

Blue or Purple? Reflections on the Future of the Labour Party

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the future ideological direction of the Labour party by analysing two intellectual offerings that have appeared in the post-New Labour era: 'Blue Labour' and *The Purple Book*. First, the article sets out the strategic context of these ideological conversations: Labour's defeat in the 2010 general election; the formation of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition; economic austerity resulting from the banking crisis and the global financial crash; and the changing political climate which ostensibly suggests a move from the 'politics of the state' to the politics of 'localism'. Next, the article discusses the main features of 'Blue' and 'Purple' Labour. Finally, the article provides an explanatory evaluation of the two divergent 'futures'. The article aids both scholars and students in the ongoing intellectual task of explaining British politics in the post-New Labour era and, more particularly, helps one to understand the ideological future of the Labour party.

Keywords:

Labour party; social democracy; Blue Labour; Purple Book; ideology

Biographies

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In 2010 the Labour party suffered its worst defeat in a general election than at any time since the 1930s (with the notable exception of 1983). The ensuing leadership contest – the first since 1994 – lasted until the party conference that September, resulting in the victory of Ed Miliband over his older brother David by the narrowest of margins. As the biographers of Ed Miliband point out, a central aspect of his leadership campaign, and ultimately the reason he was successful over his brother, was that he promised to break with the past, that is to say he offered to move on from New Labour (Hasan and Macintyre, 2011). His two principal rivals – David Miliband and Ed Balls – were regarded as being too close to the two great adversaries of the New Labour years, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, respectively. What apparently underpins Ed Miliband's approach to politics is pluralism and several times since his election as leader of the Labour party he has encouraged debate over the future ideological direction of the party.

The response has been the emergence of several distinct alternative futures for the Labour party. The two that have so far made the most headlines are 'Blue Labour' and *The Purple Book*. There are several areas of disagreement between them, especially over the respective importance that should be attached to tradition and modernity. However, they both share a commitment to greater localism, seeing the central state as a barrier to the kind of society and economy they wish to establish. This has in turn led to a series of more overtly statist arguments from a number of writers, to which one of the current authors has contributed (Hattersley and Hickson, 2011). One radical statement of the more statist approach is *The Red Book* (Clarke and Gardner, 2011). While it is important to remember that there are several contributions to the debate over the future of the Labour party, it is 'Blue' and 'Purple' that have made the biggest impact to date and it is on these that the article concentrates.

The aim of this article is to identify and evaluate these two distinctive approaches to the future ideological direction of the Labour party. In order to do this it is first necessary to analyse the strategic context within which the Labour party operates. The article will then go on to evaluate the two ideological positions in turn.

The Strategic Context

Any argument that seeks to prescribe a future course of action must be grounded in a sense of the past and the present. We identify four elements of the contemporary political scene which are of importance to the debates over the future direction of the Labour party.

The first is the electoral context. As stated above, the 2010 general election resulted in a crushing defeat for the Labour party. Labour's share of the vote fell by 6.2 per cent to 29 per cent, its lowest vote share in a generation. This resulted in a net loss of 91 seats. Clearly this was a very bad result, although it was not as bad as some had feared during the frequent low points of Gordon Brown's premiership. Brown's pugnacity ensured that he managed to avoid a complete electoral meltdown and the pro-Labour bias in the constituencies ensured that the Conservatives failed to secure an overall majority. The Conservatives increased their vote share by 3.8 per cent and gained 97 seats, mainly at Labour's expense. The Liberal Democrats obtained 23 per cent of the vote, which although up by 1 per cent from 2005 still resulted in a net loss of one seat. The results were disappointing for the Liberal Democrats who had failed to make headway on their 2005 result, when the then leader, Charles Kennedy, was criticised for failing to gain more seats. The results were also disappointing for David Cameron who had sought to repackage the Conservative party and to 'detoxify the brand'. Ultimately he had failed in his bid to gain an overall majority.

The second element of the strategic context was the subsequent formation of the coalition. The creation of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition meant that a clear parliamentary majority was established. Had a coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats been formed then the votes, or at least the abstentions, of the smaller parties were required to pass legislation. However, the formation of the coalition was important ideologically. Earlier leaders of the Liberal Democrats all expressed their doubts about a coalition with the Conservatives, but the development of a more centre-right *Orange Book* grouping including Nick Clegg himself had changed the party (Marshall and Laws, 2004). Those who now wanted to see a 'realignment of the left' therefore faced a less promising situation. Added to that there were several Labour voices arguing publicly against any possible Lab–Lib Dem coalition while some of those who did seek to negotiate such a possibility felt that the Liberal Democrat hierarchy had no interest in pursuing it. Since then the Liberal Democrats have gone into steep decline in opinion polls.

The third and most obvious reason for the defeat of the Labour government was the banking crisis and financial crash which led to recession and the consequent loss of the economic credibility that Blair and Brown had first sought to establish prior to the 1997 general election and then to preserve in government. The banking crisis was one on a global scale which highlighted the interdependence of the banking sector, but not all countries were affected in the same way. Britain was particularly hard hit and this showed the extent to which the British economy was exceptionally liberalised and dependent on the financial services sector, and also the 'light touch' nature of the regulation of that sector.

The final element of this new strategic terrain for the new Labour leader is the climate of ideas, one that can be described as having undergone a 'localist turn' in recent years. The political thought of both the two major parties had become more localist, stressing the importance of autonomous communities over the central state. This was true of the *Orange Book* Liberal Democrats mentioned above, for whom the clear theme is one of localism or decentralisation. It was also true of the Conservative party, where several overlapping localist arguments had been put forward. The first significant step in this direction was taken by David Willetts (1992; 1994). He argued that the authentic Conservative tradition was one of free markets and autonomous local communities. The two were fully compatible. In more recent years similar ideas have been presented by leading centre-right think tank authors including ResPublica's Phillip Blond (2010) and Policy Exchange's Jesse Norman, now Conservative MP for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Norman, 2010). In all of these developments the central state is regarded as authoritarian, distant and bureaucratic, which inevitably undermines the freedom of the individual and the autonomy of local communities. The emphasis on localism present within Conservative thought since 1990 also contrasts with Thatcherism, which involved a dramatic centralisation of power.

Recent intellectual developments inside the Labour party are therefore shaped by this strategic context. Current ideological debate seeks to clarify the strategic challenge and find answers to it. A successful ideological theory (or narrative) must be able to explain how best to find a winning electoral strategy; how best to respond to the Con–Lib Dem coalition; how to re-establish the economic credibility of the Labour party; and how to rethink the relationship between state, market and civil society. In short, the debate has been one about what, and who, the Labour party is for: that is to say, a struggle for the soul of the Labour party.

Blue Labour

Blue Labour is chiefly associated with the Labour peer and academic Maurice Glasman. Yet the fullest expression of what is commonly termed Blue Labour is found in an edited e-volume published in 2011 by The Oxford-London Seminars and Soundings entitled *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* (Glasman *et al.*, 2011). Before we attempt to examine this term it is worth noting that the book contains substantive essays by Glasman, Rutherford and Stears and responses from a range of Labour supporting academics, journalists and Labour MPs, and it has a preface by Ed Miliband.

The respondents' views resemble a broad church. They sympathise and disagree to a greater or lesser extent with the chapters to which they speak. Furthermore, even within the work of the editors one can detect a divergence of opinion. For example Stuart White's contribution is broadly sympathetic to several areas of 'radical conservatism' but parts company with the appeal to abandon the language of universal abstract principles and the suggestion of reducing the role of the welfare state (White, 2011, pp. 125–6). Therefore, the first analytical feature of Blue Labour is that it is not a single thesis, nor does it seek to advocate the thought of one public intellectual although the influences of Karl Polyani and G. D. H. Cole are apparent throughout. In essence, it is a conversation about statecraft, capitalism and culture within a wider conversation about Labour's ideological future.

On reading Glasman's work one is reminded that his enterprise is philosophical rather than policy oriented. It provides a critique of British post-war social democracy/democratic socialism (we use the terms interchangeably in this article) in general and New Labour in particular. The strength of the work lies in its diagnosis rather than in prescription. It is neither 'dangerous' nor 'toxic' as has been noted in *The Guardian* (Rooksby, 2011). It is most evidently a thought-provoking yet controversial critique of the economic and cultural liberalism within the Labour elite. One can say of Blue Labour that its genus is social democratic; its species is a form of communitarianism; and its sub-species democratic associationism. From this taxonomy one can better explain and understand the alternative future for social democracy that Blue Labour represents.

According to Glasman, 'Blue Labour reminds the party that only democratic association can resist the power of capital and that the distinctive practices of the Labour movement are built upon reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity' (Glasman, 2011a). Glasman, in his essay 'Labour as a Radical Tradition' (Glasman, 2011b), attempts to provide an analytical narrative of the Labour movement, teasing out the traditions and virtues Blue Labour espouses which he believes have been overlooked or even forgotten. On the one hand the essay holds to an anti-statist communitarian critique of the social democratic state as gatekeeper of the production and distribution of public goods, and also as the monopolistic actor in an ostensibly democratic public realm. From a Blue Labour perspective in each guise the social democratic state seeks to intervene benevolently but its actions and its remit have instead undermined social virtues once characteristic of working-class communities throughout the nation. The resultant effect has been a national poverty of mutuality, fraternity and cooperation. In addition, a damaging externality of the social democratic state has been economic dependence, which according to Blue Labour has been actively endorsed by Labour governments from Attlee to Brown.

On the other hand Blue Labour's communitarianism forms a critique of metropolitan liberal values and in their place it emphasises the importance of the role of family, faith and flag (Sandbrook, 2011). Liberal or progressive social democrats struggle with this attitude of mind and deem it to be alien to the rich tradition of the left that emerged in no small part in the late

nineteenth century from radical liberalism. But in the same sense that the Labour tradition is explained by the editors as ‘the politics of paradox’, each tendency, both the liberal and the communitarian, is able to trade historical examples, invoke the ghosts of their heroes within the Labour movement and construct legitimate narratives that embody their vision of Labour at its best.

The main contributions in *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* and in Glasman's other articles look to a more communitarian, socially conservative and less statist vision for British democratic socialism. They seek to draw from the rich wellspring of late Victorian and Edwardian socialism; an era replete with notions and practices predicated on ideals of cooperation and fellowship in the face of *laissez-faire* capitalism and widespread social misery. It was also an era of impoverished yet stable families; when Christianity and socialism coalesced in the public sphere and stood in opposition to liberal capitalism and conservative privilege; and in the early twentieth century when Labour's rank and file, and its elite, were at ease with patriotism rightly understood. Such democratic socialism may sound overly idealistic to contemporary ears but Blue Labour is merely ploughing old and less familiar socialist ground.

In teaching the political thought of the Labour party for a number of years one recurrent remark from undergraduates is that engaging with the pre-Attlee era is a difficult task. This is simply because the Second World War shaped modern Britain and the age in which we now live. The collective impact of the Second World War on the British nation led in no small way to Labour's first majority government. Additionally, the experience of senior Labour politicians in Churchill's national government led to a robust belief in what could be achieved by an interventionist state with a clear sense of moral purpose. It is worth noting that Attlee's administrations are regarded by leading contemporary historians as the high-water mark of British social democracy (Hennessy, 1993; Morgan, 1984). Thus, the *modus operandi* of the 1945–51 governments was the central state and despite the formal abandonment of economic planning (the notable exceptions being rationing and some nationalisation) Attlee's endeavour gave the nation the welfare state, full employment and managed capitalism via Keynesianism. This resulted in a political economy that could be termed ‘welfare capitalist’ or seen as a social democratic state with its provision of public goods and entitlements funded through progressive taxation and a focus on full employment and regulation. From 1945 until the present this model of governance (minus Keynesian demand management which left the stage in the late 1970s only to return for a brief cameo in 2008) is more or less what the majority of Labour supporters envisage Labour politics to be in practice.

But it is here that Blue Labour is at its most critical of Labour's statecraft and diverges from the mainstream of Labour opinion: ‘Labour's commitment to the state as the exclusive instrument of economic regulation had to fail. It was too blunt, too big, too small, and generally inappropriate’ (Glasman, 2011b, p. 31). But if the central state is not the most fitting instrument of economic regulation in a capitalist economy then what is? Glasman argues for ‘democratic self-government within reformed institutions of the realm ... To build a politics of the Common Good by returning citizenship to all our cities, re-establishing guildhalls, and restoring institutions of vocational self-regulation within them, including regional banks’ (Glasman, 2011b, pp. 31–2).

For Blue Labour the mistakes made by New Labour are partly the same ones made by each Labour government since 1945: namely, a Fabian statecraft which damages Labour's soul. It believes that such an approach ignores the impulse for autonomy and the need for democratic

organisation which builds cooperation, mutuality and fellowship. Citizens UK is often cited as an example of a grass-roots organisation that demonstrates what can be achieved when a shared conception of the common good is built through relationships. Marc Stears notes that Labour's future must move away from top-down, elite-driven praxis if it is going to rebuild itself in communities across Britain and contend for power: 'Labour needs to recognize that the immediate task is to help release the relational capacity of its own party members, supporters, and the broader citizenry. This would make Labour a more powerful party capable of competing in elections' (Stears, 2011, p. 64). Simply put, while Labour's social democratic state flourished, its movement withered.

Blue Labour has been widely debated and has contributed to an alternative future for Labour politics but it has also suffered from controversy which risks ending its part in the conversation. This controversy occurred when Glasman made two sets of comments: the first in conversation with Robert Philpot of Progress when he suggested that Labour ought to open dialogue with supporters of the English Defence League (EDL):

'You consider yourself ... so opposed that you don't want to talk to them, you don't want to engage with them, you don't want anybody with views like that anywhere near the party'. This, he believes, is to ignore 'a massive hate and rage against us' from working-class people 'who have always been true to Labour'. The solution, he says, is 'to build a party that brokers a common good, that involves those people who support the EDL within our party. Not dominant in the party, not setting the tone of the party, but just a reconnection with those people that we can represent a better life for them, because that's what they want' (Philpot, 2011a).

The second was when he suggested that immigration ought to be temporarily suspended during an interview with *The Telegraph's* Mary Riddell:

But exemptions should be made on a case-by-case basis? 'Yes. We should absolutely do that ... Britain is not an outpost of the UN. We have to put the people in this country first'. Even if that means stopping immigration completely for a period? 'Yes. I would add that we should be more generous and friendly in receiving those [few] who are needed. To be more generous, we have to draw the line' (Riddell, 2011).

These comments caused much criticism within the Labour party and Glasman issued an apology (Shackle, 2011). Blue Labour has, for the time being at least, appeared to have gone quiet. Nonetheless, the ideas surrounding Glasman and the *Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* are likely to continue to spark conversation and inform discussions about Labour's ideological future.

The Purple Book

A different ideological position has been put forward by the party's remaining Blairites. It is only a slight caricature to say that the essential argument of this position is to argue that only a Blairite formula can win the next general election, in the same way that Blair won the 1997, 2001 and 2005 general elections. Any deviation from this Blairite agenda will result in further general election defeats on top of that in 2010. This was the argument of David Miliband (2012) – once the head of the Number 10 Policy Unit under Blair – who argued that there was an element in the party that wished to retreat into its comfort zone, but which would mean that the party would remain in opposition. Former minister James Purnell has

recently made a similar argument saying that the Labour party must respond to the concerns of voters such as Gillian Duffy, the woman dismissed by Gordon Brown during the 2010 general election as ‘bigoted’, only to discover later that he had been recorded and that she was in fact a member of the Labour party (Purnell, 2011). Such views – particularly expressing concern over immigration – are, he feels, ones shared by a majority of the electorate. Any deviation from this essentially Blairite formula is a threat to the successful electoral strategy established by New Labour prior to 1997.

The fullest expression of these views to date is that of *The Purple Book*, produced by the Blairite think tank, Progress, and published in the autumn of 2011 (Philpot, 2011b). The book contains chapters by several distinguished figures of the last government including Peter Mandelson and Alan Milburn as well as several younger members of the current shadow Cabinet and senior back-bench MPs such as Frank Field.

Purple is chosen as the colour that represents the marginal constituencies which Labour needs to win. In order to do this it must be ‘revisionist’ according to its editor, Robert Philpot, who argues that New Labour was part of this revisionist tradition (Philpot, 2011c, p. 13). Paul Richards argues that New Labour modernisation was essential for the survival of the party. Without it Labour would be a ‘political sect, not a governing party’ (Richards, 2011, p. 58). This argument is developed by Douglas Alexander who argues that New Labour consisted of positions, personnel and policies (Alexander, 2011, p. 21). The people in charge may have changed and the means (policies) need to be constantly revised but the positions – economic competence and a strong approach to law and order – are essential for the future revival of the Labour party.

Unlike Blue Labour, which deals in greater abstraction, *The Purple Book's* authors deal with practical issues and the book contains many policy proposals. Although it is not the intention of this article to undertake a thorough discussion of all such proposals, the arguments put forward by Rachel Reeves for credit unions are particularly noteworthy (Reeves, 2011). The key themes of the book are modernity, decentralisation and choice. The differences between Blue Labour and writers in *The Purple Book* are defined by Philpot: ‘most importantly, though, while revisionism seeks to ensure that Labour remains connected to the world as it is, blue Labour all too often appears fundamentally backward-looking’ (Philpot, 2011c, p. 15). Purple Labour finds Blue Labour far too nostalgic. The point is made again by Mandelson: ‘its romantic ideas about working-class people turning back the clock is misplaced’ (Mandelson, 2011, pp. 36–7). The consequence of this departure from New Labour's embrace of modernity would be electoral defeat. Remaining with New Labour's approach – even if the word ‘new’ has been dropped – is the only viable electoral strategy, Mandelson asserts (Mandelson, 2011, pp. 36–7).

However, in its advocacy of localism Purple Labour shares a striking similarity with Blue Labour. Philpot draws on the work of G. D. H. Cole, Peter Clarke and David Marquand to argue for a decentralist agenda. Such an approach is a strong theme of this book and, Philpot asserts, will be the basis for a credible electoral strategy by responding directly to the Big Society message of the Conservatives under David Cameron: localism ‘should be the guiding objective of a future Labour government, and the narrative with which the party describes its mission as it seeks to attain office once again’ (Philpot, 2011c, p. 18). Richards stresses the localist position as an alternative to the ‘familiar social democratic’ (Richards, 2011, p. 45) model of winning power in order to redistribute resources. The representatives of this decentralist tradition are said to be William Morris, Keir Hardie and G. D. H. Cole as well as

the municipal and cooperative traditions of British socialism. In a similar way to Blue Labour, Richards argues that this was replaced by centralism from 1945 onwards. New Labour did initially seek to redistribute power, but constitutional reform fizzled out. Third Way thinking on public service reform persisted, although there was also a countervailing tendency from the Treasury for central control. Whether this analysis is a particularly accurate one is open to debate and the links between some of these historical developments and New Labour are more problematic than is presented here – for instance, there is very little in modern social democracy on the limits of the market, the need for greater industrial democracy or for greater equality of income, wealth and power.

Mandelson argues that the next Labour government will inherit a weak economy, meaning that it cannot commit to increased public spending but rather to an agenda of public service reform and efficiency savings as well as maintaining low taxation (Mandelson, 2011). There is limited scope for redistribution or an increase in the size of the state. A further recognisably Blairite theme is presented by Milburn who argues that there is much more to do in terms of extending choice in public services, including giving parents of children in ‘underperforming’ schools an education credit worth more than the cost of their current schooling which they can use to send their children to a better school (Milburn, 2011). Meanwhile, Field argues that there is a need to extend the responsibility and reciprocity themes in welfare. The extension of means testing under Gordon Brown is held as responsible for the entrenchment of welfare dependency: ‘we have, in effect, created a class of dependants, as addicted as anyone on crack cocaine’ (Field, 2011, p. 161). Finally, Jenny Chapman and Jacqui Smith continue to stress an approach to law and order that balances punishment with rehabilitation (Chapman and Smith, 2011).

It is very easy to criticise the key arguments presented in the book. There is no account of why the Labour party lost 5 million votes in successive elections after 1997, let alone how to get these votes back, which would be necessary for future electoral success. Moreover, there is very little by way of criticism of the policies pursued by the Blair governments, understandably enough given where the book has come from. Finally, there are several key areas that are not discussed including foreign policy and macroeconomic policy beyond repeated calls for deficit reduction. It is telling that there is no serious analysis of the recession. The implication of all this appears to be that once the recession is over it is necessary to get back to a pre-crash policy settlement.

Two chapters do, however, warrant further attention as more serious intellectual contributions. The first is by the former historian and now Labour MP, Tristram Hunt. Hunt emphasises the idea of the positive conception of liberty – that we are not free unless we have the capacity to act. He also advocates a policy of ‘pre-distribution’, reforming the structure of the economy and developing new forms of corporate ownership that will allow for the creation of fairer market outcomes without the need to redistribute income and wealth to compensate for unfair outcomes (Hunt, 2011, pp. 65–6). This is an original idea and reflects the recent interest in mutualism. This has both an advantage and a weakness. It provides a more strategic ideological objective in the medium to longer term but it does not have much to say about the way out of the current economic difficulties.

The second is by Patrick Diamond. Diamond rehearses the familiar theme of decentralisation but has something more distinctive to say when he argues that the ideological objective should be that of empowerment. Again, this is the positive conception of liberty and Diamond draws on the arguments of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. The public sector has a vital

role to play in promoting positive liberty but public faith in the state is undermined by centralisation. The answer is to decentralise power: 'the devolution of power in Britain is an important prerequisite towards building a fairer, more equal society' (Diamond, 2011, p. 114).

However, the validity of this claim is called into question by a closer inspection of the arguments of two further chapters on the localist theme. Both Steve Reed and Paul Brant, and Stephen Twigg argue for a more localist position. The idea of 'double devolution' is used to justify the decentralisation of power from central to local government and from both to communities (Reed and Brant, 2011, p. 256). However, both chapters concede that localism is likely to lead to greater inequality as prosperous areas outpace poorer ones. Reed and Brant call for a 'redistributive mechanism' from richer to poorer areas but fail to explain either how this is compatible with a localist agenda or how it would differ from the current system where income is redistributed through the rate support grant (Reed and Brant, 2011, p. 263). Twigg, in particular, recognises the tension between equality and localism (Twigg, 2011).

Finally, this raises an important issue about the relationship between ends and means in socialist thought where ends equate to the values that guide the means, or policies. Although the claim of several authors is that they remain committed to the principle of equality, they fail to recognise that their preferred means, localism, is at odds with it for the reason stated above. Localists need either to accept that the ends of social democracy have been revised or come up with a more convincing policy proposal for avoiding increased income and wealth disparities which localism brings without undermining the principle of localism, assuming that such a policy exists.

Conclusion

Blue Labour's critical diagnosis of New Labour, according to Jonathan Rutherford, is that 'Labour is viewed by many as the party of the market and of the state, not of society' (Rutherford, 2011, p. 91). Blue Labour views New Labour as presiding over a dominant central state which continued the post-war erosion of social norms and practices that underpin the virtues of mutuality, solidarity and community. New Labour's tendency towards a Fabian statecraft with its technocratic managerialism suppressed grass-roots local activism and permitted an increase in the culture of state dependency. This was married to its preoccupation with markets which led to an economic liberal appraisal of capitalism and abandoned any radical economic critique. As Rutherford suggests:

A financialised, liberal market model of capitalism has transformed the social order in Britain over the last three decades and as a consequence there have been new waves of dispossession and exclusion that are reshaping the economy, family life and culture (Rutherford, 2011, p. 98).

Blue Labour's prescription is for the Labour party to advocate the decentralisation of power from the central state: to empower citizens within their localities so they are free to provide goods and services in their own communities through democratic association such as cooperatives, mutuals and community enterprises. The intended outcome is a greater degree of active citizenship: participation; mutual responsibility; reciprocity; stronger, closer connections between people within communities; and, in turn, a society that is relational, cohesive and characterised by trust and liberty.

However, one problem with Blue Labour's analysis of New Labour is painting it as one particular political tendency when in fact it too was a part of the 'politics of paradox'. The Blair and Brown governments were not solely an admixture of Fabian technocracy and economic liberalism but they were actively communitarian, emphasising notions of reciprocity and balancing social duties with social rights. This can be evidenced in their approach to welfare to work benefits and law and order policies, especially in Blair's 'Respect' agenda from 2005. In this sense, although Glasman suggests that Blue Labour is 'a completely agitational idea to provoke a conversation about what went wrong with the Blair project' (Philpot, 2011a) it is in fact covering some of the same ground. Moreover, in terms of engaging with faith communities; reclaiming the Union flag from the right; and honouring patriotism in the service of citizens at home and of British service-men and -women abroad, New Labour is in common cause with such virtues espoused by Blue Labour thinkers. Again, the 'politics of paradox' comes to the fore because New Labour contained elements that were simultaneously metropolitan liberal and communitarian; patriotic and internationalist; Fabian and devolutionist; followers of economic liberalism in the financial sector and tax-and-spend social democrats.

In the updated edition of *The Unfinished Revolution* Philip Gould likens the story of New Labour's modernisation of the Labour party to the development of globalisation itself:

In many ways these chapters read like a private history of globalisation, seen through the individuals and their families that it directly affects. Global forces touch almost every concern discussed on these pages, from squeezed living standards to community erosion, to migration, patriotism and political disengagement (Gould, 2011, p. 531).

Gould's insider account of the birth, rise and fall of New Labour is a fascinating story. It is a story of a small group of Labour MPs and activists whose experience of the economic, social and political change brought about by the twin pressures of globalisation in general, and Thatcherism in particular, led to a specific interpretation of revisionism which culminated in a moderate centre-left politics. New Labour was the dominant Labour perspective for a generation and one which, despite fracturing and courting much controversy, continues to this day and can be understood in its Blairite guise through *The Purple Book*. Although at its core New Labour was a project of a relatively small group of elite political actors, it grew rapidly and by so doing it developed tendencies. The most obvious were personality-based but they also reflected slight policy differences in the form of Blair's supporters and Brown's backers. The think tanks Progress and Policy Network are solidly New Labour and, for certain periods, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and Demos reflected different flowerings of New Labour perspectives during the party's thirteen years in office.

Gould's book is unsurprisingly positive about the achievements during New Labour's tenure. Interestingly, for an arch-moderniser, Gould's most cherished political value is one that is also central to Glasman, namely mutuality:

For me there is no doubt what our purpose and our synthesis is, and it is best articulated by the idea of mutuality. This is the value most able to drive our politics and our lives. It contains within it the concepts of interaction and dialectic; it is reciprocal and implies contract; it makes explicit one of my grounding assumptions: that if we work together, and live together, in relationships of shared and fair contribution, then our success and our future will be sustained (Gould, 2011, pp. 538–9).

Gould implies that mutuality is a core New Labour value and yet it is precisely the absence of a sense of mutual social endeavour that Glasman highlights in his critique of New Labour: ‘social democracy has become neither social nor democratic. This is the land that Labour has vacated and is now being filled by the Conservative’s “Big Society”’ (Glasman, 2011b, p. 27).

Analytically, neither *The Purple Book* nor Blue Labour sees a prosperous future for Labour in a project of state-led reform and regulation of capitalism which was essential to the traditional task of British social democracy. Moreover, neither alternative future has confidence in the social democratic state as practised by previous Labour governments. For advocates of *The Purple Book* the market-reformist agenda that New Labour seized must be extended if Labour is to recapture the centre ground and stand a chance of securing a parliamentary majority. This is because their logic insists that floating voters, especially those in marginal constituencies, do not view the central state in a positive way. Throughout *The Purple Book* one can readily decode the subtext which is that they are not merely pointing out the limits and failures of the social democratic state, but they are also more convinced of the economic liberal assumption that markets are a better mechanism for the allocation of goods and services and that the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition (a consistently economic liberal partnership) is correct in its narrative of the ‘Big Society’ and the localism agenda. The resultant politics of *The Purple Book* pushes Labour to be localist and economically liberal.

Both Blue Labour and *The Purple Book* suffer from being overly critical of the central state. This is a significant electoral and ideological weakness. It is electorally weak because to win general elections the Labour party needs to mobilise not merely its own supporters but also millions of non-aligned voters. These citizens, like the vast majority of Britons, use and rely on the NHS, state education, public pensions and the myriad social services that exist to counter the financial insecurity that can occur throughout their lives. The argument that floating voters would rather pay for private or community-run health care, education and social services or, for that matter, take responsibility for securing such services is unpersuasive. Moreover, the assertion is ideologically problematic for Labour because, although the central state is imperfect, it continues to offer social democrats the only possibility to regulate capitalism; to offset economic and social externalities of the market economy; and to build institutions that are publicly funded and help shape Labour’s vision of the good society. This was understood by the generation of 1945 and yet it is apparent that it is lost in Blue Labour’s and *The Purple Book*’s reflections on the future of the Labour party.

Note

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