

Progressive Politics after the Crash

Olaf Cramme, Patrick Diamond and Michael McTernan, eds,
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The 2008 crash did not result in renewed support for social democracy. It was the right, rather than the left, that largely benefitted from the crisis; arguments for cutting expenditures and reigning in the state have dominated the discourse. Neoliberalism has not been displaced as the policy orthodoxy in the Western democracies.

Progressive Politics after the Crash is a collection of seventeen essays assembled by the Policy Network, a London-based centre-left think tank. Featuring contributions from many leading social democratic and progressive academics, the book attempts to address the question of political strategy for social democratic parties in the post-2008 era. Rejecting austerity as ultimately harmful to long-term growth and living standards, the emphasis is on long-term structural reforms to tackle inequality and encourage productivity and growth.

The first section looks at the post-crisis environment. In the opening essay, Peter Hall argues that “the technocratic social democracy of previous decades, marked by claims to operate market economies as efficiently as the right, has reached its limits” (27). Economic insecurity has resulted in what Hall refers to as *sauve que peut* politics—where people defend what they have and voters are reluctant to support redistributive measures. However, Hall argues that the 2008 crash presents an opening. Neoliberal policies have resulted in diminishing levels of social mobility. Social democrats must put a renewed emphasis on fairness and equal opportunity, make the case for public investment in human capital and infrastructure, and again articulate a moral vision of a better society.

Andrew Gamble argues for the need for a new centre-left political economy that breaks from the basic assumptions of neoliberalism. In particular, it needs to develop a new discourse about austerity and the public household, in contrast to the prevailing neoliberal view that government is essentially analogous to a private household. The role of politics in managing the affairs of the public household and in shaping the rules of how markets in governed must be reasserted.

Sheri Berman laments that social democracy—based on the reconciliation of capitalism with democracy and social stability—has lost its transformative vision. Among the culprits are skepticism of globalization and aversion to modernity, as well as a European Union that has acted as a force for neoliberalism and austerity. She rightly notes that social democrats failed to articulate a progressive vision to get out of the crisis, but, remarkably, there is no assessment of the extent to which social democratic governments have accommodated to neoliberalism in recent years.

The essays in the second section focus on a post-crisis reform agenda. One theme is that of “predistribution” as a means of countering inequality. As Jacob Hacker explains, this involves moving beyond redistribution and “focus[ing] on market reforms that encourage a more equal distribution of economic power and rewards even before government collects taxes or pays out benefits” (123). A predistribution agenda would include tackling concentration at the very top through reforms of financial markets and corporate governance, strengthening collective bargaining and workplace representation, and expanding early childhood education and access to postsecondary training.

The theme of predistribution is also picked up by Wendy Carlin, who argues for a progressive economic strategy based on an innovative economy competing in global markets, measures to combat inequality in assets and in market income, and the creation

of good jobs in labour-absorbing services, such as care services and early childhood education. Both Hacker and Carlin argue that redistribution, in shaping market outcomes, does much of the heavy lifting in terms of combating inequality and is less likely to face a political backlash in countries such as the UK than taxation and redistribution. The point is well taken but, given that citizens in the Nordic countries, for example, pay more in taxes, the case for higher taxation and countering skepticism about “big government” can hardly be avoided.

Jane Jenson compellingly argues that social democrats have accepted the neoliberal mantra of keeping taxes low, inhibiting the ability of parties to promote social solidarity. Progressives must make the case for the positive role of taxation that pays for quality public services for all citizens, rather than leaving them dependent on the market. Bruno Palier addresses the issue of intergenerational inequality. Welfare state expenditures are heavily skewed toward the elderly, and investments in children and young people—now the poorest group in most European countries—are all too readily sacrificed. Palier calls for a social investment strategy—following the example of the Nordic countries—of investments in early childcare, education and lifelong training. Such a strategy would increase the future tax base and could create a new constituency for social democracy.

Overall, *Progressive Politics after the Crash* is a well-written and well-edited compilation that is a welcome contribution to debates about the future of social democracy. There is a general recognition that the Third Way strategy had been too accommodating to the market and the basic premises of neoliberalism. Certainly, there are ideas here that could form the basis of a reinvigorated social democracy, although the political challenge of overcoming the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism remains formidable.

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Barack Obama et le printemps arabe. Le repositionnement de la politique américaine au Moyen-Orient

Gilles Vandal et Sami Aoun

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Gilles Vandal et Sami Aoun, dans leur plus récent ouvrage, proposent de faire l'examen de la réaction américaine face au printemps arabe. Les auteurs affirment non seulement que l'administration Obama a anticipé le mouvement contestataire (37), mais aussi qu'elle a su développer une politique étrangère lui permettant de positionner les États-Unis au moment des révolutions arabes de sorte à protéger à long terme leurs intérêts stratégiques (10–11). Cet ouvrage expose ainsi une situation opposée à celle de la réaction américaine à la révolution iranienne de 1979, où la CIA, à quelques mois de la révolution, considérait comme inconcevable que le Shah d'Iran puisse être renversé. Est-ce que ce changement serait le produit de l'adoption d'une stratégie plus appropriée en matière de politique étrangère par l'administration Obama, ou sommes-nous plutôt en présence d'une analyse rétroactive excessivement optimiste? Ainsi, cet ouvrage vient questionner la littérature sur le caractère imprévisible des mouvements révolutionnaires sans pour autant présenter une alternative convaincante.

L'ouvrage est organisé en trois parties. La première, introductive, comprend (a) un historique de la politique étrangère américaine au Moyen-Orient qui établit un contraste entre l'ère de Barack Obama face à celle de George W. Bush; (b) une courte analyse des influences de la vision du président Obama en matière de politique étrangère; et (c) une description des grands jalons de celle-ci au Moyen-Orient, notamment le concept du