

## Comments and Reviews

Review of *Conservative Politics in Western Europe*,  
edited by Zig Layton-Henry,  
(1982) London: Macmillan Press

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The basic problem in the analysis of present-day conservative politics is the decision as to what is to count as conservatism. In the introduction to the volume on conservative politics in Western Europe, Zig Layton-Henry makes an attempt to solve this problem. His solution is the *eclectic alternative*: the concept of conservatism or conservative politics denotes a set of ideas that derives from Edmund Burke on the one hand, but this set also comprises notions that are associated with political parties themselves claiming to be conservative on the other hand. What is common to this ideological heritage and present-day conservative practices? According to Layton-Henry, what unites tradition and actual operations today is that both belong to the right side of the ideological continuum, whose characteristics are 'the preservation of the status quo and opposition to change' (p. 6).

It may be argued that such an ideological criterion for the identification of conservative parties — and the volume is in fact about the set of conservative parties — creates more problems than it solves. It is a well-known fact that the term 'conservative' is by no means a neutral one; actually, some political parties defend themselves against this label being attached to them. Moreover, it is not that easy to arrive at consensus about which political parties in actual fact pursue policies that result in the 'preservation of the status quo' or imply an 'opposition to any change'.

The problem of identifying the set of conservative parties becomes acute when it comes to classifying parties that confess themselves to liberalism, Christian democracy or to the newly emerged politics of distrust. In the chapter on the British conservative party we note that, according to Gillian Peele, its conservative ideology in the current period is the expression of 'an increasingly self-confident neo-conservatism, owing more to nineteenth-century liberalism than to traditional conservatism' (p. 31), which is somewhat

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different from the identification criteria introduced by Layton-Henry. And in the contribution dealing with the Swedish experience, Sten Berglund and Ulf Lindström note that Moderata Samlingspartiet has 'signalled the return to a tougher, right-wing conservative stand' and yet it 'singles itself out on issues like free enterprise and government interventionism' (p. 72). What is a conservative party and what is a liberal party? How are we to handle the fact that a party traditionally identified as conservative calls itself the most liberal party in Sweden (in the words of the former party leader Gösta Bohman)?

Drawing the demarcation line between conservative parties and Christian democratic parties may result in even larger problems. It appears that it is very difficult to apply the concept of a conservative party within the party systems of Belgium and the Netherlands; in fact, it is not at all surprising that Anthony Mughan talks about conservatism in Belgium in a narrow sense. And consequently Mario Caciagli is hesitant about equating conservatism with the Democrazia Christiana in Italy: 'Nevertheless, the DC has represented and still represents the centre-right pole in the Italian party system' (p. 264). However, Layton-Henry counts the Christian Democratic Party of Italy as conservative, because he recognizes the need for a distinction between various types of conservative parties, some being less in opposition to 'any change'; he states:

'While Christian democrats, for good historical and electoral reasons, may repudiate the term 'Conservative', in terms of their political principles and policies, the nature of their political support and their political position vis-à-vis other major European parties, they can be identified as conservatives of the pragmatic and reformist tradition'. (p. 17).

Also problematic is the distinction between conservative parties and the newly emerged populist parties. In the Danish paper by Ib Faurby and Ole P. Kristensen there is an interesting attempt to determine by empirical method if the populist parties — the CD and the FRP — should be described as conservative. Though the data consisting of surveys to party activists have to be handled with care, the conclusion of the authors is a straightforward one: 'nor when it comes to ideology and policy are the new parties really conservative' (p. 101). But, how do we know what is 'really' conservative?

If ideology is problematic or if labels cannot be trusted, then perhaps more simple criteria could be resorted to. One could easily employ a criterion like participation in the European Democratic Union (EDU); or it is possible to use data on the self-orientation of the voters on the left-right continuum to construct a criterion that would count those parties as conservative whose voters belong to the right side of the continuum. If participation in the EDU is used as the criterion, then some of the Christian democratic parties like ÖVP (Austria), CDU-CSU (West Germany), CDS (Portugal) and the CVP

(Switzerland) belong to the set of conservative parties, whereas the same type of parties in Belgium, the Netherlands and in Italy must be excluded. The

Table 1. Overview of Conservative and Christian Democratic Parties in Western Europe.

Country	Party	Included in Layton- Henry (ed)	Membership in		Electoral position on a left-right scale as reported by ***	
			EUCD*	EDU**	Sani & Sartori 1980:10	Inglehart & Klinge- mann 1976:253
Austria	Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP)		x	x	7.6	
Belgium	Parti Social Chrétien (PSC-CVP)	x	x		7.3	
Denmark	Konservative Folkeparti (KF)	x		x		7.4
	Fremskridtspartiet (FRP)	x				6.1
Finland	Kansallinen Kokoomus (KOK)			x	8.1	
	Svenska Folkpartiet (RKP)			(x)		
France	Rassemblement pour la République (RPR)	x		x	7.3	7.2
	Parti Républicain (PR)	x			6.8	
	Centre des Démocrats Sociaux (CDS)			x		
Germany W.	Christlich-Demokratische Union (CDU-CSU)	x	x	x	7.0	7.4
Greece	Nea Demokratia (ND)			(x)		
Ireland	Fine Gael (FG)			x		6.7
Italy	Democrazia Cristiana (DC)	x	x		5.9	5.6
	Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)			(x)		
Netherlands	Christen-Democratisch Appel (CDA)	x	x			
	Anti-Revolutionaire Partij (ARP)	x	x		7.0	7.8
	Christelijk-Historische Unie (CHU)	x	x		7.2	7.9
	Katholieke Volkspartij (KVP)	x	x		6.9	7.3
	Norway	Høyre	x		x	
Portugal	Centro Democratico Social (CDS)			x	x	
	Spain	Union de Centro Democratico (UCD)	x		(x)	5.9
-	Alianza Popular (AP)	x			7.0	
	Equip			x		
Sweden	Moderata Samlingspartiet (MOD)	x		x		
Switzerland	Christliche Volkspartei (CVP)			x	(x)	7.1
Britain	Conservative Party (CONS)	x		x	7.2	7.5

NOTES:

\* EUCD stands for European Union of Christian Democrats

\*\* EDU stands for European Democratic Union and a parenthesis indicates that the party has a status of observer

\*\*\* The higher the value of the index, the more to the right

employment of the other indicator has similar consequences, though it appears to be questionable if the DCI is or is not to be included in the set of conservative parties. Table 1 covers some alternative classifications (cf. Pridham). Summing up, it may be stated that the volume covers some parties that are difficult to characterize; the Christian democratic parties in Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy could be described as conservative, but this is open to debate. On the other hand, the volume bypasses some parties that should be classified as conservative though they seldom enter into English overviews: the Finnish KOK, the Portuguese CDS, the Swiss CVP. In addition there is the conservative ND in Greece, which has been described by Loulis (1981).

Most of the contributions to the volume were originally presented at an ECPR workshop in Brussels in 1979. It is conceivable that the editor found a broader comparative analysis of conservative politics wanting, but also that several participants were interested in the conservative revival that began to appear in the late seventies. Of course, the question of a resurgence of

Table 2. Electoral trends for Conservative Parties.

	Electoral trend 1945-1982	Negative	Positive
Electoral trend 1978-1982	Negative	CVP ÖVP PSC-CVP	FG CDU-CSU
	Positive	CONS KF CDA DC	HØYRE KOK MOD

Note: The electoral trends have been estimated for two periods: 1945-1982 and 1945-1978; the difference between the two trends as estimated by the unstandardized coefficients constitutes the trend for the 1978-1982 period.

conservatism is a matter of historical perspective. Let us look at Table 2, which covers the electoral trends of the parties included in terms of two perspectives, 1945-1982 on the one hand and 1978-1982 on the other.

Though it is not possible to estimate trends for some of the parties — in Greece, France, Spain and Portugal — it appears that it is debatable whether it is appropriate to talk about a general expansion for conservative parties in the longer time perspective. However, data from the narrow time period studied partly corroborate the thesis of a conservative revival. The conservative parties have expanded in the Nordic countries, in particular. If conservative parties in Portugal, Spain, France and Greece are included in the analysis, then the picture is not that clear.

Once it is agreed upon which political parties are to be classified as conservative parties, then one may move on to an examination of the factors that are conducive to the electoral strength of conservative parties; several of the papers in the volume deal with this question. A distinction may be made between short-term factors and long-term factors. One short-term factor — participation in government — is not dealt with in the volume, which is somewhat surprising considering the fact that this factor may explain the electoral trend for the conservative parties in Norway, Finland, France, Greece, Belgium and Spain (negatively if in government, positively if out of government); this short-term factor does not apply everywhere as the case of ÖVP testifies to. Recent elections in West Germany, Finland, Austria and Portugal do not contradict this general observation, in any case.

Among the set of long-term factors, Lars Svåsand and Bjarne Kristiansen identify the size of the tertiary sector as particularly relevant to the strength of Høyre. In their ecological analysis they find:

'This may indicate that the Conservatives have benefited enormously from the structural changes that have taken place in Norwegian society over the last thirty years. With a significant rise in the service sectors there has been a continuous supply of potential voters to the party'. (p. 126).

Most probably, this is a correct conclusion with regard to the Norwegian case; but one may ask for other factors, because the forces that Svåsand and Kristiansen adduce in their explanation have been operating all over Western Europe, though the effect has not been the same in other countries.

Organizational development of the political parties is a factor that is often mentioned as conducive to conservative support. In the Norwegian paper there is an interesting analysis of the build-up of the party in the seventies as a key to its success in coming to power in 1981. Høyre used to be a typically urban party, but the organizational development transformed it into a national party (p. 112). A similar connection between electoral strength and organizational power is to be found in the Italian DC. It is argued convincingly that a main factor behind the capacity of the DC to hold its positions from the 1950's is the organizational growth of the party (p. 258). In Scotland we note that the weakness of the British conservative party — 'an almost unbroken record of electoral failure' (p. 64) — is a result of a poor organization of the party. It seems to be the case that the weak organization of the party has had the effect that the party has lost its traditional ties with the protestant working class (p. 59-60), according to William John Money.

It must be emphasized that organizational development or growth is not in itself a key to electoral success. This finding comes out in the analysis of the French conservative parties — the Gaullist party and the Giscardiens; though they attempted to improve on their organizations they could not

avert a socialist victory in 1981 (p. 247). And the Swedish conservative party did receive a very high level of support in 1982, though its all time high membership figure dates twenty years back. Again, it is difficult to make general inferences from the country findings. Gilliam Peele notes in the analysis of the British case that both the Labour Party and the Conservatives have done especially well in their own marginal constituencies, 'thus suggesting perhaps a need to revise some of the accepted orthodoxies about the impact or organization and individual candidates' (p. 42). It appears that we must allow for structural variability, or the fact that factors that are conducive to conservative support may not operate uniformly in different countries. It is clear that the expansion of the service sector as well as the attempt to build up strong party organizations have had an impact on the electoral fate of some conservative parties.

How about tactics or election strategy? Hints to an answer to the question about what strategy means for the conservative parties may be extracted from the analysis of the Nordic cases. Sten Berglund and Ulf Lindström describe the dilemma of the conservative parties: 'ideology *or* vote maximization. It cannot stand firm on both at the same time' (p. 75). This perspective is derived from the standard Downsian model (p. 69), but the extent to which this model fits the facts of the case that Berglund and Lindström analyse — the Swedish Moderaterna — is open to doubt. It appears to be the case that the Swedish version of a conservative party managed to increase its vote share substantially at the same time as the party attempted to revitalize a right-wing ideology. Actually, the Moderaterna have been successful both at the polls and in government participation at the same time as they delineated themselves from the two centrist parties. However, even starting from the Downsian model it does not have to be the case that a median voter adherence means a vote maximum, as too large an emphasis on adherence to the welfare ideology may open up the possibility for entrance of new right-wing parties regaining the vote of traditionally conservative groups in the electorate. Look at the developments in Finland, Denmark and Norway. Thus, it could be argued that the 'tougher, right-wing Conservative stand' (p. 72) of Moderaterna is part of the explanation of the absence in the Swedish party system of populist movements.

Considering the fact that the literature on conservative parties and conservative policies is not very extensive, this volume serves a need for more information and discussion about a phenomenon that seems to be of increasing political relevance. Though the various contributions to the volume are different, they contain historical overviews, data describing electoral trends and the social characteristics of the conservative voter; in some of the case-studies we also find data concerning party membership. In addition each study lists the important country literature in the notes.

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## Review of Henry Valen: Valg og Politikk (1981)

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### *Background*

The Norwegian political scene changed rather dramatically in the 70's and early 80's. There was a trend towards increased electoral mobility and a pronounced swing to the right which benefited the Conservative Party. Henry Valen's recent *Valg og Politikk* (NKS-Forlaget 1981) may be seen as an explicit attempt to account for the changing Norwegian voter, but there is considerably more to the book.

It draws heavily on Stein Rokkan's famous model of the Norwegian party system, where the parties are seen to compete along a number of political dimensions or cleavages (Rokkan 1967):

- a territorial cleavage (center vs periphery)
- a linguistic cleavage (*riksmål* vs *nynorsk*)
- a moral cleavage (teetotallers vs others)
- a religious cleavage (non-conformists vs conformists)
- a rural/urban cleavage (the primary vs the secondary and tertiary sectors)
- an economic cleavage (labor vs capital)

Socioeconomic, attitudinal and individual level behavioral data all provide clues about the underlying conflict structure in a society. If a party is con-