

Croissants and roses

New Labour, communalism, and the rise of muslim Britain



Introduction

In 1997 New Labour came to power with the promise of sweeping away the last vestiges of the old British establishment, with all the class ridden and racist attitudes it had entailed, and create a new diverse, meritocratic and multicultural Britain. Exemplifying the emergence of this new multicultural Britain, the very same year saw, with the active encouragement of New Labour politicians, the formation of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which claimed to represent the two million strong 'British muslim community'. However, five years later the honeymoon between New Labour and the 'British muslim community' seemed to be over. As ten of thousands of muslims mobilized to join the national anti-war demonstrations in the months before the invasion of Iraq, the 'British muslim community' appeared as a cohesive political force opposed to New Labour's foreign policy.

Buoyed by the huge up swell of popular opposition to the war, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), together with their leftist allies within the Stop the War Coalition, saw the opportunity of breaking into the big time of bourgeois politics on the back of this wave of anti-Tony Blair feeling. To this end Respect was set up in 2004 as a broad electoral alliance that sought to harness the popular opposition to the war and transform it into an opposition to New Labour as a whole.

Yet vital to the success of this project, particularly as the anti-war movement began to subside, was the need to bring the 'British muslim community' on board. So as not to put muslims off, the SWP insisted that Respect eschew left-wing 'shibboleths' such as women's and gay rights. They went to the mosques and echoed the arguments of the more radical

political Islamicists by claiming that Bush's 'Global War on Terror' was in fact a war on muslims – both abroad, with the attack on muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also at home with the succession of anti-terrorist legislation – that should be opposed by all muslims as 'muslims'. And like the more radical political Islamicists they denounced New Labour as being Islamophobic and racist.

Yet for all their efforts to pander to muslim sensitivities, Respect failed to win over the 'British muslim community', which remained wedded to New Labour. As we shall argue in this article, this attempt to bring the 'British muslim community' was doomed to fail since it was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what the 'British muslim community' is and the nature of its connection to New Labour.

In Part 1 we shall consider how the politics and ideology of New Labour both emerged out of and transmuted the ideas and politics of the counter-culture and New Left of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular we shall show how anti-racism became transformed into the ideology and practice of communitarianism and multi-culturalism. In Part 2 we shall turn to consider how the 'British muslim community' emerged as a formal and abstract 'community' out of the various concrete Asian communities across Britain. In Part 3, we shall examine the relations between New Labour and both the 'British muslim community and the various Asian communities that it seeks to represent. And we shall see why although the government's support for the 'global war on terror' placed a strain on these relationships, it did not break them.

Part 1: From New Left to New Labour

The ascendancy of New Labour in 1997 saw the culmination of a remaking of the establishment that had already been taking place for several years before. The establishment now consists of significant numbers of people who came to politics around 1968, when radical social change was in the air. This class of 1968 now runs Britain. In a sense, the political world has been turned upside down.

The class of '68 come from a broader cross section of society than their old establishment forebears. The social conditions of the post-war period – in particular social mobility and the expansion of both university education and the white collar service sector – have meant that some of the New Labour ruling class went to grammar schools and some even grew up on council estates – for example Jack Straw, David Blunkett, Alan Johnson, and Hazel Blears.

The emergence of this new, upwardly mobile establishment has been accompanied by a new consensus around the nature of 'society' and 'politics'. This new consensus is at least in part explicable in terms of the political and social experience of this class of '68. The consensus is over such issues as multiculturalism and makes sense of New Labour's relation to 'the muslim community'.

Community and 'community'

Bourgeois society is the negation of community, for in bourgeois society people do not relate to each other directly (whether in terms of authority, equality or whatever) but through commodities. Local 'communities' are simply people who by accident share the same living space. Yet long after the decline of traditional community relations in Britain, the concept of 'community' is important in the new establishment consensus, and is bandied about such that it seems to refer to just about any category of people, whether they actually know each other and relate to each other in some way or not.

Hence it is a commonplace now in bourgeois discourse to refer to the 'black community', the 'gay community' and so on. But this is not just talk. There is, as the right have bemoaned, an orthodoxy in the establishment around the moral and material status of these 'communities'. The rights and interests of the different 'communities' are given various forms of support through financial and legal relationships with the state. 'Equal opportunities', for example, has been expanded and consolidated to become a structural part of every organization and a powerful arm of government in its own right. And there is always a need for structures to ensure fairness since there are always (members of) 'groups' who might be discriminated against. While 'positive discrimination' is still not explicitly sanctioned, the police, for example, actively welcome applications from gay, female, vertically challenged, differently abled, 'ethnic' and other supposed representatives of 'minority' groups.

The rights of different 'communities' and categories of people are so taken for granted they are barely commented on nowadays, except by the more unreconstructed and nostalgic mouthpieces of the rabid right. Yet what we are referring to here is a massive cultural change that has taken place, from a relatively narrow national culture of conformity to one where 'diversity' is seen as a virtue by the establishment. Forty years ago, for example, who would have believed that Sussex Police would encourage their officers to attend the

ostentatious Brighton Gay Pride parade – not in order to police it but to celebrate their identity as gay police officers! The police, like other organs of the state, recognize that they operate more efficiently if in their demographic profile they reflect the society that they operate on – i.e., a society constituted essentially of different given 'communities' and interest groups.

Multiculturalism - the recognition of the essential worth and nature of pre-given 'cultural difference' - is a key plank of the consensus around the virtue of diversity. Multiculturalism has a long history. But, under New Labour, for the first time in the UK it has become embodied in state policy and practice. The idea has been central to New Labour's contribution to the creation of a politicized 'muslim community'. Multiculturalism not only assumes that there are different given cultures (with given or essential natures and interests) embodied in different communities, in practice it operates on the assumption that such 'communities' have a relatively solid internal structure, with recognized leaders etc. who the state can deal with. As we shall see, this isn't always the case. Yet, more than some other ethnic minority groups in the UK, traditional muslim families and their wider social networks do resemble a 'community' with a structure. There is no equivalent New Labour relation with 'the black community' (or, at least, it is not at all the same) as there is with the 'muslim community' and its political organs.

As indicated, these new establishment principles and policies – of society as constituted of different 'communities' and of multiculturalism – in part can be traced back to the experiences of the class of '68. In part at least, therefore, the New Labour establishment is a descendent of the New Left.

Critics of this 'continuity' thesis might rightly point out that there is a glaring and obvious discontinuity between the two – that while the New Left was anti-American (not least over the Vietnam war) New Labour is notoriously 'shoulder to shoulder' with the United States, and severe on those within the Party who have been critical of American policy, who are branded unrealistic, naïve, immature etc. Yet alongside such a break from the past, there are also clear and obvious continuities. For New Labour, every minor policy initiative and change within existing strategy and direction is described as 'radical', echoing the language and aspirations of those involved in the events of '68. What is interesting is the way that the co-existence of these two sorts of tendency within the new establishment has led to a crisis for New Labour. The relativism inherent in the new establishment values of multiculturalism and diversity, inherited from the radical days of 1968, conflicts with the new establishment's equally strong commitment to universalism - in the form of its war in Iraq, which was justified on the basis of democracy. As we shall see, one manifestation of this crisis is that, with the war, multiculturalism has lately come under attack from liberals as well as the right, due to the threat of 'home grown terrorism' (i.e. some members of ethnic minorities violently opposed to the 'British way of life').

To understand how the radical and revolutionary impulses of 1968 could be the basis of establishment policies and practices today that consolidate and build upon the counter-revolutionary right-wing offensive of the 1980s, we need to step back and look more closely at the different

meanings that could be found in the events of this earlier time. The explosion of events was on the one hand a re-emergence of visceral class struggle, in terms of attacks on the cops, state, businesses, employers, war and numerous government institutions. But the form and participants of the struggles also opened the way for seeing 1968 as a historical turning point for the class struggle as such. Was the proletariat expressing itself differently but the same in essence? Or did 1968 in fact mark the end of 'class politics' – the struggles of different groups of people, often outside the traditional forms and structures of the labour movement, signifying that society was now fundamentally structured according to quite different social strata and entities? To understand how and why New Labour has followed one strand of the New Left in taking the latter position, we must understand the nature and origins of the New Left itself.

Origins and nature of the New Left

The roots of the New Left go back before 1968, and are based on disillusion within the Old Left. First, the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 represented a massive blow to the idea of 'actually existing socialism' in the East. How could Stalinist Eastern Europe be 'progressive' if it sent tanks sent in to crush workers' councils? To these former supporters of the Soviet Union were added those who were increasingly critical of its oppressive practices at home.

Beyond the Soviet Union, the other bulwark of the old left was the gradual progress of social democracy¹ in Western Europe. In the UK, after the second world war, the post-war settlement² heightened expectations of what was possible through parliamentary means. The Labour government was elected, and there were immediate plans to nationalize aspects of the economy and basic infrastructure. The National Health Service was established; there was an extensive programme of social (council) housing, and the welfare state was developed to support those who couldn't work. Yet all these high hopes were soon dashed with the defeat of the Labour Party in the 1951 general election. Thirteen years of Conservative rule followed. While the relative consensus between the parties served to consolidate most of the social democratic gains, there was no further progress. The left were

¹ Social democracy can be defined as the representation of the working class as labour within capital and the bourgeois state, politically through social democratic parties (such as the old Labour Party), and economically through trades unions.

² In the UK, following the second world war pressure from the working class, and ruling class fear of revolution, led to the provision of comprehensive and inclusive welfare, corporatism (tripartite organizations and trade union rights), full employment and wealth redistribution through taxation. In effect, the working class exchanged the desire for revolution or further radical social changes in return for the inclusion of its demands within the state and capital. The 'gains' for the working class - for example, free health care, universal welfare system, social housing - necessarily involved its demobilization. Working class communities were broken up as new housing estates were built. The old networks of mutual aid and solidarity were replaced by the bureaucratic administration of welfare etc. At the same time, rising real wages necessarily involved an intensification and monotization of work. This *post-war settlement* could only be sustained through the economic conditions of the post-war boom; yet it also tended to undermine these very economic conditions. See 'Unemployed recalcitrance and welfare restructuring in the UK today' in *Stop the Clock!* or on our website.

on the outside again (most notably in this period in the form of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). The subsequent re-election of the Labour Party in 1964, promised much but delivered less than its predecessor. Tony Crosland, by no means a left winger of any description, made plans to nationalize some of the leading companies in the country! But in fact, rather than further progressive change through social democracy, the Labour government made a number of compromises – most notably perhaps their adoption of Polaris nuclear missiles.

After these disappointments, then, the period around 1968 was a massive inspiration. The prospect of real, radical social change was discernable in the various events around the world: the Chinese cultural revolution (1966), the near revolution in France, May 1968, the anti-war and civil rights riots and protests in the USA, and the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia were just the most well known examples. While there were industrial actions by workers as workers, the subjects of many of the strikes, occupations, street confrontations, and campaigns were not workers qua workers but organized students and others not of the old left at all, and weren't constrained by the traditions of the workers' movement. In fact, the involvement of many young people fresh and new to politics led some to interpret the events as a 'clash of generations'. If the New Left was the product negatively of the failures of social democracy and Stalinism, positively it was the political expression of this resurgence and reinvention of the mass impulse towards social change by a new generation of activists.

But if the tumultuous events of 1968, particularly those in Paris, showed that the most radical social change was a real possibility, the nature of this social change, the identity of those who would carry it out, and – importantly – the reasons why it failed were subject to a variety of interpretations. The New Left was not an homogenous or unified movement or perspective coming out of 1968, but is rather a plethora of currents, movements, and trends across the left and libertarian spectrum that arose from that time.

On the one hand, the New Left expresses the resurgence of class struggle and hence of tendencies which emphasized class analysis in various forms. The Chinese cultural revolution had already raised the profile of Maoism as an alternative socialism to Stalinism; and a number of non-Stalinist Marxist groups were involved in the events of 1968. There was at the time and subsequently a re-engagement with the ideas of Marx. Older revolutionary traditions that had until then been eclipsed by the duopoly of Stalinism and social democratic reformism were re-energized. Versions of Trotskyism flourished, for example. The Situationist International and those who followed them famously drew upon the ideas of council communists, such as Pannekoek; left communism and the ideas of Bordiga too had a revival (e.g. the International Communist Current).³

On the other hand, some New Left tendencies stressed the 'cultural' aspects of the events of 1968. In these accounts, struggle and hence revolution was no longer about economic scarcity and the old class-based politics but about oppression and hence liberation of various forms. Social change was linked to lifestyle and personal politics; and the agents of

³ Readers will know of the ICC through their news-sheet *World Revolution* which is sold from the fringes of leftist and anarchist meetings, demos etc.

change were the 'new social movements' of such groups as women, blacks, gays, youth, squatters, anti-nuclear and ecological campaigners and so on. These cross-class cleavages became the basis for the 'identity politics' of the 1970s and 80s, fragmenting the New Left.

As we shortly see in more detail, ten years later there was an economic downturn and a right-wing backlash. In this context, the hopes of many of the New Left still bore the stamp of that time of radical change but became more modest in practice. Many of the same people who condemned the unprincipled compromises of social democracy, and argued that change could only come from outside the establishment, now looked to the inside for change. With the reality of revolution apparently fading into the distance, the only possibility of any kind of social transformation now seemed to be through much more gradualist reformist means for the foreseeable future. Many of the 1968-inspired New Left therefore now entered the Labour Party for 'the long march through the institutions' to a better society.

This turn from outside to inside the institutions was made possible by changes that had been taking place in British society since the last war, which had affected many of the class of '68. Before describing these changes, however, we need to remain with the events of 1968. As we shall see, the celebration of group diversity and difference was not only inspired by the autonomous struggles of different groups but was also prompted by a defence against a last-ditch attack by the Conservative old right in its efforts to hold on to a notion of supposed homogenous Britishness.



Imperialism and racism of the old British Right

On April 20th 1968, barely two weeks before the revolutionary events were to break out on the other side of the English Channel, Enoch Powell, the then shadow secretary of state for defence, delivered his notorious 'rivers of blood' speech⁴ to the Birmingham Conservative Association. Powell

⁴ Powell never explicitly referred to 'rivers of blood' in his speech. The title derives from his reference to Virgil's epic poem, *Aeneid*: 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood."'

argued that the numbers of immigrants from both the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent over the previous two decades had become far too large to be assimilated in to the British way of life. As a result, as they settled in Britain and had children, the immigrant populations were establishing their own separate and alien cultures in many of Britain's major towns and cities that would inevitably come into conflict with the culture of the indigenous White population. On the basis of lurid anecdotes drawn from his white constituents, Powell warned, that unless concerted measures were immediately taken to repatriate immigrants, serious racial conflict would sooner or later become inescapable.

Enoch Powell, like most of the Conservative Party, had previously welcomed the large scale immigrations from both the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent as a means of dealing with the acute labour shortages, and the consequent strengthening of the trade union bargaining position, that had arisen during the long post-war economic upswing. Indeed, as Minister of Health between 1960-63, Powell had actively promoted the policy of recruiting workers to fill unskilled jobs in the NHS from the West Indies. However, over the winter of 1968, culminating with his 'rivers of blood' speech, it became clear that Enoch Powell had made a decisive about-turn with regard to the issue of immigration.

Powell, had not been the first Tory politician to break ranks with the then existing official Conservative policy on immigration in order to play the 'race card'. In 1964, much to the embarrassment of Conservative Central Office, the Conservative Party in Smethwick constituency in Birmingham, had waged a vehemently racist anti-immigration local election campaign to win control of the local council – one of the few electoral gains made at a time when there was a nation wide swing to the Labour Party.⁵

However, Powell's speech was particularly significant because he was a prominent front bench politician for the Conservative Party, and one of the party's few recognized intellectuals. But what is more, with his old fogey image and the frequent allusions to the literature of ancient Greece and Rome which littered his speeches, Enoch Powell seemed to many to epitomize the persistence of the old British establishment and the Victorian order and values that served to uphold it. Indeed, for liberals, modernizers and progressives, Powell was a reminder, amidst the hopes raised by the election of a Labour government after years of Conservative rule, that Britain remained a 'class-ridden' society, in which social rank was strictly demarcated by accent, dress and mannerisms, formed through an elitist and class based educational system. Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech underlined the fact that the Victorian order, and the insular, reactionary and racist attitudes it engendered, was still very much alive.

The British establishment, and the Victorian order which upheld it, had emerged in the late nineteenth century as a result of the alliance, and gradual fusion, between the newly

⁵ It was alleged that the Smethwick Conservative Party had distributed stickers with the slogan 'If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour.' The local Conservative Party of course denied having anything to do with these stickers. However, Conservative Central Office was so concerned about the overtly racist inclinations of the Smethwick Conservative Party that they sent down 'mindes' at the subsequent general election to supervise the running of the election campaign. See *The Rise of Enoch Powell*, Paul Foot, Commarket Press, 1969.

emergent industrial bourgeoisie and the declining ruling landed aristocracy. After the tumultuous social change and intense class conflicts of the early decades of the century, which had been brought about by industrial revolution and rapid urbanization, both the industrial bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy had been united by the aim of consolidating the existing social order and their position within it, particularly in the face of an increasingly militant and organized working class.

During the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, the industrial bourgeoisie had been permitted to run the new industrial cities while the landed aristocracy continued to rule the countryside and govern national affairs. However, with the agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s and the consequent decline in land rents, the economic independence of the landed aristocracy was steadily undermined. The political and social position of the ruling establishment became increasingly dependent on the transfusion of wealth and economic power of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. Successful businessmen, who wished to consolidate their gains by obtaining influence in the corridors of power and by enhancing their social status, were increasingly able to gain admittance to the institutions and social networks that together constituted the ruling establishment. They were encouraged to buy country estates, to go hunting and grouse shooting; to invite the titled to lend prestige and authority by sitting on the boards of their companies; to marry their daughters into aristocratic families and to send their sons to public school to be educated in the classics alongside the sons of the upper class. In such ways sections of the bourgeoisie could be slowly assimilated into the establishment and what remained of the old landed aristocracy could secure their privileges and social position as part of the governing class.

This gradual assimilation of the bourgeoisie into the ruling established order necessarily entailed the maintenance, and indeed a reassertion of distinctions of social rank. Yet while Victorian Britain remained a sharply 'class' divided society it became increasingly ideologically united behind the supposed common allegiance to 'Queen, Country and Empire'.

The rapid growth of the British Empire in the final three decades of the nineteenth century had important economic advantages that served to underpin the emerging Victorian order. Firstly, the Empire had to be run. It provided expanding secure and well remunerated posts both in the army and the civil service for the sons of the landed aristocracy. For the capitalist, the Empire provided protected markets for the commodities they produced, privileged access to raw materials and cheap labour, and an outlet for banking and finance. At the same time easy profits that could be made from the Empire allowed British capitalists to make timely material concessions to the working class that served to mitigate class conflict at home.

However, just as important as these economic advantages in cementing together the sharply 'class' divided late Victorian society, particularly as far as the working class was concerned, was the inherently racist ideology of Empire. Britain was seen as taking up the torch of Western civilization that dated back to the ancient world of Greece and Rome. The British Empire, like that of Rome, brought the benefits of civilization to the world, but on a far greater scale. Yet while the spread of the British Empire could be justified in terms of

bringing the benefits of Western civilization to the 'primitive' peoples of Africa, Asia and elsewhere, this was insufficient to justify continued British rule. After all if these 'primitive' peoples were civilized by the British Empire why could they not then eventually rule themselves. The answer to this was racialism, that is that the non-white races were biologically inferior and were therefore inherently incapable of ruling themselves in a civilized manner. The British therefore, it was concluded, had a right, and indeed a duty, to rule. By the end of the century, like elsewhere in Europe, the racist theories of racialism and eugenics had become pervasive to the point of being common sense in Britain, with even socialist intellectuals accepting them.

The social and political changes following the first world war, particularly the continued growth of organized labour, combined with the decline of Britain's economic hegemony, which culminated in the dismemberment of the British Empire, undermined the basis of the old Victorian order. By the end of the second world war large sections of the old establishment had come to accept, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that if the British working class was not 'to go Communist', and if British industry was to compete with that of Europe and the USA, then Britain had to be modernized. By the 1950s, all but the most diehard right-wing Tories came to accept, in the face of national liberation movements and pressure from the USA, that Britain's former colonies would sooner or later have to be granted independence. While in domestic affairs it was accepted that the social distinctions and class privileges of the old Victorian order had to be dismantled. The only issue was the pace of change.

One of the central planks upon which this post-war consensus was built was the *post-hoc* justification of the second world war as a war that had united Britain, with its long established democratic traditions, against Nazi and fascist totalitarianism. With the revelations of the Nazi holocaust, eugenics and racist theories, which as we have mentioned were once so pervasive in both ruling class circles and amongst intellectuals, were now thoroughly discredited. Indeed, suggestion of racism was now to become a taboo in 'polite society'.

The myth that Britain had been united in a war against the Nazis and their fascist and racist ideology served the British left well in its efforts to build a national consensus around social democratic reforms. It could be argued that the great sacrifices made by the nation, particularly by the working class, had to be rewarded by a fairer more progressive Britain. However, it was a convenient myth for many on the right since it covered up the widespread anti-Semitism and pro-Nazi sympathies amongst the British ruling establishment during the 1930s – ranging from members of the Royal Family down to proprietors of national newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*.

For many on the left, in 'daring to speak out' in his 'rivers of blood' speech, Enoch Powell had betrayed the persistent covert racism of large parts of the British establishment. However, while this may have been the case, for Powell the old establishment, having already betrayed the Empire for its own short-term advantages, was now standing by while Britain's thousand-year-old culture and traditions were about to be overwhelmed and destroyed. Indeed, Powell had little but disdain for many of those who now made up the establishment who were prepared to sacrifice ancient traditions and principles for the sake of preserving their

privileges a little bit longer and who failed to live up to his romanticized view of the old Victorian order.

In making his 'rivers of blood' speech Enoch Powell was clearly aiming to make his appeal, not to the right wing of the establishment but directly to the 'lower orders. Indeed, The speech was full of anecdotes expressing the fears of the Tory working class and lower middle class that their exalted position in the world was under threat and that now that the Empire was gone the tables would be turned and 'the black man will have the whip hand'.⁶ Powell's speech certainly resonated amongst large sections of the working and lower middle classes. Not only was Enoch Powell inundated with messages of support but at the time his speech was widely credited with contributing to the Labour Party's subsequent unexpected defeat in the 1970 general election.

For the new left, Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech and its aftermath was a defining episode in terms of both the issue of racism and in its relation to the old left. Indeed, it was to play an important part in the subsequent development of the new left's ideas concerning multiculturalism. Following his speech Enoch Powell was widely denounced by nearly all mainstream politicians. Even the *Sunday Times* denounced Powell for 'racialism' and he was promptly dismissed from the shadow cabinet. Yet in response to the subsequent popularity of Enoch Powell's speech, as had happened previously when the issue of immigration raised its head, within months a new immigration law was passed aimed at curbing the right of entry for immigrants from the New Commonwealth – that is from those parts of the former British Empire whose populations were predominantly black or Asian.

The question that arose was why liberals and social democrats in government and parliament had so easily capitulated to the demands of Powell and his racist right wing populism. Was it because these well meaning liberals and social democrats were simply weak kneed? Or was it because they were implicitly racist themselves to some unacknowledged degree?

It is probably true that many of those at the time, who both rallied to his support or vehemently opposed him, saw Enoch Powell as defending the old-style racialism. However, Enoch Powell was careful to avoid arguing that 'coloureds' were biologically inferior and thus unable to be fully integrated into civilized British society. What prevented the integration of black and Asian immigrants into British society was their *alien culture*. Thus there was nothing to stop blacks and Asians from adopting the British way of life as individuals, but as groups asserting their own distinct culture they could not. As such the difference between Powell and the mainstream proponents of assimilation was simply a question of numbers. That is, how many blacks and Asian immigrants could Britain absorb.

Indeed, to the extent the liberal policy of assimilation assumed that it was appropriate for immigrants to adopt British culture, it was just as racist as Powell – it was part and parcel of the new style racism based not on biology but on culture. This rise to the notion of multiculturalism, with its insistence on the equality of cultures, we will see was to emerge over the following four decades as the new dominant consensus.

⁶ This was a fear of one of Powell's constituents quoted in the speech.

The aftermath of the 'rivers of blood' speech

The positive response to the 'rivers of blood' speech served to highlight the endemic racism and social conservatism of significant sections of the British working class. For many in the new left this served to strengthen their rejection of the old left's faith in the working class as the primary agent for social change and underlined the need to look for new agents of social change, which were being constituted by the new social movements, such as the young, women, blacks or the oppressed people of the Third World.

For others in the new left this endemic racism and social conservatism in the working class was the result of the labourist ideology embedded in the institutions and leadership of the traditional British labour movement. Often invoking Lenin, it was argued that from its very inception in the mid-nineteenth century the reformist British labour movement had been dominated by a 'labour aristocracy' whose relative privileged position was dependent on the super-exploitation of oppressed peoples of the British Empire. As a result there had been a long history of complicity on the part of the British Labour movement with imperialism, and a failure to combat the racism it engendered within the working class. From this it was concluded that the British labour movement had to be radically reshaped or a new more revolutionary one built out of the militancy of the rank and file.

Either way, for both the 'new new left' and the 'old new left', the widespread conclusion was a rejection of the Labour Party and its reformist politics for much of the 1970s. But by the end of the 1970s the political climate had begun to change as the dark clouds of reaction began to draw in.

The 1970s were a period of economic uncertainty and increasing political polarization. Amidst soaring inflation and rising unemployment, the revolutionary hopes raised by '68, and sustained through to the miners' victory in 1974, had by the late 1970s been overtaken by fears of a right-wing backlash and a 'return to the '30s'. Deepening economic crisis, and with it the hastening of Britain's long term economic decline, coupled with cuts in public spending on housing and public services were all serving to accentuate racist sentiments, particularly amongst the economically insecure lower middle classes and less well off sections of the working class. Blacks and Asians were easy scapegoats and faced not only persistent discrimination by employers and police harassment but also frequent racist abuse and mounting physical attacks by racist gangs.

On the back of this rise in overt racism, fuelled by lurid tales in the tabloids, came the rise of the National Front. The National Front had been founded in 1967 as a means to unite the various fragments of the old British Union of Fascists and other tiny fringe far right-wing groups. At that time it had been easily dismissed as merely a collection of harmless nutters. Ten years later the National Front was threatening to become a serious political force. It was beginning to make significant gains in local elections and had become bold enough to attempt to seize control over the streets by holding sizeable marches through immigrant areas. Fears grew on the left that sooner or later the British ruling class would abandon its post-war anti-fascist ideology and turn to the National Front to find a solution to the deepening economic and political crisis facing Britain.

Undoubtedly the National Front was able to tap into the racist currents that were still widespread within British

society, and which had been brought to the surface by the deepening economic and political crisis of the 1970s. However, at the same time, longer term ideological and cultural changes, which had been developing since at least the end of the second world war, meant that there were far stronger anti-racist currents that could be mobilized.

Victory in two world wars had certainly served to bolster British nationalism; but in both these wars Britain was seen as championing democracy, firstly against the Kaiser's authoritarian militarism and then against Hitler's Nazi Germany. Consequently, even for people with right-wing opinions, any affinity with Nazism, and its anti-Semitic white supremacism, was widely seen as being unpatriotic - quite unBritish in fact. This was always a formidable barrier for the acceptance of the National Front as the party of British nationalism.

Furthermore, although the world wars had served to inflate a sense of British superiority this was soon to be punctured. In 1956 Britain was humiliated at the hands of the Americans when, in the face of US opposition, the British and French governments were obliged to call off their combined invasion of Egypt to re-capture the Suez Canal that had been nationalized by Nasser.⁷

The humiliations of 1956, combined with the final demise of the British Empire by the early 1960s, brought a general recognition of Britain's diminished position in the world. Of course, it was precisely this realization that Great Britain was no longer as great as it once was - along with the belief that this was due to the failings of the British ruling elites - that had served to fuel the popular support for both Enoch Powell and subsequently the National Front. However, for many, particularly amongst the younger generations of the time, the notion of 'making Britain great again' was simply a hopeless nostalgia for a by-gone age. After all, what had been so great about Britain apart from its ability to conquer half the world?

This acceptance of Britain's decline in the world, and with it a rejection of British chauvinism, brought with it an increasing acceptance of other cultures. Indeed, for the generation born after the second world war, embracing other cultures offered a means of escape from the conservative and insular confines of British culture, whose drabness had been accentuated by the post-war austerity of the 1950s. As a consequence, central to the British counter-culture of the 1960s was a trans-culturalism, which sought a cross fertilization of cultures - from India to that of black America.

As a result, when the children of the wave of immigrants from the West Indies of the 1950s and '60s came of age and began to assert their culture this was not seen by most young whites as a threat, as Enoch Powell had foretold, but as an exciting opportunity. Ska, reggae and ganga became a common point of reference to both young whites and blacks. Hence when social tensions erupted into full-scale riots in the late 1970s and early 1980s these were not race riots, as

Powell had predicted, but anti-racist and anti-fascist riots. In the riots that followed the Notting Hill Carnivals in the mid-1970s, in the Lewisham and Southall riots of 1977 and in the country wide riots of July 1981, young blacks, whites and indeed Asians joined together to fight the racist actions of the police and to stop the National Front.

In 1977 the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) was formed as a broad front to oppose the political advance of the National Front. In drawing in everyone from Anarchists and Trotskyists through Labour Party members to liberals and even a few Tories, the ANL served to bring together the New and old left in a common fight against racism and fascism. With the slogan the 'National Front is a Nazi Front' and by tapping into the anti-racism of the counter-culture with its 'rock against racism' campaign the ANL succeeded in halting the electoral advance of the National Front. This, combined with the physical defeat of the National Front's attempt to dominate the streets, meant that by the end of the 1970s the threat posed by the National Front was receding.

However, although the advance of the National Front was halted, Thatcher won the 1979 election by landslide - an electoral success in part due to her willingness to 'play the race card'. Echoing Powell's 'river of blood' speech, Thatcher had expressed the fear of Britain being 'swamped' by immigrants.⁸ Indeed, by echoing Powell, Thatcher was able to take the wind out of the National Front's sails and make the Conservative Party the representative of those who feared further immigration.

In the face of the new Thatcher government many on the new left now flocked into the Labour Party. The new left now began its long march through the institutions ending up as new labour as we shall now relate.

The rise of the new middle classes

The class of '68 were born into a world where the old Victorian social order that Powell was seen to represent was already dying. As we have argued, while some of the ideas of the new establishment find their origins in the events of 1968, the class of 1968 were only able to become the new establishment - to move from the outside of New Left social movements to roles within the institutions - due to by changes that had been taking place in British society since the last war. In particular, changes in social mobility altered the class position of many. Their changed class positions are themselves part of the explanation of the new establishment consensus over the 'muslim community'. We now turn to briefly outline these changes in social mobility that allowed a generation with quite different social background than their

⁷ But perhaps more important for many was England's humiliation at the hands of the Hungarians in football, firstly with their unprecedented 6-3 defeat at Wembley in 1953 and then the 7-1 hammering in Budapest the following year. England's prestige was partly recovered by winning the World Cup in 1966, but this was not to last long. In 1970 England was knocked out in the quarter finals and for the rest of the decade the England team found it very difficult even to qualify for the tournament.

⁸ Interview with the journalist, Gordon Burns, broadcast on Granada TV, January 30 1978. Thatcher was responding to a question over immigrant numbers by arguing that 'if we went on as we are then by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.' www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=103485

forebears to emerge as the UK's most influential leading politicians, civil servants, intellectuals and entrepreneurs.⁹

The post war settlement is the key to understanding the enhanced social mobility that took place after the war. One of the features of the settlement was a huge university building programme, which made it possible for many working class and lower middle families to send their offspring to university or polytechnic for the first time. Further and higher education were no longer in effect the privilege of the toff class. This massive expansion of higher education was matched by growth in the public sector more generally – the lower end of the civil service, local authority services, and the national health service all expanded. Thus those graduating from university now found new management, white collar and other higher-status places waiting for them.



The growth of higher education made bourgeois society in the UK much more meritocratic and rational, as more people were appointed on the basis of formal qualifications regardless of family background. The growth of middle class jobs in effect meant that a whole swathe of working class people became middle class in one generation. The first people to make this transition were the post war baby-boomers, those people born in the 1940s and 50s. These same people who would become young adults around 1968. They therefore made up a large part of the New Left that grew from the events of this time. When the prospect of revolution receded, it was these same people who then pursued more modest objectives. They often did this through the ranks of the Labour Party, or through reformist and 'single issue' campaigns and pressure groups, or through liberal institutions, or local government.

By the 1980s, many of the new middle class New Left class of '68 found that their earlier modest strategy choices now took the form of appealing career ladders. New opportunities opened up to them in the developing creative industries (media, advertising), in higher education, and in the civil service.

In this context, their working class origins became increasingly forgotten, and the class analysis that had once been as relevant the exciting new perspectives of the late 1960s now seemed to have little applicability to their

lifestyles, aspirations, identities and social circles, and their politics. After all, it seemed to them, the working class were often the problem itself not part of the solution at all. It was the old-fashioned, conformist working class where sexist attitudes, homophobic opinions and racist expressions were found to still exist unabashed.

Indeed, these kind of points were not peripheral but central to the new political consensus that was emerging in the new middle class and their allies in the old establishment. For example, political correctness – the imperative to use language that does not offend different groups – could be seen as the natural extension of one of the key innovations of the New Left (i.e. the recognition of the autonomous potential of various different groups). Thus social change could indeed be achieved, and the remaining barriers to equality and freedom for all the different groups of people making up society, could be overcome. All that was needed then was for these new middle classes to be in positions of power, on the inside.

Hence for example the unarguable attack on the dominance of 'white middle-aged (middle class) men', with their assumed oppressive attitudes, was first made in the Labour Party - through the argument for black and female candidate short-lists. This attack on the monoculturalism of the old elite was then pressed through allied groups such as the National Council of Civil Liberties (now Liberty) and other liberal charities, think-tanks, intellectuals and lobbying groups. The attack was understood as a rallying call for the positive contribution that minority groups could make, for the essential value and worth of these groups, who had been excluded for no other reason than the prejudice of tradition. It was a call for a more rational and fair society.

The strategy flourished in the Labour Party's local government strongholds. The clearest and most developed expression was in the Greater London Council (GLC). 'Red' Ken Livingstone oversaw the appointment of numerous highly paid professionals to look after special interest groups such as blacks, gays, women, gay women, black gays etc. etc. But the creation of jobs for the representatives of these 'communities' and interest groups was significant in forming careers that took 'radical' people from the outside and put them on the path to the establishment. Any number of community activists, who had originally organized independently, got vast amounts of funding from the GLC, which eventually took them from the outside to a career path on the inside. The careerization of radical feminists is an obvious case in point.

Throughout the 1980s, the Conservatives were still in power nationally, so the New Left attacked the old establishment from the outside. The GLC and other labour strongholds saw themselves and were seen as anti-establishment. This was true, in the sense that the campaigning groups and individuals that Labour councils such as the GLC supported were critical of the status quo: they campaigned around such issues as police racism, for example.

Yet, the old establishment was also under attack from the inside. Prime minister Margaret Thatcher was herself not from the upper middle class but had come to power through forging an alliance between the old establishment and the new, an alliance which in fact served to undermine the old establishment. Thatcher and her ministers promoted old-fashioned establishment values such as the traditional family and gender roles, nationalism, and racism. But she also

⁹ Media, advertising and finance have been some of the areas where this new breed are to be found, but such ex-hippie figures as Richard Branson (Virgin Records then Virgin everything else) and Anita Roddick (the Bodyshop founder) are also good examples.

sacked a number of the old school tie brigade and promoted into her cabinet new middle class and former working class grammar school boys like Norman Tebbit, Kenneth Clarke, and John Major.

In effect, with the support of some of the old establishment in an alliance of old and new right, Thatcher pursued neo-liberal policies on the freedom of money capital.¹⁰ Sweeping away all barriers to the movement of money-capital meant destroying some of the traditions, customs and rules of the old establishment. The most explosive expression of this was the opening up of the City and British banks to just anyone with money (including foreigners) – the ‘Big bang’ or ‘Wimbledonization’ of the City. This liberalization went hand in hand with the decimation of manufacturing (with its entrenched management and well as labour practices) and the retirement of old school tie mandarins such as ‘Sir Humphrey’¹¹ in the changing civil service. The changes Thatcher’s government introduced therefore served to complete the formalization and rationalization of the bourgeois revolution. Merit and profit were finally dislodging the stupifying influence of tradition in almost every area of society.

The continued pursuit of nationalism, however, with its ethnocentrism and irrational loyalty to the traditions of the nation state came into conflict with this free market ‘revolution’, most obviously in the Conservatives’ contradictions over Europe. As we shall see, New Labour’s pursuit of the war in Iraq and its ‘modernization’ of society has embodied a similar contradiction.

The ideological and political transition to New Labour

Post-modernism:

The bridge from New left to New Labour

As early as the 1950s American sociologists had begun to argue that with the relative decline of American manufacturing industry, and the consequent growing economic importance of ‘the service sector’, America was becoming a ‘post-industrial society’. In the early 1970s, drawing on such ideas, historians of art and, in particular architecture, began to argue that this economic and sociological transition was being reflected in a cultural shift away from the ‘modernism’ associated with the industrialization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, to ‘post-modernist’ forms of art and architecture.¹² By the late 1970s, these ideas were broadened, and given much greater philosophical depth, with their merger with the various strands of post-structuralist philosophy emanating from France. The various and often mutually inconsistent theories and notions that resulted, which came to be known under the rather broad rubric of post-modernism, swept across

the faculties of the social sciences and the humanities of Britain’s universities in the 1980s.¹³

The ideas of post-modernism, and more particularly post-structuralism, had a strong appeal to the rising generation of academics who had benefited from the large-scale expansion of higher education in the 1960s and that, as a consequence, had been drawn from a much broader section of society than any previous generation of academics.

First of all, for those who had been radicalized by their involvement in the new left and the counter-culture, but who had now given up all hope that there would be any immediate revolutionary change in society - and had consequently ‘sold out’ and embarked on an academic career - post-modernism offered a means to preserve their sense of being radical and critical. Indeed, post-modernism often drew on many of the political and cultural themes of the counter-culture and the new left and, what is more seemed to give them a more radical theoretical and philosophical basis. As a result, post-modernism could appear to many young academics at the time as being, at least theoretically, far more radical than the rather ‘outdated’ nineteenth century ideas of revolutionary Anarchism or Marxism that they had once adopted in their student days.¹⁴

Secondly, post-modernism provided this new generation of academics with rather devastating weapons with which to storm to the old elitist, white and male-dominated bastions that still remained within academia, as well as the means to carve out a niche for themselves in the newly expanded world of higher education. Post-modernism provided the distinctive subject matter for a whole new range of academic departments; such as cultural studies, media studies, women’s studies, black studies and so forth. At the same time, in the older existing academic disciplines, such as English literature and sociology, post-modernism provided a radical new alternative that could undercut the established orthodox theories.

One of the first university departments that post-modernism colonized was that of English literature. English literature, particularly at Oxford and Cambridge, was traditionally regarded as something of a backwater. A subject deemed suitable for the small number of women students that in less enlightened times had managed to reach the level of a university education. For a time in the 1980s, English departments, particularly the one at Cambridge, became the cutting edge of the Post-Modernist offensive. The notion, dating back to Mathew Arnold in the late nineteenth century, that the role of the universities was to defend the elitist ‘high culture’, defined by a canon of great literary works, from the barbarism and philistinism of mass popular culture was ruthlessly attacked. The class walls between high, middle and low brow culture had to be torn down, while the voices of those that had been long suppressed and excluded from the white, male-dominated great canon, had to be heard and recognized. Thus the artwork of the *Beano* and the lyrics of

¹⁰ These policies would in the nineteenth century have been referred to as middle class liberalism.

¹¹ Sir Humphrey is the name of the powerful career Whitehall civil servant in the television comedy ‘Yes, minister’.

¹² Of course the notion of ‘modernism’ is quite vague and nebulous. Indeed, in literature, what are usually considered as modernist writers were more often than not reacting against modern industrialism. See Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Verso, London, 1998.

¹³ For critiques of post-modernism, see Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Verso, London, 1998; Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989 and Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Press, Oxford, 1996.

¹⁴ For arguments showing how post-modernism was an ideology of defeat, see Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989 and Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Press, Oxford, 1996.

Bob Dylan could be considered just as worthy of academic study as the paintings of the 'Grand Masters' or the poems of Keats. The writings in English of women, as well as the Black and Asian writers of the former colonies had to be considered as just as much a part of English Literature as the predominantly white male writers recognized by the great literary canon.

However, the Post-Modernist offensive did not remain confined to undermining what was after all the rather conservative and Victorian notion that the essence of Western civilization, and indeed its superiority, was embodied in its high art and literature. In much of the social sciences the established schools of thought, whether liberal, conservative, or even Marxist, all sought to emulate to a greater or lesser extent the empirical methods and reasoning of the natural sciences. The radical challenge of post-modernism was to attack empiricism foundationalism of the social sciences by undercutting its very roots. The Post-Modernists set about attacking the underlying notion that the history, and, with this, the superiority of Western civilization and culture was defined by the progress of reason, which, with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment, had thrown off the shackles of superstition and religious dogma so as to find its highest expression in science and technology.

For the shock troops of post-modernism this notion of the progress of reason and science was merely the conceit of a 'euro-centric meta-narrative'. It was not simply that there was no such thing as empirical facts independent of the theory that was to be verified or falsified by them; but that there was no such thing as an objective truth that could be known by reason. Both the solidity of the knowable 'object' and the 'rational subject', the twin pillars of the epistemology of science and indeed the Enlightenment, were 'deconstructed' and 'de-centred'. There was, it was declared, nothing knowable beyond 'discourse' or the 'text' - there was only the free interplay of signifieds and signifiers, which ultimately only referred to themselves and their differences. Science, it was asserted, was no more than a narrative, which, as such, had no more claim to a superior or privileged status than any other narrative, including those it had claimed to have overcome, such as magic or religious dogma of other, allegedly less advanced, cultures.

History and progress, and hence the very claim that Western civilization was in some way more advanced than other societies and cultures, was merely a fiction. As such, history as known by Hegel, Marx and other Enlightenment figures, was merely a 'grand narrative'. There was no such thing as history, only a multitude of stories; and hence there was no such thing as historical progress (hence it was meaningless to talk of something being progressive or reactionary).

By the end of the 1980s post-modernism had reached its apogee. The university departments that were most susceptible to post-modernism had by then already become colonized. The notion of 'post-modernism', and a vague understanding of the ideas associated with it, had now become a part of the common knowledge of the 'educated classes' beyond the walls of the lecture theatre. 'Post-modernism continued to have an appeal to the social milieus associated with Britain's rapidly expanding cultural, media and advertising industries. However, for those of the post-68 generation who were on the verge of taking senior positions

in the management of British capital and state, the intellectual nihilism of post-modernism, while retaining a certain fascination for some, was of little practical use in running the everyday reality of capitalism.

With the self-indulgent obscurantism of much of its writings, its glaring logical incoherence, together with the startling ignorance of the natural sciences it claimed to critique and the injudicious remarks concerning world affairs of its more vulgar proponents - most notoriously Baudrillard's insistence that the Gulf War did not happen - only served to open post-modernism up to ridicule and hasten its decline. By the early 1990s post-modernism was becoming distinctly passé. With the collapse of the USSR, and the consequent neo-liberal triumphalism, it became fashionable once again for intellectuals to speak of 'progress', 'modernization' and the 'end of history'.

Nevertheless, despite its decline, post-modernism was to have two distinct, if at times contradictory, legacies for the new ruling ideology that was to find its clearest political expression in the then emerging New Labour 'project'. First and foremost, post-modernism was to bequeath a strong predisposition towards cultural relativism within this emerging ruling ideology. As such post-modernism was to provide the intellectual basis for the relativist multicultural consensus, which insisted on the difference and incommensurability between cultures, that, as we shall see, was to influence much of New Labour's thinking on social policy.

Secondly, post-modernism, for all its supposed ultra-radicalism, paved the way for the acceptance of neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism, which was to be the defining element of the New Labour project. The pseudo-radicalism of post-modernism was always readily apparent as soon as its principal proponents were lured out of the comfort of their academic preoccupations to address some concrete political issue, when, almost invariably, they would reveal themselves to be either middle of the road liberals or conservatives. But this was not due to the proponents of post-modernism falling short of their theory, but was inherent in post-modernist theory itself. In denying the 'modernist' and enlightenment appeals to reason, history and reality, post-modernism denied any actual possibility for systematic total social transformation. Post-Modernists either had to be content, like Foucault, with the fragmentary reformism of everyday life; or else, like Baudrillard, to an inherently conservative acceptance of the inevitability and inescapability of what simply *is*. Such resigned acceptance easily slipped into a celebration of the freedom and individualistic hedonism of the market. After all, it could be argued for example that by playing with the ever shifting semiotics of differing commodities, the free market allows the consumer to constantly redefine their image, and hence roles and identities through what they buy. As a consequence, the well paid post-modernist academic could easily conclude that shopping could be a subversive activity.

At least as far as the educated and upwardly mobile 'class of 68' were concerned, it could be said that post-modernism did more to bring about the acceptance of neo-liberalism than any of its chief advocates, such as Hayek or Friedman, could have dreamed of doing through their explicit polemics and propaganda. But, of course, there was a certain irony in all this in that post-modernism ended up contributing to the resurrection of the most pervasive of all 'meta-

narratives' of the nineteenth century – that of classical economic liberalism: in which history is told as the progressive freeing of the market and the individual from state interference. Indeed, as we shall see in Part III, the latent contradiction between the post-modernist legacy of relativism underpinning New Labour's multi-culturalism, and the universalism of its acceptance of neo-liberalism, was to come to the fore following the attack on the Twin Towers and the subsequent invasion of Iraq.

But the question we must now ask is how did post-modernism, which after all was merely an intellectual fashion which could have well remained entrenched within the realms of academia, help give rise to the New Labour Project? As we have mentioned, the catalyst that hastened the demise of post-modernism and the rise of New Labour was the decline and fall of the USSR. The decline of the USSR and its eventual collapse brought to a head a longstanding conflict between traditionalists and modernizers in the communist parties of Western Europe. This conflict in many ways prefigured the similar struggle in the Labour Party in the early 1990s. Indeed, as we shall now see, many of the ideas that were to become central to the New Labour project were developed by the modernizers of the old Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).



New Labour: New Britain

Unlike its sister parties in France and Italy, the old CPGB had always remained a relatively small party. However, despite its size, the CPGB had from its inception exerted a considerable influence over the British labour movement. Right up until the late 1970s, the CPGB had maintained a highly organized presence within both the leadership and the rank and file of the trade unions. What is more, from the 1930s onwards the CPGB had been an important centre of attraction for left-wing intellectuals, whose ideas held significant sway over what was otherwise an atheoretical and pragmatic British labour movement.

With the industrial militancy of the early 1970s, many of the more 'realistic' elements of the British new left had been drawn to the CPGB. For those reacting against the utopianism and disorganization of the movements of 'post-68', the CPGB offered a highly disciplined organization that had deep roots within what could be seen as an increasingly militant working class. Of course, the CPGB was still very much of the old left: it remained very much a Stalinist party, while its aging militants were often socially conservative and were slavishly committed to an unquestioning defence of the USSR. Yet, in contrast to the response to the invasion of Hungary in 1956 where the Party had simply closed ranks against all internal and external critics of the USSR, the trauma caused in the CPGB by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 now seemed to open up the possibility for radical reform of the Party.

In their efforts to modernize the Party, new left intellectuals in and around the CPGB in the late 1970s began to import the 'third way' politics and theories of Euro-communism, which were at the time emerging in France and Italy. In attempting to find a 'third road' that could combine the democratic pluralism of liberal European capitalism with socialism, the advocates of Euro-communism required the old Communist parties to jettison both their last remaining revolutionary pretensions and their commitment to establishing a monolithic dictatorship of the proletariat. At the same time, the tired old dogmas and politics based on a rigid economic determinism, it was argued, had to be replaced by the far more subtle theories of social change that stressed the importance of culture – one of the principal source of such ideas being Antonio Gramsci.

Compared with France and Italy, the task of the British Euro-communist modernizers was perhaps far easier. The CPGB had long since abandoned any hope of displacing the Labour Party as the mass party of the working class and had instead adopted the role of guiding the Labour Party along the 'parliamentary road to socialism'. Indeed, by the early 1980s the modernizers were already able outmanoeuvre their Stalinist opponents to capture key positions in the CPGB, and had taken control of what was to become the Party's influential monthly journal - *Marxism Today*.

In becoming what was to be known as the house journal of 'yuppie socialism', *Marxism Today* did much to popularize, particularly amongst the rising post-68 generation of Labour politicians, the culturalist theories of both post-modernism and the neo-Gramscianism put forward by Stuart Hall and his fellow academics at the Centre for Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. At the same time *Marxism Today* also popularized the complementary theories of post-Fordism, which despite the post-structuralist anti-foundationalism of the post-modernist purists, could be seen to provide an updated and Marxist economic basis for both the culturalist theories of post-modernism and neo-Gramscianism.

Drawing on the theories of the French regulation school it was argued that the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s had been based on a Fordist regime of accumulation in which the mass production of standardized commodities had been balanced with their mass consumption through the implementation by the state of Keynesian policies of demand management. In the 1970s this regime of accumulation had gone into crisis, which had prompted a fundamental restructuring of capitalism. For the theorists of post-Fordism this restructuring had already given rise to the beginnings of a

new regime of accumulation based on flexible and specialized production, which allowed commodities to be customized to meet the tastes of relatively small groups of consumers. The emergence of this post-Fordist regime of accumulation underlay the shift away from the mass politics and mass culture that had been recognized by post-modernist writers.

This shift to post-Fordism meant that the old style of mass politics, which had underpinned old-style socialism and social democracy, was now out of date. It was argued that with her appeal to individual aspirations and advancement, Thatcher had already recognized this economic and cultural shift. What the 'left' needed to do was to abandon its old ways of thinking and take a leaf out of Thatcher's book. The 'left' had to appeal, not to collective class interests but to individuals as aspiring consumers. Just as Thatcher had built a Gramscian style 'hegemonic project' that had mobilized the cultural shift towards individualism and consumerism to shift Britain to the right, the 'Left' had to mobilize these very same tendencies to build a 'hegemonic project' that would push Britain in a more 'progressive' direction.

Following the fall of the USSR the modernizers of the CPGB succeeded in liquidating the Party, and promptly joined the mission to modernize the Labour Party. Several of the leading figures that had been associated with the now defunct *Marxism Today* became key advisors to the then still small cabal of modernizers that were coalescing around what was to become known as the New Labour project. These advisors not only contributed ideological ammunition to win arguments, but also their long experience of bureaucratic manoeuvring was to prove invaluable in capturing the controlling heights of the Labour Party.

Of course, the New Labour project, as a practical ruling ideology, was the result of a convergence of various and often mutually inconsistent ideas and theories. However, the ideas that had been promoted and popularized by *Marxism Today* played a vital part in distinguishing New Labour from both the social democratic politics of 'old Labour' and Thatcherism.

Combined with the fashionable theories of globalization, which claimed that the old social democratic and Keynesian policies that sought to manage national economies were no longer feasible, post-Fordism lent an air of inevitability to Thatcher's neo-liberal economic reforms. The social democratic political beliefs of old Labour were seen as arising from the now out-dated corporate and class politics of Fordism. As a consequence, it was argued that the Labour Party could no longer appeal to the class loyalty of those who 'worked by hand and brain' since the working class no longer identified themselves as producers but as individualistic consumers. There was therefore no alternative but to abandon efforts to appeal to collective solidarity and instead embrace the politics of 'individual choice'.

From a very early stage in her rule Stuart Hall had pointed out that Thatcher was not merely an old-style reactionary Tory. Her right-wing populism, which sought to promote 'a property owning democracy' and 'a popular capitalism' through the sell-off of council housing to council tenants and nationalized industries to the general public rather than to the financial institutions of the City, was in stark contrast to the elitism of the old Tory right-wing. Indeed, Thatcher had not only succeeded in breaking up the old social democratic post-war consensus but in doing so had also hastened the demise of the old establishment and the last

remnants of the old Victorian order that had upheld it. Hence, perhaps rather ironically, it was Thatcher that to have inaugurated what Gramsci might have seen as a top down 'passive revolution' that had served to modernize the British state and capitalism.

Nevertheless, although the New Labour ideologues were prepared to admit with hindsight that Thatcher's neo-liberal economic reforms were on the side of history, and hence in some sense 'progressive', there were key aspects of Thatcher's right-wing populism that were could only be considered reactionary. Her willingness in echoing the new racism of Enoch Powell in expressing fears that Britain would be 'swamped' by immigrants in the 1979 election campaign; her vehement militaristic British chauvinism displayed in her commitment to buying the hugely expensive Trident nuclear weapon system and her accompanying Cold War rhetoric; and her insistence on defending 'traditional family values', had all been essential to Thatcher's electoral appeal – particularly amongst lower middle class and working class voters born before the second world war.

As New Labour made clear right from the outset, following Tony Blair's election as leader of the Labour Party in 1994, there would be no return to the old social democratic policies of 'old Labour'; there would be no re-nationalization of the industries and public utilities privatized under the Tories, there would be no redistribution of wealth through high progressive taxation and there would be no repeal of the Tories' anti-trade union laws. New Labour made it clear it was committed to continuing the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcher and Major governments. However, within the limits of the post-Thatcher settlement New Labour promised to set different priorities to alleviate and rectify the worst aspects of Thatcher's legacy. After more than two decades of stringent curbs on public spending, New Labour promised increased investment in health and education, 'a New Deal to help the unemployed back in to work', higher welfare benefits targeted at the 'deserving poor' such as pensioners and 'poor hard-working families' and larger regeneration budgets for 'deprived areas'. These promises, coupled with the subsequent introduction of the minimum wage, offered some hope and relief to Labour's traditional supporters, particularly those in the old industrial cities of the North that had suffered the most from the defeats of organized labour by Thatcher and who had borne the brunt of her class vindictiveness.

However, the extent of these promises, and the degree to which they could be implemented in New Labour's first term of office, was severely circumscribed by the over-riding concern to restore government finances without reversing the tax cuts imposed by the previous Tory administrations. In order to make an appreciable difference, what little money that could be found from juggling the government's spending priorities had to be concentrated through targeting particular groups and areas.

Hence, in accepting the post-Thatcher settlement, the scope of the economic and material differences New Labour could offer were highly restricted. Instead, New Labour's broad appeal, which was to be central to its landslide victory in the 1997 election, was based on the promise to promote a 'new Britain' that would be inclusive, diverse and multicultural. The New Labour government would be in stark contrast to the narrow-minded social conservatism promoted by the previous Tory governments. Whereas both Major and Thatcher had repeatedly deplored the changes in

culture and sexual mores that had gathered pace since the 'permissive sixties', the New Labour government would embrace such changes and actively promote the equality of women and gays as well as religious and ethnic minorities and accept non-conventional families. Under New Labour, Britain would no longer look back to its imperialist past and define itself in terms of its military prowess; it would define itself in terms of its cultural dynamism exemplified by the then current trends of Britpop and Britart of 'cool Britannia'.

Having been repelled by the increasingly desperate attempts by Conservative leaders to rally its aging core supporters by moralistic speeches and policy initiatives; such as Peter Lilley's vilification of single mothers, 'section 28' of the 1988 Local Government Act, which banned local authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality, and John Major's much derided 'Back to Basics' sloganeering, for large sections of the electorate, particularly those belonging to those generations which had come of age since the 1960s, New Labour's 'New Britain' had a broad cross-class appeal. Yet New Labour's culturalism did not simply have a broad appeal to the electorate; more importantly it also appealed to key sections of the bourgeoisie.

Of course, in the boardrooms of Britain's major companies Thatcherism had been seen as vital in restoring the fortunes of British capitalism. But once the restructuring of British capitalism had been achieved the need for the Conservative Party to appease the xenophobia and euro-scepticism of its increasingly restless supporters had become more and more tiresome.

Now that it had embraced neo-liberalism, New Labour offered a welcome change. This was perhaps no more true than for the banks and financial institutions of the City of London. As one of the principal bastions of the old establishment the City of London had traditionally been the natural enemy of the Labour Party. However, New Labour was particularly in tune with the new meritocratic and cosmopolitan City of London that had emerged since the 'big bang'. As a centre for global finance capital, the new City of London had little time for conservative and imperialistic attitudes that had typified the old City. The new City exhibited a bourgeois multiculturalism: all cultures had to be given equal respect so long as they did not interfere with profit-making and the free movement of capital around the globe (i.e. they were just variegated forms of bourgeois culture). Indeed, as the City of London's emergence as the leading world centre outside the Middle East for 'Sharia compliant finance' necessary for the recycling of billions of petro-dollars has shown, cultural differences could be highly profitable for Labour's new friends in the city. [this is a point that perhaps needs expanding on later on]

Communitarianism and New Labour's 'Third Way'

New Labour, communitarianism and functional sociology

As we have seen, the largely French-inspired theories of neo-Gramscianism, Post-Fordism and indeed post-modernism, particularly as interpreted and popularized by *Marxism Today*, by changing the intellectual climate in and around the Labour Party, provided the bridge between new leftism and New Labour. However, for New Labour's key architects, the more immediate intellectual influences, which were to give rise to the practical politics and policies which were to define New Labour, came from across the Atlantic. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair drew inspiration for their 'Third Way' from the

apparent success of the policies then currently being implemented by Bill Clinton in the USA. In doing so they necessarily adopted much of the closely associated theories of functional sociology and communitarianism that underpinned and justified them. Hence, with Bill Clinton acting as the intermediary, Amitai Etzioni, the leading American theorist of communitarianism, was invited to give seminars to Labour Party policy makers in London. At the same time, Anthony Giddens, who had played a central role in reviving the functionalist sociology of Talcott Parsons in the 1980s, was commissioned to write the primer for New Labour's 'Third Way'.¹⁵

Functional sociology had developed in the 1950s as an ideological defence of the post-war settlement in America. As such it had upheld the principles of a pluralistic liberal democracy based a predominantly free market capitalist economy against not only what was seen as the totalitarian socialism of the USSR, but also British style social democracy.¹⁶ But, at the same time, it had to both justify and prescribe the limits of the increased role of the state that had come about as result of the 'big government' policies that had followed Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s. As a consequence, a central theme of functional sociology, and subsequently Communitarianism, was the problem that neither the liberal democratic state nor a market capitalist economy were sufficient in themselves in ensuring the social reproduction of capitalist society.

Although it was presumed to be the most efficient economic system, the market capitalist economy necessarily fragmented society into competing groups and individuals, all pursuing their own narrow, often divergent, self-interests. As a consequence, the capitalist economy necessarily gave rise to individual and group conflicts that were dysfunctional to the reproduction of society as a whole.

Of course, it was also presumed that the liberal democratic state provided the most rational means to overcome these conflicts. It could provide a legal framework, which could limit the dysfunctional actions of economic agents, and it could act as a neutral arbitrator in resolving conflicts of interests. Furthermore, it was also accepted that the state might intervene to address market failures, to ensure the provision of public goods and services that would not otherwise be provided by the private sector and to alleviate poverty and economic distress that might undermine public order.

But the problem was that by itself there was no guarantee that a liberal democratic state would actually act in these ways to resolve dysfunctional conflict and ensure the orderly reproduction of society. Indeed, if the pluralistic democratic political system simply reflected the conflicting interests of the economy then economic conflicts would simply be

¹⁵ A. Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*, Polity Press, Blackwell, 1998.

¹⁶ In his *The Structure of Social Action*, Free Press, New York, Talcott Parsons established the basis for his functional sociology through a review of the writings of what he saw as his forerunners; Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. In his new introduction to the work in 1968, remarks 'On the theoretical side, the book concentrated on the the problem of the boundaries and limitations of economic theory. It did so in terms which did not follow the established lines of either the theory of "economic individualism" or its socialist opponents, even the British democratic socialists to say nothing of the Marxists.'

mirrored in the state. The state would then be captured and run by the politically most powerful sectional interests. The state may then exacerbate social conflicts and ultimately undermine the liberal democratic state itself. After all, the state could only act as an arbiter to the extent that it was perceived as being in some sense neutral. Furthermore, the rule of law in a liberal democracy depended on a degree of consent of those governed. The more the law was seen as being biased towards one group or class the more it would have to be imposed by authoritarian and repressive means.

Alternatively the state could rise above particular interests and impose what it saw as the general interests on the groups and interests of society as whole. But what was to prevent the state, or more specifically the state bureaucracy, from emerging as a particular interest like any other, and thereby end up imposing its particular interests as the 'general interest'?

Either way it seemed that a liberal democratic capitalism was doomed to either disintegrate into the disorder of competing interests due the centrifugal forces of the economy or else would end up with a totalitarian or authoritarian state. A liberal democratic free market capitalism would therefore seem to be unsustainable if not impossible.

However, for functionalist sociologists this was evidently not the case; liberal democratic free market capitalism was certainly alive and well in the USA if not elsewhere. What was it about actual liberal capitalist societies that ensured their orderly reproduction?

As we have seen, for the functionalist sociologists although the liberal democratic state and the free market capitalist economy were considered as providing the most rational and efficient *means* to achieving given political and economic ends, they did not determine these ends, nor could they ensure that such ends were congruent with each other. The question then was how were these ends determined and reconciled. The functionalist sociologists' answer was that liberal capitalist society necessarily gave rise to a distinct *cultural sphere* in which the amoral and asocial economic agents constituted by the competitive market were educated and socialized to become ethical citizens. As such, the ends pursued by groups and individuals were not merely those of narrow hedonistic self-interest but had a broader moral and social dimension. Furthermore, in interacting through this cultural sphere as ethical citizens, a general consensus could emerge that could reconcile particular interests through the emergence of a generally accepted idea of what was the 'common good' and 'public interest', which could then serve to define what should be the ends and purposes of state policy.

For the theorists of communitarianism the most important basis of this cultural sphere was the 'community'. Communities were constituted by the nexus of voluntary social relations between individuals that extended beyond the family, and as such were distinct from social relations mediated by the market and the state. The existence of communities became evident in the form of voluntary bodies, charitable institutions and in religious groups that actively bound their members together in the pursuit of ethical and moral ends.

Both the theorists of functional sociology and communitarianism could trace their origins back to the late nineteenth century. Whereas Talcott Parson's claimed his functional sociology was rooted in the classical sociology of Weber and Durkheim, communitarian theorists have traced

their ideas back to the British philosopher, Thomas Hill Green. Green's philosophy had been an attempt to go beyond what he saw as the limitations of utilitarianism that had underpinned classical economic and political liberalism of the early nineteenth century. In doing so he came to reject the long tradition of British empiricism and instead looked to the classical German philosophy of both Kant and Hegel. By the end of the nineteenth century Green's philosophical works had gained considerable influence amongst British intellectuals and provided one of the central foundations for the ideas of New Liberalism that was to guide the policies of Liberal Party at the turn of the century.¹⁷

Both the classical sociology of Weber and Durkheim, and the philosophy of Green can be seen as part of the broader re-orientation of bourgeois social theory that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in response to 'the social question' and the problem of defending the existing order posed by the rise of organized labour.¹⁸ Of course, the problem of ensuring the orderly reproduction of capitalism, particularly in relation to the working class, had long been an issue for bourgeois social theorists. Adam Smith, writing a hundred years before, had warned of the dangers that could arise from the mind-numbing effects of factory production and the material deprivation caused by the drive to force wages down to a bare subsistence level. Smith feared that these consequences of capitalist accumulation might threaten social cohesion through both the material and moral degradation of the working classes. The possible breakdown of the social reproduction of the working class because of material and moral deprivation was to be a recurrent concern for classical political economists and other bourgeois theorists right down to the mid-nineteenth century.

However, with the advance of organized labour from the middle of the nineteenth century, the main concern of bourgeois theorists became less that the material deprivation of the working class would lead to family break down, rising crime and the spread of disease. Instead the main concern of the bourgeoisie was that the growing strength of an organized working class would ultimately lead to revolution and the expropriation of private property. The response to this threat had been to make timely political and economic concessions that aimed to integrate the organized working class within bourgeois society both collectively and individually. This had led to the radical re-orientation and re-organization of bourgeois social theory in order to provide the theoretical framework to understand and guide such reforms.

New Liberalism had sought to both forestall the advance of the labour movement through social reforms and, at the same time harness its power in the fight against the old establishment and the continued power of landed property. However, following the first world war, the Liberal Party, and with it New Liberalism, was overtaken and sidelined by the electoral success of the Labour Party and the statist politics of

¹⁷ This resonated well with Tony Blair who had barely disguised disdain for the social democratic politics of old labour that for him had been an unfortunate detour in the advance of 'progressive politics' in 20th Century.

¹⁸ See Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991.

social democracy. As a consequence, Green, and his neo-Hegelian philosophy, was soon forgotten.¹⁹

In Britain social democracy became established with the post-war settlement; which saw the establishment of a comprehensive welfare state, extensive public ownership of the economy and a commitment to full employment. Social democracy served to integrate the working class within British capital and the British state by *representing* it as a class-for-itself, via the organizational forms of the Labour Party and the trade union movement. Yet at the same time as *representing* the working class as a class-for-itself – that is as a class that was both conscious of itself as a class, and sufficiently organized to advance its own interest as a class – social democracy served to preserve the working class as a class-in-itself – that is a mere aggregate of individualized workers and consumers. If social democracy was to advance the collective interests of labour and wring concessions out of the bourgeoisie it had to be able to mobilize the working class to take political and industrial action. However, at the

same time, to the extent that such concessions were ultimately dependent on the continued accumulation of capital, social democracy had to contain working class militancy within acceptable limits – it had to demobilize the working class.

This contradiction within social democracy, together with the changing technical class composition brought about by the decline of British manufacturing – came to the fore in the crisis and capitalist restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s. The very success of entrenching social democratic reforms in the post-war era had served to undermine the ability of both the Party and the trade union movement to both mobilize and demobilize the working class as a class. Social democracy had become hollowed out, making it vulnerable both to the working class offensive that threatened to go beyond the limits of capital, and to the subsequent bourgeois counter-offensive, which was to begin in earnest under premiership of Thatcher.

Thatcher was able to turn back the advance of social democracy through a two-pronged attack. Firstly, she broke the collective strength of organized labour through mass unemployment, a battery of anti-strike laws and ultimately through police repression. In doing so she sought to make it clear that any attempts by the working class to advance their interests through collective action and class solidarity was futile. At the same time, Thatcher sought to integrate the working class directly as individualized workers and consumers through her policies and ideology of ‘popular capitalism’. While collective action and solidarity may be futile, there would be plenty of opportunities for working class individuals and their families to advance themselves.

However, although growing economic prosperity following the restructuring of capital in the 1980s had allowed large sections of the aspiring working class to be

19 Green’s neo-Hegelian philosophy, having emerged with the incipient advance of organized labour and having been eclipsed by the subsequent rise of social democracy, has been revived by Communitarian social theorists with the retreat of organized labour and social democracy. Indeed it is perhaps also no surprise that this revival of Green’s philosophy first emerged in the USA, where advance of social democracy was most limited in the Western world, and in conjunction with American functional sociology that had originally emerged at least in partial opposition to Western European social democratic ideas.

integrated directly within bourgeois society, Thatcher’s neo-liberal policies had marginalized and ‘excluded’ significant sections of the working class, which in American terms threatened to become an ‘underclass’.²⁰ Thatcher may have defeated the ‘enemy within’ of organized labour but in doing so she had left a legacy of mass unemployment, family breakdown and growing levels of crime in many of Britain’s declining inner cities. The ‘social question’ was no longer the problem of organized labour but once again the problem of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘social inclusion’.

Communitarian social theory was adopted by New Labour as the theoretical framework to address this ‘problem of the working class’. Indeed, with the emergence of the new conservatism of David Cameron, the arguments of communitarianism have become an essential part of the ruling political consensus and ideology. As Cameron puts it: if Thatcher mended the broken economy now the problem is to mend the broken society.



Communitarianism as ideology and practice

Communitarian theorists argued that the establishment of the welfare state, combined with the hedonistic individualism promoted by both the spread of the 1960’s counter-culture and the neo-liberalism of the 1980s, had undermined the sense of community and social responsibility that were essential in holding society together. In a diverse multi-cultural society, in which the standard traditional family was in irrevocable decline, the appeals to national unity and a return to family values put forward by the right were no longer sufficient to ensure social cohesion. Yet calls for the extension of rights and entitlements and for the redistribution of wealth to deal with the ‘social problem’ were also out of date. For the communitarians, rights and entitlements had to be balanced with social obligations and duties. At the same time the state had to take a more extensive and proactive role in fostering communities.

For many of those in the post-68 generation who were now reaching senior positions within the management of the state and capital, these arguments had a certain resonance. First of all, the communitarian idea of ‘community’ was certainly reminiscent of the notion of ‘*gemeinschaft*’ – as a social form based on direct and unalienated human relations – that had gained a wide currency in the new left in the ’60s and ’70s, and which had been used as the basis of the criticism of

²⁰ Of course, the notion of an ‘underclass’, which carries with it the ideological baggage of welfare dependency etc., is highly controversial and one that we would not accept ourselves.

the alienated social forms of the commodity and the state. Secondly, the communitarian stress on the plurality of communities was in accord with the emerging consensus around multi-culturalism and contrasted with both the narrow and outdated monoculturalism and individualism of Thatcher and Powell. Thirdly, the communitarians' rejection of the libertarianism of '60s counter-culture and their stress on social duties no doubt chimed for many in the post-68 generation, who were now middle-aged with their own family responsibilities. Finally, for those in New Labour, who were now taking over the running of the state, communitarianism offered a new role for state intervention in society now that 'globalization' had supposedly ruled out effective state intervention in the economy.

Although communitarianism may claim to be class neutral in theory, this is certainly not the case in the ideology and practice of New Labour. For the bourgeoisie and the middle classes attempts to promote social responsibility and a sense of community have been based merely on exhortation and incentives. The middle classes have been urged to be ethical consumers and recycle their rubbish, while companies have been encouraged to adopt policies of corporate responsibility and engage with their 'community'. But 'community engagement' usually means increased 'networking' with national and local politicians and government administrators that has been necessary to prepare the way for public-private partnerships, private finance initiatives and other forms of privatization of public services, which have required a breakdown of the old divisions between the public and private sector.

In contrast, New Labour's attempts to inculcate a sense of social responsibility in the 'problem' sections of the working class have taken on a far more coercive aspect. Pseudo-contracts have been imposed on the unemployed, parents and those in council or social housing. Failure to comply with what New Labour deems as adequate socially acceptable behaviour can lead to benefit cuts or even eviction. Furthermore, in order to promote a sense of community, particularly in 'problem neighbourhoods', by curbing anti-social behaviour, neighbours have been encouraged to grass each other up to the authorities over the most minor of nuances. Instead of intervening as a last resort to arbitrate in neighbourly disputes, the authorities take sides. With the consequent issuing of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) quite draconian restrictions can be placed on individuals alleged to be guilty of anti-social behaviour, often merely on the basis of hearsay evidence and with little immediate opportunity to contest the case made out against them.

In short, 'community' has become a vacuous term in New Labour speak. On the one hand it has merely served as a cover for privatization. On the other hand it has been used to justify the increasingly intrusive policing of sections of the working class. Indeed, rather ironically, communitarianism in practice has served to pre-empt any emergence of any sense of community and social solidarity that might be in any way in opposition to the state and capital.

The fundamental problem of communitarian theory is that the problem of the decline of Community is not a simple result of social policy. It is a problem resulting from capital itself. The advance of capital into every facet of life necessarily leads to the destruction of direct human relations and their replacement by the alienated forms of the commodity and the state. Capital and human community do

not simply exist side by side but are in antagonistic relation to each other. Thus, in promoting the advance of capital's rule through their neoliberal policies New Labour serves to undermine and hollows out the communities that they claim to wish to promote.

Indeed, in their efforts to promote and 'engage with the community', state agencies have had to invent quite abstract and empty 'communities. Hence, for example, everyone living in a certain area is deemed to constitute 'the local community', everyone who is gay constitutes 'the gay community', anyone who happens to be disabled is part of 'the disabled community' and so forth even if the members of these communities have no connection with each other than within the heads of state administrators.²¹

This is not to say that communities in some sense do not exist in Britain. However, the strongest communities are the vestiges of those traditional and pre-capitalist forms of community that have been transplanted from the Indian sub-continent as a result of successive waves of immigration since the 1950s. As we shall see in Part II, it is these Asian communities that were seized upon and vigorously promoted by New Labour politicians, not only for ideological reasons but for practical political purposes. These communities, with their traditional social conservatism, not only serve to exemplify New Labour's idea of 'community' but also, through their communalist politics, served to provide a vital electoral base for New Labour.



²¹ A blatant example of the far reaching effect of the ideology of 'community' occurred in Brighton at the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the local anti-war movement had called for two local demonstrations against the invasion. The second demonstration was heavily policed, which drew criticisms from the local newspaper. Instead of justifying their actions on the traditional grounds of maintaining public order, the police argued that they were defending Brighton's 'Jewish Community'