Brexit and the Labour Party:

Europe, Cosmopolitanism and the Narrowing of Traditions[1]

Abstract

The phenomenon of Brexit is reordering British politics. Its effects have led to political and cultural shock, disruption and rifts. This article explores how the phenomenon of Brexit has decentered the Labour Party's ideational traditions. The article utilises a mixed methodology which combines qualitative and quantitative data in the form of scholarly literature on Labour history, Labour Party manifestoes, speeches and media interviews by front-line politicians as well as polling data. In particular, the article analyses how Labour politicians are reimagining the two main traditions of thought: the euro-enthusiast tradition and the euro-sceptic tradition. The article argues that Labour's euro-enthusiasts are reimagining the tradition as a full blooded cosmopolitanism and this is simultaneously controversial and high risk because it has refashioned Labour's interests into a narrower social and cultural electoral offering.

Introduction

The phenomenon of Brexit is reordering British politics. Ties of class and occupation matter less and cultural identity and values matter more. But this is not the politics of partisan class dealignment (Denver, 1994). It is accurate to explain and understand this as a socio-cultural realignment. A realignment of citizens who differ on aspects of political economy, hold competing financial interests, and yet share bonds of culture and similar social values (Ashcroft, 2016).

The reordering of British politics by the phenomenon of Brexit can be understood through the conceptual framework of decentred theory. Decentred theory emanates from the work of Michel Foucault (1977) but one does not have to endorse his post-modernism or his Cultural Marxist claims to use an aspect of his theory.[2] Bevir (2013) utilises decentred theory to interpret changes in governance:

> Changes in governance are not products of ineluctable social processes. On the contrary, governance, whether conceived as social organization or as a new politics, is a series of disparate social practices that are constantly being created and recreated through concrete and meaningful human activity. (Bevir, 2013: 5)

Brexit, as I have recently argued, is a decentering event for the British state (Beech, 2020). Such a phenomenon disturbs and interrupts practices of state governance. These practices, dispositions and traditions of thought are not fixed, solid institutions. Neither are they mirages of the imagination. They are real, but are formed by the beliefs and ideas of actors. The agency of actors - in this case that of Ministers of the Crown, civil servants, Opposition politicians, Backbench MPs and peers of the realm - serves to author and re-author practices of governance and traditions of thought. Politics and governance viewed through this lens brings into sharp focus the role of ideational traditions and enables those studying state institutions and public policy to perceive the political landscape as deeply influenced by past events and characterised by contestation between competing worldviews.

If Brexit decenters the British state, by the same measure it contributes significantly to the decentering of political parties. Of the established political parties it is the Labour Party that

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[2] For a reasoned account of epistemology see A. Plantinga (1990) God and Other Minds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) and for a dependable account of ontology see A. Plantinga (2000) Warranted Christian Belief (Oxford: Oxford University Press). For a robust counter to post-modernism see S.R.C. Hicks (2014) Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault (Ockham's Razor Publishing) and for a strong disquisition of Foucault's thought see chapter 4 of R. Scruton (2016) Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left (London: Bloomsbury).

has most sharply experienced - and arguably will continue to experience - the decentring effects of Brexit. This will no doubt seem a bold claim to some. After all, the Parliamentary Conservative Party has been riven by the effects of the outcome of the referendum vote on 23rd June 2016 and it has cost two Conservative Prime Ministers and Cabinet Ministers their careers. Nonetheless it is evident from data from the two notable national polls taken in the build up to the EU referendum - the 2014 EU Parliament election and the 2015 UK general election - and in the three notable national polls taken since - the 2017 UK general election, the 2019 EU Parliament election and the 2019 general election - that the second great party of state has experienced the culmination of a 'values gap' (Edwards and Beech, 2016; Beech, 2018). This gap is the outcome of a process of decentring of the Labour Party. The values gap is, on the one hand, between a significant portion of erstwhile Labour-inclined voters and, on the other hand, between the Parliamentary Party and card-carrying activists. It is important to note that whilst Brexit has heightened and sped up the process of the values gap it was not the causal factor. The Labour Party's journey into a pro-European union, cosmopolitan party is a long and complex evolutionary story.

The aim of this article is to explore how the phenomenon of Brexit has decentered the Labour Party's ideational traditions with regards to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and cultural identity and values. The article utilises a mixed methodology which combines qualitative and quantitative data in the form of scholarly literature on Labour history, Labour Party manifestoes, speeches and media interviews by front-line politicians as well as polling data. The central thesis of this article is that Labour's *reimagining of its euro-enthusiast tradition* into a full blooded cosmopolitanism is simultaneously controversial and high risk because it refashions Labour's interests into a narrower social and cultural electoral offering. The article begins by interpreting the traditions of Labour thought towards the European project. The article then moves to consider two traditions of thought which can be understood as areas of Labour's ideational reimagining: the euro-enthusiast tradition and the euro-sceptic tradition.

Labour and the European Project

Since the commencement of the European project, the Labour Party and wider Labour movement, has contained the full spectrum of opinion. Utilising Bulpitt's typology of attitudes to the European Union by Conservative MPs and activists (Bulpitt, 1992), one can identify euro-sceptics, euro-pragmatists and euro-enthusiasts in the Labour Party.[3] These competing traditions of thought have found advocates on both wings of the Labour Party. For example, the Labour left has contained euro-sceptics (Foot, Castle, Benn, Heffer) and euro-enthusiasts (Holland, Abbott). The right has comprised sceptics (Bevin, Gaitskell, Shore, Field, Hoey and Stuart) and enthusiasts for the European project (Hattersley, Blair, Brown, Harman, Miliband). Euro-pragmatists have sat on both wings of the Labour Party: Crossman and Wilson (at least initially) on the left and Crosland, Callaghan and Healey on the right. The diversity of views on the European project and the passion with which they have been held has often been a source of much tension for the Labour Party (Daniels, 1998).

It was the 1950 Labour Party manifesto which praised the beginnings of post-war European cooperation but tempered it by locating Britain's duty at: '…the heart of a great Commonwealth extending far beyond the boundaries of Europe.' (Labour Party, 1950:11) The sole reference to Europe in the 1955 Labour manifesto was in the aspiration of a reunified Germany in the context of disarmament and relaxing international tension. (Labour Party, 1955:1) Two years after the Treaty of Rome was signed by 'The Six' the 1959 Labour manifesto was silent on the issue of Europe, preferring to concentrate on the United Nations, the arms race, decolonisation and global poverty (Labour Party, 1959). A year after Britain's first application to join the Common Market was rejected by French President Charles De Gaulle, the 1964 Labour manifesto clearly stated a Commonwealth first policy: 'Though we shall seek to achieve closer links with our European neighbours, the Labour Party is convinced that the first responsibility of a British Government is still to the Commonwealth.' (Labour Party, 1964:19). Four years later, Wilson, then Prime Minister, experienced Macmillan's rejection when, once again, De Gaulle vetoed the United Kingdom's membership application.

Given the two rejected applications and the fact that the Parliamentary Labour Party had endorsed Britain's future in the club of West European nations, it is unsurprising that the 1970s sharpened divisions over Europe within the Labour Party. The 1972 European

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[3] In his typology, Bulpitt identified five positions: Euro-unionist, Euro-enthusiasts, Euro-pragmatists, Euro-sceptics and those who 'dislike the European Community' namely anti-Europeans. In this article I utilise the second, third and fourth descriptors. These descriptors are contested and other scholars may apply different designations.

Communities Act had been authored by the Conservative administration of Edward Heath with the support of 69 Labour euro-enthusiast MPs. This paved the way for the UK's entry into the European Economic Community on 1st January 1973. By the time of the emergency general election of February 1974, Wilson, ever the pragmatist, stated in his Foreword to the Labour manifesto:

> The Common Market now threatens us with still higher food prices and with a further loss of Britain's control of its own affairs. We shall restore to the British people the right to decide the final issue of British membership of the Common Market. (Labour Party, 1974)

Labour was returned to Office as a minority government but Wilson's strategy of a national referendum did little to reduce internal party tension surrounding the European question. The debate between pro-Marketeers - who voted 'Yes' to remain in the Common Market in the referendum of 1975 - and anti-Marketeers - who campaigned to leave - left deep political and personal scars that were to reappear in the following decade. As early as the 1970s there was a disconnection between Labour heartlands and the Parliamentary Party on Britain's role in Europe and Andrews Geddes recalls that during the 1970s many Labour activists were staunchly Euro-sceptic:

> Hostility to the EC amongst Labour's rank and file in the 1970s had been compounded by the perceived failings of the Wilson and Callaghan governments… Callaghan was a pragmatist on Europe, as well as an Atlanticist, he held no truck with the lofty rhetoric of European union and had a poor reputation in EC circles as a result of dogged pursuit of national interests during the re-negotiation. (Geddes, 1994: 372)

Tension over Europe resurfaced in 1981 amid the internecine acrimony caused by the departure of the 'Gang of Four' and subsequently in their formation of the Social Democratic Party as an explicitly Euro-enthusiast, centre-left rival to Labour. In stark contrast to the euro-enthusiasts who had abandoned ship, Foot's 1983 Labour manifesto declared: 'We are not 'withdrawing from Europe'. We are seeking to extricate ourselves from the Treaty of Rome and other Community treaties which place a heavy burden on Britain.' (Labour Party, 1983: 33-34).

It was under Neil Kinnock that Labour's relationship and disposition towards the European project evolved. Labour's 1987 manifesto can best be described as euro-pragmatist:

> Labour's aim is to work constructively with our EEC partners to promote economic expansion and combat unemployment. However, we will stand up for British interests within the European Community and will seek to put an end to the abuses and scandals of the Common Agricultural Policy. We shall, like other member countries, reject EEC interference with our policy for national recovery and renewal. (Labour Party, 1987)

As late as 1988, Kinnock was sceptical of aspects of the European Community particularly the Common Agricultural Policy, the emergence of the Single Market and the influence of transnational businesses. (Kinnock, 1988: 1) Kinnock's position warmed with the evolution of the European Community and this was largely due to Jacques Delors' Presidency of the European Commission (1985-1995). Delors, a French Socialist, proposed a new vision that Europe's Single Market become also a Social Europe with clear social democratic policy prescriptions at its core. This was a philosophical step-change in the European project and galvanised the support of many social democrats in the Labour Party. As Daniels asserts:

> For Labour, pro-Europeanism became attractive, feasible and consistent with the party's policy goals. The pro-European stance finds support at all levels of the party and internal opposition to Britain's membership of the EU is negligible. Divisions remain within the party over the scope, pace and direction of European integration. (Daniels, 1998: 92)

By the same token Delors' Social Europe with its concomitant federalism infuriated many economic liberals in the Conservative Government (Thatcher, Baker and Parkinson) but not all (such as Howe and Lawson). This reformation of the Single Market with an integrationist social dimension became the determining factor in the Labour movement's *rapprochement* with the European project. As Richard Heffernan points out:

> As Margaret Thatcher increasingly vociferously denounced Europe for its creeping Euro-federalism, a stance typified by her September 1988 Bruges Speech, Labour's pro-Europeanism gradually deepened – a policy shift encouraged, but by no means dependent on, a changed attitude towards Europe on the part of the trade union movement. (Heffernan, 2001: 181)

Whilst the 1986 Single European Act was a significant step of further economic integration specifying the freedom of movement, goods, services and capital (and occurred on Thatcher's watch) it was the 1992 Maastricht Treaty which authored the paradigm shift in Britain's

relationship with the European project. Maastricht, signed by Major, became the touchstone for dispute and division for euro-sceptics especially within, but also, without the Conservative Party. The provisions of the Treaty proposed a constitution, a central bank, a single currency, a foreign minister, a standing army, a flag and an anthem. The post-war project of intergovermentalism had been supplanted by federalism undergirded by a social democratic political economy.

Stephen George argues that by the time of the Prime Ministership of Blair, the British state had transitioned from a euro-sceptic to a euro-enthusiast perspective (George, 2000: 30). Change, albeit gradual, evolutionary, attitudinal change had taken place. Euro-scepticism within the Parliamentary Labour Party, the Labour Movement and amongst party activists had receded and a positive disposition towards European integration had flowered. Conversely, the widespread euro-enthusiasm of the Parliamentary Conservative Party had been supplanted with a deep-seated euro-scepticism.

When, on 23rd June 2016, a majority of British citizens voted for the United Kingdom to leave the EU, the Labour Party, let alone the British state, experienced an existential challenge to its progressive worldview. The phenomenon of Brexit - the unpredicted, unlikely voice of countless citizens who seldom vote - was a decentering event for the Labour Party. The decentering effect brought symptoms of shock, challenge, tension and rifts across the organisation. The data bears this out; 37% of electors who voted Labour at the 2015 general election voted Leave (Ashcroft, 2016). Individual politicians author and re-author the traditions of thought of their political parties over time. Decentering phenomenon such as Brexit cause significant change and, thereby, disrupt and disturb established traditions. In the wake of the decision for the United Kingdom to leave the EU, Labour politicians are engaged in a process of reimagining their ideational traditions. The article moves now to consider the two traditions of thought which can be understood as areas of Labour's ideational reimagining starting with the euro-enthusiast tradition.

Labour and the Reimagining of the Euro-enthusiast Tradition

As has been noted above, Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition has been a reservoir of ideas and policy for over a quarter of a century. Pauline Schnapper suggests that within Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition different schools of thought are discernible, for example, she identifies a pragmatic, more cautious school and a more enthusiastic, liberal school of opinion. (Schnapper, 2014: 158) In the aftermath of the Brexit vote the former school of opinion all but dried up. The reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition has taken on a different order of significance in the minds of its advocates. The United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union has been, and continues to be, reimagined as not only an urgent economic priority but also as an existential moral necessity.

Naturally, in the space of an article one cannot expect to capture data from all euro-enthusiast Labour politicians, so what follows is (the author hopes) a reasonable sample. This sample illustrates the reimagining of the euro-enthusiast tradition in its nascent form. The first expression of reimagining Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition comes from its most recent former Leader. A radical socialist MP who, until becoming Party Leader in 2015, was a well-known Labour euro-sceptic. At the start of his tenure Corbyn did not appear to be reimagining the euro-enthusiast tradition. His perceived reticence towards the Britain Stronger In Europe campaign in the lead up to the 2016 referendum sent mixed signals to Labour supporters, as Vasilopoulou makes clear:

> Corbyn's euro-sceptic past, combined with a general caution not to appear that he is supporting Cameron, have contributed towards a sense of ambivalence with regard to Labour's EU position. (Vasilopoulou, 2016: 221)

During his leadership, the behaviour of Momentum and the controversy over anti-Semitism were ongoing political thorns in Corbyn's side. But equal to these was the Parliamentary Labour Party's disappointment at his reluctance to be a full-throated champion of the European Union in general and, of a second referendum, in particular. This was the reasoning given by MPs on the right of the party for backing Owen Smith to challenge Corbyn in 2016. The largest resistance Corbyn and his supporters faced was from the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party; all other organs of the Labour movement were obediently Corbynite. The decentering processes of Brexit affected Labour profoundly, to the point whereby on 9th May 2019, Corbyn began to reimagine Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition:

> It is in the country's interest to get this sorted one way or another, but we can never accept the Government's bad deal or a disastrous no deal. So, if we can't get a sensible deal along the lines of our alternative plan or a general election, Labour backs the option of a public vote on it. (Corbyn, 2019)

A public vote, sometimes termed a 'People's Vote', is a second referendum. Supporters of such a policy argued that 'Remain' and the Government's deal should be the options put to the electorate.

The second reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition selected cames from the Labour right figure and former Deputy Leader Tom Watson. Perhaps Watson's boldest statement on the subject came during an interview with Justin Webb on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme on 13th May 2019, when he responded with the following:

> We are a Remain and reform party. But obviously when it comes to a deal people can form their own view. But when it comes to that European election let me just say Remain is not on the ballot paper in that election. And actually there is an issue to do with John Smith's legacy in this as well because John would look at this not just as a left right issue, I think he would have another intersection between high and low politics. And what's on the ballot at the European elections is narrow populism, a move back to nationalism and he knew the difference between nationalism and patriotism. And so this election I just say to people who were either Labour Brexiteers or Labour Remainers, please do not look at this through a narrow view, try and look at the wider context of the political world we're in. (Watson, 2019)

This is an intriguing reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition. Firstly, Watson unequivocally declares Labour a Remain and reform party. Secondly, concerned by the threat posed by other pro-European progressive parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party, Watson states that the European elections do not have 'Remain' as an option so, by implication, if one is a Remainer the best bet is to vote for Labour (a Remain and reform party) who can defeat the Conservative Party and the Brexit Party. Thirdly, Watson mentions high and low politics but, more importantly, brings the much admired former Labour Leader, John Smith, into his reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition. Smith, at the time of Watson's comments, had been dead for twenty-five years, so why deputise his legacy into an argument about Labour's euro-enthusiasm? Watson mentions Smith because he was a euro-enthusiast, a moderate on Labour's right-wing, a Scot critical of Scottish Nationalism

and a figure well respected across the political spectrum in the UK. This leads Watson to the fourth, but central, point in his statement which links Smith to Labour's policy and provides an analysis of contemporary British politics. Watson's reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition is normative and moral in outlook. He obliquely refers to the Brexit Party as the electoral offering at the European elections encouraging 'narrow populism' and 'a move back to nationalism'. Watson reintroduces the memory of Smith stating that 'he knew the difference between nationalism and patriotism'; this is accurate but the idea and memory of Smith is deployed as a device to stir Labour inclined voters - Brexiteers most of all - to eschew the Brexit Party and remember the good offices of Labour patriots who are euro-enthusiasts such as Smith. In an time when the idea of patriotism was not immediately identifiable with the Labour Party, one can see the electoral rationale for attempting to reimagine Labour's past for a contemporary electoral benefit.

The third reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition comes from the then Shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry MP. In response to a question by BBC journalist Andrew Marr, 'Is Labour now a Remain party?' Thornberry declared:

> Well our policy is that anything this Government comes forward with, particularly if they are going to come forward with no deal, we are going to ask for there to be a public vote, we are going to ask for Remain to be on the ballot paper and we're going to campaign to Remain. So it sounds pretty Remain to me. (Thornberry, 2019)

Thornberry's reimagining is similar and yet different from Watson's. It is similar in declaring that the Labour Party is a Remain party and will campaign only to stay within the EU. Where it differs is in tone and tactic. Thornberry's tone is uncompromising and her tactic is to speak directly to Remain voters. This can be understood by the fact that she is MP for Islington South and Finsbury in central London. Islington Borough Council voted Remain by 75% -25% in the EU referendum http://democraticdashboard.com/location/town/islington%20south%20and%20finsbury%20/-0.105 99999999999454,51.538. Watson's tone is more moderate. He is attempting to persuade Labour-inclined voters, who supported the Leave campaign, to vote Labour in the 2019 EU Parliament elections. His comments about patriotism being different to nationalism speak to the sense of English patriotism well documented in the West Midlands. Sandwell Borough Council, in Watson's former West Bromich East constituency, voted Leave by 67%-33% in 2016

What is evident from these three senior Labour figures and their attempts to reimagine Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition is that underpinning their narratives is a worldview. Sometimes the worldview is overt, other times it is obscured. The worldview of Labour's euro-enthusiasts is most accurately described as cosmopolitanism. The article now moves to explain and understand cosmopolitanism as an aspect of the Labour euro-enthusiast tradition.

Cosmopolitanism

Before one can discuss Labour's cosmopolitanism a definition needs to be offered and unpacked. Beck, a leading social theorist and advocate of cosmopolitanism, sets out the case for a cosmopolitan world politics with explicitly cosmopolitan parties:

> Now we must unite to create an effective cosmopolitan world politics. There is a new dialectic of global and local questions, which do not fit in to national politics. These questions are already part of the political agenda – in the localities and regions, in governments and public spheres both national and international. But only in a transnational framework can they be properly posed, debated and resolved. For this there has to be reinvention of politics, a founding and grounding of the new political subject: that is - cosmopolitan parties. (Beck, 2002: 41)

For Beck, cosmopolitanism is the logical evolution of an increasingly developed capitalist system whereby technological advances have increased opportunities and risks. For such thinkers the correct level of analysis is no longer national or regional but global because such opportunities and risks transcend national boundaries. The post-war development of the culture of human rights; the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism; and climate change are examples of phenomena which demand that a national view must be subordinate to a global view. An interesting point is that cosmopolitanism has support on the economic left as well as the right: Jospin and Merkel; Barroso and Cameron. Economic global governance can be shaped in a social democratic or an economic liberal direction.

Labour cosmopolitanism exists on its right-wing as much as on its left-wing. Whether one categorises contemporary right-wing MPs as post-New Labour or, designate them as I prefer, as the Progressives (Beech, 2018), it is clear that in the thirteen years of the Blair and Brown administrations the logic of liberalisms in the economic and social sphere led to values

change, policy reform and recalibration of the level of political analysis from the national to the global. Cosmopolitanism can be interpreted as the ideational rock on which the New Labour temple was built. Rutherford succinctly summaries New Labour's cosmopolitan worldview:

> The Third Way mixture of social liberalism and economic liberalism led to a post-national cosmopolitanism which tended to valorise novelty, the global and change, over the ordinary, the local, and belonging. Like its academic cousin post-modernism, it had the effect of flattening out time, space and the hierarchy of values, helping to clear social and cultural impediments to commodification. (Rutherford, 2013: 13)

The cosmopolitanism of New Labour (Blair and Brown) and their progressive successors (Miliband, Starmer) is socially liberal; sees globalisation as an opportunity rather than a threat; is internationalist and views western culture as liberal globalism. They are simultaneously Atlanticists and euro-enthusiasts. They hold to an orthodox reading of foreign policy. In contrast, Corbyn's cosmopolitanism is a product of the New Left movement. It holds to a socialist political economy; contains heavy doses of anti-American and anti-Israel foreign policy thinking; is sceptical of NATO; and is against the nuclear deterrent. At the heart of Corbyn's cosmopolitanism is a narrative about human rights, high levels of public expenditure, social equality and pacifism. These are the means by which the Labour left contends that a socialist cosmopolitanism can be built.

The demography of Corbyn's cosmopolitan supporters is overwhelmingly white-collar and urban, including university towns, but its spiritual home is London. To perceive the shape and tone of Corbyn's politics one need only check his voting record in the House of Commons and count the number of questions asked on particular issues and, furthermore, consider his closest political friendships: Diane Abbott, Ken Livingstone and John McDonnell. This genealogy is crucial to understand where Corbyn hails politically, but also to highlight that under his leadership Labour's New Left had, at least for a season, wrested control of the party from the centre-right progressives. Something its standard-bearer, Tony Benn, narrowly failed in doing.

When one reflects upon Corbyn's deeply held political convictions about mass immigration, law and order, out of work benefits, national security and patriotism it is apparent that these do not in general cohere with the culturally conservative proclivities of the English working

class. The cosmopolitan governing elite of the Labour Party is recognisable from the description of the political and social elite described by Ford and Goodwin:

> Britain's political and social elites tend to be drawn heavily from the more liberal end of the spectrum, and stand in stark contrast to the older, blue-collar left-behind voters whom perceive this rapid social change as a threat to their national community, values and ways of life. (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 284)

The Labour politicians still see their party as the vehicle for representing the interests of the working class and yet the 'values gap', or put differently, its cosmopolitan worldview, appears to be growing and moving further and further from the socio-cultural values and worldview of blue-collar voters. The reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition, beyond arguing that the United Kingdom should remain in the European Union, is not a coherent project. As has been shown, senior Labour figures use a plurality of tactics and tone to communicate their worldview. Corbyn and, to a greater extent, Thornberry feel that the reimagining of Labour's euro-enthusiast tradition speaks to a broad cross-section of progressives. Watson is concerned to persuade Labour-inclined voters who supported Leave in 2016 to consider Labour, and exclude the Brexit Party, especially in future elections. The difficulty for Labour is that most of their constituents voted Leave and most MPs voted Remain. There is, at root, a difference in worldview between culturally conservative erstwhile Labour voters and the cosmopolitan Parliamentary Labour Party and activist base. The question of Europe is not merely about membership of the EU but about a vision of the United Kingdom and, in particular, a vision of England that is more culturally conservative than cosmopolitan. The article moves now to consider the reimagining of Labour's euro-sceptic tradition.

Labour and the Reimagining of the Euro-sceptic Tradition

For Labour's 'Leavers' the attempt to reimagine the euro-sceptic tradition is easier when communicating to Labour-inclined voters and the electorate at large than when addressing either the Remain dominated media or addressing internal organisational meetings of a euro-enthusiast political party. This, as discussed above, has not always been the case. In a recent article exploring the social democratic euro-sceptic tradition, Hickson and Miles note that:

> …those who held to this social democratic Euro-sceptic position rejected calls for closer European integration after the Second World War, instead placing more

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emphasis on the links with America in the context of the Cold War and also of the Commonwealth. Postwar figures such as Attlee, Bevin, Dalton and Gaitskell held to this social democratic Euro-sceptic view; indeed the latter's final party conference speech in 1962 was the high watermark of that tradition. (Hickson and Miles, 2018: 877)

This tradition within Labour continued. Geddes draws out a different approach, more leftist and 'nationalistic socialist' under Foot which culminated in the policy offering put to the British electorate in 1983 (Geddes, 1994: 372). Despite the Labour Party's evolution from euro-scepticism to euro-enthusiasm, Heffernan helpfully highlights the important role British euro-scepticism played in acting as a brake on cosmopolitan euro-enthusiasts:

> …while Europeanisation is real, there are significant limits to it, as demonstrated by the fact that pro-European Labour retains a residual caution about Europe, aware as it is of a deep-seated Euro-scepticism among the British electorate and of the supranational price ever closer political union will exact. (Heffernan, 2001: 187)

Since the 2016 EU referendum campaign no such caution has been demonstrated by the Labour Party. Despite the rich storehouse of euro-sceptic ideas on the left and the right throughout the Labour Party's history for figures such as Frank Field, Kate Hoey, Graham Stringer, Kelvin Hopkins, Roger Godsiff and John Mann, the euro-sceptic position has made them *personae non gratae*.

As mentioned above, in the space of an article one cannot expect to capture data from all euro-sceptic Labour politicians (though few in number), so once again, a sample is utilised. This sample illustrates the reimagining of the euro-sceptic tradition in the aftermath of the 2016 referendum. The first expression of reimagining Labour's euro-sceptic tradition comes from Frank Field. Field is the former Member of Parliament for Birkenhead and was a Labour MP from 1979-2018.[4] In an essay for a pamphlet by Labour Leave, he notes that euro-scepticism is deeply problematic for Labour because Leave voters see Labour as an advocate of cosmopolitan values:

> Overall, the Leave vote was estimated to have surpassed 60 per cent in more than a third of Labour seats…a decoupling has taken place between the internationalist views held by much of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the hopes and fears of

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[4] In August 2018 Field resigned the Labour whip over anti-Semitism and a culture of intolerance at grassroots level and sat as an Independent Labour MP until losing his seat in December 2019.

millions of working class voters whose communities have borne the brunt of globalisation. None of this should come as a shock to Labour. Long before the referendum, voters were on the move to find candidates whose views on national identity, borders and security were more closely aligned with their own. In the hearts and minds of a growing number of voters, it is UKIP which seems to have offered the closest match. Labour had already lost 138,000 voters to UKIP between 2005 and 2010. At the last election this figure increased sevenfold – 931,000 former Labour voters decided instead to support UKIP. (Field, 2016: 11)

Field's reimagining of the euro-sceptic Labour tradition links the party's move away from the socio-cultural values of its working class base towards what he terms an 'internationalist' view. I think this is better understood as a cosmopolitan view. The story Field is trying to retell is how Labour's journey away from the worldview and values of its traditional supporters pre-dates the 2016 referendum. He implies that Labour's leaderships hold divergent views to its heartlands on 'national identity, borders and security' and that many one-time supporters had ceased voting Labour and started voting UKIP. For Field the euro-sceptic reimagining is related primarily to the disconnection between the conservative socio-cultural values of working class England and the cosmopolitan worldview of Labour politicians including Leaders of the Party. His analysis is supported by the work of Ford and Goodwin (2014) who argue that:

During the 1980s and 1990s, blue-collar voters and those with no or very few qualifications, were continuing to participate in Britain's two-party system. A large majority of them identified with one of the two main parties, most often Labour. However, during the 2000s these left-behind groups steadily lost faith in Labour, yet rather than switch to the centre-right Conservatives, they simply stopped identifying with either of Britain's main parties. (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 280)

The second reimagining of Labour's euro-sceptic tradition comes from Gisela Stuart, the German-born, former euro-enthusiast progressive who chaired Vote Leave. Stuart, writing in the same post-referendum Labour Leave pamphlet as Field, argues:

It was clear during the campaign that significant numbers of traditional loyal Labour voters did not agree with the Party's official position. Apart from London and some of the bigger cities, on the day a majority of voters put their cross against Leave. And to

this day, most MPs and decision makers in the Labour Party are still not facing up to what the result tells us about our core Labour voters. (Stuart, 2016: 7)

Stuart, therefore, reimagines the euro-sceptic Labour tradition as a contest between the traditional voters versus the Party Leadership and the Parliamentary Labour Party. She notes the defining issues which influenced many Labour supporters to opt for Brexit:

'…immigration and the free movement of people were the issues where we took our eye off the ball at home and failed to look at facts critically and respond accordingly. After the enlargement in 2004, when we did not impose transitional arrangements, we got our forecasts of the number of people who would come from Eastern Europe disastrously wrong. (Stuart, 2016: 8)

Stuart reimagines Labour's euro-sceptic tradition by critiquing euro-enthusiast policy failure of the Blair governments and, in particular, their lack of adequate response to EU enlargement and the prospect of millions of newly enfranchised EU citizens from the accession countries of Eastern and South Eastern Europe legally migrating to the UK. The negative externalities of the absence of transition controls was mass low skill and no skill migration over a relatively short period of time. This led to downward pressure on low wages for working class Britons (especially those in England) and increased burdens on public services, social welfare and infrastructure. The euro-sceptic tradition is portrayed by Stuart as more keenly aware of the outlook and disposition of Labour's traditional base and this is something she was personally aware of as the first Labour MP elected to the historically Conservative constituency of Birmingham Edgbaston.

The third reimagining of Labour's euro-sceptic tradition comes from Kate Hoey, former Member of Parliament for Vauxhall (an overwhelmingly Remain constituency). Speaking in the *EU: Withdrawal and Future Relationship* debate in the House of Commons, two days before the day the United Kingdom was supposed to exit the EU, she said:

The one group of people we cannot blame, however, are the people of this country who in the referendum voted to leave, thought they would be listened to and were told by everyone, including the former Prime Minister, that their vote mattered and would be implemented, whatever that decision. Since that day, many people in this House who never wanted us to leave have done all they can in very clever ways—an hon. Member said she had been helped by a senior lawyer to put her motion—to prevent us from leaving. The public looking in today would say, "What a nonsense. It's just a lot

of waffle. You're just putting through loads of different things." In the end, only the Government can make this happen. The Prime Minister could still get her withdrawal agreement through, if she was to recognise that she as a Conservative and Unionist Prime Minister should never have come up with something like the backstop and that the backstop has to be changed. I understand that fundamentally the one thing that must not happen today is the people of this United Kingdom being told, "You were too stupid, racist or ignorant to vote the right way, and now we want you to vote again in a separate referendum, because we think you might have changed your mind." I am incredibly disappointed that my party—a Labour party that saw the majority of its constituencies vote to leave—is whipping Labour Members to vote for a second referendum. (Hoey, 2019)

Hoey's contribution to this debate in the House of Commons is necessarily adversarial. She is seeking to reimagine Labour's euro-sceptic tradition in a similar way to Stuart, namely to contrast the public's majority decision to vote to Leave the EU with the House of Commons' desire for a second referendum. In this speech Hoey contrasts the nobility of the *vox populi* with the ruthlessness of the governing elite – the leadership of the Labour Party and Theresa May's Conservative administration. Hoey directly attacks the euro-enthusiasts in Parliament as trying to subvert the will of the electorate by proposing a range of possible motions in the hope one is carried and thwarts the mandate for Brexit. She also highlights a subtext in much Remain politics which asserts that Leave voters are 'too stupid, racist or ignorant to vote the right way'. Whilst it is accurate that Leave voters are more likely to be older, more socially conservative, less comfortable with multiculturalism and immigration and more modestly educated than Remain voters (Ashcroft, 2016) it does not necessarily follow that they are racist or incapable of understanding the nature of the 2016 referendum.

Field, Stuart and Hoey - in slightly varied ways - have sought to reimagine Labour's euro-sceptic tradition. Their worldview is more conservative and less cosmopolitan than the vast majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The article now moves to explain and understand conservatism as an aspect of the Labour euro-sceptic tradition.

Conservatism

Conservatism is famously difficult to define. It has no single core principle or, put differently, no fundamental telos. Sir Roger Scruton suggests that this has given rise to the incorrect view that conservatism is devoid of ideational content:

> Because there is no universal conservative policy, the illusion has arisen that there is no conservative thought, no set of beliefs or principles, no general vision of society, which motivates the conservative to act. His action is mere reaction, his policy procrastination, his belief nostalgia. (Scruton, 1984: 11)

Here, I use the term 'conservative', to refer to the social and cultural disposition of Labour-inclined voters especially those outside of the great metropolitan centres. I understand social conservatism as a tradition of thought to contain, in large measure, established moral attitudes inherited from Britain's Christian past. I understand cultural conservatism as a tradition of thought which possess a sympathy for, and a loyalty to, the habits, customs, behaviours and institutions that have shaped the British in general and, the English, in particular.

Conservatism, in the Labour Party, is rarely about competing approaches to economics, although globalised capitalism in its less regulated forms is a regular subject of criticism. It is the social and cultural dimensions of politics which interests conservatives. Evans and Menon point out that whilst conservatives and liberals (or put slightly differently, cosmopolitans) can be plotted on a socio-economic spectrum, it is not necessarily the worst off who are the most conservative:

> The spectrum from socially conservative to socially liberal values is quite distinct from the traditional left-right divide that has dominated our politics. When it comes to these values, it is not merely those in low-skill jobs, or with no jobs, who have felt unrepresented by mainstream socially liberal parties. Social conservatism has a wide social base, encompassing many occupations and social classes. (Evans and Menon, 2017: 40)

The reimagining of Labour's euro-sceptic tradition owes a considerable amount to conservatism. The reimagining of Labour's euro-sceptic tradition is related to the belief in the supremacy of the sovereignty of the nation-state rather than the UK as part of a federal Europe; the primacy of Parliament as opposed to its subordination to EU institutions; final legal authority of the British judiciary; and the belief of the need to defend the settled order from rapid economic and political change - from the externalities of globalisation on the one hand and, the widening of the EU with mass migration from the accession countries on the other.

Conservatism is prevalent among citizens who voted Brexit. Data gathered by Lord Ashcroft on the day of the referendum, 23rd June 2016 by surveying over 12,000 voters, reveals the extent of social and cultural conservatism of Brexiteers, including Labour inclined Brexiteers. Voters were asked, 'Do you think of each of the following as being a force for good, a force for ill or a mixed blessing?' and the table below express the views of Leave voters:

Force for ill	% of Leave voters
Multiculturalism	81%
Social liberalism	80%
Feminism	74%
The Green movement	78%
Globalisation	69%
The internet	71%
Capitalism	51%
Immigration	80%

(Ashcroft, 2016)

It is clear from Ashcroft's opinion poll data that many Labour Brexiteers can be understood as social and cultural conservatives with 37% of citizens who voted Labour at the 2015 General election in 2015 voted Leave. This emphasises the 'values gap' between the cosmopolitan euro-enthusiast politicians and the conservative euro-sceptic voters. Just under a quarter of a century before the 2016 referendum, Jim Bulpitt presciently suggested that the British political elite was intellectually removed from provincial England and culturally embedded in Europe and that this was a precarious state of affairs:

> If the British political elite becomes increasingly dominated by Euro-cosmopolitans -people who know more about airports and restaurants in Brussels or Strasbourg than the problems of, say, Middlesbrough and Walsall - then it may lose legitimacy and authority. (Bulpitt, 1992: 271)

Arguably, one has to go back to the 1970s to recall a Leader of the Labour Party who was a social and cultural conservative. James Callaghan not only came from a Southern English working class community but, even when holding the four great offices of state, did not relinquish his political and cultural values. Callaghan was therefore able to relate to 'ordinary citizens' and because of this was perceived simultaneously as a politician of principle and an advocate of the English working class. As his biographer asserts,

> Callaghan at least had an instinctive sense for what the public, including the working-class public, sought from their politicians, and how it should be expressed. He deplored a tendency in Labour ranks to discuss human and civil rights in terms of specific groups and organizations, often highly mobilized, rather than focus them in terms of the ordinary citizen, what Roosevelt called the forgotten man at the base of the pyramid. Callaghan wanted the forgotten man (and woman) to be restored and celebrated. (Morgan, 1997: 505)

Conservatism in its social and cultural sense is an important aspect to the reimagining of Labour's euro-sceptic tradition but this tradition is a contemptible, minority view amongst Labour politicians and card-carrying activists. Yet thousands of former and reluctant Labour-inclined voters have a conservative euro-sceptic worldview. As has been noted, there exists a 'values gap' that since the Brexit vote has widened considerably.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Brexit has significantly affected the Labour Party. Decentred theory offers an explanation of such change. The political and cultural shock, disruption and rifts to political parties, especially Labour, are symptoms of the phenomenon of Brexit. The interpretive approach, utilised in this article, gives credence to the agency of actors; the ideational traditions to which they belong and, through which, they author and re-author practices of governance and thought; and to the importance of understanding the historical context in which parties operate that is deeply influenced by past events and characterised by contestation between competing worldviews.

Labour politicians are reimagining political dispositions and traditions of thought. The article has argued that politicians from both traditions of thought, the euro-enthusiast and the euro-sceptic, are engaged in such behaviour and activity. Furthermore, it has been contended that the articulation of a full blooded cosmopolitan worldview - indistinct from its euro-enthusiasm - has made the Labour Party a narrower socio-cultural offering for electors. This has a number of consequences but two stand out. Firstly, the decentering effect of Brexit on the Labour Party has led to a reimagining of the party's worldview that gives no quarter to Brexiteers either inside the Parliamentary Party or in the constituency parties. Secondly, the commitment to cosmopolitanism alienates hundreds of thousands of socially and culturally conservative erstwhile supporters. The immediate effects are obvious: electoral decline and

the establishment of a more culturally conservative euro-sceptic party (the Brexit Party). Longer-term effects are less so. What is clear is Labour, as the second great party of state, is authoring and re-authoring its ideational traditions. The result is a political party intolerant of opinion diversity on the European question (and on other questions too), which holds to a full blooded cosmopolitanism, and increasingly speaks to a narrower section of the British electorate.

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