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***Labour Party Attitudes and Policy Towards Europe: Socialism,
Nationalism and British Political Culture.***

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Labour Party Attitudes And Policy Towards Europe

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Introduction: Little England?

In the 1989 European elections the British Labour Party gained 45 seats (40.2% of the vote) to the Conservatives' 32 (34.8%)¹. The result, a precise inversion of the 1984 outcome, reflected perfectly the reversal of fortunes of the two parties over the European issue²: it mirrored both electoral dissatisfaction with the Conservative government's position on Europe (which had signed the Single European Act in 1986, and yet had presented itself subsequently as unremittingly critical of virtually any form of integration), and the Labour Party's increasing commitment to a pro-European policy, and to active participation in the European elections campaign itself.³

For the 1989 elections, moreover, the party had subscribed to and campaigned enthusiastically upon a joint manifesto with other European socialist and social-democratic parties.⁴ Yet at the 1987 party conference there had been only a one line resolution on Europe, and this called for withdrawal⁵; in 1985 and 1986 at the Labour Party conferences there had been no debate at all on any European conference resolution. At the 1980 conference, the party had voted to withdraw from the EEC by 5 million votes to 2 million, and at the 1979 conference the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Peter Shore, had declared, on the question of European unity: 'We are not going to be snuffed out as a people'. Such insular defiance was no minority view (and echoed Gaitskell's earlier fear of 'the end of a thousand years of history').⁶ In

the 1979 European elections, the party had barely campaigned at all. Until recently, then, the party's emotions on Europe have run the gamut from hostility to indifference.⁷

Labour's suspicion of the European Community has always been premised upon the declared idea that it was, at best, a capitalist club, at worst, a capitalist conspiracy. Attlee held the view that a political Europe would always contain an anti-socialist majority within it.⁸ Later, Tony Benn reminded us that 'Big business underwrote the cost of the campaign to keep Britain in the Common Market at the time of the 1975 referendum',⁹ and all Benn's references to the European Community depict the EC as an alien body supporting capitalist interests and, more seriously, capable of blocking democratic movements and democratic processes in the UK. Benn's usual illustrations were that the Common Market was a laissez faire organisation; that it impeded economic interventionism by national governments; that it was anti-Third World,¹⁰ could become a nuclear superpower, and would force the UK to adopt in some form or another the alien concept of a written constitution: 'Ours was not a nationalist but a democratic argument against membership'.¹¹ And, until the mid-1980s, Tony Benn's views reflected majority and historical opinion on Europe within the Labour Party. The question underlying this paper is whether the Labour Party's anti-Europeanism was in fact - in spite of the party's doctrinal protestations to the contrary - an intriguing combination of Labour doctrine and a fundamental British nationalism, and whether it is the changing relationships between these elements which truly explains the party's tardy commitment to Europe.

In order to examine the interplay of the national and the doctrinal in the current reorientation of the party, we need to look at how the

myths underpinning Labour doctrine inform its language, and how language, in turn, facilitates further doctrinal change. In the case of the Labour Party, as we shall see, one of the most consequential results of such imperceptible interactions is the anti-Europeans' failure to hold on to claims of exclusive doctrinal integrity concerning Europe. But we shall also note the continuing ambivalence in party attitudes, as reflected in its language. In order to examine these subtle movements in ideas, we shall examine the treatment of the European question in a recent party document. We will also examine the extent to which anti-Europeanism still informs the wider political culture.

Sources of Labour Party anti-Europeanism

In the 1950s and early 1960s the Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, had opposed British entry to the nascent EEC on the grounds that it would undermine the Commonwealth and the UK's privileged relationships within that organisation. In the 1970s, that is after UK entry in 1973, withdrawal from the EEC was seen as 'one of the essential components of AES' (Labour's Alternative Economic Strategy)¹², that is to say, that membership of the European Community was perceived as a brake upon the implementation of a socialist programme in the UK by a Labour government. It is interesting, however, that since the EC's creation in 1957-8, the Labour Party's antipathy to it is an uncannily accurate mirror image of the right's hostility. Newman has argued that on such issues as Germany, the UK's role in Europe, and the Commonwealth, all British Labour governments reflected *exactly* the views of the anti-EC dominant elite.¹³ In Labour's pro-Commonwealth, anti-EC stance, there are obvious parallels with the Conservative view. But even Labour hostility to the EC on the grounds that it impedes the implementation of a radical economic strategy

echoes the anti-European voices of those who, from 1979 onwards, were, in fact, able to implement their own radical economic strategy, namely, the anti-European Thatcher government. It is not within the bounds of this paper to detail Conservative disdain for the European Community, but the very similarity of attitudes between the two parties, however doctrinally different the justification, suggests some common isolationist, if not perhaps imperial, source¹⁴, and would lend support to Newman when he equates the position of the British Labour Party with that of the French Communists, that is, not left-wing, but chauvinist and nationalistic.¹⁵

For the Labour Party this interaction of the doctrinal and the nationalistic has been expressed in two essential ways: first, that the UK represented the best democracy in the world (and the strongest in Europe) and, second, that it possessed the strongest trade union movement. The argument, regardless of its veracity, is persuasive because it combines two very similar myths: what we might call the lighthouse myths of socialism, and of imperialism; thus the light from a Labour-governed Britain would shine out across the continent (as once it shone throughout the Empire), illuminating and inspiring the minds of our politically-backward European neighbours. For the Labour Party, it was for the Europeans, therefore, to take their cue from a socialist Britain; a socialist Britain thus providing the exemplary model enthusiastically adopted by our continental neighbours. And yet, the Labour Party's position in the 1990s is for the most part pro-European. How is it, in language and in thought - and in the case of a political party, in their expression in policy - that distinct and often contradictory ideas can coexist? It is, I believe, this strange coexistence of ideas and their developmental interaction which often accounts for, indeed is the condition of, political reorientations within

parties with a strong historical or doctrinal tradition. So what are the particular modalities of discursive change which allow the Labour Party to move from one position (anti-European) to the other (pro-European)? We shall come to this in more detail below. What we can note here is that this apparent reversal in attitudes is, in fact, more a redistribution of the various views of the EC that have always existed throughout the post-war period in the British Labour Party: a realignment made possible by the relative ascendancy within the party of *both* new socialist arguments *and* supranational considerations over the former socialist/nationalist view.

The Co-existence of pro- and anti-Europeanism

There have always existed in the Labour Party pro- and anti-European Community currents, just as, at a deeper level, there have always existed nationalist and internationalist currents. The fact that the Labour Party is now pro-European does not mean that one view has negated the other. Pro-Europeanism was never insignificant in the party. In 1971, sixty-nine MPs voted with Edward Heath's Conservative government for entry into the EEC, and a further twenty abstained. But just as pro-Europeanists flourished inside the party throughout the post-war period when the party was overtly anti-European (and it is by no means the case that all were silenced when the pro-European Community breakaway SDP was formed in 1981), so suspicion and reticence still influence current attitudes to the European Community even though the mainstream view is now, as we have seen, pro-EC. Rosamund is correct therefore¹⁶ to call the changes in the late 1980s a 'shift' rather than a new attitude. What is of significance for our analysis, however, is that a Labour pro-European attitude, whether today a majority view or not, is no longer questionable in terms of

ideological rectitude. A pro-European may be considered wrong, but he or she can no longer be challenged on the grounds of some kind of social treachery or naive utopianism. Anti-Europeanism, whether as a declared socialist argument or an undeclared nationalistic one, is no longer the powerful rhetorical resource it once was. In a word, it must now compete. This is the real change that has taken place in the party vis-à-vis Europe at the doctrinal and ethical level. What, however, are the conditions of such changes in the rhetorical resources of the two positions? How is a party able to move from one position to the other? Is it simply a question of the ascendancy of one faction over another? The answers to these questions have, I believe, more to do with culture and language than with policy and factionalism.

It is true that, whenever in government, Labour's attitude to the EC has been equivocal and certainly less antagonistic than when in opposition.¹⁷ What is of more significance for our analysis, however, is that today's 'shift' does not simply involve the relative strengths of doctrine on the one hand, and pragmatism on the other, nor simply redistributions of power between the left and the right of the party, but alterations of the weight, influence and, ultimately, value of doctrinally and pragmatically justified ideas within the parameters of Labour Party discourse: it is shifts in meaning, alterations in the polyvalence of words (such as 'Europe' itself), and so on which, in part, enable major shifts of opinion *within* groups, factions, and organisations to take place.

If, then, the current mainstream attitude is more complex than the simple victory of one group over another within the party, and is both the cause and effect of a whole series of complex changes within doctrine, attitudes and beliefs, let us look at what the party says in order to see if we can identify further this hidden complexity.

Discursive ambivalence and doctrinal change

After its third successive general election defeat in 1987, the Labour Party undertook a comprehensive two-year policy review. The Policy Review, and the various publications that have emanated from it, in particular, the 1990 publication, *Looking to the Future*, make many, and for the most part positive, references to Europe. Let us briefly identify and comment upon the references to Europe in *Looking to the Future*: what we find at the level of language is not the Europeanism of our continental neighbours but hidden ambivalence and ambiguities which reflect the continuing competition between the myths that underpin Labour doctrine.

First of all, 'Strong in Europe' appears along with 'A Dynamic Economy', 'A Decent Society' on the cover of the report. Herein lies a) the attempt to distinguish Labour from the Conservatives, yet b) the ambiguity, the duality even, of Labour's perspective: strong in Europe could mean anything on a scale running from pro- to anti-Europeanism: neither Jean Monnet nor Margaret Thatcher would disagree with the statement.

The contents pages are divided into five main sections. Europe is mentioned in a sub-section of Section 1, 'A partner in the European community' (small 'c', although in the text itself it becomes a large C), and a sub-sub-section is entitled 'The Exchange Rate Mechanism' (pp.7-8). Europe reappears in Section 5 ('Britain in the World') in the title of its first sub-section, 'The New European Community' (capital C), and its four sub-sub-sections, 'European decision-making', 'The European Parliament', 'A Wider Community', 'A new Marshall Plan' (pp.45-46). Once again the doctrinal hesitation is clear. The discussion of Europe comes at the end of the text as if part of the discussion of foreign and

defence policy (which usually comes at the end of political texts and speeches in the UK), and yet, if integration were to take place at any speed, this would be *the* most crucial political event in British postwar history. As we shall see, the discussion itself is relatively positive, but its being 'part of' the wider discussion of foreign policy and defence has already contextually diminished the potential importance of the European dimension in the party's discourse.

In Neil Kinnock's introduction to the text (pp.3-4), the successful 1989 European elections are mentioned as evidence that the party is 'gaining new support'. This is an interesting use of the European elections as a source of legitimation of the party (rather than the pro-European view that the party's success is a legitimating source of the EC). Further on in his introduction, Kinnock mentions that a Labour government will make the economy more productive and 'exert proper influence in the process of change taking place in Europe, inside and outside the Community' (p.3). It is the use of the word 'proper' which defines the sentence, as does the reminder that there is a Europe beyond the EC (a standard anti-EC rhetorical resource); 'proper' implies not only the 'improper' Thatcher comportment but also an unhurried and business-like approach to Europe by the Labour Party, that is, one which will not allow the party to be intimidated or outwitted by the EC and its institutions.

In Section 1, reference to the Single Market, as being creative of 'new competitive pressure on British companies' (p.6), once again carries an ambiguous charge; is such 'pressure' to be welcomed or feared? Here it is the choice of the noun 'pressure' which creates the dual meaning, and the 'national' perspective remains. A little further on there is a complete paragraph on Europe (nb: the lack of enthusiasm suggested by the three verbs, 'recognise' (i.e. reluctantly admit), 'need'

and 'must achieve' (to protect Britain)): 'We recognise that the British economy is part of the wider European economy. We need a British government which will be a constructive partner in the European Community - neither Eurofanatics nor Little Englanders. We must achieve the best European standards in Britain and implement the Social Charter' (p.6), and the text hastens to remind the reader: 'The British economy is part of the global economy, as well as part of Europe' (p.6), this amplifying the earlier reminder that the EC is only part of Europe; Europe itself is only part of the world.

There then follows a sub-section, 'A Partner in the European Community', containing two full columns on the EC and the ERM. The text recognises the economic interdependence that has developed between the UK and its partners within the EC, asserts the need for a positive UK role, claims that via the EC high social standards will be achieved, the environment will be respected, economic democracy will be encouraged, less prosperous regions will be supported, and economic integration will depend upon co-operation. What is particularly significant about this section is that each of five paragraphs begins with the phrase 'It will be a Europe ...'. This rhetorical style underlines the idealistic element of Europeanism; it also acts as an implicit reminder that such a Europe has not yet been made; the Labour Party is therefore being called upon to *shape* the new Europe rather than simply acquiesce in it. The section ends, however, with the part-reassuring, part-enigmatic words: 'EC institutions need to be strengthened to ensure that each country's interests are properly protected' (p.7).

The sub-sub-section on the ERM opposes an unaccountable central bank and the Commission's control of national budgetary policy, and ends on a claim that EC policy-making should reconcile through debate 'the development of the Community as a whole and important national

interests'. In parenthesis, we can assume that much of the party's focusing upon economic and monetary issues also reflects a wish to be seen to be involved in the economic debate. For years, and this is reflected in poll after poll throughout the 1980s, the Labour Party was seen as weak, if not occasionally very weak, on economic issues.¹⁸ By its contributions to economic debate - which, because of EMU, has involved such a strong focus upon Europe - the Labour Party can demonstrate its growing economic sophistication, a phenomenon given credence by the figure of its sound, pragmatic, well-respected, and, above all, high-profile spokesperson on the economy, John Smith.

From this point until the final section there are a dozen or so brief references to Europe, many of which justify pro-European Labour Party policy or attitudes by treating the EC or Europe as exemplary or helpful in the struggle against the Conservatives; the references to Europe concern: Labour's proposed tax system (p.9), inflation (p.10), credit management (p.10), wages (p.10), pay and prices (p.10), price rises (p.11), technology (p.11), takeovers (p.15), employees' rights (p.15), retail and industrial co-operatives (p.15), transport (p.16), export promotion (p.18), car pollution (p.21), water supply and beaches (p.21), railways (p.22), urban standards (p.22), interest rates (p.24), local government (p.25), the arts (p.27), life-expectancy (p.27), nursery education (p.30), women's rights (p.33), pensions (p.33), industrial law (p.34), individual and collective rights (p.34), industrial action (p.34), a minimum wage (p.37), and prison reform (p.40).

All of these brief, often almost throwaway references depict the EC as either a model to emulate or a framework that offers scope for action. There are, over and above these references, several others which point to further scope for action in the EC, which is either to be resisted or welcomed. To be resisted are moves aimed at the removal

of zero rating from VAT for food, fares, and children's clothes (p.10); but other 'new challenges' in the Single Market (p.11) are to be welcomed: the chance to make the British people the best trained in Europe (p.11), the need to bring about a European Environmental Charter (p.20), the need to make companies throughout the EC publish environmental audits (p.20), reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (p.23), the need for higher standards for consumer protection (p.23), the desire for Britain to have the best education in Europe (p.30), qualifications that will be recognised throughout Europe (p.32), the task of getting Europe to implement the best Labour policies (p.33), encouragement of industrial partnerships in Europe (p.30), and the need to scrutinise European legislation (p.42).

This range of attitudes portrays the Labour Party's view of Europe as going beyond simple acceptance or rejection of the EC; it offers a three-dimensional image of enthusiasm, criticism, and the setting of example, the whole demonstrating a complex and sophisticated attitude to a Europe that the party has studied, evaluated and understands.

The remaining substantial reference to the EC comes in the final section of the text. There are several references to the New Europe and the New European Community. Both of these terms (the first referring to the wider European context which includes Eastern Europe) suggest, once again, that there is significant scope for action in influencing the *architecture* of the EC rather than simply passively accepting it. The sub-section on the party's attitude to the EC institutions offers views on a whole range of issues including enlargement of the Community (to include Austria and Norway, then Switzerland and Sweden, and later still, the new democracies of Eastern Europe), a review of decision-making procedures, the extension of majority voting in the Council of Ministers to include social and environmental policy, and increasing

(although this not dramatically) the powers of the EP. All of these views and proposals are placed in the context of the text's reminding the reader of the party's equal commitment to bodies outside the EC such as NATO, the Commonwealth, and the UN, and to certain issues (e.g. human rights, the Third World, the environment pp.46-50) which are treated without reference to the EC, as if to demonstrate that the EC is but one element in an overall programme and perspective that transcends it. What these many and subtle ambiguities suggest is that, in spite of the declared view and the enthusiasm, there is, as we have already suggested, an underlying ambivalence that has various sources.

Whatever the ambiguities in Labour thinking, it cannot be denied that there has been significant change in that Labour's universe now includes Europe, and demonstrates an awareness of the European continent and of the institutions and policies of the European Community. Whatever developments take place in the future, we can say that the party is no longer, as it were, Euro-illiterate, as it has so often been in the past; much of its earlier literature making no reference at all to the EC, or, conversely, treating it as a monolithic menace. Here, for the first time, is evidence of the party's awareness of the *workings* of the EC, and of its willingness to depict the EC as exemplary in certain areas. In terms of our earlier remarks concerning the nationalistic idea of an unfettered British socialism as a beacon for the world and a concomitant anti-Europeanism, the late 1980s and early 1990s are a significant moment in the discursive adaptation of the party to a supranational orientation. The Review is public demonstration of the Labour Party's awareness and knowledge of the European dimension of British politics, and, by taking up positions on specific issues, demonstrates the party's sensitivity to the issues involved. It is clear, however, that the qualified endorsement reflects

both the pro- and anti-European traditions within the Labour Party. A third point to note is that the party's position has evolved rapidly (in a supranational direction) over the last three years.

For example, in terms of the growing *de facto* acceptance of the whole European construction process, the party has recently revised its previously intransigent position on a number of fundamental issues. Its attitude to a central bank is now mutable, and the desire to see the acceptance of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers extended to social and environmental policy implies that acceptance of the same procedure in other policy areas is probably only a question of degree, of time, and of circumstances. Furthermore, to coincide with the inter-governmental conference on EMU launched at the Rome European Council in December 1990, the Confederation of European Socialists put out a joint statement, with the Labour Party among the signatories, which gave expression to further developments in the Labour Party's position. The statement called for an increase in the powers of both the EP and the Council of Ministers, an increase in European Political Co-operation (EPC), and, most significantly from our perspective here, 1) support for EMU (on condition that the European Community economies have first reached a point of convergence - although the 'point' itself is unspecified) and 2) acceptance of a European central bank (on condition that it is 'accountable' - also not defined - to the Finance Ministers of the Council of Ministers).

This reinforces our view that the positions taken are less significant than the fact that positions are taken, that is to say, that at the level of discourse and its relationship to policy changes, the various proposals are like crampons which offer a firm hold while allowing movement within a range of possible directions.

A final point to mention is the party's attitude to European

security. *Looking To The Future* claimed that the party would 'implacably oppose' (p.46) a military role for the European Community. Nevertheless, we can anticipate that even here developments in Labour policy are extremely likely, particularly given the possibility of the Western European Union gradually emerging as the European Community's military arm, and of greater European co-operation in foreign, and therefore, of necessity, defence, policy in the aftermath of events in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Persian Gulf in 1991¹⁹ (we shall come back to this point in our conclusion).

The growing momentum for more than simply economic integration has drawn the party's attention - albeit very belatedly - to the social implications of integration. The notion of the general standardising of legislation (such as in the area of health and safety at work) has often been seen by the other social democratic parties in Europe as an opportunity to press for the raising of standards of eleven European Community countries to that of the twelfth, namely the European Community country with the highest existing standard. The implications for the working conditions, and so on, of the UK employment force are therefore extremely attractive (especially as the Labour Party has been in opposition since 1979, from where it has borne impotent witness to a vast amount of legislation limiting the power of the trade unions and workers' representative bodies). In Italy, France and Germany, for example, social welfare adds 30-40% to labour costs. In the UK, the figure is 10%. In a word, if the European Community takes as its model the best social legislation from a member state, then European Community legislation becomes, as a whole, the best available (such 'levelling up' of social legislation is by no means the norm; the principle, however, is a highly attractive one). These are the kinds of discussions now taking place at all levels within the Labour Party. Only

a few years ago, even the party's *knowledge* of employment legislation in, say, Italy would have been a novelty. And it is true that there are debates emerging, new issues being discussed (and often with other socialist parties) on a whole range of issues in a whole range of fora on new economic structures, new political relations, new defence requirements; it is also true to say, however, that on many of these issues, the party is, as it were, still out. But there are, for example, sub-committees of the party's National Executive on monetary union and on institutional reform, that is, on the two hottest issues in the Labour Party concerning Europe. The shift has, indeed, been rapid.

On this question of 'social Europe', it is interesting from the politico-cultural point of view that it was the formerly quintessentially introspective and old-fashioned British trade unions who accelerated the Labour Party's pro-European stance. Given the proportion of power and weight of influence of the trade unions within the British Labour Party (which is far more significant than in any of its sister parties in Europe), it is not surprising that Labour should reflect and express - often against the will of its internationally aware, university-educated, elite - the white, working class, male, and indeed, conservative views and culture of its creators. By the late 1980s, however, two related developments had taken place. The first was the barrage of attacks the British trade union movement had sustained after a decade of wilful Conservative legislation against the unions' corporate political power. The second was the relative ascendancy within the TUC of a group of union leaders who were prepared to deal with the situation through the adoption of a virtually Thatcherite entrepreneurialism. Bill Jordan, leader of the AUEW, is perhaps the best known of this new generation of leaders who favour single union deals with management, close co-operation with other

European unions, active support (and encouragement in a European direction²⁰) for the Labour leadership, a series of initiatives to widen membership (but not necessarily to politicise it), the development of a 'realistic' rhetoric, and above all a pro-European stance and the exploitation of such issues as the Social Charter to support this view; it is interesting to note in this context the rapturous reception of Frère Jacques, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, at the 1988 TUC conference. In terms of the party's developing awareness of the EC and involvement in debate, and the increasing sophistication of such involvement, it is worth pointing out that in the creation and refinement of a discourse and an approach that is both suitable to Europe and appropriate for British Labourism, the party has also had a little help from its friends; the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) being particularly forthcoming in welcoming its UK comrades to the fold.²¹ There were high-level meetings between the two parties in 1989 and again (twice) in 1990. In a way, the SPD has been quietly shaping, through its advice, experience and attention (and its think-tank-cum-overseas ambassadors, such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung), some of the attitudes, perhaps even the policies, of the Labour Party towards Europe. The effect of these 'molecular' changes in relations between sister parties cannot be properly measured, but it should not be underestimated. The development of personal contacts, visits, round-table discussions and academic conferences has in the last two years or so contributed to a new atmosphere in the Labour Party, and to new relations between it and other socialist parties, in particular the German SPD. And the most productive framework for such co-operation and discussion has been the European Parliament itself. Since 1989, the Labour group of MEPs has not only played an active role within the Socialist group in the EP (the largest of all the political groups, and

within which the Labour MEPs are the most numerous),²² but, especially since the mid-1980s, has often been significantly ahead of its national party in its thinking. Formerly, such pro-European sympathies by the MEPs were discreet, but since 1989 they have become strongly asserted, even to the point where (over the Gulf crisis, for example)²³ the MEPs have followed what can only be described on occasions as a distinct European line. One of the signs encouraging a continuing pro-European reorientation of the Labour Party is that this developing contact with other European parties, in the framework of the European Socialist group in the EP, locks the British Labour Party into a *doctrinal* evolution which involves it in co-operation and debate with its sister socialist and social-democratic parties. And *institutionally* the Labour group of MEPs are today among the most vocal in calling for increased powers for the EP itself.²⁴

Pro-Europeanism and party vulnerability

Jerusalem, then, may yet be built in England's green and pleasant land, but the general view of the British left is that for both negative reasons (e.g. the strength of multinational capital) and positive ones (e.g. the scope for social legislation at the European level), there is the possibility that it can now best be built from within Europe. From the point of view of some of the myths underpinning the British Labour movement, it is worth mentioning here that it is not just socialism in one country which is now generally considered an impossible achievement; even social democracy is no longer an option for a single country such as the UK in isolation. As David Martin, a Labour MEP, has argued: 'Important democratic socialist objectives can no longer be accomplished within the boundaries of a single country'.²⁵ Whether or

not they ever could have been is now less important than recognising that this is now the mainstream view within the Labour Party. In terms of our earlier discussion of how this discursive shift has occurred, we can say that ideas related to 'socialist objectives' - the environment, women's rights, and so on - have not been moved rightwards along the political spectrum within the party, but rather from the national to the supranational level, that is to say, that the underlying chivalric idea in socialism of 'the task' remains but has been displaced. Metaphorically, 'Europe' has become a site of struggle whereas before it was the enemy itself. The result, therefore, is that pro-Europeanism has not contested the myths underpinning 'socialism' (as it did in the 1970s in the run-up to the SDP breakaway), but rather those underpinning nationalism.

It is clear, then, that a new approach informs mainstream Labour Party opinion, namely, that more can now be done for socialist objectives in the arena of the European Community than in the strictly national context. The new approach has, as we have suggested, involved both the ascendancy of one view and a series of subtle 'molecular' changes within Labour doctrine itself. It is also true, however, that the mother of such inventiveness was the cruel fact that the Labour Party was achieving little nationally. Not only did the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher seem immovable, the Conservative government had also gone about dismantling Labour's remaining political strongholds in local government by a series of measures aimed at reducing its power, especially through rate-capping, and even through abolition of local government itself, the most notable example being the abolition of the left-dominated Greater London Council in 1985. The conclusion - of pragmatic rather than doctrinal character - was that perhaps one way of reaching past Mrs Thatcher's power, in order to effect social change, was to use the wider stage of the European

Community.²⁶

Many commentators argue that the Labour Party's new commitment to Europe is now permanent. This is perhaps to overstate the case. We can say, however, from our brief analysis of party discourse, that for a combination of pragmatic and doctrinal reasons a major reorientation has taken place. One strong indication is the party's changing attitude to the question of monetary union and a European central bank. It is highly likely that the Labour Party, even in government, would accept EMU or a central bank if such a decision were democratically arrived at within the European Community. If this does prove to be the case, one has, therefore, to ask why the Labour Party did not hold such a position all the way along: what were the roots of a hostility which has meant that only recently have we heard things being said and attitudes being struck by the Labour Party that were being put forward by its sister parties nearly half a century ago? Is it not shameful that the British Labour Party is 40 years late on the European issue? This brings us back to the cultural aspect of the issue with which we began, namely, the interaction (and duplicity) between the nationalistic and the doctrinal; and to the central issue of whether (as was suggested by our reading of *Looking to the Future*) the party's new Europeanism is problematic, and vulnerable to a wider political culture which remains suspicious of Europe.

It is interesting to note, as an illustration of the relationship between national(istic) sentiment and the Labour Party, that when the then Conservative Industry Minister, Nicholas Ridley, was forced to resign over his remarks about the Germans in the summer of 1990 (an outburst which not only began the chain of events leading to Margaret Thatcher's resignation, but which also split the Conservative Party asunder), the opportunity for easy point scoring was not taken up by the

Labour Party to any degree, and nothing like as strongly as one would have imagined. Why not? Because the Labour Party is itself precariously poised in its pro-European stance. And this should be borne in mind when reviewing the Labour Party's new orientation. It is not that it is not all that it appears to be but that it is vulnerable, from both inside the party (and the wider Labour movement) and outside it. And here we come to one of the fundamental problems involved in the Labour Party's exploitation of the European dimension both as a way of counteracting the Conservative government's national political hegemony, and as a means of providing itself with a richer doctrinal content. The point is that although Ridley's outburst was seen as in bad taste (the Germans are our friends, and so on), it is probably true to say that an indeterminate section of the British people privately agree with him to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed, with German unification, such fears have been increased. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher's anti-European posturings, especially over the thoroughly exploited European Community budget wrangle in the early and mid-1980s, struck chords in the British electorate. Even her strident anti-Europeanism found a sympathetic audience in large sections of the population. And since her leaving office, it is very unclear how the new Conservative government's attitude to Europe will develop, particularly, say, in the face of a 'crisis', or new budgetary wrangle; and, more importantly, how British public opinion would respond to a perceived crisis in European cooperation. The Labour Party, therefore, has had to tread carefully 'just in case' a strong anti-European reflex were to emerge in the UK, if only for the duration of an electoral campaign.²⁷

The Labour Party's attitude to the European question, therefore, raises intriguing doctrinal and cultural questions, for despite the fact that, throughout the 1980s, the Labour Party was caught in both a

doctrinal onslaught from its left wing, and, paradoxically, a general doctrinal aimlessness which permeated the rest of the party (from the 'soft' left across to the right), it never tried to fill this void, as have other parties such as the French and Spanish Socialists and the Italian Communists, with a strong Europeanism. The answer to why the vast possibilities for a pro-European rhetoric were not tapped is the same as in the Ridley affair. To embrace Europe might be a mistake as monumental for Labour as the Poll Tax was for the Conservatives. In November 1990, Margaret Thatcher accused Neil Kinnock of 'bowing to the prevailing wind' in his attitude to Europe.²⁸ However, as we have suggested, it is by no means clear that the prevailing wind is blowing in Europe's direction, or, if it is, that it is a particularly strong one. It is true that the younger generation of UK citizens who have grown up 'in Europe' are more pro-European than their elders. Polls also show, however,²⁹ that this group is far less informed than the older group, is capable also of becoming less enthusiastic if, as polls suggest, a greater awareness were to involve, in years to come, a greater disenchantment (and polls of twenty years ago gave similar results). And it is worth saying on this cultural issue, that the continental Europeans *are* different: their political institutions are different (based essentially on French models), and their political language is different, the structure of their political discourse unfamiliar: the high-flown rhetoric of many European politicians rings very strangely, often comically, in British ears. And the Labour Party, with its long, nonconformist Christian tradition, and a very particular type of discourse, is itself a reflection of what is arguably a deep-seated view within British culture (and fears of the domination of a Protestant UK by a Catholic Europe, although to date 'untapped' as a political resource (outside Ulster Unionism), are not without potential significance).

Largely because of our varying war experiences, Europeanism is not strongly rooted mythically in the UK, as it is on the continent, or as strongly as other more patriotic myths.³⁰ In the *Sunday Observer's* feature article, 'How European are the British?', although the younger section of the polled sample were pro-European Community, the overall attitude remained negative.³¹ Whatever the reality vis-à-vis British attitudes to Europe, then, pro-Europeanism is certainly not the stuff of crusades. Europeanism is not a strong element in UK culture, and hostility, particularly towards the French for one set of reasons, and the Germans for another, is a potential political resource for any individual or any party wishing to discredit the too overtly pro-European stance of another party or a wing of their own organisation. Furthermore, pro-Europeanism has normally been perceived (and used to the advantage of those exploiting political populism) as the view of a privileged elite, whether of the right or the left.³² A further point worthy of note - and one which underlines the UK's unfamiliarity with European ways of political behaviour - is that there is seen to be, by Labour and Conservatives alike, a basic choice to be made regarding Europe, that is, that a pro-European and a pro-national stance are mutually exclusive. This does not always correspond with continental reality. Long-standing EC members with decades of experience do not necessarily operate the same way. The French, in particular, are exemplars in pushing for European ideals while unashamedly looking after French interests.³³

It is worth noting that, since 1973, when the UK joined the European Community, no British government - with the exception of Edward Heath at the personal level, for which he was much criticised - has resisted the temptation of being 'difficult' with the European

Community, always putting a highly publicised vigilant suspicion towards the European Community before the ideal of a utopian internationalist communitarianism, in contrast to - at the level of rhetoric at least - the EC's major players such as France, Germany and Italy. ³⁴

Nevertheless, if, in the Labour Party, the range of response to Europe now runs the gamut from suspicion to qualified enthusiasm, withdrawal, at least, has been dropped from the current vocabulary, and the permanency of the current reorientation is strengthened by practical considerations. Generally speaking, a united European approach in such areas as the coordination of research and development is now seen as the only way of resisting the massive economic power of Japan and the United States. It is today a commonplace that the twelve member states combined spend more on R&D than does Japan, and yet in each area are way behind: a lack of coordination means the unnecessary multiplication of the R&D effort. In information technology, the situation is already critical. According to the Labour MEP, Glynn Ford, by the year 2000, the US and Japan will have created two-and-a-half million new jobs. By then, Europe will have lost 200,000.³⁵ Even the assessment of the damage, let alone a strategic programme, involves a coordinated effort which, to date, only the framework of the EC has offered its member states.

The pragmatic reasons for maintaining the party's European course are coherent. And besides, there are no alternatives, either isolationist or Atlanticist, to close cooperation with the European continent. But there remains the difficult-to-assess cultural resistance. It is true that the image of the blinkered and outdated Little Englanders with their provincial prejudices and crumpled suits is one that few Labour activists would wish to be associated with. Nevertheless, the response

within the wider political culture cannot be so easily dismissed. And it is still the case that the effects of economic integration, and of future forms of political integration, have as yet been scarcely perceived.

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Conclusion

We can make a series of concluding remarks and observations. The first is that the post-1987 period is the first in which the British Labour Party is demonstrably pro-European when out of office. This, therefore, seems to indicate that it has inscribed itself more than ever before into the overall orientation of its sister parties in continental Europe.³⁶ By the same token, however, we can also speculate that the party's attitude *in government* - given a) the constraints imposed upon governments by EC membership (ERM, and so on) and, b) the unresolved cultural hostility we have identified - might easily revert to a less enthusiastic one.

The related question poses itself: if the hostility is still there, why does the party change at all? The reasons for this are, as we have seen, to a large extent pragmatic ones; but also cultural (the young are more pro-Europe) and doctrinal (supranational socialism v. fortress socialist Britain, for example). And from our analysis it seems that there is now an inescapable logic of party identification with the EC in general, and its sister socialist parties in particular. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the emotional distance, expressed so well symbolically and geographically by Britain's island status, remains.³⁷

This question of the interaction of cultural distance and pragmatically-inspired proximity can be seen in virtually any example of activity in the EC context. Over the Gulf crisis, for example, both the Conservative government and the Labour opposition criticised the EC for

its indecisiveness over a common position vis-à-vis Iraq, the commitment of troops, the use of force, and so on. Kinnock's criticism³⁸ was indistinguishable from the government view. However, given the drive towards integration, one has to ask whether such criticism of the EC over the Gulf war puts a brake upon integration or, on the contrary, pushes the integrative process one stage further by demonstrating the need for greater cooperation. This, in a sense, is what the anti-Europeans in the party always knew; that all forms of discursive expression inside the EC seem to push the process of integration further along. Another somewhat paradoxical example of such participation in integrative procedures is the attitude of the Labour Party towards the (quintessentially EC) bargaining process. It is clear that the Labour Party's position is fast becoming one of *exchanging* its specifically *national* sovereignty for *supranational* socialism. Recently, this has taken the form of offering a kind of 'swap': dramatically more EC aid to the Third World in exchange for the Labour Party's acceptance of economic union, and a single currency.³⁹ One can speculate that acceptance of such issues as proportional representation, first for European elections, then for national ones, will be next on the rapidly changing agenda. Whether these changes and the integrative process will see the nationalistic and chauvinist attitude replaced by a kind of pan-European chauvinism is a question of greater complexity. Such has certainly been apparent in other European parties such as the French Socialist Party. We can but note the phenomenon as a potential development here in our conclusion, saying only that, given the British Labour Party's lesser awareness of Europe than that of its neighbours, it is *possible* that such development of a kind of European nationalism would be mitigated in the UK case. On a practical note, as regards the party's greater involvement in the bargaining process, it is

worth raising the question of whether a Labour government or active Labour group in a politically stronger EP would be familiar enough with the infinite complexities of the decision-making processes within the EC to profit properly. It would be interesting to know, therefore, the extent to which the Labour Party has taken steps to familiarise itself with procedures and relationships that the French and Germans, for example, have known for over thirty years.

Let us conclude with two remarks, one concerning the wider electorate, and one concerning the party. First, we have to remember that the problem of the UK's attitude to 'Europe' is still one which ranges, essentially, from indifference to hostility. It is worth remembering that, in spite of the Labour Party's successes at the 1989 European elections, the turnout was less than 40%. Such a vast area of 'non-enthusiasm' adds an element of extreme unpredictability to attempts to assess future UK attitudes to Europe, and given that the Labour Party has been, as it were, trying to work its passage back into the electorate's affections for a decade and more, a miscalculation could have very negative consequences. And in such circumstances, given the public nature of Margaret Thatcher's hostility to things European, she could, in the future, take on a Cassandra-like quality and so contribute to an anti-European momentum in British political culture.

The second point concerns the party, although it is by no means unrelated to our previous point concerning the wider culture. From our analysis it seems clear that the current pro-European position of the British Labour Party cannot be explained as the result of the victory of the pro-European (right) of the party, formerly a small minority, over the anti-European (left) of the party, formerly a significant majority. What has happened is that there has spread throughout the party an acceptance, and later a qualified enthusiasm for the EC, which clearly

reflects the position of the earlier pro-Europeans. Nevertheless, the current pro-European is not the same creature as the pro-European of the earlier period. Nor is it simply the triumph of pragmatism over idealism. Both inform the current position as we have seen. From our analysis and commentary of the language of *Looking to the Future* we can see that the party's position is one of a pro-Europeanism that is shot through with ambivalence and uncertainty. Such a view reflects the party's true attitude to Europe, as well as its uncertain reading of the 'mood' of the electorate. This attitude also reflects a centuries old suspicion of the continent which still holds sway over the now Euro-friendly British Labour Party as it searches not only for a dependable electorate, and the exercise of governmental power, but also for a new doctrinal identity. It remains to be seen the extent to which Europeanism will become part of such an identity.

NOTES

¹ The low turnout of 35% is typical for European elections in the UK. As well as the Conservative and Labour seats, there were elected 1 Scottish Nationalist, and three Ulster MEPs (1 Democratic Unionist, 1 Ulster Unionist, and 1 Social and Democratic Labour Party). The Greens polled 15% but gained no seats. (Total 81 seats)

² The 1984 results were: the Conservatives, 45 seats (40.8%); Labour, 32 seats (36.5%), Andrew Adonis, "European Elections, 1979-1989" *Contemporary Record*, February 1990, p.23.

³ The Conservative Party's losses in the 1989 elections meant that Margaret Thatcher had lost, as it were, her legitimacy to oppose Europe (even though she continued to do so). This factor, as well as Labour gains, allowed the Labour Party to step forward more boldly as pro-European. Moreover, the Liberals did very badly, thus allowing Labour to steal some of their European thunder. It is worth pointing out that the

Liberals' European policies are very progressive on such issues as women's rights, the rights of the individual, Third World aid, energy, and political reform; all these are areas of concern that the Labour Party could, more or less, exploit to its own advantage.

⁴ There was a joint manifesto in 1984 too but this was a deliberately low key affair, with many disagreements, and the party retaining a very ambiguous attitude to crucial parts of it.

⁵ Resolution 456 at the 1987 conference read: 'This conference calls upon the next Labour government to withdraw Britain from the European Economic Community.' (Barnsley West Constituency Labour Party); Amendment: 'unless there are fundamental changes in the Treaty of Rome as per previous decisions of the Conference' (Wolverhampton N.E. Constituency Labour Party).

⁶ See Kevin Featherstone, *Socialist Parties and European Integration*, Manchester University Press, 1988, p.54.

⁷ It is illustrative of the British attitude that at the French Socialist Party's research institute's (ISER) many conferences during the 1980s there were always representatives and academics from Germany, Italy, Spain and so on. The British Labour Party never bothered to acknowledge the invitations, let alone participate.

⁸ Featherstone, *op. cit.* p.49.

⁹ Tony Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980, p.50.

¹⁰ According to the Swiss sociologist, Jean Ziegler, the EC is an integral part of an inegalitarian world order in which 40,000 people a day die of hunger. 30% of the world's population live in the industrialised countries of Europe, the US, Canada, Japan, the USSR, and Australia and between them control 82% of world production, 91% of all exports, 85% of world defence budgets, and 98% of R + D. The industrial countries' spending on arms is more than the GNP of all of Africa and Asia. The industrial countries consume seven-eighths of world resources. Ziegler's statistics go on and on. In a word, 5 billion people are held in poverty by 1 billion, one-third of whom live in the EC. Such figures offer cogent arguments for the anti-European socialist lobby (Jean Ziegler, *Contemporary European Affairs*, Vol. 2, no.1,1989, pp.173-180).

¹¹ Benn, *op. cit.*, p.164.

¹² Ben Rosamund, 'The Labour Party and Europe', *Politics*, Vol. 10, no.2, October 1990, pp.41-48.

¹³ M. Newman, 'British Socialists and the Question of European Unity' *European Studies Review*, Vol. 10, 1980, quoted in Featherstone, *op. cit.*, p.44.

¹⁴ Tom Nairn, *The Left Against Europe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973.

¹⁵ M. Newman, *Socialism and European Unity: the dilemma of the Left in Britain and France*, London, Junction, 1983, p.268, quoted in Featherstone, *op. cit.*, p.341.

¹⁶ Rosamund, *art. cit.* p.41.

¹⁷ Bearing in mind our earlier point concerning the complementarity of the Conservative and Labour positions, it is worth remembering Deighton's point that Conservative leaders (e.g. Churchill, Macmillan) were more pro-EEC when *not* in power; Anne Deighton, 'Missing the Boat: Britain and Europe, 1945-1961', *Contemporary Record*, February 1990, p.15.

¹⁸ According to a recent poll, only 25% trusted the Labour Party with the economy; *Guardian*, 15/12/90.

¹⁹ *Guardian*, 24/1/91

²⁰ It is interesting to note that the Italian trade unionist, Bruno Trentin, has argued that the trade unions of Italy, Spain, France and the UK today offer more to the debate on credible social and employment legislation than do the parties of the left themselves, *Contemporary European Affairs*, Vol.2, no.3, 1989, pp.63-69. Featherstone points out, moreover, that at various points in the 1920s and 1950s, as well as the 1980s, the British TUC was often more sympathetic to Europe than the party itself; Featherstone, *op. cit.*, p.42.

²¹ Such solicitation of the Labour Party by its sister parties is not new. It occurred over the ECSC, the EDC, Euratom, and the EEC proposals. The difference today is that the Labour Party is responding.

²² It is worth noting here that the Conservatives have few 'family' friends in Europe, as has been shown, for example, by their unhappy membership of the Conservative group in the EP. The Labour Party, on the other hand, is part of a socialist and social-democratic family of European parties and, of course, a century-long member of the Socialist International.

²³ During the Gulf War of 1991, for example, Labour MEPs, along with

the rest of the Socialist group in the EP, voted overwhelmingly for an immediate ceasefire; although it is worth pointing out that the status and influence of the MEPs in the Labour Party has been, to date, minimal.

²⁴ *Guardian*, 8/3/91

²⁵ David Martin, 'A Left Agenda for Europe', *Contemporary European Affairs*, Vol.1, nos.1-2, 1989, pp.109-127.

²⁶ It has become clear that many Labour MEPs, especially those representing large conurbations, have been able to exploit EC regional policy and bring EC funds to cities such as Bradford, Salford and Birmingham, thus countering some of the restrictive aspects of Conservative local government legislation.

²⁷ The contrast with France is striking. The French Socialists have relatively effortlessly added a kind of Eurocentrism to their rhetorical stock since gaining power in 1981.

²⁸ *Guardian*, 8/11/90.

²⁹ 'How European are the British?' *Observer Magazine* poll, 28/10/90.

³⁰ One wonders, therefore, at the wisdom - as regards UK integration within Europe - of Jacques Delors' deliberately provocative declaration to the EP in July 1988 that by the mid-90s there would be an embryonic Euro-government, with 80% of national legislation originating in Europe.

³¹ According to the poll, 4% thought that Egypt was in the European Community, 45% did not know that Greece was a member, only 32% knew that Jacques Delors was the President of the EC Commission, and only 16% knew the French word for newspaper (78% did not even try to answer). When respondents were asked which countries were most hostile to the UK, France came out top, with Ireland second (only 7% of respondents named Germany). And when respondents were asked to choose where they would go if forced to live abroad, Australia, Canada, and the United States came before EC countries as choices.

³² To the extent that this is true it is also the case that a pro-anything elite will, precisely because it is an elite, have a disproportionate influence over the prevailing non-elite view.

³³ For an amusing and illustrative description of the way the French treat the EC's rulings and directives, see Christopher Tugendhat, *Making Sense of Europe*, London, Viking, 1986, pp.84-88.

³⁴ The Labour government's renegotiation of the UK's terms of entry in the mid-1970s and the way this was treated in the media is one of the

best examples of this. And the former Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, has himself stated that it was his government which set up the conditions which allowed the subsequent Thatcher administration to so publicly renegotiate the UK's budgetary contributions in the early 1980s.

³⁵ Glynn Ford, 'Researching Europe's Tomorrow', *Contemporary European Affairs*, Vol.1, no.1-2, pp.271-280.

³⁶ Featherstone has agreed that it is invariably the anti-European socialist parties which also exhibit the most internal strife; Featherstone, *op. cit.*, p.333.

³⁷ The irony here is the numerical strength of the Labour MEPs, 45; the SPD have only 31 MEPs, the Spanish 27, and the French 22. Such relative UK strength in Europe and its implications could never be deduced from the party's literature.

³⁸ *Guardian*, 24/1/91.

³⁹ *Guardian*, 18/1/91.