



Hard Choices: Social Democracy in the Twenty- First Century

Christopher Pierson

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As the twenty-first century dawned, social democratic parties across Europe and beyond found themselves newly, and rather surprisingly, in the ascendant. Britain's New Labour was only the most spectacular in a whole series of political restorations. For many, this renewal only became possible when 'modernizing' social democratic parties jettisoned their old ideological and institutional baggage, setting off down a 'third way' that rejected the outmoded ideas of both left and right. The argument of *Hard Choices* is that this view is doubly misleading: it misrepresents the past and misunderstands the present.

The first half of the book restores some of the complexity to social democracy's past and shows that it was much more subtle, varied and intelligent than its latter-day critics suppose. Turning to the present, the second half of the book shows how a few contemporary half-truths - relating to globalization and demographic change - have been used to justify the abandonment of the defining core of a social democratic politics. The book does not argue that 'nothing has really changed'. In fact, a great deal has changed and policy-makers have to adjust to a range of new circumstances, constraints (and opportunities). But those who exhort us simply to abandon the 'traditional' terrain of the centre-left are wrong. Social democracy remains just what it always was - a politics of messy compromises and hard choices.

This book will appeal to undergraduates, postgraduates and scholars in politics, social policy and political sociology, as well as the interested general reader.

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