

`BLUE' AND `PURPLE' LABOUR CHALLENGES TO THE WELFARE STATE. HOW SHOULD `STATIST' SOCIAL DEMOCRATS RESPOND?

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Abstract

This article explores two influential strands of thinking about the welfare state - Blue Labour and Purple Labour – that have emerged following New Labour's defeat at the 2010 General Election. It is argued that although both these new approaches raise some important issues about the relational and associational dimensions of social welfare as well as diversity and pluralism, those committed to universal and egalitarian goals should not abandon the 'statist' social democratic approach to the welfare state.

Key Words

Blue Labour, Purple Labour, Social Democracy, Welfare State

Following New Labour's heavy defeat in the 2010 General Election, there has been little sign of any marked revival of party interest in what will be termed here as the Statist Social Democratic (SSD) approach to the welfare state that held sway within the Labour Party for much of the post-1945 period. Indeed, two of the more influential strands of recent revisionist thought – Blue and Purple Labour - have emphasised the importance of moving even further away from the state centric social democratic model. This article will focus, first, on the key aspects of the (SSD) approach that underpinned the Labour Party's approach to the welfare state in the post-war era and the subsequent 'revisionism' of New Labour. Attention will then be given to Blue and Purple critiques of the SSD approach. In the final part of the paper it will be argued that the SSD approach to the welfare state based

on ideas of common needs and equitable provision of services retains contemporary relevance and that the 'localist' agendas of Blue and Purple Labour are likely to give rise to the fragmentation of essential services and increased inequality in society.

The Statist Social Democratic (SSD) Approach to the Welfare State

Given the diverse definitions of social democracy (Gamble and Wright, 1999: Wright 2010), it is necessary to be clear at the outset about the constituent features of what is described here as its 'statist' variant. In contrast to those who regard social democracy as a reactive, 'ideologically-light' doctrine in which the 'welfare' role of the state may be altered legitimately in relation to changing economic and social circumstances (see discussions in Brandel, Bratberg and Thorsen, 2013 and Martell, 2013), the composite statist (British-centric) variant discussed here is equated with the deeper transformative ideology that was promoted both by those of a 'fundamentalist' democratic socialist persuasion such as Bevan as well as by revisionist social democrats such as Crosland and Jenkins in the post-1945 era. Although there were some significant differences between these two strands of Labour thinking, not least in relation to public ownership and the control of capital, there was intra-party agreement for much of the post-war period that the state should play a major role in the planning, funding and the provision of welfare services.

Background

The post-war Attlee governments (1945-51) are commonly seen as exemplars of the SSD approach to social welfare in Britain. Central direction and control, which had proved so

effective during the war, was now to be employed to defeat the domestic 'giants' (want, idleness, disease, ignorance and squalor) identified by Beveridge, thereby paving the way for the emergence of a more cohesive and egalitarian society (see Timmins, 2001). Labour aimed to ensure that social services of the highest possible quality would be made available to all on the basis of need not 'desert' or ability to pay. Strong central state direction was seen as an indispensable part of this process not because of some covert desire to subjugate individual autonomy for the collective good, as some right wing critics argued both at the time (Hayek, 1944) and subsequently (Joseph and Sumption, 1979), but because it was deemed to be the best way of bringing about greater equality and enhanced social solidarity. Different means were adopted for the achievement of these goals. In the case of social security, Labour (influenced, but not constrained, by the recommendations of the Beveridge Report - Report of the Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, 1942 – see also Francis, 1997) opted for a unified, contributory national insurance scheme which aimed to provide protection, in Griffiths' (1969) memorable phrase, for everyone from the 'barrow boy' to the 'Field Marshal' (p.84). Although those unable to secure regular paid work were obliged to rely on a 'less eligible' form of public support (National Assistance), Labour could claim with some justification that a nationwide, 'universal' (though differentiated) system of provision had been established. 'Gold' standard universalism was introduced for the newly established National Health Service in which citizenship, rather than a personal contribution record, was to be the sole determinant of access to both primary and secondary medical treatment. The central state played a major role in both these areas of social policy. Nationwide social security offices were introduced and the existing patchwork hospital system was nationalised. In contrast, local authorities were given the lead role in the fields of education and housing. In terms of the former, for

example, local education authorities were given responsibility to ensure an adequate supply of free secondary school places which would meet the aptitudes and abilities of all children in their community.

Although Labour luminaries such as Tawney and G.D.H.Cole had previously voiced concerns about the threat that enhanced state activity at both national and local level could pose to mutualist and syndicalist forms of socialism, there was a consensus amongst both the fundamental (Bevanite) and revisionist (Croslandite) wings of the post-1945 Labour Party that the state should play a key role in the planning, funding and delivery of the welfare state. This view was echoed by leading post war Fabian socialist experts at the London School of Economics such as Richard Titmuss and his protégés at the LSE, Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend (the 'Titmice') who advised (and, in the case of the latter, frequently cajoled) successive Labour governments in areas such as social security and health policy (Timmins, 2001: Sheard, 2013).

Labour's post-war welfare policy was constructed along SSD lines. It was believed that citizens had uniform needs and aspirations and that there was, in consequence, no need for highly differentiated forms of provision on the grounds of individual differences or 'unique' local conditions. From this perspective, geographical or social 'exceptionalism' was not expected to influence the availability or quality of service provision. In practice, of course, there were significant regional disparities which reflected historic patterns of provision and policy trajectories. In the case of hospitals, for example, there were variations in the quantity and quality of provision and personnel, which mirrored earlier philanthropic (voluntary hospitals) and local government initiatives. To overcome disparities of this kind

elaborate funding formulas were subsequently devised (such as the Resource Allocation Working Party formula for health and personal social services – DHSS, 1976) to ensure that resources were directed to areas of greatest need. In addition, a range of other initiatives were introduced in an attempt to ‘induce’ professionals such as GPs to work in communities where the level of need was most acute (Butler, 1973). Proponents of the SSD approach have always accepted that the precise mix of provision in any given area will vary in accordance with the demographic profile of the locality. A community with a large older population would, for example, require a different mix of services from one in which the population had a much younger age profile. The key task for policy makers was to obtain accurate projections about social and economic trends so that appropriate plans could be put in place to reflect these changing demographics (e.g. new schools or an increase in care services for older people).

The First Stirrings of Discontent

The SSD approach to social policy has come under fire from across the political spectrum since the creation of the post-war welfare state. The most concerted attacks have emanated from neo-liberal and public choice commentators (see Crouch, 2011). Think Tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) challenged SSD orthodoxies in relation to both economic and social policy (Cockett, 1995: Denham and Garnett, 1998) by suggesting that monopolistic, uniform, state welfare services posed a threat to consumer choice (Seldon, 1957: Lees, 1961: Peacock and Wiseman, 1964) and undermined the voluntaristic character of British society. Public choice theorists such as Tullock (1965) questioned the assumption that public officials were motivated by ‘selflessness’ suggesting,

instead, that they were often more interested in their own remuneration and conditions of service rather than in responding to the expressed needs of vulnerable citizens. It was contended that public officials had too few incentives to contain costs, improve efficiency or enhance service quality.

A number of influential social policy academics also drew attention to some of the shortcomings of the SSD approach to the welfare state in terms of reducing poverty (Abel-Smith and Townsend, 1965: Townsend, 1979) and inequality (Townsend, 1958: Le Grand, 1982). Others highlighted the way in which the social democratic welfare state was acting as a malign form of social control over those experiencing poverty and disadvantage in spheres such as social security (George, 1973: Kincaid, 1975) council housing (Ginsburg, 1979) and social work (Corrigan and Leonard, 1978). The demeaning treatment meted out to some benefit claimants, council tenants and NHS patients was seen as undermining public support for the welfare state, as did the failure to consult citizens about the delivery of services or prospective changes to provision (see Committee on Public Participation in Planning, 1969: Coates and Silburn, 1970: Jordan, 1973). In addition, feminist writers highlighted the way in which the welfare state continued to operate on a patriarchal basis which left women financially dependent on men, not least in terms of their 'rights' to social security (Wilson, 1977: Pascall, 1996).

New Labour Revisionism

During the Thatcher (1979-90) and Major (1990-97) eras the SSD welfare state was subjected to both challenge and change. Although key elements of the welfare state remained intact, its egalitarian and universalist ethos was undermined by the advance of

neo-liberalism (Farrell and Hay, 2014). When New Labour came to power in 1997 there was no concerted attempt to revive the SSD approach to economic and social policy that Labour had previously pursued in the post-1945 era. This doctrine was deemed outmoded in the face of the growth of global markets, changing family and work patterns and more diverse forms of personal and cultural identity (Giddens, 1994, 1998, 2000: Blair, 1998). The left-right division was now deemed obsolete and the 'false' opposites of old needed to be jettisoned. It was, New Labour argued, now possible to be committed to both a thriving, appropriately regulated, free market economy and to the promotion of social justice. Crucially, though, their 'third way' approach required a more 'active' welfare state which prioritised work over benefit dependency, a better balance between universal and selective provision, a focus on egalitarian opportunities rather than outcomes, the encouragement of choice and competition and the adoption of rigorous performance and audit measures (see Le Grand, 2003: 2007). While some critics (see Faucher-King and Le Gales, 2010: Sivanandan, 2013) have contended that New Labour reforms of the welfare state reflected a neo-liberal, rather than a modern social democratic approach, others detected no major ideological shift pointing to New Labour's investment in the welfare state and its determination to pursue long-standing social democratic objectives such as the eradication of child poverty (see commentaries by Hills and Stewart, 2005: Joyce and Sibieta, 2013).

It is important to note that although New Labour was committed to the reform of the 'outmoded' SSD approach to the welfare state, they remained convinced of the value of strong central control in relation to policy and practice, not least because they feared that devolving power or resources from the centre would run the risk of ineffective service delivery (Mulgan, 2012: Steers, 2012). New Labour was not, however, opposed to

devolution in principle. They paved the way for directly elected Mayors (see Marsh, 2012) and regional assemblies, although the latter initiative failed to ignite electors in the North-East of England when they were given the opportunity to express their preferences in an election in 2004 (BBC, 2004). Moreover, New Labour were not opposed to what came to be known as the 'new' localism with its emphasis on the need to re-engage citizens in the policy process and with enhancing multi-governmental synergies so that complex problems could be resolved more effectively (see Stoker, 2004; Lodge and Muir, 2011; Hickson, 2013). In terms of social policy even Gordon Brown, often portrayed as an arch centraliser, acknowledged the limitations of what Deacon (2002) has termed the unitarist approach to service provision. Writing in *Political Quarterly* in 2003, he argued that

...in every single post-war decade – on both sides of the political spectrum - the centralised state was wrongly seen to be the main, and sometimes the sole, expression of community, often usurping the case for localities and neighbourhoods taking more responsibility for the decisions that affect their lives (Brown, 2003: 265).

Certainly, diverse localist arrangements were allowed to develop under New Labour such as the greater involvement of 'third' sector organisations in service delivery, the establishment of membership based NHS Foundation Trusts and co-operative trust schools (see Jowell, 2011). However, critics argued that such initiatives amounted to little more than what Evans et al (2013) have termed a managerial (strong central involvement) rather than representative (power devolved to local government) or community (power transferred to citizens within local communities) form of localism (see also, Davies, 2008). By the time of the inconclusive General Election of 2010 New Labour was still being portrayed by its main political opponents as an overly statist, profligate 'tax and spend' government. Once established as a coalition government both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties

attempting to define themselves as deep rather than shallow (Labour) localists. As the Coalition Agreement of 2010 stated:

The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals. We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups (HM Government, 2010: 11).

The Labour Party's heavy defeat in the 2010 General Election has led to renewed thinking about Labour's SSD approach to the welfare state (whose contemporary standard bearers include, Hattersley and Hickson, (2011, 2013), Meacher (2013), and Toynbee and Walker (2001, 2005: 2011)). Two significant strands of thinking have emerged within Labour circles which extend the challenge to the SSD approach to the welfare state that began under New Labour – namely - 'Blue' Labour and 'Purple' Labour.

Blue Labour and the Statist Social Democratic Approach to the Welfare State

Blue Labour is a strand of thinking within the Labour Party that was developed by Maurice Glasman (2010, 2013: Glasman et al, 2011), Jonathan Rutherford (2010, 2011, 2013) and Marc Stears (2011 – see also commentaries by Davis, 2011: 2012: Cooke, 2011: Finlayson, 2011: Rooksby, 2011 and Derbyshire, 2013: Jobson, 2014.) Although it lacks a formal 'membership' or a set of concrete policies, Blue Labour has been influential in Labour's ideological repositioning following the election of Ed Miliband as Party leader in 2010 (see Gaffney and Lahel, 2013). Blue Labour is highly critical of the neo-liberal turn in economic policy undertaken by New Labour arguing that the Party should return to its earlier guild socialist tradition and embrace German-style corporatism, in which employers, employees and financiers work together for longer term economic prosperity.

Blue Labour has been critical of Labour's failure to provide a clear narrative of the party's underlying beliefs and values (Rutherford, 2011). Re-engagement with the Party's earlier mutualist and relational tradition, which was championed by writers such as G.D.H.Cole (1917, 1920a, 1920b), Richard Tawney (1921) and Harold Laski (1925), and greater sensitivity to traditional working class concerns are seen as vital if Labour is to regain popular support. While this orientation towards the past has a 'nostalgic' feel to it, Blue Labour believes it has contemporary relevance with its emphasis on co-operation, solidarity and mutuality (Jobson, 2014. See also, Kenny, 2014). For Blue Labour, the party needs to abandon its fixation with abstract and 'unrealisable' goals such as equality and social justice and focus instead on relationship building within local communities (Stears, 2011).

According to Blue Labour the Party needs to recognise the 'communitarian' advantages of encouraging residents of a particular area to come together to debate and resolve the pressing local issues that concern them. Associational activity of this kind can, it is argued, help local communities to recognise and act on their shared goals such as the need to improve the administration of local public services, saving a school playing field from developers or purchasing and running a community library threatened with closure. Blue Labour contend that the glue that binds diverse citizens together is their mutual interest in their locality be it a village, town or city. This 'sense of place' where individuals and families live and work is seen as having a deep social resonance (Rutherford, 2011).

Blue Labour cautions against the liberal cosmopolitan mind-set that holds sway in elite Party circles which has resulted, they contend, in a failure to connect with the more 'conservative' dispositions of many of its working class supporters. As a consequence,

contentious issues such as immigration and nationhood have been ignored rather than confronted. Indeed, Glasman's determination to reconnect the Party with its working class base even led him to suggest that Labour should enter into dialogue with the far right English Defence League and to consider curbs on further immigration into the UK; proposals that led some senior Party sympathisers to distance themselves from the Blue Labour project (Beech and Hickson, 2014).

Crucially in relation to the main focus of this article, Blue Labour has been highly critical of Labour's attachment to the traditional social democratic welfare state, which they believe has paved the way for the rise of an elite form of politics and professional bureaucratisation which have undermined the development of meaningful social relationships and devalued mutual forms of support and reciprocity. As Glasman (2011) contends, it is important to:

recognise that the administrative or "welfare" state, built upon principles of neutrality and fairness, is ... based upon the unmediated relationship between the individual and the collective and gives precedence to administrative impartiality, subordinating relational particularity to procedural homogeneity. Justice, fairness and universality are allied with efficiency here, and relationships, institutions and tradition play no role' (p.31).

From a Blue Labour perspective, then, the establishment of the welfare state by Attlee's post-war governments (1945-51) should be seen *not* as a crowning achievement of the Labour movement in its historic effort to tame capitalism but, rather, as a potentially destructive force that has undermined the emergence of a more deeply rooted and highly valued 'relational' and participative form of socialism represented by say the 1899 Dock Strike or the more recent London citizens campaign for a living wage (Glasman, 2011: Stears, 2011).

In an effort to counter what they regard as impersonal, legalistic and 'inhumane' forms of state welfare, Blue Labour recommends a shift from central direction and control to more localised forms of decision making and control where allocations of scarce resources such as housing can be made in accordance with community preferences rather than remote forms of administrative fiat (Glasman, 2013).

Blue Labour's criticisms of New Labour have focussed in the main on its continued reliance on a state centric form of social democracy and its reluctance to empower local communities. This differs markedly from the criticisms of those on the more radical left who, as was noted above, have focussed on the failure of the Blair/Brown governments to pursue a welfare strategy characterised by a deeper commitment to egalitarian, universal, publicly funded and provided services.

Let us now turn to Purple Labour and its critique of the Statist Social Democratic approach to the welfare state.

Purple Labour and the Statist Social Democratic Approach to the Welfare State

Purple Labour is a revisionist strand of opinion that has emerged from a broad range of New Labour sympathisers who are associated with groupings such as Progress and Policy Network. As such, they are much less critical of New Labour's economic revisionism contending that global economic change still needs to be embraced rather than resisted. They accept, however, that the light regulatory structures that were put in place to drive the economy forward provided inadequate protection for many citizens when the global financial crash took hold in 2008. Purple Labour has a more liberal, cosmopolitanism

outlook and does not share Blue Labour's fears about the adverse social and economic impact of immigration. They believe that Blue Labour's 'faith, family and flag' masthead represents a forlorn appeal to a world that has passed. As Peter Mandelson (2011) contends, 'the future is not going to come from the sort of populist, anti-immigrant, Europhobic, anti-globalisation language used by Blue Labour' (p.37). However, Purple Labour shares Blue Labour's desire to 'revive Labour's decentralising tradition of participation, self-government and "moral reform"' (Philpot, 2011, p.12). The abandonment of a state centric social democracy is seen as both intellectually feasible and compatible with Labour's traditions. As the editor of *The Purple Book*, Robert Philpot, contends:

abandoning statism does not require Labour to shed its identity or adopt the political traditions of its Liberal or Tory opponents. Instead, it requires us to rediscover an old tradition rooted deep in Labour's history which is right for new times (Philpot, 2011:17).

The fact that many Purple Labour supporters, such as former Cabinet ministers Douglas Alexander, Liam Byrne, Caroline Flint, Tessa Jowell, Peter Mandelson, Alan Milburn, and Jacqui Smith are now distancing themselves from some of the SSD welfare measures of the New Labour governments from 1997-2010, is significant. Freed from the constraints of collective Cabinet responsibility they are now, like others in the Purple Labour 'movement', openly supportive of a more relational form of social policy (see Richards, 2011: Reed and Brant, 2011: Mulgan, 2010, 2012). According to Jon Wilson (2012), for example, what is now needed is 'a state that treats people as people, not as statistics or units of management. This means public institutions which are better at cultivating relationships, where reciprocity and mutual responsibility count' (p.6).

Two other developments are also likely to have persuaded some of the more 'pragmatic' Purple Labour supporters to distance themselves from the SSD approach to the welfare state. First, contemporary polling evidence suggests that the public are becoming more sceptical of the egalitarian citizenship principles originally outlined by T.H.Marshall (see Marshall, 1950: Lodge and Muir, 2011). According to the 'Open Left' project undertaken by Demos, some 25% of the voters who deserted Labour at the 2010 General Election were critical of the role of the central state (Darlington, 2010 – though also see Whiteley, 2012). In a similar vein, Policy Network found that the British public concurred with the views of their fellow citizens in other advanced industrialised democracies that the central state is no longer able to protect citizens from the adverse impact of corporate market activity (Policy Network, 2011).

Secondly, it is recognised that any future Labour government will find it difficult to generate sufficient tax revenues to meet the escalating cost of the welfare state given demographic and other pressures. With little likelihood of significant productivity gains in labour intensive social services, Purple Labour accepts that some hard policy choices are likely to meet projected shortfalls in funding. Greater reliance on non-state funded provision is seen as inevitable as is the possibility of increased diversity and inequity in service provision.

The Blue and Purple Challenge to the Welfare State. How Should Statist Social Democrats Respond?

Assuming that those supportive of the SSD approach are reluctant to 'concede and move on' (see Bale, 2013), how should they respond to the Blue and Purple challenge to the welfare state which seems likely to be incorporated into Labour's emerging One Nation

strategy for the 2015 General Election (see Richards, 2011: Reed and Brant, 2011: Meyer, 2012: Wood, 2013)? It is argued here that while SSD advocates should engage constructively with the arguments put forward by Blue and Purple Labour, they should not abandon their commitment to an egalitarian, universal welfare strategy based on a strong role for the central state. It is useful to consider in more detail some of the counter arguments that those of a SSD persuasion might use in response to the three key themes relating to welfare state reform which have emerged from the Blue and Purple stands of thinking.

1. The Relational/Associational Challenge

As was noted above, one of the key criticisms levelled at the SSD approach to the welfare state by Blue and Purple Labour is its failure to give sufficient attention to the relational and associational aspects of social policy, which earlier Labour thinkers promoted as vital ingredients of socialist endeavour (see Stears, 2006: Cottam, 2011). It is contended that the deep rooted 'imperial' mind set of Fabian 'statists' led to a disregard, or even disdain for non-expert opinion and populist sentiment (see Bevir, 2011). The technocratic emphasis on the egalitarian 'delivery' of welfare resulted, it is argued, in a failure to recognise the importance of the relational aspects of such provision. Those supportive of the SSD perspective should acknowledge that there was a tendency to under-estimate the importance of the relational aspects of welfare provision. Too great an emphasis on service delivery did result in insufficient attention being paid to the expressed needs of service users. For SSD advocates, the strengthening of the user voice is the remedy for this shortcoming not the wholesale rejection of state provision. In defending their approach, SSD enthusiasts could also remind their Blue and Orange critics that one of the reasons why

luminaries such as Richard Titmuss (1970) believed so passionately in the statist National Health Service was precisely because of its ethical value base. For Titmuss, the NHS embodied relational welfare and the commonality of human experience that was absent in atomised forms of market exchange (though see Reisman, 1977). For Statist Social Democrats there is no self-evident reason why all citizens, regardless of social background or geographical location should not, given appropriate resource levels and well trained staff, have access to high quality unitarist social services in which they are treated with respect and are encouraged to form valuable relationships with the welfare professionals and administrators they come into contact with. Indeed, SSD supporters would argue that Blue and Purple criticisms of the relational deficiencies of 'statism' would be better directed at non-egalitarian, neo-liberal inspired forms of 'New' public management (which gathered momentum under New Labour) that served to deskill and devalue caring professionals, alienate service users and legitimate the notion that vital tasks such as caring for older citizens could be performed by low paid, poorly trained staff or by other exploitative forms of 'co-production' (see Beresford, 2008: Griffiths et al, 2009 Cooke and Muir, 2012).

Interestingly, this emphasis on a neo-liberal rather than SSD 'causation' of a 'relational' deficit appears to have had a greater resonance in Wales and Scotland where the case for increased devolution in the former and independence in the latter has been based in part on the need to preserve the egalitarian welfare arrangements associated with the SSD approach (see Foley and Ramand, 2014: Fusco, 2014: Hassan, 2014: Marquand, 2014. See also, Jackson, 2014).

As was noted previously, a major reason why both Blue and Purple Labour are such strong advocates of localism is that they believe that citizens will continue to feel alienated from

the political process unless active steps are taken to encourage citizens to participate more fully in local decision making and priority setting. Stears (2011) contends that the postcode differences in service provision that will inevitably result from deliberation of this kind are a price worth paying for securing political re-engagement of this kind. Similarly, many within Purple Labour believe that the devolution of power to local communities will prove more effective and legitimate than the uniform prescriptions of 'detached' state planners and officials (see Brett, 2012). While Purple Labour is less enthusiastic about the more radical forms of local autonomy that some more enthusiastic localists advocate, believing that variations in services should be limited by a framework of national standards, they are supportive of initiatives such as those introduced, for example, in the London borough of Newham. Council house allocations in this borough are determined by 'status' (e.g. membership of the armed forces), contribution (caring duties or service to the local community) and length of time on the waiting list rather than need *per se*. While SSD proponents accept that the design of equitable allocation systems for scarce resources such as council housing are inherently difficult, they contend that increased supply, transparent and uniform procedures coupled with elected representation are essential features of an egalitarian welfare state. Allowing non-elected community 'leaders' and others to influence local policy agendas runs the real risk of advantaging powerful and articulate groups at the expense of lower income groups and those less confident about participating (Lownes and Sullivan, 2004) thereby embedding discriminatory practice. Innovative ideas like participatory budgeting often disadvantage those who are unable to be involved in such processes because of their need to work long hours or because of onerous caring responsibilities. Increased variations in local service provision which risk a return to the settlement laws of previous eras (see Slack, 1995), can also 'entrap' citizens in particular

geographical locations because of fears that a proposed move to another town or city will mean the loss of valuable services. Finally, following Crosland (1956), those supportive of the SSD approach can point to the limited historical evidence regarding a deep rooted desire amongst the British public for ever more intensive forms of civic engagement. After the Second World War, Statist Social Democrats foresaw a surge in public enthusiasm for increased participation in local affairs. In practice, though, citizens seemed to prefer domestic pursuits rather than civic interaction (see Fielding et al, 1995: Black, 2003a, 2003b. See also Putnam, 2001 for a modern US perspective). Arguably, it may well be the case that contemporary citizens want to be able to access a uniform range of high quality social provision at time of need but would rather not have to engage in time-consuming local debates about service reconfigurations, even if this limits their associational opportunities (see Lawrence, 2013).

Universalism and Diversity

A second major criticism that Blue and Purple Labour have directed at the SSD approach is its failure to respond or adapt to growing diversity in British society. This is not just a matter of ignoring the dynamic, though uneven, changes in the 'ethnic' composition of many British towns and cities (see Soutphommasane, 2012: Goodhart, 2013), but also of failing to grasp the more varied forms of personal identity that have developed. The question, 'who are you?' is likely to give rise to more multi-textured responses in 2014 than it would have done fifty years previously when identity was arguably more closely allied to class, occupation or geographical location. For Blue and Purple Labour, the failure of Statist Social Democrats to respond to, and engage with, growing diversity has left them defending an outmoded

welfare system in which uniform types of provision, such as comprehensive schools, no longer serve the expressed interests of modern citizens. While Statist Social Democrats accept the need for rules and regulations to be modified in order to ensure that minority groups are not 'inadvertently' excluded from accessing particular services, they have been reluctant to promote separate forms of provision which prioritise differences over similarities. The National Health Service is seen as an exemplar in this regard. Patients are treated on the basis of their medical condition rather than on the basis of social class, gender, ethnicity or other personal characteristic. Although 'diversity' critics have argued that 'difference-blind rules and institutions' are problematic in heterogeneous as opposed to 'homogeneous' nations (Anttonen et al, 2012), Statist Social democrats maintain that the challenges of heterogeneity are not of sufficient magnitude to justify the abandonment of universal principles. Instead, they argue that while reasonable adjustments should always be considered, diverse forms of provision based on gender, sexuality, faith or culture should be resisted if public confidence and support for the welfare state is to be maintained (see Rothstein, 2011). Equally, they contend that attempts to exclude some higher income groups from universal benefits to which they are 'entitled' by virtue of a particular contingency should also be resisted. Eligibility for a universal benefit is based on the contingency itself not the income of the prospective recipient.

Welfare pluralism

For both Blue and Purple Labour, uniform national services are ill suited to meet the diverse needs of local communities. Accordingly, greater budgetary devolution is recommended so that communities can plan and commission their own services rather than rely on inflexible

forms of national provision. The devolving of responsibility to localities will, it is argued, enable communities to construct an appropriate mix of informal, third sector, public and for profit services which can best meet the needs of local citizens in affordable ways. In common with civic Conservatives such as Blond (2010) and Norman (2010), Blue and Purple Labour are keen to see a revival of mutual organisations which provided a wide range of 'social' services prior to the creation of the post-1945 welfare state (see Finlayson, 1994). Membership/employee owned and controlled organisations of this kind are seen as providing opportunities for welfare professionals to design and deliver innovative, responsive and effective local services. Central Surrey Health has, for example, been held up as an example of how a modern 'welfare' mutual might operate. Owned and run by some 700 former NHS staff, this organisation secured a £20m contract to provide a range of community services in mid Surrey in 2007. A smaller scale social enterprise, Southwark Circle, has also attracted positive support. Established in 2009 in response to the patchy nature of support for older people in a south-east London borough, this membership based social enterprise provides residents with reliable help for everyday tasks such as shopping and gardening, thereby helping them to maintain their independence (see Cottam 2009). While such schemes appear superficially attractive, Statist Social Democrats would point to the fact that one of the key reasons for establishing a welfare state was to counter the uneven coverage and variable quality of non-state welfare provision in previous eras (see Bogdanor, 2012). From a SSD perspective, the non-state sector has a number of inherent weaknesses. Despite differences in the governance and goals of the non-profit and for profit sectors, both sectors operate along 'business' lines and both will have to cease trading in the event of a major funding shortfall. A recent example of such failure was Southern Cross, which was forced to close its care homes after running into serious financial

difficulties leaving residents and their funders having to make alternative arrangements at short notice. Statist Social Democrats contend that the mutualisation of state services is all too likely to prove to be the first step on the road to the privatisation and fragmentation of public services as evidenced by the policy agenda of the current neo-liberal Conservative-led coalition government (see Jacobs and Manzi, 2012: Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). Certainly, many smaller non-profit concerns have been unable to compete with their larger and better funding for-profit rivals in securing NHS contracts. Indeed, despite its early success in securing public funding, Central Surrey Health was unable to 'outbid' the private conglomerate Virgin Care for a subsequent NHS contract in North and West Surrey. Moreover, once public services are contracted out it is likely to prove very difficult to restore state monopolies in these fields not least because of trans-national competition rules (see Pollack, 2004: Player and Leys, 2011).

The Blue and Purple Labour view that local control, negotiation and ownership of social services will engender deeper forms of public affection for, and attachment to, the welfare 'state' (see Holtham, 1999: White, 2011) is also treated with scepticism by Statist Social Democrats. While the local ownership of institutions may increase the level of community solidarity, one predictable consequence of this will be that historic inequities between localities will prove even harder to resolve. It is difficult to imagine a cohesive local community agreeing to the relocation of a much loved local hospital on the basis that this will guarantee a more equitable service for their more distant regional neighbours.

Concluding Remarks

Blue and Purple Labour have presented Statist Social Democrats with a renewed challenge in relation to their long-standing approach to the welfare state. It is argued here that although these 'new' strands of thinking should be taken seriously, not least because they will form part of Labour's One Nation revisionism (see Nandy and Reed, 2014), which is attempting to balance the interests and concerns of a more diverse electorate. Given growing disengagement with political parties, the desire to reignite interest in politics at a local level is a laudable aim. However, the willingness of both Purple and Blue Labour to accept that such re-engagement requires a willingness to accept increased inequality in access to social services should be rejected.

Statist Social Democrats have a strong and compelling story to tell about the transformative power of the welfare state in terms of security, opportunity and equality. By articulating their message with clarity and conviction rather than responding defensively to contemporary dilemmas such as resource constraints, demographic pressures and the ascendancy of 'neo-liberal' mind-sets (see Taylor-Gooby, 2012, 2013; Park, Curtice and Bryson, eds, 2014), they may not only embolden the current Labour leadership to re-evaluate their ideas about the role and purpose of the welfare state but also present a much more convincing alternative to the 'third' stage neo-liberal reform of the welfare state that is being undertaken at breakneck speed by the current Conservative-led coalition government.

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