

Book title: Labour and the Left in the 1980s  
Book author: Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam (eds.)  
Location: Manchester  
Publisher: U. of Manchester P.  
Year of publication: 2017  
No of pages: 215

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This book reassesses both the Labour Party and the wider left in the 1980s, suggesting that this was a more creative and exciting period than has often been assumed: not eighteen ‘wilderness years’ but a period of ideological development and organisational dynamism. As Peter Tatchell puts it in the foreword, the 1980s was ‘the most creative, exciting era for the left in many decades. It had an impact on British politics and culture ever since. Many of its once trail-blazing radical ideas are now mainstream consensus; especially around issues of equality, inclusion and diversity’ (xii). One of the book’s central claims is that 1980s was significant as the period where Labour became concerned with women’s rights, gay rights and Black people’s rights. *Labour and the Left in the 1980s* makes a start in suggesting how and why it was that ‘identity politics’ made its way onto Labour’s agenda in this period. Peter Bloomfield’s chapter, for example, examines the cases of gay rights and video nasties, and argues that Labour remained in general (if sometimes falteringly) liberal in its approach to such questions of sexual morality in the 1980s. But here there is more to be said about the precise balance of liberal ideas and revisionist ideas in the shaping of Labour’s policies on sexuality and morality, and about the precise nature of the impact of the new social movements on different factions within Labour in these years.

The first section of the book examines Labour in a domestic context. Eric Shaw outlines how New Labour’s leaders constructed a homogenised, essentialised caricature of ‘Old Labour’, which served the purposes of their political narrative, but conceded the right-wing press’s worst stereotypes of Labour. Richard Carr’s contribution is a fascinating look at the fortunes of the idea of a National Investment Bank (NIB) in the Labour Party during the ‘long 1980s’. This idea went from being a core part of the Bennite left’s agenda to a central part of Neil Kinnock’s offer in 1987 and 1992. As Carr argues, the idea of a NIB was, in part, useful to modernizers because it was an idea of the left which could also be subtly recalibrated to fit into a more moderate agenda. Where in the hands of the left it had been associated with the confiscation of capital, Kinnock found other means to capitalise a NIB, and shifted towards the use of incentives to stimulate more responsible, long-term lending to British industry. While it was eventually abandoned under Blair, the idea of a NIB served a useful function in the ‘modernization’ process. These two chapters start from different angles, but both make important contributions to the growing literature on ‘modernization’, unpicking the interplay of personalities, ideas and electoral imperatives.

The second section examines Labour in an international context, with chapters by Jonathan Davis and John Callaghan. Davis’s chapter examines relations between the British Labour Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, arguing that Perestroika in the Soviet Union provided an opening for the construction of a common project of democratic socialism. However, this possibility was swiftly foreclosed by the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as the ‘general mood seemed to be defined by an implied question: “why vote for socialism when half a continent is rejecting it?”’ (129). John Callaghan’s chapter takes a broader look at the fortunes of the left and centre-left internationally in the 1970s and 1980s, and the lessons that the British left drew from this. He suggests that in the late 1960s and 1970s, while some social democratic parties were in trouble, there were also signs of ‘ideological renewal and more radical ambitions’ (132) developing: from Sweden, with the Meidner

plan, to Greece and Spain, emerging from dictatorship, to France, with the Union of the Left in 1972. Into the early 1980s it was possible to view the left as strong internationally, with, for example, the election of Mitterand as the first socialist President of France in 1981. However, quite quickly the tide turned; it was the success of the neoliberal programme of Thatcher and Reagan that seemed ascendant, particularly after Mitterand's U-turn in 1983-4, and with socialist governments in countries like Spain pursuing mainly moderate and pragmatic policies. One route out of this crisis for the left was Europe, and this explains, Callaghan suggests, Labour's relatively brief embrace of 'social' Europe. Callaghan offers a fascinating window into changing perceptions of the constraints on and possibilities for the left within the British left, though, given that much of the material comes from *Marxism Today*, it would be instructive to extend the analysis to different publications and networks of debate, to see if views of the international context and lessons drawn from it differed in different parts of the left.

The book's final section examines the left outside the Labour Party in the 1980s. A chapter by Neil Pye examines Militant in Liverpool, coming to a negative assessment of their project (and suggesting in passing that Momentum has similarities with Militant, a comparison which hardly stands up to scrutiny). It is the final two chapters which demonstrate most clearly the vitality and innovation that Tatchell describes on the left in the 1980s. Maroula Joannou examines support for the miners' strike, describing the huge mobilisation of support for the strike, and how the trade union dispute came to be attached to 'a politics of struggle in the inner cities, linked to the discontents of urban poverty and laced with the concerns of environmentalists and feminists' (175) as well as black activists and gay and lesbian campaigners. Robin Bunce examines the Race Today Collective, the 'centre' (192) of black liberation in Britain. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s this collective was mainly concerned to support small-scale, grassroots black activism. From the mid-1980s to its dissolution in 1991 it reoriented itself to promote black culture and arts. It was key to the organisation of important events like the Black People's Day of Action in 1981, and in responding to the Brixton riots; some of its members, particularly Darcus Howe, became significant public figures. Thus the collective ensured that race and racism were firmly on the political agenda, helping to shape the socially liberal stance that emerged as a broad consensus in British politics by the 1990s.

There are some gaps in this book – as the authors point out, there is strikingly little discussion of the important figure of Tony Benn, for example. Nevertheless, the wide-ranging chapters map out important themes in the study of Labour and the left in the 1980s, and set new agendas for research.