives. A critical engagement with the discourse of the Third Way is thus integral to an understanding of the political character of New Labour, as well as in the forging of viable alternatives. Interestingly, the importance of the discursive elements of political strategy are not lost on third-wayers themselves. Leading New Labour modernisers frequently call for the Centre-Left to develop a more robust narrative, linking in the public mind disparate policy mixes as part of a ‘big picture’.

David Morrison traces how the key objectives of Centre-Left modernisers have been discursively articulated, both prior to and through the Third Way. He suggests that while labels such as ‘stakeholding’ and ‘the Third Way’ may be transient, a core modernising version of citizenship has been remarkably consistent since the early 1990s. Consequently, the Third Way theory offered by Giddens, like that of stakeholding before it, has been appropriated by New Labour and other Centre-Left actors only selectively, where it is of use in developing this enduring agenda. This is based on neo-liberal assumptions about the nature of a ‘changed world’ that must be adapted to, the perceived failure of both the Old Left and the neo-liberals themselves in responding to that change, and the need for a consensual society apparently free from antagonism in developing new responses. This analysis reveals the Third Way as an attempt to actively construct an economic ‘Subject’ appropriate to external imperatives such as economic globalisation and labour market flexibility.

Paul Cammack undertakes a similarly close reading of the language of the Third Way, focusing on the work of Giddens in particular. Like Morrison, he sees Third Way discourse as reflecting a definite and coherent project. For Morrison, that project is the attempt to reconcile social justice and economic efficiency. Alternatively, as Cammack sees things, Giddens has deliberately subverted the language of social democracy in order to usher in a new and aggressive phase of

neo-liberalism. On his account, the Third Way is not an attempt to address the perceived failures of both the Old Left and neo-liberalism, but rather the ideological expression of a new phase of capitalist expansion into all areas of social life. The Third Way is thus, for Cammack, a reflection and an agent of the triumph of neo-liberalism, rather than an attempt to move beyond it.

In both contributions, the deeper structural imperatives of capital accumulation loom large. However, their authors imply that third-wayers could have *chosen* different – more progressive – strategies. This suggests a continuing role for political agency and room for alternative Third Way discourses.

The conditions for developing such alternatives are discussed in the concluding chapter, by Will Leggett. Leggett surveys the general state of criticism of the Third Way, in particular as illustrated by the contributors to this book. He suggests that critics are at their most convincing when they take the Third Way seriously, engage with the analysis it makes of social change, but show how such change can be taken in a more progressive direction than at present. He illustrates the importance of these features by considering our contributors' suggested reconstructions of Third Way themes and, in particular, by revealing an enduring role for the traditional leftist concern with the distribution of wealth and power.