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& SWEDEN

FOREWORD BY A. H. HALSEY

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# DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM IN BRITAIN AND SWEDEN

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# Foreword

Two hundred years have passed since industrialisation and democracy set the European political agenda. It was Marx's achievement in the nineteenth century to understand the outcome as a social transformation by revolution. The theory lives on despite the fact that, at least in the Western world, both industrialisation and democracy have experienced transformations different from and indeed contradictory to its Marxist predictions. Accordingly, political scientists at the end of the twentieth century seek new understandings of political movements in industrial society. Dr Hamilton's study of Britain and Sweden is a scholarly contribution to that search.

He has chosen two countries in which it might be said that the Marxist theory of the future history of capitalism had been tested, found wanting and rejected before the end of the nineteenth century. Unlike Germany where the Social Democratic Party was avowedly Marxist or like France where the Communist Party had widespread popular support, the British and Swedish labour parties have been evolutionist, reformist and committed to democratic transition to socialism through parliament throughout the twentieth century. The argument of their proponents has not, of course, been that their intentions to transform capitalist society were any less radical. The dream of a society of free individuals bound to each other by equality of citizenship was never essentially different from Marx's kingdom of freedom. But the means were different because democracy was held to be also a desirable end in itself; and both ends and means were different because the class analysis of Marxism in effect postulated the impossibility of socialism by parliamentary legislation in a state controlled by capitalist interests.

Dr Hamilton is not concerned, however, to argue the truth or falsity of competing theories of class in history. He takes the British and Swedish social democratic parties for the twentieth century facts that they are and asks a narrower but vital question: Why have these parties oscillated in the degree or intensity of their radicalism? What factors have determined whether they have been more or less 'socialist' in their programmes? Such an approach avoids, or its left-wing critics will say evades, controversy about whether these parties and their leaders have betrayed the socialist cause. He regards it as pointless to ask why neither the British nor the Swedish socialists

have not pursued revolutionary policies which they never intended to pursue. He does not question their belief in parliamentary democracy and he accepts the constraints thereby placed upon them by their commitment. Instead he seeks explanation for their ebb and flow of social democratic militancy.

The two countries are well chosen for the project Dr Hamilton pursues. The Swedish case is an uncomfortable one in three respects: for Marxists; for contemporary economic liberals who claim the necessity of *laissez-faire* policies for modern freedom and prosperity; and for the British Labour Party with its chronic and possibly fatal propensity to internal faction and fraction.

Marxist theoreticians must be discomfited by a country where private enterprise remains central to the economy and yet opportunity and access to welfare have been significantly reduced. Neo-conservatives must be similarly baffled by the Swedish achievement of high productivity, market competitiveness, an unemployment rate of below three per cent and a vigorous, individualistic independence among a people shamelessly willing to join trades unions, to support high rates of taxation and to maintain public services, pensions, social security and all the apparatus of an enervating welfare state. The British Labour Party must not only look enviously at the successes of their Swedish counterparts, but also reflect sadly on their own record of discord within the party and seriously declining electoral appeal.

However, these triumphs and disappointments are not Dr Hamilton's direct concern. The political lessons are there but are second order. The purpose of the book is to construct a theoretical basis on which such political lessons may be staged. His central purpose therefore is to produce an explanatory model. The dependent variable is radicalism in party policy. The independent variables, taking the existence of parliamentary democracy and of social democratic party formation as given, turn centrally on the choice of policies. Twelve are included and the model is, consequently, a complex one as may be seen from Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2. Three, however, turn out to be virtually constants – the character of the labour movement, the political constitution and the party structure. Four others are shown to have a direct influence on the policies pursued – the party's electoral position, its ideology, politics within the party and the perceived ratio of costs to benefits of the policy in question. Other factors work indirectly through the four factors specified and include party strength as measured by membership and