

Preface

This book is an exploration of some historical problems of the British Labour Party, and their relation to some of the current concerns of British politics and the British state. It examines the British revisionist tradition and the emergence of 'New' Labour as a strategy to re-cast the historical Labour Party.

With 'New' Labour, it could at last become a successful party of government, undertaking a transformation of British politics, and averting Britain's long-term economic and social decline. The book nonetheless argues that such a revolution is far from complete.

As a body of work, it is concerned with Labour's ideological development as a social democratic party, and does not put the record of the Labour Government since 1997 to the revisionist test. That task awaits us.

These arguments are explored by reproducing revisionist arguments taken from their original sources, charting the course of the party's ideological transformation since 1931. The editor has written an introduction to each extract, as a guide to each thinker's contribution to debates about revisionism.

This is a specific, and relatively narrow, method for the historian of political ideas. Some attention is also paid to such published sources as the books, pamphlets, and periodicals that are the main receptacles of British social democratic thought during this period.

The study draws additionally on diaries and biographical material, as well as interviews with several of the leading protagonists in the ideological debates of these years. Many friends and colleagues have helped me to write this book. I am grateful to them all. Special thanks go to Claire McCarthy, without whom it would simply not have been possible.

My intellectual debts are too many to mention – though special reference goes to Professor Peter Clarke and Professor Andrew Gamble. Their influence will be apparent throughout this book.

The original style of each essay has been retained, despite the presence of language that is now considered sexist. It is a male-dominated affair, reflecting the dominance of men in the post-war Labour Party — a situation that it is hoped 'New' Labour will reverse.

This book is not uncritical either of the revisionists or 'New' Labour. It was put together in the belief that socialist ideas are greater and more important than whoever happens to be leader of the Labour Party, or in the Labour Cabinet at any one time.

A party of blind obedience and mindless loyalty has no long-term future.

PD

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