

Brian Girvin (ed.): *The Transformation of Contemporary Conservatism*. London: Sage, 1988, 232 pp.

In recent decades, roughly since about 1970, socialism and socialist parties have been on the retreat in several developed countries. Conversely, conservatism and conservative parties have been on the offensive. Thus, the book under review here is clearly a topical one. The book is the result of a cooperative effort undertaken under the auspices of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). The different chapters were originally presented to an ECPR workshop held at the Department of Political Science of the University of Gothenburg in April 1986.

In the Introduction, the editor of the book, Brian Girvin of University College, Cork, writes that what has become known as the 'New Right' or 'neoconservatism', but which in the book is called 'contemporary conservatism', 'grew out of a contest both political and intellectual with the New Left, the new social movements, and feminism' (p. 3). Girvin goes on to state that, in liberal democracies, there are three broad varieties of conservatism: the liberal conservative form, Christian Democracy and authoritarian conservatism (pp. 9f.).

So far, so good. However, further distinctions are needed. What is, to be more precise, the basic problem of the book – the transformation of contemporary conservative *ideology* or the transformation of contemporary conservative *parties*? These two things do not necessarily coincide. Girvin does not answer that question – he does not even raise it.

However, one of the authors does so, namely Edgar Grande of the University of Constance. In his chapter on Germany, he states: 'A conservative party can be forced to include more than only conservative issues in its programme for reasons of electoral success; conservative intellectuals might be able to express their criticism more drastically and clearly than a party can; finally, political value patterns and norms can change in everyday life long before political parties are aware of these "changes of tendency" (*Tendenzwenden*)' (p. 57).

That statement is, in my opinion, a perspicacious and important one. It is hardly just by chance that the chapter on Germany is one of the best, perhaps the best of all. Grande's remark should have been made by the editor in the Introduction and taken into account by all contributors.

Besides the contributions mentioned so far, the book contains chapters on Great Britain (Gillian Peele), France (Volkmar Lauber), The Netherlands (Paul Lucardie), Austria (Wolfgang C. Müller), Norway and Sweden (Stig-Björn Ljunggren), Spain (José R. Montero), the United States (the editor, Brian Girvin) and, lastly, on the social bases of Western European conservative parties (David Broughton). Here I will take up the chapters by Peele (Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford) and Ljunggren (Department of Political Science, Uppsala).

Gillian Peele presents overviews of the developments of ideology and policies within the British Conservative Party. According to her, the Conservatives in government have sustained much of their radical approach to policy: 'However, although there has been a substantial break with previous policy assumptions in a number of areas, the direction of economic policy has not been as straight as its apologists would like to think and the force of public opinion has kept public expenditure high' (p. 22).

In her conclusion, Peele stresses that no British party can view its electoral basis as solid. The voters must always be persuaded by attractive policies and leaders. Even though during the electoral campaign of 1987 the Labour Party had to operate under a substantial handicap, Neil Kinnock's (the Labour leader) campaign showed

Brian Girvin (ed.): *The Transformation of Contemporary Conservatism*. London: Sage, 1988, 232 pp.

In recent decades, roughly since about 1970, socialism and socialist parties have been on the retreat in several developed countries. Conversely, conservatism and conservative parties have been on the offensive. Thus, the book under review here is clearly a topical one. The book is the result of a cooperative effort undertaken under the auspices of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). The different chapters were originally presented to an ECPR workshop held at the Department of Political Science of the University of Gothenburg in April 1986.

In the Introduction, the editor of the book, Brian Girvin of University College, Cork, writes that what has become known as the 'New Right' or 'neoconservatism', but which in the book is called 'contemporary conservatism', 'grew out of a contest both political and intellectual with the New Left, the new social movements, and feminism' (p. 3). Girvin goes on to state that, in liberal democracies, there are three broad varieties of conservatism: the liberal conservative form, Christian Democracy and authoritarian conservatism (pp. 9f.).

So far, so good. However, further distinctions are needed. What is, to be more precise, the basic problem of the book – the transformation of contemporary conservative *ideology* or the transformation of contemporary conservative *parties*? These two things do not necessarily coincide. Girvin does not answer that question – he does not even raise it.

However, one of the authors does so, namely Edgar Grande of the University of Constance. In his chapter on Germany, he states: 'A conservative party can be forced to include more than only conservative issues in its programme for reasons of electoral success; conservative intellectuals might be able to express their criticism more drastically and clearly than a party can; finally, political value patterns and norms can change in everyday life long before political parties are aware of these "changes of tendency" (*Tendenzwenden*)' (p. 57).

That statement is, in my opinion, a perspicacious and important one. It is hardly just by chance that the chapter on Germany is one of the best, perhaps the best of all. Grande's remark should have been made by the editor in the Introduction and taken into account by all contributors.

Besides the contributions mentioned so far, the book contains chapters on Great Britain (Gillian Peele), France (Volkmar Lauber), The Netherlands (Paul Lucardie), Austria (Wolfgang C. Müller), Norway and Sweden (Stig-Björn Ljunggren), Spain (José R. Montero), the United States (the editor, Brian Girvin) and, lastly, on the social bases of Western European conservative parties (David Broughton). Here I will take up the chapters by Peele (Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford) and Ljunggren (Department of Political Science, Uppsala).

Gillian Peele presents overviews of the developments of ideology and policies within the British Conservative Party. According to her, the Conservatives in government have sustained much of their radical approach to policy: 'However, although there has been a substantial break with previous policy assumptions in a number of areas, the direction of economic policy has not been as straight as its apologists would like to think and the force of public opinion has kept public expenditure high' (p. 22).

In her conclusion, Peele stresses that no British party can view its electoral basis as solid. The voters must always be persuaded by attractive policies and leaders. Even though during the electoral campaign of 1987 the Labour Party had to operate under a substantial handicap, Neil Kinnock's (the Labour leader) campaign showed

that this disadvantage could be overcome, at least in part: 'British conservatism has proved able to win in an environment where its opponents are weak. It will have to learn to live in an environment where nothing can be taken for granted.' (p. 33). Peele's text is lucid and informative, and her chapter is clearly one of the best in the book.

Alas, the same cannot be said about Ljunggren's chapter on Norway and Sweden. His description of the development of Swedish conservatism is confusing, and sometimes even incorrect. Ljunggren states, on the one hand: 'The Conservative parties in both countries [i.e. Norway and Sweden] were closely associated with industrial and urban interests and they did not meet the needs of the agricultural strata.' (p. 123). On the other hand he writes 'The origins of the Centre Party [i.e. in Sweden, formerly the Farmers Party] can be traced directly to the same parliamentary groups which formed the Conservative Party, and up to this day the Conservatives have this agricultural flank to consider.' (p. 127).

These statements do not go well together; neither is wholly correct. Ljunggren fails to mention two important differences between the Conservative Party and the Centre Party in Sweden. Firstly, the Conservative Party (nowadays called the *moderata samlingspartiet*) started as a parliamentary party. It was the successor of the *lantmannapartiet* (the Yeoman Party), the leading party in the lower chamber of the *Riksdag* during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Centre Party, on the other hand, was founded outside the *Riksdag* around 1910, just like the Social Democratic Party about two decades earlier. Secondly, although both the Conservative Party and the Centre Party had roots among the farmers, the latter, especially in the northern parts of Sweden, had a much more underdog character than the Conservatives.

I would certainly not like to end this review on a negative note. On the contrary, in summing up I would like to say that most of the chapters in the book are informative and well written. It is gratifying to see how an efficient workshop leader/editor is able rather promptly to bring out interesting results of joint scholarly endeavours.

*Torbjörn Vallinder, University of Lund*