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What's Left of the Left: Democrats and Social Democrats in Challenging Times.
Embracing Markets, Bonding with America, Trying to Do Good

The Ironies of New Labour

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Not long after Labour won office in 1997, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder put their names to a book entitled *The Third Way* (Blair and Schröder 1999). It was not destined to be a best-seller, but it did capture the feeling in the late 1990s that perhaps New Labour had solved the problem of how to be a social democratic party in an era largely inhospitable to parties and movements of the left. The party came to power armed with a supposedly new outlook and program and it had ridden its new message to an overwhelming electoral victory. Was New Labour the future?

A decade later very few progressives, whether European social democrats or American liberals, would assign to New Labour such a historic role. The war in Iraq largely discredited Blair’s government at home and abroad, and the fallout from Iraq served to confirm for many, especially on the left, the suspicion that Labour under Blair’s leadership had sold its soul for political power (Shaw 2007). Gordon Brown’s tenure was worse, for although he sought to separate himself from what were seen as the negatives of Tony Blair, he did not succeed in regaining popular support. Brown had some bad luck, though no more than is normal for a leader, and he suffered as the economy collapsed as well, but these factors alone cannot account for the dramatic decline in his, and the party’s, support. At least three other factors would appear to have been at work: Brown’s unattractive persona; a perhaps normal but in this case unusually rapid shift away from the party that had held power for over a decade; and the quite important fact that the Tories had not only a new and younger and more attractive leader but also a new set of policies that at least in theory were much closer to those of Labour than its earlier policies had been.
The effect of all this has been a kind of amnesia and absence of context in the assessment of what Labour achieved in its decade in power. Critics focus reasonably, but far too narrowly, on the recent defeat or on the party’s difficulties over Iraq, and their eagerness to pronounce the “end of New Labour” suggests an antipathy masking itself as history. The newly elected leader, Ed Miliband, largely based his campaign on the need to go beyond New Labour and in this way abetted those who never liked it. The unfortunate effect is to largely pass over the actual record of Labour in government. There is also a tendency to forget that the appropriate context for assessing New Labour is the record of failure and frustration that preceded it: specifically, the eighteen years that Labour spent in the wilderness after 1979, as Thatcher and her successors effectively destroyed what Labour had built over generations and in the process transformed the political landscape in Britain. This particular piece of forgetting has also allowed people to believe that because Labour won large parliamentary majorities in 1997 and again in 2001, the party was free to do more or less whatever it chose to do while in office. Forgetting the context affects the assessment of foreign policy as well and, because the war in Iraq turned out so badly, critics have not been compelled to confront the very complicated question of what a “progressive” foreign policy would look like in an age of globalization, “rogue states,” jihadist terror, and international uncertainty. It has been enough to denounce what was done and those who did it. Fair enough for debate, not good enough as history or as political analysis, and quite unhelpful in answering the perennial but now especially urgent question: “What is to be done?”

**Forged in Adversity: The Making of New Labour**

New Labour’s claims to be new were, and indeed still are, sometimes disputed. Inevitably the party in its current form bears the marks of its origins and its long history, not least in its name. Nevertheless it is also the product of a protracted and systematic effort to “modernize” the party, to reimagine its vision, to remake its program, and to develop new sources of support. The effort was a response to the challenges confronting all social democratic and liberal parties, but it is important to understand just how, and how seriously, these challenges presented themselves in Britain. Everywhere the center-left was forced to deal with the perceived ineffectiveness of Keynesian formulas in solving the economic problems of the 1970s and 1980s. This is not to say that Keynesian solutions were by themselves wrong or their theoretical underpinnings less firm than those supporting rival policy frameworks. The point is that the conventional wisdom associated with Keynesianism—
the priority in policymaking given to full employment, the assumed compatibility between large state expenditures and sustained growth, the notion that moderate shifts in fiscal and monetary policy could effectively manage economic problems—ceased to be compelling and so came to be less widely accepted.

Nowhere did this process go further or have more devastating effects than in Britain. The “stagflation” of the 1970s was superimposed upon a pattern of long-term economic decline in the United Kingdom, and policymakers were asked to address both the short-term crisis and the secular trend. They failed on both counts, calling into question all their policy nostrums and discrediting mainstream, consensually oriented Conservatism as well as the Labour Party. Labour was particularly vulnerable because it was in office during the period 1974–79, the worst of the crisis, and so bore much of the blame, and because even while it was in office its policies were incoherent. The party was deeply split between the left, centered increasingly on the figure of Tony Benn, and those on a looser right, though it is perhaps more accurate to call them centrists or simply moderates. The left wanted more state ownership and planning, more spending and taxes, and a “fundamental and irreversible” shift in power away from corporations and elites—what together became the “alternative economic strategy.” The strategy was premised on withdrawal from the European Community and the need to construct an autarchic “siege” economy during the transition. Centrists within the party were more corporatist in approach, keen to build on the party’s historic ties to the trade unions to craft a social contract that would hold down wages and prices while redistributing wealth toward the poorest by increasing “the social wage.”2 This was basically a strategy to manage the economic crisis of the 1970s and do some good for the least well-off workers in the process. Actual policy was decided and implemented by party moderates, though the left won many rhetorical battles and the unions exercised a veto over initiatives from wherever they came. By 1979 policy had failed dramatically, and the Labour government led by James Callaghan found itself presiding over a “winter of discontent” brought on by a rebellion from within the ranks of trade unionists, especially in the public sector. Pictures of garbage piling up in the streets, reports of graves undug and of ambulance drivers refusing to drive the sick to hospitals, paved the way for the election of Margaret Thatcher and a dramatic break with all the orthodoxies of the Labour Party, those of its right as much as its left. The shift away from Keynes would be truly seismic in Britain, and it would be ongoing.

The turn away from Keynes and the state and toward the market was the defining and enduring feature of Thatcherism. Its “neoliberal” program had
enormous effects on the economy and society: it shifted the burden of taxes away from the wealthy; it abolished exchange controls and deregulated industry and finance; it renounced the government’s traditional commitment to full employment and replaced it with commitments to fiscal orthodoxy and the control of inflation; it abandoned previous “corporatist” policies, according to which key decisions were discussed with representatives of industry and the trade unions—instead the government chose to confront the trade unions and restrict the scope and effectiveness of industrial action. Thatcherism divested the state of ownership and hence control of key industries and to that degree gave away critical levers over the economy, and it sold off the bulk of the public housing that half a century of progressive urban policy had built.

What was decisive and brilliant about these moves was that they were largely irreversible. Once the state has given up control and ownership over essential industries and resources, it is hard or at least prohibitively expensive to get them back; once taxes on the well-to-do are reduced, raising them again is nearly impossible short of a national emergency; once working people get a taste of homeownership, they do not want to lose what they now own; once the unions have been reduced in membership and political influence, they stay relatively powerless. Thatcher’s governments left a huge legacy that was very hard to displace, and it was this institutional inheritance that Labour was forced to deal with. New Labour has often been criticized for accepting too much of this legacy. The party’s record in office, it followed, would amount to little more than a “humane Thatcherism” or, as one analyst labeled it, a kind of “compensatory neoliberalism.” Such criticism, however, is fundamentally and historically naïve, for it vastly underestimates the weight and durability of what Thatcher brought about.

Labour in Britain also confronted, more sharply than the center-left elsewhere, a rapidly changing electorate. The transition from an industrial to a postindustrial economy, from the production of goods to the provision of services, was more drastic and abrupt in Britain than elsewhere in Europe or even in America. As of the 1960s Britain still had hundreds of thousands of workers employed in industries like mining, textiles, and shipbuilding. These were among the leading industries of the first industrial revolution and, appropriately, were often Victorian in their use of technology, their management structures, and their approach to marketing. They were old and destined to disappear. The United Kingdom also had its share of firms operating in the industries characteristic of the second industrial revolution—steel, chemicals, later motor cars and other consumer durables—but even here productivity lagged and techniques compared poorly with those prevalent among
Britain’s continental competitors and in the United States. But neither Labour nor the Tories had much of a plan for managing the rundown of old industries and the shift into newer lines of work. The historic strength of finance and services did provide employment for an ever-expanding share of the workforce, prompting endless discussions during the 1950s and especially the 1960s about the “black-coated worker” (Britain’s term for the white-collar worker) and “affluent worker” and their impact on politics. But into the 1970s very large numbers continued to work in manual jobs in older industries. The effect on Labour as a party was twofold: first, it only gradually and inconsistently redirected its appeal toward white-collar workers and did little to adapt its message and appeal; and second, its policies were overwhelmingly oriented to protecting a workforce whose physiognomy was already changing and about to change even more. The clearest manifestation of this social fact was the enormous clout of coal miners within the counsels, thinking, and lore of the party: mining strikes in the early 1970s virtually brought down the Conservative government led by Edward Heath, for example, and served as the template for what “direct action” could achieve; and it would be the miners whose desperate but doomed strike in 1984–85 sealed the fate of the enduring tradition of Labour as the party committed overwhelmingly to the defense of manual workers.

For the Labour Party, therefore, the transformation from a party of the workers to a catch-all cross-class party came very late and all of a sudden. During the Thatcher period, in fact, entire industries and working-class communities simply disappeared, and when the economy slowly began to grow again in the 1980s it did not in any sense revive; rather, it expanded by means of new industries in new locations and in the process created the outlines of a new social structure. The Labour Party was therefore forced in the 1980s not only to develop new policies but to do so while confronting a new electorate. It was this novelty that *Marxism Today*, the most thoughtful and engaged advocate of a reoriented Labour Party, tried to capture with the phrase “New Times.” Deploying the classically Marxian trope of “base and superstructure,” the New Times were said to be rooted in the transformation from a “Fordist” to a “post-Fordist” economy and required that ideas and policies be updated accordingly. The party had to alter its traditional rhetoric, policy assumptions, and even emotional attachments if it was to compete effectively in a post-Fordist, Thatcherite, neoliberal world. As with the shift away from Keynes, the Labour Party was pushed to reconstruct its social base, the constituencies and interests that it spoke for, dramatically and abruptly.

The need to reshape the Labour Party was made still more urgent by the electoral landscape of the 1980s. The split within Labour actually worsened
The left effectively took over the party and prompted secession by the right, which in 1981 launched the Social Democratic Party (SDP) with the specific aim of capturing the center ground of British politics. Labour’s first response was to hold firm, and it chose to fight the general election of 1983 on the most left-wing program it had ever espoused—what one MP called “the longest suicide note in history.” The party’s worst defeat since 1931 led to the election of Neil Kinnock as party leader. Kinnock was seen as a man of the left and elected as such, but he was ultimately to lead the party back toward the center. However, he was forced to spend his first two years dealing with the miners’ strike and the influence on the so-called Militant Tendency (a small but surprisingly effective Trotskyist sect) within the local parties in Liverpool and parts of London. By 1985 Kinnock turned to an effort to re-shape the party’s message and, in effect, to compete for the centrist voters lost to the SDP and the Tories. To do so he gathered around himself a coterie of “modernizers” including Charles Clarke, Patricia Hewitt, and Peter Mandelson. The immediate focus was presentation, but after the defeat of 1987 it would include policy as well. The Policy Review of 1987–89 moved the party’s program decidedly to the center. By certain standards it could be argued that Labour only became a genuinely social democratic party in 1989, when it finally reconciled itself to working within the “mixed economy” and gave up its aspiration, never realistic but nevertheless never relinquished, for socialist transformation.

Despite this major policy reorientation, Labour failed again to dislodge the Tories in the election of 1992. It had seen off the threat from the SDP, but it was still far from being able to beat the Conservatives. This fourth successive defeat was in some respects even more traumatic than earlier ones. After all, the party had reformed itself, purged itself, fashioned a new and more attractive message, and still lost. The effects were mixed in the short term, profound and utterly decisive in the long term. Kinnock resigned straight-away and was replaced by John Smith, a moderate Scot whose selection signaled a period of consolidation and whose supporters believed that with “one more shove” Labour could win. The modernizers, who by this time were led by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, were appalled, for they believed that the lesson of 1992 was the need for further reform. When Smith died in 1994 he was replaced by Blair, who chose to push even harder on the modernizing agenda. His first big achievement was to convince the party that it should replace clause IV, the commitment to public ownership, in its constitution. The move was largely symbolic, but it had the right effect, for it sent a message to voters, the press, and potential rivals that Labour had become a quite new and different party.
These final moves toward modernizing and centering the party were at least partly stimulated by the two other forces that have recently constrained center-left parties across Europe: the collapse of communism and the progress of globalization. The Communist Party (CPGB) was never a major force within British politics, in part because it effectively chose to cast its fate with the Labour Party from the 1930s. Marxist ideas of various sorts had nevertheless a fairly wide influence on the left. The collapse of communism had an effect that was only modest practically, but large symbolically and emotionally. It was a signal that notions of socialist transformation, and hopes of transcending capitalism, really were the stuff of nostalgia and served no useful purpose even in the rhetoric of the Labour Party. To some, like Jack Straw, this meant that it was time to alter the party’s image and discourse by finally abandoning claims about socialism and in particular by ridding the constitution of clause IV (Straw 1993). Blair, as party leader, would agree.

Britain’s place in the world economy, and its unique dependence on international trade and finance, has long been an important factor in British politics. As the first and most consistent of free trade nations, Britain has been much more exposed to the opportunities and vulnerabilities that stem from that stance than its rivals and competitors have been (Trentmann 2008). This exposure was increased massively and deliberately after the election of Margaret Thatcher: the Tories quickly announced the abolition of exchange controls, for example, and sought to make London once again the world’s leading financial center, albeit through the activities of American banks and investment houses. The “big bang” of 1986 was the key milestone in this process. The Conservatives also welcomed foreign investment in industry and, perhaps most important, were willing to see British firms perish if they could not effectively compete internationally. Britain was also keen on creating a European “single market” in the 1980s. All of this made globalization more real for Britain than for other major economies and made it easy and logical for the modernizers in the Labour Party to insist that their policies were to a considerable extent dictated by the need to compete in international markets. Some within the party might be tempted to object, of course, for there had been strong support within the party for policies that would constrain or counteract the world market and protect industry and jobs from its devastating effects. These were in fact the assumptions and intentions of the “alternative economic strategy” proposed in the late 1970s. But the implementation of that strategy was effectively preempted by the decision to secure an IMF loan in 1976. The need for the loan, though disputed then and since, offered a choice between participating fully in the world economy and not doing so. Once made, the choice was difficult to reverse; and the modernizers within
the party insisted that opting out was inconceivable (Burk and Cairncross 1982; Fay and Young 1978; Callaghan 2000).

So party competition, shifts in the sociology of the electorate, and the repeated failures of the Labour Party while in office and the consequent discrediting of its policy assumptions, as well as the more diffuse but no less important effects of the end of communism and the advance of globalization—all put enormous pressure on the Labour Party to become something very different. As the modernizers, Blair especially, came to understand this imperative, they sought to transform three of the defining features of the party. First, they worked hard to refashion the party’s image and rhetoric. This meant embracing modern campaign techniques and the instruments required to make them effective—polls, focus groups, and the employment of public relations staff rather than researchers or organizers. It also led to the selection of leaders and spokesmen who looked, talked, and acted the part. The second task was to redefine the message: Labour’s program during the 1970s and into the late 1980s was on the whole quite radical, but it had by the 1990s been rejected again and again. The major work in revising the program was done in the late 1980s under Kinnock, but the process would continue under Smith and Blair. With the accession of Blair to the leadership, moreover, revision became more intense and aggressive. So long as Kinnock and Smith were leaders, the move to the center was seen and understood as a tactical necessity, not something done out of conviction. Blair set out to convince voters that he really meant it, that he and Brown and their allies genuinely believed that the market was a good thing and not merely something to be accommodated, that New Labour could make a market economy work better and produce more humane outcomes, and that they embraced the future and the role of the market and of business within it rather than merely acquiescing in its inevitability. Not everyone within the party agreed, and many grumbled privately and a few openly, but the grumbling was much diminished when the party won office in 1997.

The third and less often noted set of changes had to do with organization (Russell 2005). The structure of the Labour Party differed qualitatively from that of other parties in Britain and, it would seem, from social democratic parties elsewhere. Labour in origin was a projection of the trade union interest into politics, formed largely to protect that interest industrially, and the trade unions were built directly into its organization. Thus most members of the party were members by virtue of their membership in trade unions; the great bulk of party finances came from the unions rather than from individual subscriptions or donations; at the annual party conference, which defined the party’s principles and set out its program, trade unions controlled fully 90%
of the votes until the early 1990s; and trade unions long had substantial built-in representation on the National Executive Committee. Inevitably the connection largely defined the underlying outlook and culture of the party also, even if there was a gloss of ethical socialism and Marxism laid on top. And it served the party well over many years, providing financial support and the backbone of electoral mobilization.

Over time, however, the union link had two further and ultimately unhappy consequences. During the 1960s and especially the 1970s the party in government had tried to do three things simultaneously: to generate as much growth and employment as possible; to move the economy, or society, in a more collectivist and egalitarian direction; and to do these things while keeping prices under control. The problem was that the first two objectives largely contradicted the third. Labour governments in Britain, like governments elsewhere, had very few mechanisms at hand for maintaining price stability. The best they could do was ask the trade unions to help. Trade union leaders were willing, but their members were not. The effect was a series of botched efforts to get the trade unions’ cooperation in controlling inflation. In 1968–69, for example, the government produced a white paper, “In Place of Strife,” which proposed that union leaders be given the power to rein in unofficial strikes. In return unions and their members would be accorded an impressive array of rights and privileges. The effort got nowhere, and the government was forced into a retreat that showed its impotence in the face of union resistance. A decade later a still weaker Labour government tried to manage the economic crisis it faced by asking unions to agree to another year of wage restraint. Such a policy had worked from 1974 through 1977, as the government had offered increases in the “social wage”—i.e., in pensions and social services—and in the wages of the poorest workers as part of a broad “social contract.” It finally failed, in the “winter of discontent.”

The effect was not merely the election of Mrs. Thatcher. The inability to make the trade union connection work for Labour in power discredited the connection itself as well as the trade unions. The fiasco over “In Place of Strife” demonstrated that trade union leaders wielded a de facto veto over Labour policy; the winter of discontent demonstrated that the disaffected rank and file could veto what their leaders had decided on high. The party was rendered doubly ineffective. Leaders like Wilson and Callaghan and later Kinnock found the situation embarrassing; Blair regarded it as intolerable, and his allies were determined to overcome it. They were aided in this by Margaret Thatcher, who beat the miners into submission, rewrote labor law, and presided over a decade of industrial transformation that left the unions
severely weakened. For their part the Labour modernizers were careful in opposition not to promise to reverse Tory industrial relations policy; they also made it clear that the unions were not to enjoy special access to a future Labour government. More important, they initiated a series of alterations in the internal organization of the party that reduced the influence of the trade unions. The aim was not merely to distance themselves from the unions but to prevent the unions from ever exercising the decisive influence they had wielded during previous Labour regimes.

New Labour in Power

These decisions, the problems they were meant to solve, and the constraints they were intended to overcome all had a very big impact on what New Labour did in power after 1997. So too did the party’s promise not to exceed Tory spending limits for the first two years and the decision, made shortly after the election, to let the Bank of England set interest rates outside the control of the government. The effect of a moderate program, a rhetoric aimed at consensus, and policies designed not to upset but reassure financial markets made for a first term with only modest achievements. Gradually, however, New Labour gained the confidence and experience to begin seriously to implement its program. It also profited from the brute fact of economic success, which meant that the proceeds of growth could be used to direct money to Labour’s preferred objectives. In the election of 2001, moreover, the government hinted at least at the prospect of an increase in national insurance contributions—in theory not a tax increase, but everyone understood it as such—and another decisive victory led to its adoption. Labour now had the money and the experience to put its stamp upon policy and upon society.

What did it do, and how well? The answer depends in part on where one looks, on what area of policy one chooses to emphasize. Any list is arbitrary, but any moderately comprehensive one would presumably include: economic performance and employment; the funding and administration of public services such as health, education, and transport, and how these translate into outcomes; the constitution and distribution of power and authority; and issues of personal and national security, from crime to foreign policy. What is perhaps most interesting about the experience of New Labour is that in most of these areas the government claimed to be doing something new and distinctive, different not only from the Tories but also from what past Labour governments had done or at least tried to do. In assessing its performance, it is therefore useful to ask both how New Labour did and also whether success or failure had
anything to do with the distinctive innovations, if any, made by New Labour in government. A thorough analysis would take volumes, but a brief inventory is possible (Shaw 2007; Seldon 2007; Toynbee and Walker 2010).

The Economy and Employment

Labour had the good fortune to inherit an economy in recovery. The party promised, of course, to manage growth better than the Tories, but it offered few specific proposals. Labour would essentially continue to provide a stable macroeconomic framework with only minor alterations. The most visible move was the decision to let the Bank of England set interest rates free from detailed government involvement. Did this matter economically? It is difficult to say definitively, but the decision did send a message to financial markets that Labour was committed to market mechanisms and to the fight against inflation. The message was a welcome one to business and certainly did much to reassure investors that they had little to fear from New Labour. Whether that belief conduced to greater economic growth is, again, very hard to determine. What can be said is that this initial decision, coupled with a decade of generally prudent fiscal policy under Gordon Brown’s supervision, did nothing to derail an economy that was already growing substantially. In fact, the record of sustained economic growth compiled during the first decade of New Labour rule exceeded that of any previous administration. It is of course possible that New Labour was merely profiting from policies begun earlier by its opponents and was unfairly given credit that others deserved, but that is how politics works.

What was new about Labour’s economic and employment policies, then, was not any departures from what the Tories had put in place, but rather how they differed from the party’s history. New Labour broke decisively from what was seen as the pattern of previous Labour governments, which promised to do a great deal, to spend and (inevitably) to tax, and to make use of the state to spur economic growth and create jobs. New Labour no longer believed this was possible, and so did not promise it. What it did offer was a range of policies to increase employment by making people more employable and giving them greater incentives to work. The theoretical underpinnings of the approach were found in “endogenous growth theory,” which focused on skills and knowledge. Practically speaking, getting more people into work—insertion, as some would call it, or labor market activation in another parlance—would simultaneously reduce the number on welfare and promote “social inclusion.” A prominent initiative, partly modeled on the welfare reform efforts of President Bill Clinton, was the so-called New Deal,
which offered financial support as well as childcare to those willing to enter approved training schemes, vocational education, or subsidized work (King and Wickham-Jones 1990). The first program aimed at the young; subsequent ones focused on single parents, the disabled, and the long-term unemployed. A related set of policies sought to reduce the disincentives to work: free or subsidized childcare, for example, would eliminate or at least lower that barrier to employment; a minimum wage would make work pay better for the poorest; and the “Working Families Tax Credit” together with the Child Tax Credit would allow a kind of “top-up” beyond what they ordinarily earned. The aim was to escape the so-called poverty trap that rendered work less profitable than relief. Alongside these “active labor market policies” was a broader interest in encouraging human capital development through increased investment in education and policies aimed at nurturing “knowledge-based” industries through more research and development. Labour chose to call this mix of policies “supply-side socialism,” and they did work on the supply side, though to call this socialism is rather a stretch (Romano 2006).

Whatever the label, the consensus is that the New Deal, tax credits, training, and improved daycare arrangements have been moderately effective: more people were employed overall and in the target groups, and the welfare of the poorest workers and their families substantially improved. It is of course hard to say with certainty that these shifts are long-term and that they will survive a sustained economic downturn, but the effects in the short and medium term have been largely positive. It also seems that in certain respects the quality of work has improved and the rights of workers have been marginally enhanced. Policies on family leave and equal opportunity, for example, have been deemed largely successful. Here the key was not so much new British laws and programs as the importation of European standards. During its long period in opposition the Labour Party had faced a dilemma over its stance on the rights of unions and of workers more generally. The Thatcher government’s industrial relations legislation was deeply resented by the trade unions but popular with voters. The party therefore needed to do something for the unions without alienating others. The solution was found in Europe: Labour decided to leave the Tories’ legislative framework intact but to accept the Social Charter first proposed by Jacques Delors. The Tories, by contrast, opted out of that bit of the European bargain. The social rights outlined in the charter stood between the minimal rights accorded workers and unions in current British law and the much more extensive set of protections and immunities that unions had enjoyed in Britain up through 1979. The party managed to convince the trade unions that the European package was the best they could get; and on assuming office in 1997 the government opted
in to its provisions. Unions and workers have benefited, more as individuals than collectively, and union membership, which declined precipitously in the 1980s and 1990s, has begun to recover, if only slightly (Howell 2004).

Public Services

If Labour inherited an improving economy in 1997, it also inherited a deteriorating array of public services. Nearly twenty years of Conservative government bequeathed a legacy of underinvestment in education, health, and transportation. Scholars have debated to what extent the Conservatives were able to roll back the welfare state, and it is clear that they were able to make only modest cuts in the National Health Services (NHS) and for the most part in education (Pierson 1994). It is nevertheless also widely agreed that rates of increase were cut, necessary improvements and maintenance were delayed, and pay and conditions for public sector employees declined or improved only marginally. There was thus a historic deficit of expenditures that the Labour government would want to make up.

That would almost have to happen, though finding the funds would not be simple. Doing so, and doing so with minimal tax increases or controversy, was Gordon Brown’s primary achievement as chancellor. It took a couple of years for the government to begin increasing expenditures on public services, but over time it provided enormous sums. Indeed, it has been widely reported that the NHS was simply unable to spend all that it was receiving from the government. And there have been results: the recruitment of doctors and nurses went way up in the health services, waiting times came way down. Expenditures on health increased by 7.4% per year in real terms between 2002 and 2008, for example, and nearly as much was spent on education. Spending for transport also increased substantially.

Increased funding and better outcomes on a wide range of measures have nevertheless not brought happiness. Two reasons apparently account for this. First, taking responsibility for social provision makes any government, any agency, responsible for what goes wrong as well as for what works. Blair famously said that New Labour believes not in dogma but in “what works,” but what works tends not to be noticed and so is taken for granted while failure attracts endless attention. Every botched diagnosis, every MRSA infection, every drop in exam results, every train failure is reported and someone is blamed, so it is very hard for any government to get proper credit for improved services. This enduring condition has been exacerbated by New Labour’s approach to the public sector. Early on New Labour decided that increases in funding had to be accompanied by “reform,” and reform was
typically defined, controversially, as involving increases in competition and choice. The public sector, in New Labour’s view, should be restructured according to the principles and practices of the market. In certain cases services should be provided directly by the private sector, even if that led to profit making at public expense. It also meant a shift in rhetoric, with public sector workers and their unions cast as opponents of reform, as “producer interests” that got in the way of the interests of consumers or patients or clients or passengers, and whose self-interested rigidities effectively reduced choice.

Why did New Labour choose this approach to the public sector? For some, it was because they really believed in choice and the superiority of market models. Evidently Blair really did think that competition and choice, whether in medicine or in education, would produce superior outcomes. For others, it was more a matter of expediency: getting the private sector to help finance new schools, hospitals, buses, and trains or to perform certain medical procedures would allow a more rapid expansion and improvement. Critics have of course pointed out that privately provided services and facilities are no cheaper or better than those done by and through public authorities, and sometimes have higher cost and lower quality, but that is not the point: the perceived need as of 1997 was for speed. There was also the issue of political expediency, in both the short and long term. Short-term, it was believed to be easier to sell increased public expenditure if that was going to produce not just more but better, more “reformed” services. Long-term, many within New Labour reckoned that the viability of the public sector depended on keeping the middle classes and the increasingly affluent working class within the system. The big threat to the public sector, it was argued, was the defection of people whose standards were rising and who could afford to go elsewhere. To keep them happy meant providing higher standards and more choice within the basic framework of public provision. This strategic argument is hard to prove or disprove, but it is not for that reason wrong, disingenuous, or unimportant. Labour’s policies toward the public sector have as a result proved highly controversial, and disaffection within the ranks of public sector workers has prevented Labour from reaping the benefits that its record of increased expenditures might otherwise merit. Critics have claimed with some success that New Labour has eroded the “public service ethos” and in that sense violated its core principles.

This critique has been reinforced by the lack of interest that New Labour has shown in another core principle in its tradition: equality. The data here are frankly contradictory. Under Labour the fate of the poorest section of society has improved a great deal: child poverty in particular was lessened; the working poor became much better off; and the tax and benefit system be-
came more redistributive. At the same time, inequality has slightly increased. How are these developments reconciled, in fact and in theory? It is clear that recent economic trends have been very regressive in their effects. Incomes have grown much faster for the middle and upper classes than for others, those with property and investments have fared much better than those without, and the ongoing shift away from industry and toward services has continued to reduce the number of high-paying manual jobs. In that context—as, it should be noted, in most other advanced countries—inequality steadily increases. In Britain, supporters of New Labour will argue, inequality has grown less and has to some extent been counteracted by government policy. The defense is compelling enough, but it is also true that in theory New Labour is not averse to increases in wealth or inequality. From the beginning New Labour asserted that it wanted to be pro-business and that it heartily approved of entrepreneurship and the accumulation of wealth. Labour professed to want “more millionaires,” not fewer. And it is this attitude, particularly as and when it combines with the disparaging of the public sector and the constant hectoring to reform it, that has convinced at least some people that New Labour has truly “lost its soul.”

The Constitution, Power, and Security

For most of its history the Labour Party has been about “the social.” Of necessity it has had to develop a foreign policy, policies toward crime and the regulation of personal life, and a philosophy of how government should work, but it has typically not distinguished itself on these issues. The party has not fundamentally challenged the “Westminster model” of government but has sought instead to capture the model; it has been moderately liberal on matters of rights and social questions, but hardly in the forefront on these matters; and its foreign policy has not differed fundamentally from that of its rivals. Indeed before the advent of New Labour the Labour Party’s greatest success had been in the 1940s, when it could claim to be the party which best represented the national interest rather than the interests of a particular class, and when it managed to portray its opponents as willing to sacrifice the national interest. Labour was at that moment the national party, not a sectional interest, and as such would do a better job of protecting the state, its institutions, and the “British way of life.”

It is therefore ironic that in the decade after 1997 Labour brought into effect a series of far-reaching constitutional changes. The most important were devolution in Scotland and Wales, decisions with potentially transforming consequences for the shape and definition of the nation; reform of the
judiciary and the House of Lords, a process that is far from completed; and
the incorporation into British law of the European Convention on Human
Rights and other EU laws which have in effect given Britain its first written
constitution. In addition, there is peace and the beginnings of reconciliation
and devolved government in Northern Ireland, a success in foreign policy
with major constitutional ramifications. The full effects of these innovations
will not be clear for a very long time, but they are likely to be profound.

Radical constitutional change was not something with which Labour had
ever been identified, and it was not very high on Labour’s list of priorities in
1997. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Labour has been given little
credit for these initiatives. Instead it has suffered for its ambivalence toward
these shifts even as it has overseen their implementation. It has appeared in-
consistent and illiberal to advocates of constitutional reforms and so forfeited
its place as the party most strongly committed to typically liberal reform.
Labour has been vulnerable to the charge of illiberalism on several other
fronts as well. Blair declared that Labour would be both “tough on crime,
[and] tough on the causes of crime.” The point was to take away the ability
of the Tories to claim that Labour was “soft on crime” because of its concern
with getting at its root “causes” rather than punishing criminals and protect-
ing victims. Labour actually managed to get crime down, or at least the main
measures of crime, and it adopted policies like the introduction of “anti-social
behavior orders,” or ASBOs, that allow it to claim to be decisively on the side
of the victims of crime. The party’s stances on immigration and asylum have
been similar. Under Labour, Britain has had more generous policies on immi-
gration and asylum than most other European countries, but the government
has also worked assiduously to convince voters that both are under control.
It has received little credit and considerable criticism for its specific mix of
tough rhetoric and moderately open policy on these issues.

Assessing these policies is therefore especially difficult, partly because the
issues and data are complex but mainly because it is difficult to know what
standard to apply. Over a protracted period Labour has been a socially lib-
eral party, although the Liberal Democrats (and the parties which merged to
create them) have occasionally competed on these grounds. The architects
of New Labour understood that the party needed to maintain that stance
while also finding a way to compete for voters who were less socially lib-
eral but might respond to other elements of the party’s appeal. They chose
in response to move toward what was regarded as the center on such issues
as crime and immigration. To some extent this dilemma reflects the shifting
social base of Labour. Like social democratic and liberal parties elsewhere,
Labour now gets as many votes from the professional middle classes, espe-
cially in the public sector, as from the working class, and among these newer supporters social liberalism is quite important. So too are economic issues like support for spending on public services, an area in which these voters very often work. By most accounts, however, working-class voters are less liberal or progressive on social issues. New Labour’s strategy, both in opposition and in government, has been to try to satisfy both groups and find ways of maintaining the party’s traditional liberalism while allaying voters’ fears about crime, immigration, asylum, and most recently terrorism. It is a delicate balance, and probably the best that a party like Labour can do is adopt a series of compromises that will, with luck, keep the issues from becoming salient enough to rupture the coalition required for electoral success. Still, balancing of this sort gives further ammunition for those who wish to argue that Labour has “lost its soul.”

Much the same dilemma confronts Labour regarding foreign policy, but on this issue the party has less control of what is and is not salient and when. Clearly, Iraq became far more salient than Blair or his colleagues ever dreamed, except perhaps in their worst nightmares. Just what an appropriate Labour foreign policy would look like is by no means obvious. After Blair’s resignation and David Miliband’s appointment as foreign secretary, the government chose to put somewhat less emphasis on the “special relationship” with the United States. It was also eager to be seen as more multilateral and more attentive to Europe than it seemed to be in the first years after 9/11, and to emphasize goals like development aid and climate change that command wide if perhaps shallow public support. It is not a distinctly new foreign policy, but a more agreeable one. It still leaves open, however, just what Labour’s orientation should be, or should have been, toward the awkward questions of “humanitarian intervention,” terrorism, and Britain’s long-standing strategic posture as America’s closest ally. The reason these are open questions is that despite Blair’s activism and decisiveness and despite New Labour’s efforts to rethink policy across a wide range of issues, the party as a whole has not engaged in any fundamental reassessment of foreign policy over the past quarter-century.

The roots of today’s uncertainties within the Labour Party go back at least to the election of 1983, which Labour fought on a program of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Voters got to choose between Labour’s antinuclear and implicitly anti-NATO stance and the Conservatives’ far different policies—continued support for NATO and nuclear weapons and support for the United States regardless of the scary rhetoric of President Reagan’s administration and the deployment of intermediate-range (Pershing and Cruise) missiles in Europe. Thatcher won a huge victory, aided in no small measure by Britain’s
recent triumph in the Falklands. In the aftermath Labour began to back off its unilateralist and non-nuclear positions, but it failed to do so effectively and the issue again cost votes in 1987. In the policy review that followed the defeat, one working group was commissioned to look at foreign and defense policy, but its members had great difficulty reaching a consensus until they took a trip to Moscow. Mikhail Gorbachev met the delegation and told them not to fret. The British nuclear deterrent was not a matter of great concern and besides, the United States and the USSR were in the process of agreeing to a package of major reductions in both intermediate and strategic weapons. The debate within the party was adjourned rather than resolved, and the issue dropped way down the list of party concerns as the cold war ended. The effect was to bequeath to New Labour a heritage of ambivalence in foreign and defense policy. Antiwar and antinuclear sentiments sat uneasily alongside the traditional Atlanticist and anticommunist record of the post-war Labour governments.

New Labour thus took office in 1997 with virtually no experience in foreign and defense matters, with few specific commitments and no clear vision. Once in power Labour opted for continuity: it reaffirmed support for the Atlantic alliance and came to share the basic policy orientation and preferences of President Clinton—free trade, the promotion of human rights and market-based democracies, the enlargement of organizations like the EU and NATO, and “engagement” with the UN and other multilateral institutions. New Labour also shared with the United States a determination to maintain Anglo-American military power at roughly the levels set at the end of the cold war. Blair and the shadow foreign secretary, Robin Cook, thus differed but minimally with their Tory predecessors, though in opposition they had sharply criticized the Tories’ apparent indifference to the tragedy of Bosnia. The Labour government would go on, largely at Blair’s insistence, to emerge as a strong advocate for selective “humanitarian intervention,” and Blair would personally push Clinton toward a more active policy in Kosovo. It was in the context of the debate over Kosovo that in April 1999 Blair gave his famous speech in Chicago on the “Doctrine of International Community” and made this position explicit (Blair 1999; Little and Wickham-Jones eds. 2000; Kampfner 2004; Rawnsley 2001; Coates and Krieger 2004; Freedman 2005).

That statement put Britain on record in support of aggressive action to respond to “rogue states” and humanitarian crises, a commitment that would facilitate the subsequent choice to invade first Afghanistan and then Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11. It was in that respect an important precedent, but it is clear that back in 1999 very few, including Blair, envisioned the world as it would become after 9/11 or the very different context in which foreign policy
would be carried out in that world. Still, New Labour had cast its fate with the United States and the “special relationship,” and with the principle of humanitarian intervention, and it would become very difficult to turn back. What made it especially difficult was that New Labour had no other coherent or convincing set of policies on which to draw. Debate over foreign policy had simply not been a priority in the party since the end of the cold war, and the New Labour project was a largely domestic affair: it did not encompass an alternative vision of Britain’s role in the world. Nor, frankly, is it likely that a lengthy prior debate would have done much to prepare the party, or Britain more generally, for the difficulties presented by 9/11 and the rise of militant Islam. Knowing what they know now, neither Brown nor Miliband nor Jack Straw nor Blair himself would have been likely to argue for the invasion of Iraq, but even now the present lack of a clear alternative suggests that getting it right would have been very hard. And would the Americans have listened if they had succeeded?

Foreign policy matters, however, and Iraq matters because on this issue New Labour was seen very much to have lost its way and perhaps its very soul. That the Tories would undoubtedly have done the same thing as New Labour, and that the Liberal Democrats would never have had the opportunity to decide on the right or wrong strategy, does not make the loss of support, and of legitimacy, any less real for New Labour. Blair left in 2007, but his successor was not able to recoup the support that Blair lost because of Iraq. Again, that Brown’s Conservative challenger failed to offer a fundamentally different policy did Labour no good, for it did not constitute a reason to come back to Labour. Nor was there an obvious set of domestic issues with which to lure voters back, for the Conservatives under David Cameron had moved to the center on most key issues and effectively stolen New Labour’s rhetoric (Rentoul 2008). The effect of this curious conjuncture is that not only voters but also scholars, political leaders, analysts, and activists failed to appreciate the numerous and often quite successful innovations to which New Labour could rightly lay claim. New Labour thus became a model that voters chose to reject in May 2010. New Labour’s history and its record may nevertheless contain lessons critical for the renewal and advance of the center-left everywhere but in Britain. If it is to play such a role elsewhere, or even regain a purchase on the allegiance of British voters, however, New Labour may well require new labels, new rhetoric, and new understandings. This will also not be easy. It has been claimed again and again that New Labour has offered no distinct vision, just clever rhetoric (Fairclough 2000). Perhaps, but not for lack of trying. When New Labour was still taking shape as a political force in the 1990s, there were in fact repeated efforts to outfit it with a discourse and rationale
that would capture what was actually new and different about it. At least two big ideas were floated, along with a more modest argument from Blair, before New Labour settled on the ultimately unsatisfactory “Third Way.” The first idea was community, or communitarianism. The reasoning was that the party needed a phrase that pointed to the same values or goals as socialism but avoided the assumption that the way to achieve them was through the state. Talk of community implied that citizens had duties as well as rights and that to some extent the two were interdependent; and it allowed the party to avoid charges that it was too soft or permissive. It fit especially well with the phrase, coined by Brown but used by Blair, “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.”

The notion never quite caught on, perhaps because its inherent, and intended, illiberalism had little appeal within the party. The second concept that was aired and debated in the mid-1990s was that of “the stakeholder society” (Hutton 1995; Hutton 1997). Again, the purpose was to convey what was regarded as a key principle of socialism without using the word. All citizens had a stake in society and the economy, not just the owners of capital, and their interests should be taken into account in policymaking. It was precisely this meaning, however, which rendered the idea unviable: it was seen—allegedly by Gordon Brown, but surely by others as well—as too threatening to capital at a moment when Labour sought to reassure business of its intentions. The concept also lent itself to particular appropriation and use by trade unions, for if anyone besides owners could reasonably claim a stake in a firm, it was surely the organized workers. This too was a message that New Labour did not wish to send.

So both “community” and “the stakeholder society” were left to the side, as was an argument that Blair began to develop in his anniversary lecture on the election of 1945, published as *Let Us Face the Future* (1995). In it he made the controversial claim that what triumphed in 1945 was not socialism nor even social democracy, but a distinctly British type of progressive politics that combined socialism and liberalism. The model for Blair was thus less the Labour government elected in 1945 than the New Liberalism represented by the Liberal government elected in 1906. Blair insisted that the Labour Party should combine the virtues of both traditions. Once more, the obvious intention was to avoid the negative associations attached to socialism by instead proclaiming allegiance to the inheritance of liberalism in its reforming, socially concerned, and mildly collectivist variety of the early twentieth century.

This outpouring of argument, of theory, occurred at precisely the moment when New Labour was shedding its old image by abandoning clause IV of its
constitution, and it was obviously directed at creating an effective substitute. None of these ideas succeeded in doing so, however, and by the time of the election of 1997 that seemed not to matter. New Labour won a decisive victory without having settled upon a big new idea or even an animating slogan. It was in this context that the party settled on the relatively vacuous notion of “the Third Way.” As critics have cruelly pointed out, the Third Way has no intrinsic meaning at all: it is merely a way of saying that the Labour Party was neither this nor that, neither the hard-hearted Tories nor the dour and dirigiste socialists of the past. Its content was, at least at the beginning, negative and empty. Over time a cluster of quite thoughtful people—Anthony Giddens most prominently—would try very hard to fill in the vast conceptual space inside the Third Way (Giddens 1998; Giddens 2000; Giddens ed. 2001). The exercise was not without merit, for it provided the rubric under which quite useful debates were conducted on policy and on more fundamental questions about the relationship between markets and states, the individual and society, justice and equality, and the environment and the global economy. The work would continue in think tanks like the Policy Network, the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Foreign Policy Center, Demos, and others, and with considerable sophistication. Yet it was and still is an elite discourse—the Policy Network, for example, began as the Progressive Governance Network and included only the leaders of center-left governments—and its focus on policy did not and still does not easily translate into marketable slogans. There was probably never any real possibility that the concept of the Third Way could have inspired the kind of enthusiasm and loyalty which other terms—socialism, social democracy, or, in their own way, community or stakeholding—had done, or might have done, whatever the venue and style. In the event, talk of the Third Way inevitably died down and Labour in office was unable to come up with anything to take its place.

So long as the party kept winning elections, the absence of a big idea probably did not matter greatly. As the party’s fortunes declined, gradually under Blair and then more seriously under Brown, the lack of a major unifying theme or vision came to be more acutely missed. Will Labour find one in opposition? Does it actually need any particular animating vision? There has recently been some renewed attention devoted to the possibility of combining the best of liberalism and of social democracy by crafting a new definition of citizenship which in one version would be anchored in a new constitution for Britain. There are also those who, in response to the weakening of New Labour, would prefer to revert to the old and reconnect with an older social democratic tradition emphasizing redistribution and an expanded role for the state. The issue is unlikely to be settled at the level
of theory and will effectively be decided by the choices made by Gordon Brown’s successors.

It was clear by early 2010 that the future of the Labour Party would hinge largely on the choice of leader, but also on the electoral performance of the party under Brown, on the manner and context of Brown’s leaving, and on the character of the opposition that the party would face once Brown was replaced. The election of 6 May produced unexpected results on all three fronts. To begin, Labour performed better than predicted. During the election campaign the rapid rise of Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats—attributed most plausibly to the impact of television debates staged for the first time ever—raised the possibility that Labour would be pushed into third place behind the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. That did not happen: by election day “Cleggmania,” as it was called, had faded and the party secured 23% of the votes and lost five seats in the House of Commons, for a modest total of 57; the Tories had failed to break through, getting just over 36% of the vote and a plurality (306) but not a majority of seats; and Labour had rallied to win 29% of the vote and 258 seats. The result was, or so it seemed, a hung parliament; and then, to the surprise of many, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats formed a coalition. In the process Gordon Brown made a dignified and gracious exit.

Critics of Labour, and especially of “New Labour,” had anticipated a historic collapse, and the circumstances in which the election was fought were about as bad as one could imagine. Labour had been in power for thirteen years, and the enthusiasm generated way back in 1997 had long since dissipated. The party’s achievements, which were many and substantial, were forgotten or taken for granted; its style—the tendency to “spin,” its preference for increasing taxes and spending by “stealth,” its sometimes vacuous rhetoric—had begun to grate; and many had never forgiven the party for the debacle in Iraq. Even more important, according to exit polls, was the state of the economy, for which Labour was forced to bear responsibility. Brown and his chancellor, Alastair Darling, had by all accounts responded effectively to the financial crisis, but the economy remained in terrible shape and the looming budget deficit seemed to guarantee an era of austerity which would erode much that Labour in power had wrought. In addition, there was the utter disaster of the expenses scandal, a phenomenon that affected both the major parties (and the Liberal Democrats rather less) and heightened the sense that something had to change. And finally there was Brown himself, with a “face made for radio” and an affect and personality that did not come across well in any medium, who was forced to compete on television with two younger and much better performers. Back in 1994, when Blair had persuaded Brown to
step aside in the leadership contest, a key consideration was how much better Blair performed on television and in Parliament. Little had changed on that score by 2010.

Add these adverse conditions together and it is hard to imagine a party in power not losing many votes and seats. The party did lose on both measures in 2010, but no more and perhaps even less than they could and should have lost. Why? The short answer is that the architects of New Labour got it right and Labour’s policies were more or less where they ought to have been. The Blairite embrace of the market may have been excessive, but only marginally so, and it was probably more effective than the alternative; the party may also have been too quick to “spin” rather than to explain, but in a world of instant communication and in a country with a press that feeds on controversy and scandal, to err in that way was surely better than to have erred in the direction of greater candor; constant talk of “reforming” public services and increasing choice may have alienated some of Labour’s supporters in the trade unions and the public sector, but not enough to prevent the unions from bankrolling the party’s election campaign; and in the desire to appear tough on crime and immigration and terrorism, the party may well have veered too far from its socially and politically liberal traditions, although its policies were less illiberal in practice than its rhetoric might have implied. And of course the Labour government’s willingness to lend its support to the United States and its adventures was also profoundly controversial, but again, would the alternative have been more successful? The attack of 9/11 was truly an exceptional moment, and a reluctance to back the United States then would have been unthinkable. Once that backing was offered the options were limited; and New Labour had extremely bad luck in having to deal not with Bill Clinton or Barack Obama but with George W. Bush.

The argument that Labour, in its New Labour incarnation, had been sensible and effective gains at least some support, if not confirmation, by what has come to replace it. The Tories, it would seem, made gains by moving to the center and toward the mix of policies on welfare and the public sector favored by Labour (Bale 2010). If the heart of the Conservative Party remained Thatcherite, its head led Cameron and his allies to speak a different rhetoric, write a different manifesto, and run a different campaign. It may also be that the party did not do even better in the election because voters perceived this split between head and heart and feared a return to Thatcherism or something like it. If so, then the coalition with the Liberal Democrats was a brilliant move, for it allowed the Conservatives to ditch those policies that were most attractive to its Thatcherite wing and move much closer to the sort of centrist and socially liberal policies that can help them win elections.
If the coalition lasts—and the commitment by the two parties to stay together in government for a full five years should not be discounted—it will ironically represent the triumph of Labour’s efforts to move Britain away from the Thatcherite settlement and toward the political center, toward something more humane and stable. It will also confront Labour with the need to differentiate itself from a discourse, a reality and a set of policies that it did much to create.

There is great irony, of course, in the fact that as the coalition speaks in the language of fairness, it has adopted a policy of extreme fiscal austerity and begun to blame Labour for running up deficits and leaving the country in dire straits. The cuts proposed by George Osborne seem to many to be the equivalent of the measures taken by Thatcher (McKibbin 2010). And yet both the total of cuts proposed, and many of the details, differ only marginally from what Labour had proposed or was prepared to do if it been reelected. This is surely why the initial resistance to the coalition’s austerity measures was modest and restrained. That may change as the more controversial and draconian policies come into effect—especially if the protests over tuition fees are an indicator—but will Labour be able to offer a credible vision that is radically different? Will the new leader, Ed Miliband, succeed in crafting a credible Labour response? His politics are slightly less Blairite than those of his brother David, whom he defeated in the leadership election. Will that help or hurt in this process?

It seems unlikely, and the situation in which Labour finds itself would seem to argue more for continuity than for change, especially if change is conceived as a reversion to something that looks and sounds like “old Labour” and feels like the “winter of discontent.” It would be foolish to keep talking about “New Labour” so long after its invention and so long after the phrase did its work in separating the party from those aspects of its past that were no longer popular. New slogans will by necessity emerge, and they ought to embody substantive new thinking about issues on which New Labour was most vulnerable. Still, a more fundamental break seems unlikely and indeed unwise, for a rejection of Labour’s recent past would mean turning one’s back on a record marked by considerable success and on a brand of politics that may well represent a viable future for center-left parties and movements in Britain and elsewhere.

Notes

1. For greater detail and more extensive documentation of this historical process see Cronin 2004.
2. Deciding who was the left, who was the center, and who was the right of the party was often tricky. A clear “right” had emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s around the party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, and his ally, Tony Crosland, the main theoretician among the “revisionists.” Leaders such as Callaghan were intellectually quite close to this camp, but their strong ties to the trade unions, or at least Callaghan’s strong ties, were probably more important in determining his policies. He is probably better regarded as being in the center of the party. Harold Wilson’s achievement was of course to bridge the factions, but at considerable cost; Tony Benn’s later failure was to divide them and drive the right completely out of the party. Tracking the disputes and arguments within the party is entertaining; somewhat harder is figuring out the basis of coexistence. The best answer to the puzzle, I have argued, focuses on the term “labourism,” an outlook that was genuinely shared and served to distinguish the party from its competitors in the United Kingdom and also from its sister parties on the continent. For an explanation see Cronin 2004, 7–10.


4. Stephen Gill (1995) used the phrase “disciplinary neoliberalism” to describe the Thatcher era and neoliberalism more broadly; it was revised to “compensatory neoliberalism” by Perry Anderson (2007).

5. See the essays by Gerassimos Moschonas and Ruy Teixeira in this volume.

6. Determining the right response to the post–cold war crisis in the former Yugoslavia was clearly not easy, but some people were demonstrably wrong. For a compelling argument on the deficiencies of the British response see Simms 2002.