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Introduction
The New World of the Center-Left

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Left History and Its Crossroads

The idea of the “left” has varied greatly since its first appearances on the benches of France’s revolutionary assemblies. Born of rebellion against perceived injustices in capitalist development, the left has had to adapt constantly, often painfully, to the dynamics of capitalism and the changing dimensions of capitalist societies. The subject of this book is how parties and movements of the center-left have responded to the vast shifts that have occurred in worlds around them since the 1970s. But before turning to this, it is worth reviewing some of the left’s experiences with crossroads in the past.¹

Faced with early industrialization, different lefts had tense discussions about whether the socialist movement should work through the state or work from the ground up through social movements like trade unions. Would social democracy come from high-level political action, or action at the very base of society? These discussions led to divisions between anarchists and socialists, memorialized in Marx’s vivid anti-anarchist polemics. In some places, like the United States, divisions between advocates of politics and advocates of trade unionism reproduced these earlier arguments in different forms. These early disputes have continued to help shape the trajectories of many, if not most, labor and socialist lefts since then.

In the early twentieth century, after it had become clear that industrial capitalism had more staying power than earlier lefts had anticipated, there came new and bitter splits between revolutionaries and social democrats—Kautsky versus Bernstein being but one example. For social democrats, if capitalism was not about to implode, leftists had to settle in for the long haul by building and deepening a democracy which would eventually empower the people to demand changes to humanize harsh market societies. Revolutionaries concluded, quite differently, that if capitalism had unexpected stay-
ing power, quasi-military vanguards of professional revolutionaries should transcend it by putchist force. The vanguardists, inspired by the success of the October revolution in Russia, advocated disciplined party centralization to seize power and the building of socialism from above by technocrats of revolution acting in the name of the “masses.” The legacies of this division permeated and often poisoned the left’s twentieth century.

Earlier left theorists had also assumed that the left would naturally be internationalist. “Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains” was one famous statement of this thesis. But in 1914, when real, existing socialists marched eagerly into the trenches in national uniforms to massacre one another, there came a shocking correction. The lesson was that from then on lefts would be national.2

Postwar Crossroads and Golden Ages

The lefts that we are about to analyze emerged from another crossroads that began after the Great Depression and the Second World War. In Western Europe countries rushed to emulate the mass production consumer capitalism pioneered in the United States, while the United States deepened its own version. Lefts in these nations were deeply touched by the general issues raised by this new society and economy, which often came simultaneously with new democratization, particularly in the societies where fascism and authoritarianism had won in the interwar period. The puzzle of this period, now seen by many nostalgically as a golden age, was whether left parties and movements would seek to transform capitalism into a new form of socialism or rather “settle” for the new compromises between capital and labor that postwar welfare states, Keynesianism, and new economic growth seemed to allow.

Answers varied, and the world of postwar lefts became an exotic mosaic. Where lefts were divided between social democrats and communists, as in Latin Europe, they had difficulty winning power, and even extensive welfare states and protective employment relations systems were often promoted by others. British Labour occasionally won power, but had problems conciliating Labourism with economic dynamism. The Swedes, the great success story, were never particularly Keynesian, but they built an egalitarian middle-class system which created stakeholders for social democracy and also had mechanisms to compete in the international economy. The Germans succeeded, again without much Keynesianism, when strong unions and innovative private sector exporters cooperated on wage restraint and flexibility, carefully supervised by a very demanding central bank. Americans, with fewer social-
ists and weaker socialist dreams, continued their waning New Deal trajectory, falling well behind their European counterparts.

The left’s key claims in this golden age are familiar. Capitalism was deeply flawed, unable to manage the risks that it created, prone to waste and periodic crises, and an incubator of inequality. Capitalist markets left to themselves paid little attention to human needs, often corrupted political life, and were imperfect in the terms of economics textbooks. Left politics had strong remedies to propose, mainly through action by the national state. Keynesianism might help states shape their macroeconomic policies by managing demand to limit the chaos, even out ups and downs, achieve full employment, and target particular groups through welfare state programs and industrial policies. The world of the golden age was industrial, and in it workers counted most because they created value and had the most significant needs. They were, or would be, well organized into trade unions, they would support left visions of change, and they voted for progressive political parties.

Lefts after the Golden Age?

Four decades later this left world and its slogans have disappeared. Indeed one rarely hears the term “left” these days: instead, electable left parties of the world are almost always labeled “center-left.” Center-lefts now include a variety of political forces, among them social liberals, social democrats, democratic socialists, progressives, greens, and human rights campaigners. They accept markets and a mixed economy, but favor limited state intervention, are “moderate” in most ways, and are somewhat “libertarian.” Perhaps the most important thing, however, is that this new center-left accepts the multiple constraints of economic internationalization. With the limited exception of the brief period at the onset of the current crisis, it has abandoned Keynesianism in favor of “sound” budgetary practices involving low deficits, low debts, and restrained spending. The dream of full employment has been replaced by an emphasis on achieving price stability and promoting national competitiveness in the broader world. Commitments to redistribution have been attenuated, and center-lefts have learned to live with greater income inequality. Postwar ideas about social policies and employment relations systems to provide lifetime security have been leavened by notions about choice and “flexibility.” The center-left remains reformist, but with a changed repertory that now includes environmentalism, civil and human rights, and individual cultural liberties on top of older concerns like economic security and cross-class redistribution. The idea of transcending capitalism and creating “socialism” has completely disappeared.
Center-lefts now live in a changed environment and work with changed political technologies. There are fewer workers, and unions are weaker. Mass-based political parties are in decline. Politics, even on the left, has been professionalized, and sophisticated specialists now track potential voters and issues into every nook and cranny of every more complicated, individualized societies. Money also talks louder, along with wealthy lobbies, in a world where extensive and expensive media attention counts hugely. Last but not least, the transition from left to center-left has made for political orphans who often do not recognize their concerns in what center-lefts are proposing. Some of these would earlier have been in what were once called “mass organizations.” Others, in “new social movements,” issue-focused NGOs, or lobbies, would earlier have looked to left parties for inclusion of their issues in party programs and outlooks. They are now much more likely to take their appeals directly to engaged audiences and to policymakers, often through the Internet. From the point of view of center-left parties, these orphans can be politically volatile and unpredictable. Some, like anti-globalization activists, see themselves as the “left of the left” whose protests will keep the center-left “honest.” Others will stick to their own issues even if it hurts the center-left’s electoral chances. Still others venture into a fluid world of populism to oppose freer trade and immigration, or even join mobilizations over “values” or “threatened identities.”

It would be wrong to conclude that the coming of center-lefts marks the dead end of the left’s long march, however. Labour and social-democratic parties and, in the United States the Democratic Party, have remodeled their outlooks, organizations, and relationships with constituents in response to very large, often global, changes. The political space within which they operate has changed greatly. But neoliberalism, which vaunts markets as the appropriate place for all social decision making, has not succeeded in banishing all effective opposition. Left-right competition is still the most prominent feature of our politics (Noel and Therien 2008); center-lefts still advocate serious reformist programs, and they still win support and elections.

This book seeks to explore the center-left’s new political space and the content that fills it in different places. What is the demand out there for center-left reformism? What are the hopes of the center-left and the projects that it proposes in response? The chapters that follow will explore these issues historically and comparatively through a range of case studies covering various nations, including the United States. They will consider why and how the old world of the left has given way, what the new world of the center-left looks like, and how promising its future may be. What we will see is a patchwork of different center-lefts, some with serious problems, others just barely coping,
and still others doing very well. We insist that new political spaces for the center-left have emerged everywhere, however, and our interest is in illuminating how different parties have acted to fill them and to take advantage of the opportunities they offer.

**From Left to Center-Left: Three “Crises”**

Sometime in the 1970s the long postwar boom came to an end for western democracies, beginning a long crisis that challenged the certainties of the world in which the left had lived for a quarter-century after 1945. Inflation, built into postwar settlements in many western democracies, had already been slowly rising in the 1960s. Successful Fordist reindustrialization in Western Europe and Japan had slowly diminished America’s competitive advantages. The American decision in 1971 to abandon the commitment to gold enshrined in the Bretton Woods agreement began a lengthy process of readjustment. This process was then massively complicated by the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, which fused rising unemployment and uncontrollable inflation in a “stagflation” that in theory could not happen.

The slump that followed ended the Keynesian era and its consensual assumptions about running the economy, including the compatibility of a large state sector, high public expenditure, and prosperity. For left and social democratic parties throughout the industrial world, including the Democratic Party in the United States, Keynesianism had for a time made it possible to maintain that market-constraining social and economic policies—large welfare states, protective labor laws, high redistributive taxation, and an activist, regulatory state—were good for the economy and society and in the national interest.³

With Keynesianism challenged, this understanding of the public good was no longer compelling. This was particularly true when ascendant neoliberalism argued for reversing Keynesian priorities, asserting that large government, centralized planning, high taxes, and social spending were antithetical to growth and should be considered obstacles to prosperity. The most visible reversal came in the realm of macroeconomic policy. The notion that smart demand management could fine-tune otherwise unruly markets and produce consistent growth was largely abandoned. What replaced it was a turn to what some have labeled a “market fundamentalism,” which largely conquered public servants, politicians, economists, and the news media. Monetarism and fiscal retrenchment quickly became the norm, and emphasis shifted to “supply-side” policies and efforts to produce competitiveness through higher productivity, greater flexibility, and constant innovation.
Neoliberalism promoted a vastly different view of the state and its roles. Where American liberals and social democrats elsewhere had seen the state as an essential and largely benign instrument, the new advocates of the market saw it as detrimental and sought to restrict its scope and impact. This meant, in the first instance, ceasing to see the state as the solution to social and economic problems and abandoning commitments to full employment—probably the most important legacy of the 1930s. The more extreme formulations of neoliberalism insisted on the need to permanently reduce taxes, privatize nationalized industries, and pursue deregulation, thus depriving the state of the means to steer the economy. Beyond that, the state itself should be restructured so as to use market mechanisms to deliver services and market criteria to assess its performance. Wherever possible, the state should not provide services directly but rather contract or partner with private companies to do so.

This shift posed a huge challenge to the center-left: would it also make the turn toward the market or would it resist? The answer was a long time in coming, for it required the experiences of policy failure and electoral defeat to produce a major rethinking. It was the sorry fate of many of the social-democratic, labor, and democratic parties to be in power during the 1970s and early 1980s and to suffer the frustrating consequences of changing environments around them. In Britain the Labour governments led by Harold Wilson and then James Callaghan responded to the oil shocks by adopting income policies that the party’s core supporters came to reject in a defiant wave of strikes, leading to the election of Margaret Thatcher and nearly two decades of neoliberal Conservative rule. In the United States Jimmy Carter, facing stagflation and foreign policy crises, was equally ineffective and also prepared a turn to the right in 1980. In France, the Mitterrand government, elected in 1981 and committed to strong Keynesian and statist reforms, had to retreat rapidly on almost every front. Center-left parties in general, including those that built the “Nordic model,” had difficulty adapting economic and social policies to the problems of the new era, problems with which voters were overwhelmingly concerned.

A second crisis, more political than economic, was soon to follow, involving the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the disappearance in 1991 of the Soviet Union. These huge events further narrowed the discursive and programmatic political space within which the center-left could operate, putting paid to what remained of any nineteenth-century vision of replacing capitalism with a wholly different system. There was great irony in this, because parties of the democratic left had long been at pains to distance themselves from communism and “actually existing socialism.” But in fact,
while western democratic socialists had vehemently deplored the illiberal, antidemocratic practices of communism, they had nonetheless held many abstract beliefs and predispositions in common with their communist rivals. Although the intensity of the most utopian of these passions had slowly attenuated in most of the left since 1945, what happened between 1989 and 1991 nonetheless forced a reckoning with the socialist past and its thinking about the world. The dream of transcending capitalism disappeared, making a political life bounded by capitalism and markets look permanent. This shift dictated a more restricted definition of what was politically possible and desirable. It is important to add that the end of the cold war and the Soviet experiment occurred when campaigns for hard-line neoliberalism—the political consequence of the economic crisis that opened in the 1970s—were reaching their apogee. The western victory over “already existing socialism” was thus a huge gift to market fundamentalists.

Globalization is our third critical event, or process, and its effects on the center-left have already been very powerful. Beginning in the 1990s fast-moving trends that expanded world trade, opened product and financial markets, and heightened international capital mobility combined to place new limits on how national states could manage their economies, protect workers and their environments, and pursue fiscal policies, including those that provided social services. The crisis of the 1970s and computer technologies had opened the door to financial globalization, which came on strong in the 1990s with the growth of multinational companies, tentacular investment banks, mutual and hedge funds, futures, swaps, derivatives, and rapidly flowing hot money. Over the same period successive GATT rounds had lowered tariffs and opened trade, culminating in 1995 in the new World Trade Organization. The Bretton Woods institutions—the World Bank and the IMF—had also done their part by energetically imposing the “Washington consensus” on countries that resisted the new orthodoxies. In Europe the move toward more open markets had also been pushed forward gradually by European integration, but it took the single market program and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) after 1985 to institutionalize fully open markets and the new paradigms of price stability and budget balancing. Less encompassing regionalizing efforts in North America had similar results. Economic and policy borders became more permeable, affecting sovereignty and narrowing what national governments could do.

The limits created by globalization were also in part discursive and ideological. Motivated by either sincere belief or perceived political imperatives, politicians and intellectuals of the left and the right now ruled out all sorts of policy options because of the supposed dictates of the global economy. The
reality beneath the rhetoric was nevertheless sobering enough. The global economy and new technologies clearly made it easier to move capital and jobs to places with fewer rules and lower labor costs. They also allowed employers and, more broadly, investors to threaten such moves and thus enhance their political leverage to insist that states adopt their preferred fiscal, monetary, and regulatory policies. The impact of globalization was made still more real as it became itself more truly global. While the United States and Europe might have begun the processes that created a more open world market and to that extent laid the ground rules for its operation, other nations joined in and thus acquired an interest in keeping it open and functioning. Specifically, China, India, Russia, Brazil, and other “emerging” economies entered global manufacturing with a vengeance, marching forward on the back of huge comparative advantages in labor costs and growing economically at rates not seen since the nineteenth century. Energy producers like Russia, the leading Arab oil exporters, Venezuela, Nigeria, and South Africa were no less invested in the world market, whatever the ideological complex-ion or rhetoric of their regimes. The effect was to reinforce the trend toward international economic interdependence and to underline the dictates of globalization.

Taken together, these three shocks remade the world in which center-left parties and movements operate. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the contemporary center-left is itself a product of this new world and the constraints and opportunities that it presents. In this transformed world, the alternative to actually existing capitalism is not socialism, but a better and more just capitalism. Scholars and activists now study not transitions to socialism but the “varieties of capitalism” or the virtues and vices of distinctive “worlds of welfare” and state provision (Hall and Soskice 2001; Esping-Andersen 1990; Schröder 2008). This is not a time bereft of possibilities, but it is a moment when possibilities need to be located within the global economy rather than outside or in opposition to it. This is, most important, a moment when to be effective the center-left must be creative and find opportunities in new policies and strategies.

From Left to Center-Left: Large Social Changes

The effects of the passing of the Keynesian era, the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union, and the coming of a more intense era of global economic competition were felt at the levels of both ideology and policy. It was hard to know what to believe, what to hope for, and
what actually to do. But the center-left confronted yet another set of problems about electability. To be successful in the new era it had also to come to grips with a fourth major challenge: the shifting social bases of its political appeal. The left’s utopias, legends, programs, and practices had historically been grounded in the social movement of the industrial working class, especially its most organized sectors and occupations. This fact, true even if electoral success also typically required support from the middle and professional classes, had been built upon long and storied historical struggles. The rich lore that surrounded the Paris Commune, the Haymarket, the struggle for the eight-hour workday, the October Revolution, the British General Strike, the French strikes of 1936, the struggle against fascism, the French May and Italian Hot autumn of the 1960s, to list but a few headline moments, nourished the politics of generations.

In recent decades, however, these stories, traditions, and utopias have become far less meaningful. The social bases of “progressive politics” have dramatically shifted, mainly because of the transition to what has been variously termed a “post-industrial,” “service,” or “knowledge-based” economy. Starting in the 1920s, if not earlier, services began to grow faster than industry in developed economies (Clark 1940). The trend accelerated with the information and communications revolution that began in the 1970s. The introduction of labor-saving technologies, including computer-based technologies, together with rising consumer affluence and demand for new goods and services substantially transformed the nature of the workforce.

The first consequence is that the industrial working class has literally shrunk. In 1950 agriculture had accounted for 28.3%, industry for 34%, and services for 37.7% of employment in developed countries. By 1971, with Fordist mass production at its peak, the figures were 12.7%, 37.9%, and 49.4%. By 1998 they were 4.8%, 27.0%, and 67.4%. While the added value of manufacturing to GDP hovered at around 35% of the total throughout this period, deindustrialization proceeded apace and the number of industrial workers, relative to other wage earners, steadily declined (Feinstein 1999). Much of the manufacturing not already relocated to developing countries is now capital- and skills-intensive, and the workers who remain are better educated and trained, live better and differently, partake in mass consumption and culture, and are no longer encapsulated in the working-class subcultures that informed the mythologies of the left’s pasts. Many are also women, now somewhat better off when compared to men even if not yet equal, and in most countries male breadwinner status and pay scales are in retreat. Rising living standards have also blurred the line between workers and the lower middle class, while ser-
vice work is often hard to categorize as either blue- or white-collar, manual or non-manual. The demographic underpinnings for what Eric Hobsbawm (1978) once labeled the “forward march of labour” have thus dissipated.

Similar things can be said of the organizational structures that sustained older left projects. In some countries—mainly smaller ones—union membership remains practically obligatory (because of what is called the Ghent system) and therefore at high levels. Since the 1980s, however, union membership in the EU-15, the heartland of traditional social democratic politics, has declined by roughly 20%. And where trade unionism has not been quasi-obligatory, unions have had a particularly rough ride. In France union membership has halved since 1970 and is now at 8% of the workforce (around 3% in the private sector); in Germany it is 22% and falling; in the United Kingdom it is down one-third, to roughly 30%; and in the United States it is down to 12.5%. In most of Europe declines may be mitigated somewhat by legal extensions of collective agreements to non-unionized workers. Even there, however, over time the membership drop is likely to undermine these extensions and the overall meaningfulness of collective bargaining. And in more liberal industrial environments, where contract extensions don’t exist, the situation is much worse (Visser 2006). In the United States 13.8% of workers are covered by contracts, as are 30% in the United Kingdom. Moreover, most union organizations, however powerful, have themselves changed. Earlier efforts to fuel broader working-class cultures have given way to the provision of highly professionalized and bureaucratized representational services for members.

Lefts and center-lefts have needed middle-class help to “march forward,” and this in turn has always necessitated complicated strategic calculations and compromise (Przeworski 1985; Przeworski and Sprague 1986). With the relative decline of the organizations, culture, and size of the working class, this need is now overwhelming. Average employment in services in the EU-15 area in 2006 was 70% of the labor force, compared to 78% in the United States (OECD 2008a). “Services” are not an undifferentiated group, however, and involve occupations ranging from low-paid precarious work, through social service workers in caring and teaching work, to relatively secure public sector functionaries, professors, and investment bankers. The challenge of formulating appeals to capture the needs and aspirations of such a diverse population is daunting. At one end of the spectrum, low-paid personal and distributional service workers are the core of a growing “working poor” whose needs for dignity and “social inclusion” are widely recognized but not easily addressed by the existing repertoire of center-left policy prescriptions. That these populations often consist of immigrants or ethnic minorities compounds the danger of an emerging social dualism between market insiders
and outsiders, a split that can and occasionally has become political and is almost always detrimental to the center-left.

Attending to the concerns of more middle-class and professional constituencies is more complicated still. Political science literature has made much of the emergence of “post-material values” among educationally credentialed new middle strata (Inglehart 1990). The strategic problem is that center-lefts have problems conciliating traditional “material” issue outlooks with the more “libertarian,” individualist, and universalist passions of new middle-class groups (Kitschelt 1994). Concerns for the environment or for human rights or the rights of women and minorities might well be compatible with the traditional goals and visions of the left, but they sometimes seem not to be. In any event, engineering the ideological, programmatic, and organizational changes needed to reconcile the conflicting demands of constituents who have “material” needs and demands with others who have “left libertarian” or “quality of life” concerns is now a baseline for center-left success. Achieving it remains a struggle, however.

As if the changing social bases of center-left parties were not enough of a challenge, the ways of doing politics have changed as well. In the United States after the Second World War—earlier than in Europe—new worlds of political campaigning opened up, connected to the decline of traditional party organizations and their constituent groups, especially labor unions, and the simultaneous rise of modern mass communications, particularly television and later the Internet. As costly “air wars,” including positive and negative TV ads, replaced the grassroots, labor-intensive “ground wars” of old, political consultants of various kinds—strategists, pollsters, media experts, and fundraisers—assumed control of political campaigns from traditional party leaders. More recently, American parties have adopted sophisticated, computer-assisted “micro-targeting” techniques, through which vast amounts of consumer data are analyzed to identify likely sympathizers. Messages are then delivered to these voters by direct mail, phone calls, and increasingly, with the rediscovery of the value of face-to-face contact, in person by grassroots volunteers.

In the new style of electoral campaigning, issues have remained important for attentive voters. Advanced polling techniques are used to ascertain voters’ preferences on salient issues, while “issue ads” and other media tactics are used to “frame” issues in language favorable to particular candidates, to “prime” voters to judge candidates on the basis of issues that a particular party “owns,” and in some cases to persuade voters to change their preferences. In complex post-industrial societies, however, the rise in salience of new social, cultural, environmental, and other non-economic issues along-
side traditional economic ones means that candidates have to position themselves on multiple issue dimensions to win the support of some groups without alienating others that have conflicting preferences. To avoid such dilemmas, politicians often take vague or ambiguous issue positions. Beyond this, because most voters are relatively inattentive to politics and have little awareness of candidates’ issue positions, one contemporary trend, greatly reinforced by the growing role of the mass media, is for electoral campaigns to downplay issues and instead foreground themes that demand less from viewers and listeners. These include incumbents’ performances and candidates’ personal characteristics—their integrity, honesty, experience, leadership ability, religiosity, patriotism, affability, race or gender, physical attractiveness, etc.

These new media-centered and computer-aided campaign techniques are very costly and would thus seem likely to disproportionately benefit conservative parties tied to powerful business interests and other wealthy donors. Parties on the center-left may also have more qualms and hesitations about making use of these tactics than their opponents. But the very newest of these campaign techniques, enabled by the emergence of the Internet, may actually be of greatest value to parties of the center-left. For example, in the United States Barack Obama—through his own campaign website, social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, YouTube videos, e-mail, and text messaging—was able to raise vast sums of money from small donors and mobilize tens of thousands of grassroots volunteers, both processes contributing immensely to his innovative and successful presidential campaign. In the French presidential campaign in 2007 Ségolène Royal used analogous techniques to short-circuit her Socialist rivals and win her party’s nomination, even though, unlike Obama, she did not win the general election.

All this is not to suggest that the new forms of campaigning are of decisive importance in determining election outcomes. The so-called fundamentals—the balance of partisan identification in the electorate, the state of the economy and international relations, and the popularity and effectiveness of the executive—retain a dominant role. But especially in close elections, campaigns can definitely matter; and the changed character of political campaigning adds yet another challenge to the parties of the center-left.

Policy Dilemmas

Shifting bases of political allegiance, combined with the new economic constraints and new campaigning techniques, vastly complicate the task of putting together stable and long-term center-left coalitions. They also make it
harder to develop policies to bring and hold together fragmented and heterogeneous constituencies and then to govern effectively. In the policy realm, for example, center-left parties—especially in Europe—must adapt to new monetary policies that emphasize price stability and deemphasize counter-cyclical spending, constraints limiting their ability to reward old and new constituencies. They also confront difficult issues of welfare state reform prompted in part by aging populations that have produced skewed pension dependency ratios and rapidly rising healthcare costs. They must devise programs in response to new social needs—childcare for new single-parent and two-breadwinner families and support programs for the working poor, for example. Most controversially, they are expected to promote flexible labor markets without undermining employment security, to reform institutions governing industrial relations, and to promote new patterns of cooperation between labor and capital. An equally difficult challenge involves reforming educational systems to promote lifelong learning, training, and retraining. Finally, they need to find new revenue sources without damaging national economies engaged in global competition. These strategic dilemmas have created new political minefields.

There is another side to this, however. The new conditions also open up new political space for center-left parties and political entrepreneurs. With older certainties gone, there is much greater room for more persuasive and creative center-left politicking than earlier. Navigating the contemporary maelstrom of changing economies, social bases, and political technologies is obviously difficult. But recent setbacks notwithstanding, there is ample evidence that parties of the center-left remain capable of winning elections. The American presidential election of 2008 provides some evidence, but other data are easy to find in contemporary European history. The changes that we have listed have not eliminated the political space for strategies and policies beyond, and often against, the neoliberal paradigm. In a number of countries humanized “supply-side” alternatives to Keynesian demand management have produced successes. Productivity-enhancing public investment—in education and training, infrastructure, and new technologies—has been expanded without abandoning fiscal restraint. It also seems possible, given the right raw materials, to make labor markets more flexible and liberalize them without turning them into the sites of wars among the insecure. This, plus innovative attention to equal opportunities and public services, and absent severe macroeconomic shocks, can generate levels of growth, employment, and other benefits sufficient to produce electoral victories. Policies aimed at and premised on delivering economic growth thus remain prominent. They have not dominated center-left policymaking quite as much as they did in
the past, however, as new issues, backed by new constituencies, have become more prominent. In part this is because the same economic processes that have led to fewer manual workers have also produced more white-collar professionals who can be mobilized by the center-left on social and cultural rather than economic issues. The increase in women’s employment likewise contains possibilities as well as challenges. The declining significance of class more broadly creates room for a politics that broaches questions of racial and sexual equality, human rights, war and peace, the environment, and lifestyles—questions that cut across electorates differently from earlier class cleavages. Center-left parties, which have long debated the electoral significance of these shifts, by now have come to understand them reasonably well and have begun to successfully incorporate new issues into their electoral appeals and programs. On old and new issues, with old and new constituencies, there are real possibilities for the center left even in a different world.

There Are Center-Lefts and Center-Lefts . . .

All center-lefts have had to confront these crises and changes, but it would be misleading to argue that there is one center-left everywhere challenged in the same way. Histories and policy legacies vary tremendously from country to country in ways that may either facilitate or hinder adaptive responses to new conditions. In addition, differences among national constitutional, institutional, and political systems can result in a wide range of policy responses to similar economic and other circumstances. Specific location in the uneven development of the unfolding global economy is also important. The chapters in this book will illustrate these different variables at work through case studies.

Different narratives about recent political changes tend to have different heroes. Many center-leftists grant pride of place to the Nordic countries. These countries, perhaps uniquely, have been able simultaneously to adapt public financial practices to new international standards, promote public investment and flexible internal labor markets to facilitate rapid innovation, and sustain generous welfare states. Denmark and Sweden have been particularly good at active labor market “flexicurity” policies that liberalize labor regulations while providing support to wage earners looking to make employment transitions and reskill. There are specific reasons for this. The Nordic countries, each different, are all very small—the population of Denmark is about the same as that of greater Boston, for example. Their size has long obliged them to be open to international trade, and over time they have internalized the lesson that success on international markets demands high
levels of national cross-class cooperation. Active labor market policies and monetary policy prudence have long been central parts of the package. The Swedes were never extravagantly Keynesian, for example, and the Danes tied their currency to the D-Mark early in the 1980s, binding themselves to the tough monetarism of the German Bundesbank. As conditions changed around them, therefore, Denmark and Sweden began with helpful policy legacies, although even being so endowed none of the Nordic countries has avoided severe moments of crisis and change. Moreover, their much-admired labor market flexibility, monetary soundness, and admirable welfare states have not always helped the center-left. In Denmark social democrats have been relatively weak and the country is now run by a center-right coalition. Finnish politics has almost always involved centrist governing coalitions. In Sweden once-hegemonic social democrats are now out of power and, if they return, will only do so as part of a complex coalition. The Norwegians are exceptional in this discussion because they have had oil to grease their economic wheels.

The United Kingdom has provided a very different northern European success story, although it now seems over. Here good recent results for the center-left are in large part the product of radical discontinuities caused by Thatcherite neoliberalism. The Thatcher years undid much of Old Labour’s postwar heritage of a vast, inefficient, public sector, decentralized collective bargaining that fed chronic inflation, and persistent budgetary difficulties. They left a lean, mean liberal environment, and until its defeat in 2010, New Labour achieved success through its intelligent acceptance of this as a basis upon which to build. The point of departure for its Third Way was thus an extreme market fundamentalism that cried out for a move to the center and an effort to restore public services. New Labour was also blessed until recently by a decade of steady economic growth, which it helped sustain through prudent public financial management. New Labour thus had resources for a series of modest innovations, particularly in social policy. To be sure, it took policy creativity to zero in on what to do, and the good if also flawed leadership of Tony Blair to carry it out. The present financial crisis profoundly challenges the New Labour formula, however.

The EU’s continental political economies, in contrast to the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom, have been more troubled, with center-lefts deeply implicated. Excepting brief interludes, France has had low growth and high employment since the early 1990s. The French left, obliged to work radical changes in financial and monetary policies in the 1980s, has been slow at adapting to the need for a more liberal and flexible labor market. These two processes may have been linked. French governments of the center-left and
sometimes of the center-right, afraid of electoral reactions to labor market reform, reduced the size of the workforce at taxpayers’ expense in ways that may have made economic matters worse. One consequence has been high, and not terribly productive, levels of public spending. Moreover, despite incremental but serious welfare state reforms, there has been growing division between insiders and outsiders. The center-left has had huge problems developing attractive, coherent programs and has lost almost all major elections since 1993.

Germany started out better placed than France for the new world. It did not need to abandon Keynesianism, because the long-standing monetarist practices of its Bundesbank had ruled it out in the first place. Also, Germany pursued an export-oriented development strategy built around very competitive manufacturing operations, whose success had trickled down to finance a generous welfare state. Thus while virtually everyone else faced trauma in the 1980s, Germany sailed as Modell Deutschland. But the end of the cold war and globalization proved more troublesome. German unification, a huge political success, was promoted in economically unsound ways and led to huge and chronic internal west-east transfers (upward of 5% of GDP annually), a huge jump in unemployment, and chronic budgetary problems. Germany remains the world’s leading exporter, but at the cost of increased capital investment and labor shedding. Germany’s exporting companies now employ fewer well-paid, highly skilled, and flexible workers. But German society has been more and more troubled. Recent social policy reforms have helped, but the German welfare state remains expensive, and trickle-down effects from successful exporting no longer reliably float broader living standards. The result has been insider-outsider dualism. The German center-left, held responsible by parts of its working class base for painful welfare state reforms, has lost electoral support to a new left competitor, die Linke, whose stock in trade is defensive resistance to social policy change.

In southern Europe the distinctive character of political regimes has affected prospects of the center-left. In Italy the left long meant the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which had deep working-class roots, solid experience in local government, and a leadership less craven in its relations with Moscow than its counterparts in the rest of Europe, France especially. It would for all these reasons become Eurocommunism’s best hope in the 1970s. But the PCI was also ghettoized, and its dominance of the working-class vote produced for most of the postwar era a rallying of right-wing and centrist political forces around the Christian Democratic Party (DC), which had an effective lock on central government. That firm grip allowed Italian politics to remain clientelist and corrupt, and the corruption enveloped nearly everyone, including
the socialists under Bettino Craxi. The end of the cold war and of Christian Democratic domination had the effect of undermining both left and right: the PCI became a shadow of its former self; the DC suffered massive defections and was replaced by smaller, more erratic, and often right-wing groupings; and the socialists never recovered from the scandals known collectively as Tangentopoli. One consequence was a center-left that was fragmented and lacked a history, vision, and program; a second was the rise of the clownish, populist, but electorally successful Silvio Berlusconi; the third was a policy stasis, as no party or coalition could muster the will or the means to reform the welfare state and economy. Italy as a society has thus also moved toward the dualism—the insider-outsider pattern visible elsewhere—but with more corruption and, it must be admitted, much better style.

Spain, Portugal, and Greece, in contrast, all lived under authoritarian dictatorships that did not end until the mid-1970s. In both Spain and Greece they ended in ways that helped lefts to become center-lefts and then gave them an unusual record of electoral success. In part this was because in both countries rights had been tainted by complicity with the dictatorships. The center-lefts thus had access to power which, in the context of joining the EU and modernizing their societies and economies, gave them a widely shared national mission and, with success, strong new credibility. The Portuguese left did less well, losing its post-dictatorship advantage through excess revolutionary posturing and internal divisions.

The new lefts of Eastern European countries provide different illustrations of the importance of historical legacies. Revulsion with the communist past ruled out the emergence of strong forms of traditional social democracy. As they democratized and built market societies, these countries started out on a more liberal path than their Western European neighbors. Ironically, this tendency has not prevented center-lefts, often formed from the remnants of communist parties, from winning elections. The policies that they then carried to power have been very different from those in the West. Two decades of transition are not long enough to discern permanent trends, however, and the situation remains unsettled.

Including the American Democratic Party in a comparative analysis of center-left parties is unorthodox, since unlike Europe, America has not produced a socialist movement tied to a strong union movement. Yet the Democrats may have become center-left before anyone else, obliged by their different historical trajectory to build complex alliances with social groups other than the working class and to deal with unusually powerful capitalists. At the same time, from the New Deal through the 1960s the Democrats followed many of the policy trajectories of their European brethren. But constrained
by an anti-statist political culture, a fragmented federal state, and a weak labor movement, the American welfare state was a “residual” one, combining tax-subsidized, employer-provided retirement and healthcare benefits for workers in the core, mostly unionized sectors of the economy, government-sponsored pension and healthcare programs for the elderly, and means-tested programs for the poor. Momentum in the growth of an already limited welfare state was largely stopped in the early 1980s by a deeply rooted and long-lived conservative political reaction that lasted until Barack Obama’s victory in 2008.

Ironically, owing to the size and global strength of its economy, the United States has been able to circumvent some of the crises that have bedeviled European countries. The United States spearheaded the international shift away from Keynesianism, but the administration of Ronald Reagan, while hawkish about the practices of other governments, was able to engineer a quick and politically beneficial recovery from transitional recession by running budget deficits that could, thanks to American international monetary and financial centrality, be financed in global capital markets by foreign investors and central bankers. It was only during the Democratic, center-left presidency of Bill Clinton that the United States turned toward obeying standard rules of fiscal responsibility; these were swiftly abandoned by President George W. Bush, who returned to the use of internationally financed budget deficits to fund sweeping, politically driven tax cuts for corporations and the upper class. Rule violations and role reversals have seemed eminently feasible for a country that has been the biggest elephant in the international economic zoo, at least until very recently.

The negative consequences of these practices and of the harsh conservatism that pushed them forward are in part why even as Europe continued to liberalize, the Democratic Party in the United States began to move toward a more active government economic role. With the bursting of the technology and housing bubbles, economic growth and job creation in the United States slowed, while globalization, technological change, the weakening of labor unions, a declining minimum wage, and regressive Republican tax policy contributed to stagnant wages, eroded retirement and healthcare benefits, and increased inequality. In response to all these developments, as well as to the resulting shift of American public opinion to the left since the mid-1990s, and with the continued availability of capital in global markets, Democratic policy intellectuals and politicians themselves moved a bit to the left. Reconsidering the economic and political primacy of reduced budget deficits, Democratic elites, in some cases drawing on the example of the European experience, began to call for universal healthcare, increased public investment,
wage insurance for workers displaced by globalization, and progressive tax reform.

This Democratic shift to the left accelerated briefly in the wake of Obama’s victory and the global economic crisis, which at least temporarily relaxed traditional constraints on an expanded government role. In addition to rescuing failing financial institutions and auto companies, Obama and congressional Democrats, in the face of vociferous Republican opposition, passed a massive economic stimulus program and a budget resolution—including aid to the states and big increases in public investment in infrastructure and “green jobs”—to spark an economic recovery and strengthen the foundations for long-term growth. After an epic battle, Obama and his allies then successfully restructured the nation’s healthcare system and later enacted an important if modest financial reform bill. However, a persistently weak economy and mounting public concern over bailouts, rising spending and deficits, and “Big Government” led to significant Republican gains in the congressional midterm elections in 2010, jeopardizing the durability of the recent shift to the left in United States politics.

There is therefore considerable variety in the economies and societies where center-left parties operate and hope to make gains. There are also very different histories, whose legacies may not quite determine the future but nevertheless matter greatly. Still, the center-left parties work within strikingly similar electoral maps across Europe and North America, confront surprisingly similar social and economic problems, and must find their way within a common world economy. We believe that it is therefore worth examining their situations and prospects together.

The Book and Its Goals

The book explores the post-Keynesian, globalized political world in which the center-left finds itself after the cold war and assesses its consequences and implications. It is premised on a belief that it is unhelpful to lament the recent narrowing of political debate and to regard the acceptance of new constraints as betrayal. Instead, it will probe the new political structures faced by the center-left with an eye toward realizing, seizing, and expanding the political possibilities that they offer. We shall investigate the center-left’s more successful initiatives and analyze when and where they occurred, which conditions facilitated the most useful political responses, which barriers blocked their emergence in other places, and how they were subject to limitations even where they were politically feasible. Our work as presented here will often be historical, but we shall try consistently to look forward. It will be
broad in its reach but necessarily selective; and it will be transatlantic, but also aware of the very real differences that separate the European experience from that of the United States.8

The first chapter focuses on the unique history of social democracy in Europe and its roles in securing democracy, prosperity, and a measure of social justice and social protection in the postwar years. It also makes clear the pitfalls, detours, and false starts that accompanied what the author, Sheri Berman, considers the victory of social democracy, and the continuing difficulties that social democrats have had in understanding their own achievements, sustaining them in hard times, and building upon them in the most recent era. Gerassimos Moschonas follows with a comparative essay on the shifting electoral fortunes and social bases of center-left parties over the past quarter-century. The story he tells is mixed and complicated, like Berman’s, in which achievements and setbacks are carefully balanced through time and space. Less mixed, but unsurprisingly so, is the record of center-left parties in eastern and central Europe surveyed by Jean-Michel De Waele and Sorina Soare. In that unfortunate region the legacy of “actually existing socialism” and Soviet domination cast doubt on the legitimacy of anything calling itself socialist or social democratic, even as the economic and social wreckage left behind called out for a political vision offering more than neoliberalism and “shock therapy.”

Three case studies follow: on Britain, France, and Sweden. Britain and Sweden illustrate two potentially viable paths for center-lefts. France, in contrast, embodies many of the obstacles to taking any path. James Cronin reviews the unhappy history out of which New Labour emerged and argues that this history, and the desire to transcend it, explain a great deal of what New Labour has been about. Viewed in that historical context, New Labour has achieved more than it is usually credited with having achieved. It may or may not be a model for the center-left, but despite its defeat in the elections of May 2010, it is at the least a model worth studying. Art Goldhammer and George Ross undertake a similar analysis of the lengthy process by which the French center-left reached its present impasse. They see a record of incoherence and factionalism that has prevented French socialists from capitalizing on the many failures of their opponents and from undertaking the sorts of policies that might give them a more lasting purchase on voters’ preferences. Jonas Pontusson tells a different story about Sweden, where, he explains, a period of political uncertainty and economic distress in the 1980s afforded social democrats the opportunity to sort out what was central in their vision and program. That involved a reaffirmation of the party’s commitment to work rather than to a particular job, to the skills and training and social sup-
ports required for obtaining and keeping work, and to a world market in which workers and firms would find their just rewards. If properly understood and locally tailored, this slimmed-down and updated Swedish model can, Pontusson insists, inspire the center-left in countries far different from Sweden and its Scandinavian cousins.

What form of center-left politics is likely or even possible in a place as different as the United States? That is part of what the three chapters focused on the American experience seek to determine. In his chapter on electoral dynamics, Ruy Teixeira makes the argument that for all of America’s real and imagined “exceptionalism,” and notwithstanding its setback in the congressional midterm elections in 2010, the party of the center-left is in the process of becoming politically dominant. Democrats have emerged as the party of professionals in the “knowledge” industries and the service sector as well as of women, the young, and ethnic and racial minorities. The party has lost support among its traditional bases in the white working class, but offsetting this to a considerable extent is that those workers who do vote Democratic, mainly those in trade unions, turn out in large numbers to do so. Teixeira differs sharply from those who argued before the last two election cycles that the unusual strength of the religious right, the effects of Republican-controlled redistricting, and the enduring attraction of tough rhetoric on national security, immigration, and divisive social issues had given Republicans a permanent edge. Teixeira concludes his highly useful corrective by predicting that despite the current decline in Obama’s popularity and the Democrats’ substantial midterm losses in 2010, due in both cases mainly to the weak economy, the subsequent economic turnaround and the continued growth of the Democrats’ demographic coalition will likely produce a reelection victory for Obama in 2012 and a broader Democratic revival. Time will tell if Teixeira’s relatively optimistic forecast is borne out.

Chris Howard breaks with the conventional wisdom about the supposed retrenchment of American social policy, describing a record of consistent and not insignificant increases in what would normally be considered government social expenditure. Spending in the United States does not match that in other developed nations, but America is not quite the laggard it is often thought to be. Howard stresses three additional and critical features of the American welfare state: a reliance on the tax system to transfer funds to those in need; the tendency of government programs to miss those most in need and to focus instead on those with real but less pressing needs; and, because the United States economy generates very unequal incomes and distributes wealth disproportionately to the very top, the failure of increases in social spending to do much to redress inequality. Howard further shows that the
Democratic Party bears considerable responsibility for the recent growth in social spending, although the enactment of social programs and the shift in the distribution of social benefits has often required cooperation from Republicans. Assessing the future of the American welfare state in the wake of the current economic crisis, Howard notes the many positive provisions of the recently enacted economic stimulus and healthcare reform bills. He concludes somewhat pessimistically, however, that for a number of economic and political reasons, Obama and congressional Democrats are unlikely to make more than a dent in poverty and inequality.

James Shoch’s chapter on globalization begins by noting that European social democrats have long recognized the benefits of free trade while both compensating “losers” with various social policies and expanding public investment to boost national competitiveness and save and create jobs. The Democratic Party, however, once committed to free trade, has in the past few decades charted a different course. Democratic presidents representing broad national constituencies have continued to promote trade liberalization. But congressional Democrats, under strong pressure from trade-battered labor constituents while also unable or unwilling to press for significant compensatory or public investment programs in the face of Republican attacks on them as “tax-and-spend” liberals, have instead opposed and in some cases blocked recent free trade initiatives. Barack Obama’s victory and the expansion of the Democrats’ congressional majorities in 2008 initially appeared to signal a new era of increased social and public investment spending and thus also a possible eventual decline of labor and Democratic opposition to freer trade. But Democratic midterm losses in 2010 and likely further Senate setbacks in 2012, Shoch concludes, have seriously diminished these prospects.

Taken together, the three chapters devoted to the United States show that the center-left in America faces much the same set of problems as elsewhere and, especially in light of the election results from 2008, that the Democratic Party’s potential to win elections, despite its current slide in approval, may be at least equal to that of any center-left party in Europe. The American chapters also show, however, that historically center-left policies are perhaps harder to develop, implement, and maintain in America than in Europe. Still, policy and politics go together everywhere, and some of the most pressing policy concerns will pose difficulties for center-left parties on both sides of the Atlantic. The last three chapters in the book demonstrate this very clearly. Jane Jenson looks closely at what have been termed “new social risks” and the policy responses they have provoked. New risks come in part from the changing demography of the workforce, as more women work and family structures shift, and from the changed nature of work itself, which is now
less secure, more variable over time, and more highly concentrated in sectors and regions. Specifically, there are now more single mothers as well as more women working, and more of the so-called working poor. The main response to this set of changes has been to try to get more people into the workforce—labor market activation is the term for this—or to make work pay better, either by subsidizing low-paid work or by supplementing wages with social supports. Jenson demonstrates that these problems and responses are shared across different countries with historically rather different welfare systems and types of political economy. The implication is that systems and regimes and parties can and will learn from each other, because whatever the policy legacy, the problems are converging in a more and more global economy.

Sofía Pérez makes a very similar argument about an issue that is equally important for the center-left: immigration. All over Europe there are more immigrants than before, and some of them, especially those from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, are by definition more different from Europeans than earlier immigrants and in that respect less easily integrated in the societies to which they have come. The effects of immigration have varied between countries, Pérez shows, but everywhere it matters in unprecedented ways and, one might add, in ways that have affected American politics for a very long time. The center-left has problems with immigration, since part of its natural base (organized labor) may find immigrants an economic threat, but the center-right faces similar problems (with employers). Both factions try to avoid these problems through symbolic political positions which tend to cancel the partisan effects.

The penultimate piece in our collection is George Ross’s analysis of the impact of the European Union on the center-left. When the EU began as a Common Market, many on the left regarded it as either a capitalist plot or an irrelevancy for national politics. Then from the mid-1980s, when the EU came to exercise new and extensive power over its member states, lefts had to pay more attention. For a while some hoped for a “social Europe,” but recently the EU has looked more like a force for globalization and market liberalization. Ross provides a tour of these moves and what each has meant for parties of the center-left across the continent. His is a particularly intimate and, at base, disenchanted view, but he sees possibilities as well as constraints in EU institutions which are obliged to speak in, if not seek, broad consensus. Ross’s account of the EU is in many ways an account of the present state of the world economy and of the institutions and assumptions that govern it, and so also of their impact on the prospects of the center-left in Europe and elsewhere. It is a reminder again of the novel mix of constraints and opportunities, limits and possibilities, within which center-left politics now operates, and which
must be mastered if it—or rather they, for the constituents of the center-left are many and varied—are to prosper and fulfill the hopes of supporters.

The book ends not with a summary but a set of reflections on what the center-left and its components—be they socialists or social-democrats or democratic socialists or members of the Labour Party or just plain Democrats in the United States—have meant in the past and how the world they inhabit today requires that they evolve new identities, meanings, and means of being effective. The portrait which emerges is varied and nuanced. Some center-lefts are better placed than others to conciliate the demands of economic management, humane policy innovation, and popular support. Some live in institutional environments that favor success; for others this is less true. Some have been able to sustain support among a large number of voters, while others live in fragmented political landscapes that vastly complicate the tasks they need to undertake. All face a new historical crossroads, created by the collapse of the global financial sector that spread from the United States outward beginning in 2008.

It is too soon to know what this crisis will bring for center-lefts, but significant change is likely. Initial responses pointed to a blunting of the excessive faith in markets that had colored politics everywhere where center-lefts had operated for the past quarter-century, a return to government and politics in the making of key economic and social decisions, enhanced regulation of markets, and perhaps even more extensive global governance. All these initial efforts were first aid, designed to save North America, Europe, and the rest of the world from the catastrophic collapse of the global financial sector. They did not necessarily indicate a fundamental shift, and in any case history tells us that major economic crises have not immediately helped lefts. The "Great Recession" lingers, its effects still spreading, but if recent electoral cycles are an indication, it has benefited center-right parties for the most part. This is predictable, as is the way in which conservatives have sought to turn what was initially a crisis of capitalism, for which capital itself was largely blamed, into a crisis of the welfare state and social provision. The big question not yet answered is whether, as has often happened in the past, center-lefts will eventually be able to regroup, gain strength, and bring new and needed reforms. Crises can present great political opportunities, but one can never be sure just who will be able to seize these opportunities. Center-lefts should be in a position to profit if they are able to recognize that this crisis is an invitation not to resurrect the past but rather to innovate in ways that could enhance and restore economic security and produce sustainable new development and greater distributional justice and opportunity for their supporters.
Notes

1. The editors are more than aware of their debt to the enormous and thoughtful literatures on which they build. Some of that is reflected in the references, but surely not all.

For a sampling of the best literature and extensive references see Sassoon 2010 and Bartolini 2007.

2. The only really effective left internationalism of the twentieth century turned out to be imposed and enforced on communists by the Soviet Union.

3. Whether the experience of the 1970s truly disproved Keynesian notions and policy prescriptions remains controversial. So too are the questions of how and when Keynesian ideas were adopted and implemented in various countries. Even in Britain, where Keynes himself was intimately involved in policymaking from the 1920s until his death in 1945, it can be argued that Keynesianism triumphed as a means to fight inflation during the Second World War rather than as a means to counter depression and stimulate the economy. See Hall ed. 1989.

4. The narrowing is especially evident among those who seek to resist it. See, for example, the review by Therborn (2007) of the ideas and projects of those who place themselves to the left of the center-left.

5. A number of authors, most notably Iversen and Stephens (2008), have sought to combine the “varieties of capitalism” and “welfare state regimes” frameworks in a notion of “welfare production regimes.” See also Schröder 2008.

6. Denmark’s crisis, like that in the Netherlands, came earlier in the 1980s. The Swedes had several years of inflation, high unemployment, and financial instability in 1990 which led them to join the EU. Finland had a massive crisis with higher unemployment than anyone in the EU 15 after the end of the cold war in the 1990s. The Norwegians had oil. See Dølvik 2008 and, on the Netherlands, Visser and Hemerijk 1997.

7. The question of whether to study the United States alongside other advanced industrial societies is often debated but seldom resolved. Does “American exceptionalism” render comparison meaningless, or is the United States similar enough to justify comparison? See among many others Lipset and Marks 2000, Kopstein and Steinmo eds. 2008, and Baldwin 2009.

8. As noted above, this volume builds upon the efforts of many other scholars. There are a number of admirably broad studies on the center-left, most of which unfortunately end chronologically at roughly the point where our volume will begin. These works also focus almost exclusively on Europe. One classic example is Scharpf 1987, which treats only the end of the Keynesian postwar boom years. Other large-scale and important studies—including Bartolini 2007, Sassoon 2010, Eley 2002, and Pierson 2001a—bring their stories to a close at roughly similar points. Kitschelt 1994 is an impressive analysis whose focus is primarily on parties and voting rather than policy, and its database may now be somewhat out of date. Moschonas 2002 comes close chronologically to what we propose, even if it remains European in its focus, but Moschonas’s presence among our contributors indicates that he has a great deal
more to say. Another impressive and more current study, focused on the experience of parties in power in six countries, is Merkel, Petring, Henkes, and Egle 2008. On recent developments in social democracy, including the turn toward “third way” reforms, see Bailey 2009a and Huo 2009. In more of a political theory vein see Meyer with Hinchman 2007. More prescriptively see Giddens 1998.