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## Introduction: the British Left and European integration

The focus of this book is the historical and contemporary division of the British Left in relation to the post-war process of European economic and political integration, henceforth referred to as the European project or the European Union (EU) rather than its previous titles of Common Market, European Economic Community (EEC) or European Community (EC). The main objectives of the book are to document, analyse and theorize the European policies of the British Left from 1945 to 2005; from the launch of the European project to the recent debates on the euro and the European Constitution.

As a follower of Tony Benn's political career and writings, particularly his published set of diaries spanning over fifty years as a Labour Member of Parliament (MP) and Cabinet Minister in several governments, I was intrigued by his shifting stance on European integration. He was in favour of the EU from the mid-1960s until the early 1970s, viewing it as a means of arresting Britain's decline and containing the growing power of transnational corporations (TNCs). One example at a practical level was his support for a European Technology Community as part of the solution to Britain's failed economic policy. However, Benn's ministerial experience led him to rethink his position. He increasingly viewed the EU as a capitalist bureaucracy with a growing democratic deficit that aspired to superpower status. At a Cabinet meeting in July 1974, Benn announced his intention to campaign against Britain's continued membership of the EU.

Although Benn's journey is not typical, as many on the British Left have moved from a position of opposition to one of support for the EU, it serves to illustrate the contentious and dynamic nature of European integration. Benn argued that left sectarianism is rife: 'there are too many socialist parties in Britain and not enough socialists' (Benn, 2003). Nevertheless, there are issues around which the British Left can unite. These include anti-imperialism and anti-militarism, environmental protection, health, pension and welfare provision, plus progressive taxation. However, the European project is one that has long divided the British Left and one that continues to do so.

The first book on this subject, published in 1973 and based upon two articles in the *New Left Review* in 1971 and 1972, was Tom Nairn's *The Left against Europe?* These writings constituted Nairn's attempt to influence the British Left in the

national debate about whether or not Britain should join the EU. More Marxist polemic than analysis, Nairn nevertheless posed a number of important questions:

What is Europe? How is it related to the nation and national state power? Does it provide more, or less, favourable conditions of action for the left? Do our interests in regard to it coincide with those of the ruling class, or not? (Nairn, 1973, p. 2)

These questions, which are as pertinent today as they were in the early 1970s, encapsulate the difficult choice facing the British Left – whether to pursue a progressive–socialist strategy on a national or European basis – while bringing to the fore the crucial issues of agency and structure. European integration presents the British Left with the particular puzzle of how to respond to the paradox that is the EU. The environmental and social policies of the EU, plus the rhetoric that European integration is internationalism in action, delivers peace in Europe and constitutes the only immediate way to contain the forces of globalization, hold a logical appeal. On the other hand, the evidence that the EU is expanding its power over member states, while promoting pro-market policies and enforcing monetarist doctrines without a mandate to do so, leads to the conclusion that the EU is a threat to democracy and the progressive–socialist project.

Nairn parodied the pre-accession debate of the early 1970s as the 'great debate'. However, judged from a historical perspective, in terms of its importance and longevity, the ongoing debate about the European project and Britain's engagement with it truly has been a great debate, with three defining features. First, it has focused upon both the process of European integration and its final destination. Second, it is dynamic, with economic and political actors changing their positions over time. Third, it has traversed the political spectrum, dividing the centre, the left and the right alike.

### The existing literature

The existing literature on the British Left and European integration is limited in its scope. With the exception of Nairn (1973), Lynch (1996) and Broad (2001), who considered the European policies of other sections of the British Left, Kitzinger (1968, 1973), Lazer (1976), Bilski (1977), Robins (1979), Grantham (1981), Schneer (1984), Warner (1984), Young (1984), Grahl and Teague (1988), Tindale (1992), Dejak (1993), Greenwood (1993), Geddes (1994), Broad and Geiger (1996), Butler and Kitzinger (1996), Gardiner (1996), Aaronovitch and Grahl (1997), Daniels (1998), Young (1998), Holden (1999, 2002), Smith (1999, 2005), Gamble and Kelly (2000), Heffernan (2000, 2001), Forster (2002a, 2002b), Hix (2002), Carter (2003), Daddow (2003), Karvounis et al. (2003), Kettle (2004) and Parr

(2005) focused exclusively upon the European policy of the Labour Party. The dominant thesis of much of this work, which tended to focus upon particular leadership periods, is that the party underwent a process of 'Europeanization' in the 1980s as it shifted from a position of scepticism of, if not hostility towards, the EU, to one of enthusiasm. Likewise, with the exception of Baker et al. (2002), who conducted a cross-party study of the views of Scottish and Welsh parliamentarians on European integration, Featherstone (1981), Seyd and Whiteley (1992, 2002), Baker et al. (1996, 1998, 1999, 2001), Whiteley and Seyd (1998) and Cowley (2000) surveyed Labour Party members and parliamentarians, producing findings that tended to confirm the Europeanization thesis.

The literature on the European policies of the trade union movement is less consensual. Dorfman (1977), examining the response of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to European integration, pointed to a process of gradual engagement following the No vote in the 1975 Referendum. However, Teague (1989) questioned the prevailing Europeanization thesis and argued that trade unions continued to organize and to lobby at the national rather than EU level. In turn, Rosamond (1993), Wendon (1994) and Strange (1995, 1997, 2002) challenged Teague, insisting he had underestimated the extent of the Europeanization of the trade union movement, particularly the TUC. Stirling (1991) parodied the Social Chapter as the new 'Holy Grail' for trade unions, arguing that it was minimalist in its design, scope and implementation. Rosamond (1993) claimed that the TUC was able to manipulate the European policy agenda of affiliated trade unions through its information dissemination and research capacity. Wendon (1994) described how several trade unions pursued the twin-track approach of lobbying EU institutions while building links with their continental European counterparts in the 1980s but concluded, like Teague, that trade unions remained largely national in their orientation. Whyman (2002) and Mulhearn (2004) reviewed the policy of the TUC towards Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

This book seeks to address some of the deficiencies of the existing literature, departing from previous work in four critical respects. First, it analyses the European policies of the whole range of institutions that constitute the British Left, many for the first time, rather than using the Labour Party and the TUC as proxies. Second, it is unique in assessing policy formation and policy change over the whole post-war period rather than particular time frames. Such an approach allows similarities and differences in policy to be evaluated. Third, it is original in presenting an empirical analysis of policy formation and policy change through a comprehensive study of official policy documents. These include annual conference/congress reports, which contain details of the submitted motions/resolutions on Europe integration and the verbatim accounts of the conference/congress debates on the EU, plus declassified state planning<sup>2</sup> documents from Britain and the United States (US). It also utilizes in-depth interviews conducted with key actors on the British Left such as Benn, plus John Edmonds, Bryan Gould, Jack Jones, Neil

Kinnock, John Monks, David Owen, Shirley Williams, and many others. Fourth, it breaks new ground by adopting an international political economy approach to understanding and explaining the European policies of the British Left.

### The key concepts

A common weakness of the existing literature is the lack of conceptual clarity. Concepts need to be defined if scholars are to converse effectively,

otherwise, each begins their analysis from a particular assumption that determines the kind of question they ask, and therefore the answer they find. They are like toy trains on separate tracks; travelling from different starting points and ending at different (predetermined) destinations, and never crossing each other's path. (Strange, 1994, p.16)

Defining the three key concepts that are the focus of this book – European integration, the left and policy – is therefore critical.

After several years of intensive theoretical work on European integration, Haas (1971) was still grappling with what he termed the dependent variable problem, that is, the difficulty of definition. A cursory survey of the theories of European integration illustrates the wide variety of interpretations on offer. Haas defined European integration as the 'process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states'. The end result 'is a new political community, superimposed over the pre-existing ones' (Haas, 1968, p. 16). Elsewhere, Haas characterized it as 'the voluntary creation of larger political units involving the self conscious eschewal of force in relations between participating institutions' (Haas, 1971, p. 4). For Hodges it was 'the formation of new political systems out of hither to separate political systems' (Hodges, 1972, p. 13). For Harrison it was 'the attainment within an area of the bonds of political community, of central institutions with binding decision-making powers and methods of control' (Harrison, 1974, p. 14), while for Wallace it represented the 'creation and maintenance of intense and diversified patterns of interaction among previously autonomous units' (Wallace, 1990, p. 9).

It is notable that these definitions tend to focus on political rather than economic integration. Indeed, theorizing the latter has developed as a separate literature (Balassa, 1962; El-Agraa and Jones, 1981; El-Agraa, 1997; Robson, 1998). However, the distinction is a false one; Europe's bureaucratic and political elites, and to a lesser extent its business leaders, have deliberately pursued a policy of economic integration as the means to the ultimate goal of political integration. It

is also notable that contemporary definitions tend to be more generic, reflecting the gradual retreat from grand theories such as federalism, functionalism, transactionalism, neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism, towards more middle-range theories such as multi-level governance, new institutionalism and policy networks.

Rosamond (2000) identified two types of definition: those characterizing European integration as a process and those focusing upon the outcome of the process. However, this distinction oversimplifies the problem. Within the social sciences, concept definition and theorizing are difficult propositions, particularly when attempting to understand and explain complex social change. In the case of European integration, the inherent ambiguity within EU treaties concerning their intergovernmental and supranational characteristics, plus the momentum for change built into the EU objective of 'ever-closer union', make these problems even more difficult. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this book, European integration is defined as the progressive transfer of economic and political sovereignty from the national level to new intergovernmental and supranational institutions and processes at the European level.

Defining the left raises two inter-related questions. What is the meaning of the word and which economic and political actors constitute the left? The meaning of the word is spatially specific. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defined the left as 'a group or section favouring socialist or radical left-wing views' (Thompson, 1995, p. 776). By contrast, Robertson argued that, in the West, 'it has come to signify belief in state intervention in society and the economy to enhance political and economic liberty and equality.' However, he observed that, in the Communist bloc, 'the labels are reversed, limiting the consistent application of the term to radical opposition to an establishment' (Robertson, 1993, p. 277).

The meaning of the word is also temporally specific. Cliff and Gluckstein (1996), Thompson (1996) and Foote (1997) traced the evolution of British socialism from the 1880s to the present. These authors argued that, over time, the meaning of the word was challenged and the concept was reformulated. The period in question began with conflict between the (radical) Christians, the (libertarian) Ethical Socialists, the (reformist) Fabian Society and the (Marxist) Social Democratic Federation. This period also witnessed the development of Labourism and the emergence of corporate socialism.

Labourism, according to Foote (1997), possessed six main characteristics. First, it was based on the notion that labour needed to organize, in the form of trade unions, to ensure its rightful share of the national wealth. Second, it was committed to redistributing this wealth by campaigning for higher wages. Third, it was opposed to capitalists but not to capital itself. Fourth, it believed that labour should engage in political action that was independent of the state, and fifth, it adopted a national rather than international strategy to pursue such goals.

Corporate socialism, according to Foote (1997), strived to bring together the business sector and organized labour, under the direction of the state, in an attempt to reshape society. Syndicalism and Guild Socialism, both of which were committed to the workers' control of industry, and later Keynesianism, challenged the hegemony of Labourism, while the New Left, the Bennites and the supply-side socialism of New Labour eroded the 'Keynesian consensus' that underpinned corporate socialism.

As its meaning varies through space and changes over time, it is therefore necessary for the purpose of this book to define the left within a post-1945 British context. Drawing upon the work of Durbin (1984), Eatwell and Green (1984), Butler (1995) and Foote (1997), it is possible to construct an economic, moral, political and sociological framework within which the British Left can be defined. This framework provides four criteria by which institutions that label themselves left, or that are considered to be on the left, can be evaluated. Economically, the left is dedicated to the redistribution of wealth throughout society. Morally, it is committed to equality, of opportunity or outcome, and collectivism. Politically, it advances an actionable programme for social progress and/or socialist transformation through reform or revolution, while sociologically it employs an empirical and materialist analysis of capitalist society. Applying these criteria, the British Left includes the Labour Party,<sup>3</sup> the TUC<sup>4</sup> and wider trade union movement, the Co-operative Party,<sup>5</sup> the Independent Labour Party (ILP),<sup>6</sup> the Social Democratic Party (SDP),<sup>7</sup> anarchist organizations,<sup>8</sup> communist parties,<sup>9</sup> green parties,<sup>10</sup> nationalist parties<sup>11</sup> and socialist parties,<sup>12</sup> plus a number of pressure groups and think tanks.<sup>13</sup>

Parsons (1995) traced the etymology of the word *policy* and argued that its meaning should be understood within a historical context. Hecló (1972) observed that it was a term where there seemed to be some definitional agreement within the social sciences. Policy is usually considered to be something bigger than a particular decision but smaller than a social movement. It also implies purposefulness of some kind. However, Hecló acknowledged that there were differences about whether policy is more than an intended course of action; Parsons believed that policy 'may also be something that is not intended, but is none the less carried out in the practice of implementation or administration' (Parsons, 1995, p. 13). For the purpose of this book, policy will be defined in the modern sense outlined by Hecló and revised by Parsons.

### The structure of the book

The book is divided into three parts. The first part presents a brief history of the European project, locating it within the changing structure of world order. Chapter 1 highlights some of the early ideas and practical attempts at European integration, before surveying the evolution of the present-day EU through the seven

phases of its development. Chapter 2 discusses the development of the EU within the wider context of the two post-war world orders: the Cold War and the New World Order. It also discusses the attempts by the Soviet Union and the US to shape the European project. The purpose of these chapters is to provide the *European* and the *global* context within which the European policies of the British Left should be understood. However, they are not merely background reading; these chapters set out some of the main actors, events, structures and themes of the post-war period, which serve as key points of reference in the debate on the British Left about European integration.

The second part of the book documents the European policies of the British Left from 1945 to 2005. Chapters 3 to 5 are concerned with the first tectonic policy shift, during the 1945 to 1970 period, when many sections of the British Left moved from a position of disinterest or neutrality to one of support for European integration. This movement reached its zenith in the late 1960s – a period of widespread support for British entry to the EU. Chapter 3 compares the rival visions of Europe promoted by different sections of the British Left during the mid-1940s: the imperial third force favoured by the Labour Government and the socialist third force supported by the Labour Party and the wider British Left. Chapter 4 examines the policy of intergovernmental cooperation pursued by Labour in the late 1940s and the 1950s, plus the response of the trade union movement and the wider British Left. Chapter 5 focuses upon Labour's policy of offering conditional support for entry. This position, sustained for most of the 1960s, was not endorsed by the trade union movement, which preferred to wait and see the terms of entry, and was wholeheartedly opposed by the wider British Left, including factions within the Labour Party.

Chapters 6 to 10 are concerned with the second tectonic policy shift, during the 1971 to 1987 period, when most sections of the British Left moved from a position of support for European integration to one of scepticism of, if not hostility towards, the EU. This movement reached its zenith in the early 1980s when most sections of the British Left backed a policy of withdrawal from the EU. Chapter 6 looks at the widespread opposition on the British Left to entry on Conservative terms, as manifest in Labour's special conference in 1971. Chapter 7 comments upon the popular demands of the 1972 to 1974 period that Labour, when back in power, should renegotiate the terms of membership and hold a national referendum on the outcome. Chapter 8 describes the configuration of forces and the balance of power during the 1975 Referendum, when nearly all sections of the British Left were opposed to continued membership of the EU. Chapter 9 gauges the level of support within the British Left for the policy of reforming the EU following the defeat of the anti-EU left in the 1975 Referendum. Chapter 10 reveals how most sections of the British Left favoured a policy of withdrawal during the early 1980s.

Chapters 11 to 15 are concerned with the third tectonic policy shift, during the post-1988 period, when many sections of the British Left returned to a position of



support for European integration. Chapter 11 reviews the policy of constructive engagement adopted by the Labour leadership in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also presents a considerable amount of empirical evidence, in the form of resolutions and amendments on the EU submitted by affiliated organizations to the Labour Conference and the frequency of anti- and pro-EU arguments put forward in speeches at the Labour Conference, confirming that, to a considerable extent, the Labour Party underwent a process of Europeanization from 1988. Chapter 12 investigates the post-1988 belief on the part of the trade union movement that the EU was 'the only card game in town'. It also presents a considerable amount of empirical evidence, in the form of motions and amendments on the EU submitted by affiliated trade unions to the Annual Congress and the frequency of anti- and pro-EU arguments put forward in speeches at the Annual Congress, pointing to the Europeanization of the TUC from 1988 – a process emulated by the big trade unions.<sup>14</sup> Chapter 13 dissects the European policy of New Labour between 1997 and 2005, particularly its stance towards the euro and the European Constitution, and tests its claim to be the new 'party of Europe'. Chapter 14 judges the success of the trade union movement in promoting a 'People's Europe' between 1997 and 2005, while chapter 15 studies the impact of the general retreat from radicalism on the European policies of the wider British Left during the 1988 to 2005 period.

These chapters attend to the European policies of the Labour Party, the TUC and the wider trade union movement as these constitute the principal actors on the British Left. The Labour Party is the only party on the left to have attained governmental office, if not power, while the trade union movement, operating through its constitutional and financial links with the party, attempted to influence Labour both in government and in opposition. As such, these actors and their stance on European integration are of great consequence. In addition, these chapters attend to the European policies of the wider British Left, including the Co-operative Party, the ILP, the SDP, anarchist organizations, communist, green, nationalist and socialist parties, plus pressure groups and think tanks. These actors, although they did not attain state power, nevertheless played an important role in shaping the debates and policies within the Labour Party and the trade union movement. As such, they are worthy of consideration. Where appropriate, these chapters also consider the European policies of the British State and the Conservative Party, thus providing the wider *British* context within which the European policies of the British Left should be understood.

The third part of the book reviews the response of the British Left to European integration in the past and in the present, before turning to the prospects for the future. Chapter 16 concentrates upon the past, drawing together the main findings of the previous thirteen chapters. It specifically identifies the economic and political factors that precipitated the three tectonic policy shifts over the 1945 to 2005 period. Chapter 17 considers a range of approaches that could be employed to theorize the response of the British Left to European integration. It contends that, from a

historical perspective, in the balance of power competing social forces. In short, it adopts the view of Robert Cox (1987, 1995) in light of the recent debate to suggest that some sections of the movement have re-assessed their position in adopting a more sophisticated approach to witnessing a fourth test.

Chapter 18 attends to the configuration of forces and appraises the rival visions of sections of the British Left project and contemplate how they will evolve in the future.

It is expected that the Labour Party in referendums in 2001 and 2005. euro entry will also require a referendum. are both constitutional and political. direction of European integration. relationship with the euro. the future of democracy. difficult choice of who to elect; engender; the debate a difficult choice of who to elect; currently latent, will then become a reality.

The hope is that the book will locate the response of the British Left and theoretical framework and the future debate on the movement with the EU and the world.

historical perspective, the three tectonic policy shifts result from transformations in the balance of power between anti- and pro-EU forces, themselves linked to competing social forces at the global, European, national and institutional levels. In short, it adopts the international political economy approach developed by Robert Cox (1987, 1996) to understand and explain such change. Furthermore, in light of the recent debates about the euro and the European Constitution, which suggest that some sections of the Green Party, Labour Party and trade union movement have re-assessed their stance and have joined other sections of the British Left in adopting a more sceptical position, this chapter argues that we may well be witnessing a fourth tectonic policy shift.

Chapter 18 attends to the present and to the future. It sketches out the current configuration of forces in Britain on the question of further European integration, appraises the rival visions of Europe that have been/are being promoted by different sections of the British Left, surmises the possible trajectories of the European project and contemplates how the debate on the British Left about the EU might evolve in the future.

### **The relevance of the book**

It is expected that the European Constitution, rejected by French and Dutch voters in referendums in 2005, will be resurrected in 2007. Likewise, the question of British euro entry will also re-surface at some point in the future. These projects, which are both constitutional and economic, bring to the fore the contest over the future direction of European integration and the controversy surrounding Britain's relationship with the EU. These projects also raise fundamental questions about the future of democracy and socialism in Europe. The British Left will face the difficult choice of whether or not to support these projects and the EU that they engender; the debate and divisions on the British Left about European integration, currently latent, will therefore re-emerge.

The hope is that this book will go some way in helping activists and analysts to locate the response of the British Left to European integration within a historical and theoretical framework. The wish is that it contributes both to the current debate and the future debate about the nature of the European project, Britain's engagement with the EU and how the British Left should respond to European integration.



# The British Left's 'Great Debate' on Europe

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