

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

David Coates

“Social democracy is at a dead end, but is by no means dead”
Ingo Schmidt¹

“Europe’s centre-left progressive politics is in crisis, maybe in its most existentialist crisis since the foundation of the social democratic movement in the late nineteenth century”
Christian Schweiger²

“The unique place of the social democrat to be the champion of the people is over and is never coming back”
Neal Lawson³

“Labour is becoming a toxic brand. It is perceived by voters as a party that supports an ‘open door’ approach to immigration, lacks credibility on the economy, and is a ‘soft touch’ on welfare spending”
Jon Cruddas⁴

“People are fed up”
Jeremy Corbyn⁵

If further proof were still needed of the fact that one swallow does not make a summer, try comparing the performance of the Labour Party in the UK’s June 2017 general election with that of the French Socialist Party in the elections for the National Assembly, the first round of which occurred just three days after the UK election. In

both cases, centre-left parties went down to expected defeat: but whereas in the British election, the Labour Party's unexpectedly strong performance cost the Conservative Government its majority, in the French one the Socialist Party and its allies, in government as recently as the previous month, lost all but 44 of their 284 seats. Given that the French performance was by far the more typical of the two, given recent results in both American and European elections, it remains the case, therefore, that – the results of the 2017 UK general election notwithstanding – these are not great days for centre-left parties in developed capitalisms. And a hundred years out from the Russian Revolution, they are even worse days for the revolutionary Left. Indeed, it is quite difficult to think of a recent time in which left-wing prospects of either a moderate or a more radical kind have looked so problematic. Which means, among other things, that reflecting on the future of the Left against such a background is likely to be neither an easy nor a pleasing affair; but then, precisely because it is not, the need for such a reflection has arguably never been greater.

As I have long understood it, the first rule of politics is always this: that if you are in a hole, the initial thing that you must do is to stop digging. Across the western world, the contemporary Left is in a serious hole: which is why the precise nature of the hole, the manner of its creation, the immediate consequence of its existence, and the best way to find the ladder out – understanding all these dimensions of the Left's present predicament are now key requirements for the successful achievement of any political project designed to return progressives to power. The only way to ensure that the present underperformance of progressive forces becomes the lowest point of their political trajectory over time, rather than part of their permanent condition, is to have all of us who care about progressive values concentrate on trajectory improvement. We need, as a matter of urgency, to find a combination of institutions, strategies and programmes that is capable of recreating a broad basis of support for left-wing causes. And because that is so, quite what those institutions need to be, what strategies they should follow, and what policy commitments should go with them – these basic design questions are collectively the subject matter of the essays gathered here. The purpose of this introduction is to set those essays in their shared context, and to explain how and why they have been pulled together.

I

Labour Party supporters in the United Kingdom woke on 9 June 2017 to discover an overnight improvement in the Labour vote, and in its representation in Parliament, that few had anticipated just 24 hours before: and for very good reason. Because until that point, and over the last half-decade, support for left-wing political parties across Europe and North America had steadily sunk to a new low: so low indeed that Ární Árnason recently asked “is 6% the new norm for the progressive left”⁶ and Sheri Berman recently wrote that “the European centre-left risks irrelevance”⁷ The 2017 UK election stands now as an oasis of hope amid the more general desert of centre-left fortunes across western Europe to which Sheri Berman referred, as in its own way did the size and character of the vote accruing to Hillary Clinton as she fought Donald J. Trump for the US presidency just seven months earlier. But on either side of the Atlantic, it is still a desert out there, when examined calmly from even a moderate (and certainly from a more radical) progressive point of view. Hillary Clinton fought, but she also lost – and lost to Donald J. Trump of all people. Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party did better than expected, but still lost – and lost in a general election in which *both* main parties increased their share of the vote. How different is all this from the heady days of 1997, when an untested set of New Labour parliamentarians could sweep to power by inflicting on a Conservative Party once led by Margaret Thatcher its heaviest electoral defeat since 1846; or from 2008, when a young and charismatic Barack Obama could reach the White House merely by asserting that “yes, we can!”? Just two decades later in the UK case, and less than a decade in the American one, power in each political system has shifted into highly reactionary hands: leaving progressive forces in the United States facing a deliberate deconstruction of the regulatory state by ultra-libertarian Republicans and a charlatan president; and leaving the Left in the UK watching a minority Tory government (one now suddenly entirely dependent on the support of right-wing Ulster MPs) preparing to pull the United Kingdom out of the European Union – out of the one supra-national institution, that is, within which centre-left values and practices had until recently found their firmest embodiment.

Quite why this change of political fortune had occurred remains a matter of both central importance and huge controversy in left-wing

circles on both sides of the Atlantic, as a later reading of the essays gathered here will only underscore. But four things are at least clear, and worth noting as a shared framework for everything that follows.

The *first* is that, on both sides of the Atlantic, significant numbers of voters in traditionally left-wing voting constituencies have, in a series of recent elections, stopped voting for centre-left parties. They have turned instead either to conservative parties offering a more centrist message;⁸ or, turning away from both mainstream political currents altogether, have become enthusiastic supporters of right-wing populist parties and figures. Asbjørn Wahl recently put it this way, and he is right.

Large parts of the western working class now seem to have gathered around right populists, demagogues and racists. They vote for reactionary and fascistoid political parties. They helped to vote the UK out of the EU and to make Trump president of the world's superpower number one, and they vote so massively for the far right political parties that the latter have government power in sight throughout several of Europe's most populous countries. Since working people traditionally are expected to vote for the left, this creates unrest, insecurity, and confusion among experts, as well as commentators and mainstream politicians – particularly in the labour movement.⁹

This working-class realignment is not simply an American and a British phenomenon, though it is certainly the most significant feature of contemporary American politics, and of UK politics both in the 2015 general election and in the referendum on EU membership that followed a year later. For the rise of authoritarian populism is also marked across much of western and southern Europe – from France and Holland in the north to Spain and Greece in the south. At least along the Mediterranean rim, however, the defection from centre-left parties has been as much a move to the left as to the right – politics there have polarized, beaching the moderate centre – but not in either the US or the UK. In the US in 2016, Donald Trump gathered crucial working-class votes in key swing states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Ohio; and in the UK in 2016, right-wing Conservatives and the crude nationalism of UKIP combined

to produce a successful referendum bid to take the UK out of the European Union. In the UK case at least, much of that UKIP vote quickly returned to the two main parties; but even there, the gap persisted between the Labour Party and sections of its traditional base. To quote Robert Ford:

Labour, founded as the party of the working class, and focused on redistributing resources from the rich to the poor, gained the most ground in 2017 in seats with the largest concentrations of middle-class professionals and the rich. The Conservatives, long the party of capital and the middle class, made their largest gains in the poorest seats in England and Wales. Even more remarkably, after years of austerity, the Conservatives' advance on 2015 was largest in the seats where average income fell most over the past five years, while the party gained no ground at all in the seats where average income rose most.¹⁰

The *second* general point worthy of note as we begin to reflect upon the future of the Left is one related to why this limited but real degree of working class political realignment is now occurring. Many traditionally left-leaning voters seem to have turned away from their normal political loyalties in part because of the severity of the economic and social conditions to which they are increasingly exposed. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought members of well-organized labour movements in western Europe, and of less well-organized ones in North America, into increased competition with lower-paid and even less well-organized workers in former communist states; and facilitated the increasing movement of manufacturing employment out of core capitalisms to developing ones. The years of neoliberal ascendancy that coincided with this Cold War collapse were accompanied by sharp increases in inequalities of wealth and income, before culminating in the most severe financial crisis since the 1930s, and in an associated recession of unprecedented depth and (in many weaker economies) longevity. Both the inequality and the recession hit traditional left-wing supporters hard – particularly those supporters locked away in communities that were heavily dependent for their own prosperity on the production of traditional forms of energy, or of manufactured

commodities that could be produced more cheaply elsewhere. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that as more and more people found their own economic circumstances depleted and the prospects for their children diminished, they should have shifted their political allegiance to parties with no authorial responsibility for any of those adverse developments, and to parties that – because they lacked any role in the creation of these worsened conditions – could address them openly, and offer ostensibly effective and simple solutions for their resolution. And that the solutions on offer, particularly in 2016, were and are invariably backward-looking – Donald J. Trump promising to make America great *again*, and Nigel Farage’s UKIP exploiting electoral desires to “take *back* control” – tells us something else of importance too. It underscores the extent to which the underlying premise of centre-left politics – a faith in progress over time – has been eroded in sections of electorates who “no longer believe that the future will bring them material improvement and that their children will have a better life than their own”. Or, as Jean Pisani-Ferry recently put it: “They look backward because they are afraid to look ahead”.¹¹

One might well have thought – certainly at the height of the financial crisis, many of us did – that the main beneficiaries of this growing awareness of the limits of deregulated capitalism would be parties of at least the centre-left, and possibly of more radical leftism too. But the *third* shared feature of our current condition is that this “great moving left show” has not occurred, and has not done so in large measure because of the authorial responsibility for our current malaise that parties of the centre-left in both North America and the European Union share with their more conservative opponents. Centre-left parties are currently hemorrhaging support because of their failure, when last in power, to break fundamentally with the neoliberalism of the Right. It is striking that a financial crisis as severe as that of 2008, and an initially discrediting of neoliberal financial deregulation as sharp as it is possible to find, should have so quickly slipped back into being a political asset for conservative parties and a loadstone around the neck of their centre-left opponents. Yet that is exactly what has happened as, in one northern European country after another, the great economic crisis of 2008–9 generated in centre-left circles only what David Bailey and his colleagues, after surveying them, described as “ideological confusion and/or electoral decline”.¹² Being caught by the depth of their previous “Faustian pact”

with neoliberalism, and having spent a generation convinced that the Thatcher/Reagan settlement was a permanent one, centre-left parties across both Europe and North America were not well placed, when the financial crisis broke, to quickly disassociate themselves from the “third way politics” into which many of them had by then enthusiastically settled. The result was that, when neoliberalism met its Waterloo in 2008, parties of the centre-left found themselves in solid possession of remarkably few troops. Asbjørn Wahl again:

The reality is that workers’ exploitation and their increasing powerlessness and subordination now hardly have a voice in public debate. Labour parties have mainly cut their connection with their old constituencies. Rather than picking up the discontent generated in a more brutal labour market and politicizing and channeling it into an organized interest-based struggle, middle-class left parties offer little else than moralizing and contempt. Thus, they do little else than to push large groups of workers into the arms of the far-right parties, who support all the discontent and do their best to channel people’s rage against other social groups (immigrants, Muslims, gays, people of colour, etc..) rather than against the real causes of their problems.¹³

The *fourth* significant element of our shared contemporary condition is this; that the general credibility of the European Union – as a more progressive form of capitalism with stronger notions of social partnership – has increasingly lost its electoral elan among both traditional working-class and new middle-class voters, the more it too has succumbed to neoliberal orthodoxies. This was not, and is not, a problem for North American progressives, of course, unless (and to the degree that) the EU was and is used in US progressive circles as a model of how the rules around American capitalism should be reset (most famously of late by Bernie Sanders, eulogizing Denmark).¹⁴ But the embedding of neoliberal principles and practices within the governing institutions of the European Union was, and remains, a particularly acute problem for UK Labour. Heavily engaged as recent UK governments have been with US imperialism in the Middle East – Blair with Bush, no less than Cameron with Obama – the British Labour Party is not now well placed to lead a principled stance on

one major, if indirect, consequence of that imperialism – namely the flow of refugees (from Libya and Syria in particular) that has recently made immigration such a toxic issue across the entire European Union. And having been so enthusiastic about flexible EU labour markets when in power as New Labour, and being out of power from 2010, British Labour is equally badly positioned right now to lead opposition within the EU to the severe austerity packages imposed on PIIGS economies by a troika of northern European powers and institutions led by a German government in which the SPD remains a powerful junior partner. The European Union is in internal crisis, and British Labour's indifference to that crisis played its own role in the outcome of the 2016 referendum. What the current condition of both Europe and British Labour therefore demonstrates is that, if there is to ever be a new progressive dawn in the UK and beyond, it will be one that of necessity will have to be created out of the ashes of previous failed centre-left political projects – a demonstration that leaves front and centre the question of whether that progressive phoenix can rise again without first requiring social democracy to have been fully consumed in its own funeral pyre.

II

There is already no shortage of answers to that question. They range from quiet optimism to bleak despair, and they come in a variety of forms: edited collections,¹⁵ programmatic statements,¹⁶ newspaper articles,¹⁷ journal symposia,¹⁸ blog postings,¹⁹ and general overviews. Among the latter, two recent important contributions from the on-going UK debate can usefully be taken as, in some basic sense, speaking for the best of the rest: one by Patrick Diamond, the other by Neal Lawson. Both, it should be noted, were written before the unexpectedly strong performance of the Corbyn-led Labour Party in the general election of 8 June 2017.

Patrick Diamond, in his widely-read survey of the European centre-left, *Endgame for the Center-Left: The Retreat of Social Democracy Across Europe*, turned out to be quite bullish in spite of the retreat he documented, arguing that “for all the difficulties facing social democracy, pessimism can be overstated” and that “despite the apparent demise of centre-left politics, a new progressive era is

within reach, underpinned by renewed government activism and a new collectivism that goes beyond the traditional state.”²⁰ His core argument, shared by many similar commentators within the mainstream parties of the centre-left, was that “social democracy stands at a moment of great promise, but also peril”. “To write off centre-left politics now would,” in his view, “be a great mistake: right and centre-right competitor parties have their own problems,” he argued, “and in any case, societies have not rejected social democratic values”. The task rather, as he had it, is one of building “bridges between open and closed communities by updating public institutions and policies, just as socialist parties did in the immediate aftermath of the second world war”.²¹

Neal Lawson, by contrast, surveying broadly the same scene from his position as chair of *Compass*, saw “social democracy in crisis the world over” with social democrats “nowhere ... ideologically, programmatically or organizationally on the front foot”. For Lawson at least, “the crisis isn’t cyclical but existential, rooted in profound cultural and technical shifts that scorch the earth for all social democratic parties”. As he put it: “social democracy, the belief that one party, in one nation, largely through the state can create a settlement that favours the interests of labour over capital, is dying as a political practice. It is set to join the ranks of ‘communism’ as a political term of only historic relevance”.²² His is a pessimism about old politics, and a confidence in new coalitions, that is a regular feature of political conversations around the US Democratic Party, as well as around the UK’s Liberal Democrats and Greens: a conversation about how to go beyond old class-based forms of politics, and to put away worn-out ways of doing things, and move towards a new politics of identity that is sensitive to the complex modes of exploitation that currently scar contemporary capitalism. For Neal Lawson at least, with the world of work changing so fast, and patterns of consumption proliferating in both scale and variety, it is “the UK franchise of social democracy” that “is first in the firing line,” if “for no other reason than it calls itself the party of Labour”.²³

Both answers can’t be right, of course; but both can be wrong; and right or wrong, both suggest a distinct and different focus for progressive politics.

For Patrick Diamond, strengthening the Left means getting back inside – in his case – the British Labour Party, and “forging

an effective alliance between the middle class, the blue-collar working class, and those in greatest need: the jobless, the economically excluded, the most disadvantaged” around sets of policies that address their constituents’ immediate economic and social anxieties, regain the Party’s “reputation for economic competence” and reclaim “the politics of national identity” in order to make the case for liberal internationalism and a strong Europe.²⁴ Forging that effective alliance, if Jon Cruddas’s internal review of why Labour lost the 2015 election was correct, requires a firm turn back towards the centre of UK politics – taking what elsewhere Diamond termed “the hard road to power”²⁵ by reversing its current loss of “connection with large parts of the voter population who are either pragmatists in their voting habits or social conservatives who value family, work, fairness and their country.”²⁶

For Neal Lawson, again by contrast, reconstructing that Labour Party-electoral class link will no longer suffice. The world has moved on: capital has gone global “and nasty” he said, and irredeemably “infected with the virus of neoliberalism”, and is now poised to destroy both the environment that surrounds us and any vestigial collectivism in the consumer culture it is inculcating in all of us. Faced with this new and horrendous reality, since one single progressive party is no longer the answer, there is no alternative for those wishing to blunt the impact of “turbo capitalism” but to focus exclusively on the building of progressive alliances around a new understanding of what now constitutes the good society in a post-material age. And in building that alliance, with Labour so weak after the general election of 2015, it made sense – to quote Lawson’s colleague Jeremy Gilbert – “to try to work towards local agreements which would see Labour and other parties of the left and centre stand down in each other’s favour.”²⁷

At one end of the spectrum, that is, successful progressive politics is still about getting “all hands-on-board, making one more push for the New Jerusalem” – finding the programmes inside existing social democratic parties that will make the old politics work again; while at the other, it’s all about stepping away from attitudes and institutions inherited from the past, and starting over anew and afresh, building coalitions around consumption and private space as well as around work and public institutions. It’s a shared spectrum, but not a shared vision of how best to go forward. And between the two now,

in the UK at least – after the unexpectedly effective performance of the Corbyn-led Labour Party in the 2017 election – stands a party that was supposed to be too radical for long-term electoral success if Patrick Diamond is right, and too electorally viable when standing alone to easily fit into Neal Lawson’s vision of how best to take the Left forward. So, three UK strategies are now on the table – *go right*, *go left*, or *go alliance* – leaving the issue of how best to guarantee a successful future, for the British Left at least, entirely unclear and uncertain!

III

Which is why it seems to us to be potentially useful to add another set of voices to the mix. After all, these general reflective dialogues have happened before, and benefitted then from a multiplicity of views. So why not again now? The previous one much mentioned even in the current debates was that around Eric Hobsbawm’s *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*²⁸ – the publication of which just predated the arrival of Margaret Thatcher in power in 1979. Then, as now, prospects for the Left looked particularly problematic. Stuart Hall and his colleagues at *Marxism Today* were busy documenting “the great moving right show” that Thatcher was implementing (a move that involved not only new sets of policies but also a fundamental shift in dominant modes of thought); and Eric Hobsbawm, as a good and faithful old communist, was pondering the political consequences for the Left of the disintegration and departure of the traditional working class. Then, as now, the temptation to throw in the towel was enormous. A whole way of doing politics that had favoured the centre-left – in this case, Keynesian demand management – had just been rendered mute by the stagflation of the 1970s; and a Labour Party that had been in and out of government for more than a decade and a half had just been roundly rejected by its own electorate after a disastrous “winter of discontent”. So, the search was on for how best to respond both to the failure of Old Labour and to the rise of what we would now term “neoliberalism.” Re-reading that debate with the wisdom of hindsight, it is striking just how much of what was in debate in 1978 and 1979 was Labour’s past rather than the Left’s future, and yet how central to that conversation was

the political potential of a trade-union movement whose imminent emasculation by Thatcherite policies was nowhere foreshadowed. In retrospect, it is clear that the depth and character of analysis required accurately to anticipate the future was largely missing from the Hobsbawm debate. It is a depth and character of analysis that we cannot afford to leave out again.

Hence the four questions posed to each of the contributors in this collection of reflections. Each contributor was asked to reflect upon (a) what has changed in modern capitalism that has brought us to our contemporary impasse; (b) what role, if any, have errors by (or limits of) particular forms of progressive politics played in the emergence of our contemporary crises; (c) what lessons can we learn from all of this for the form and content of progressive politics going forward; and (d) what are the immediate options opening up before us, and how are they to be seized? The contributors were chosen partly because their previous writings occupied clear and differing positions on the basic spectrum between optimism and pessimism, old politics and new. Each was chosen too so that the focus of the conversation could incrementally shift from the US to the UK, then on to the EU and the wider global stage. Additionally, each was chosen because – to a very large degree – their writings and political activism covered the entirety of the politically-active time span of the baby boomers, so that in a sense each contributor was being asked to reflect on the future of the Left at the very moment when prime responsibility for building that future was passing – baton-like – from one generation to the next. The insights which these eight contributors have gleaned from four or more decades of public engagement on the Left are hopefully condensed here in the pages that follow, on the wager that such insights can only help the next generation of the Left to avoid some of the pitfalls that weakened the political impact of the generation before them.

Eight essays, therefore, each written on the basis of long past experience and political struggle, in the hope that they will be of use to those now carrying, or just picking up, the same progressive baton. The fight for a better tomorrow is always a marathon rather than a sprint, and it is best won if organized as a relay race rather than a steeplechase. Let us hope that, in some small way, the running will get easier because of the essays gathered here.

IV

The first essay is by Dean Baker. Dean makes a powerful case, addressed primarily to the American Left, for not crossing the river to fill the pail, but rather for putting down that pail where we are now: by exploiting to the full the capacity of progressive intervention (particularly at the state level in the United States) to roll back the rigged markets that create such inequality around us. The Left, we are told, should never buy the argument that markets necessarily create those inequalities. Markets are more malleable than that. Contemporary markets create such appalling levels of inequality only because they are set up in ways that favour the rich and the privileged. Their advocates defend them as “free” markets but, in reality, they are anything but free. Instead, they are skewed by federal policies that hold down inflation by increasing unemployment. They are skewed by the excessive privileging of the financial sector, by patent and copyright protections that facilitate rent taking, by lack of effective shareholder control over CEO pay, and by labour market rules that expose workers to global competition while protecting certain professions from any similar pressure on their rates of compensation. As Dean Baker has written elsewhere: “as long as progressives ignore the rules that are designed to redistribute income, they will be left fighting over the crumbs. There is no way that government interventions will reverse a rigged market.”²⁹ The rules rigging the market need to be addressed first. The Baker argument here is that, while for the moment at least progressive intervention to effect meaningful rule-change at the federal level in the United States is unlikely to be effective, that is not the case for equivalent interventions at the level of individual states and cities. His chapter illustrates the potential of grass-roots and labour-movement action at the sub-federal level to deliver real and concrete improvements in the lives of ordinary Americans, and points for inspiration to the recent (and at the time, hard to anticipate) success of such action on issues like gay rights and tobacco-use: arguing that “if progressives hope to turn the tide, we need policies that can produce real benefits in the near term, while at the same time pointing in the direction of larger changes in the future”. The argument developed by Dean Baker here is that “there is no shortage of such policies; we just need to think about them clearly”.

The second essay is by Fred Block. Fred is less sanguine than Dean about immediate possibilities, but is clear on the longer-term potential for success of a revitalized and reshaped centre-left. Arguing that “parties of the Centre-Left must reinvent themselves if they are to regain their relevance and their electoral support”, it is the Block view that such a reinvention requires two broad things; a resetting of party programmes and organization to allow membership influence to grow and relevant policies to emerge; and an explicit recognition of how the context of left-wing politics is changing and must be addressed. That change, in Fred Block’s view, is best captured by the notion of a transition to a “habitation society”, a transition that both allows and requires the Left to forge “new political strategies that cut across traditional class and locational divides”. Conscious of the way in which parties of the centre-left have recently shifted authority and influence internally, away from trade unions and towards professional politicians – and seeing that as a double-edged sword – the Block thesis is that the US Democratic Party in particular should learn from its Republican opponents that a regeneration of activism and power at the base of each party is vital to stop electoral hemorrhaging at the top. Because in a habitation society, “social reproduction becomes primary and production of both goods and foodstuff is secondary, the central challenge becomes finding new and better ways to create sustainable and resilient communities while economizing on inputs of capital, labour and non-renewable materials”. This then becomes the task of the Left: to show “various constituencies that are the base of contemporary centre-left politics – women, racial and sexual minorities, labour unions, community activists, and campaigners against inequality and the political power of the wealthy – that they are engaged in a common struggle to create human societies that are inclusive, egalitarian and governed through revitalized democratic practices”. It is the Block view that, if done properly, such an understanding of its task could change and strengthen the Left in important and necessary ways.

The third essay is mine. It is written in part to act as a bridge between the American experience of progressive politics and the British – crafted by someone who is British by birth and American by choice – and draws heavily for its content on material and arguments developed more fully in Agenda Publishing’s parallel volume to this: *Flawed Capitalism: The Anglo-American Condition and its*

Resolution. The Coates argument there, and here, is that we are in a period of transition between broad social settlements, and the job of the Left is both to recognize that (and to educate its potential electorate in that crucial recognition), and simultaneously to design policies that over time can take that electorate towards a new social settlement (of a more egalitarian and family-friendly form than that created by neoliberalism). This task of creating a new and progressive social settlement is made easier – so the argument runs – because, and to the degree that, neoliberalism is increasingly discrediting itself by the economic and social outcomes it is generating. But the task is made more difficult to the degree (very large, actually) to which centre-left parties were junior but acquiescing partners in the design and sustenance of the neoliberal settlement that came so seriously unstuck in 2008. The task is possible, however, and well within our grasp, because of the wealth of appropriate policies of a progressive kind that conservatives in power eschew, and which centre-left parties seeking power should and can adopt. There is, in the Coates view, no programmatic barriers to the creation of a more dynamic because progressively-restructured capitalism, one in which centre-left parties manage capital in the interests of labour, broadly defined. The barrier is, rather, one of agency. “The problem of the Left is overwhelmingly itself” and being itself, it is a problem that the Left can solve, and should address, with all due urgency.

The fourth essay is by Hilary Wainwright, the only one of the eight here who also contributed to the original debate with Eric Hobsbawm on *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* Drawing on her long experience of social movement politics, and writing in a tradition of scholarship heavily influenced by the work of Ralph Miliband, Hilary makes a strong case for understanding the existence of two kinds of power in and around progressive politics. The first – power-as-domination – has been how power is understood in traditional social democratic parties, an understanding they share with more conservative political formations, and which leaves social democrats trying to use particularly state power to meet the needs of supporters whom they do not themselves empower. They demonstrate what she calls “a paternalistic political philosophy”. The second – power-as-transformative-capacity – is, in Hilary’s view, the understanding that prevailed in the key social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and which is now being rediscovered by a new

generation of activists disappointed in (and alienated by) third-way social democracy. The Wainwright thesis is that those two forms of power need to coalesce in a new progressive future, with old-style social democratic parties learning that – as she puts it – they must avoid “any separation from the radical social movements from whence the parties came, and on whose transformative power they depend to achieve the changes they promised and for which they won support”. That is why, among other things and as its title implies, Wainwright’s chapter gives a more sympathetic report on the radical potential of the Corbyn-led Labour Party than is commonplace in mainstream media, even in media of a progressive kind.

The fifth essay, by Colin Crouch, invites us to examine the problems and choices faced by the contemporary centre-left in a longer time frame and against a wider set of issues, returning to themes more fully explored in his remarkable study, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*.³⁰

The argument developed here begins by noting that the dominant contradictions of contemporary politics are those pulling apart parties of the centre-right, not parties of the centre-left: with the dominant “fault line” being “between the economic globalization fostered by neoliberalism, representing the extraordinary power of business wealth, and the xenophobic form of conservatism, representing the power of mass fear and hatred”. It is that fault line that now frames the options facing progressives in both Europe and the United States, with centre-parties struggling to respond to the crisis of neoliberalism in a non-xenophobic fashion partly because of their involvement in the earlier dissemination of the neoliberal settlement, and partly because of neoliberalism’s erosion of the old forms of class identity that once sustained successful social democracy. With both religion and class losing much of their capacity to mobilize people politically, the one remaining framework of identity left able to do so would appear to be that of the “nation”; and currently the Left’s most pressing problem is that, using that framework to understand the consequences of globalization, “large sections of society [have] finally turned against neoliberal domination, but under the banner of the extreme right”. That banner is already visibly tattered, however, and no doubt will tatter more. In Donald Trump’s hands, promises to help the forgotten people are already taking second-place to business deregulation favouring the rich; and

Theresa May's hard Brexit strategy will inevitably increase the exposure of "leave" voters to foreign competition, rather than protect those voters from it. Yet none of those likely developments will bring support back to the centre-left, until progressives too develop an adequate response to the janus-face of a globalization process that cannot now be reversed.

It is the Crouch argument here that neither protectionism nor new free-trade agreements are an adequate answer to the economic and social dislocations brought about by neoliberal globalization; and that, moreover, there are sections of the electorate of many leading European and North American economies and societies with whose xenophobia, racism and sexism no progressive should dream of compromising, and from which no progressive support can be expected. In such a polarized and troubled politics, therefore, the centre-left has no choice but to make the case for a more regulated global trading order, to reach out to moderate people worried by immigration and job loss by "standing firmly for redistribution and the rights of low-income workers" (including advocating for high minimum wages and strong labour standards), and to "become part of a broader anti-xenophobic social compromise with internationalist neoliberals and moderate conservatives". The forging of a more assertive form of social democracy is, in Colin Crouch's view, both a necessary and a demanding route forward for the European and North American centre-left. As he has written elsewhere: "European social democracy needs to be shaken out of the defensive posture into which it has shrunk for many years now"; and it can be, "given the widespread revulsion at the behaviour of global finance, which has been the purest expression of neoliberalism to date. 'Let markets work for us, yes; let them tyrannize us, no!' provides a powerful rhetorical base, and a rich and promising political agenda. In parading it, social democrats need have no fear that they are voicing unpopular minority concerns. They stand foursquare in the centre of public opinion and political reality"³¹

In the sixth essay, by Wolfgang Streeck, even the possibility of effecting the kind of alliance that Colin Crouch favours comes under serious and critical review. Deploying arguments which surfaced in fuller form in his recent (and widely discussed) study, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*, Wolfgang raises one of the biggest questions facing the Left: namely "who are our

constituents, our popular base waiting to be organized and mobilized”, the ones whose interests we “hope to define so as to coincide with the general interests of mankind?”. Not, in his view, the usual suspects. As he says: “whether the future of the left can be an alliance between the old working class and the new human capital owners must be doubted”, not least because “interests, worldviews and identities differ widely”. They differ particularly on so central a modern issue as immigration, for example, with the old working class threatened by it, the new middle class benefiting from it, and the immigrants themselves likely to want to settle in and remain invisible. Nor does Wolfgang Streeck put much store by any alliance between the new losers in his failing capitalism and a New Left needing, as he puts it, to “somehow steer its potential constituents away from the late capitalist lifestyle of *coping* as test of personal worth, *hoping* as a civic duty, *doping* as a shot in the arm to either help or substitute for individual achievement, and *shopping* as the ultimate reward in an honorable capitalist life”.

Adamant that socialism is what the Left must be about – because anything less, liberalism can deliver without it – the Streeck argument on the future of the Left is bleak indeed: that “the task of inventing ‘a future for the Left,’ and indeed for a socialist Left, appears nothing short of awesome”. The Streeck thesis is that the Left requires a profound cultural revolution if the excesses of capitalism are to be contained, and yet such a fundamental shift in attitudes to consumption and resources is such a hard sell to a generation obliged to survive by “turning their creative power into human capital”. “Our most formidable task”, he writes, “may well be to talk people out of the myth that they will be happier in proportion to how much more they consume ... a myth spread and pressed into people’s minds and souls every day by the most gigantic, most sophisticated, most expensive propaganda machinery mankind has ever seen”. Little wonder that, with such a view, the Streeck conclusion is so bleak. It is this. “While it may be true”, the chapter concludes, “that there can be no new socialist left without a culture of politicized de-commodification of consumption, it is also true that no such culture is anywhere in sight. Maybe the historical moment for it has passed?”

In the penultimate essay in the collection, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin make it clear that they at least think that the historical moment has *not* passed. If any moment has passed, in their view,

it is the social democratic one. Writing together, they bring to the conversation perspectives honed around the *Socialist Register*, the non-aligned yearly collection of socialist essays first organized by Ralph Miliband and John Saville in 1964 and now edited by Leo Panitch and colleagues connected to York University in Toronto. Leo is often fond of questioning the sanity of my politics – my commitment to a regenerated social democracy – asking privately lately whether, “insofar as the Left keeps being drawn back into trying to do this [regeneration], does it not display at least some of the traces of the definition of insanity often attributed to Einstein: doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results?” But he and Sam are gracious enough to apply that definition of insanity to themselves too; and to defend their refusal (as well as mine) to become sane, if sane means surrendering to the unbridled logics of contemporary capitalism. In their view – one anchored in their unique mixture of long-term reflection and immediate case studies (here, the Sanders campaign in the US, and the Syriza government in Greece) – the increasing de-legitimation of neoliberalism is creating an opportunity for more revolutionary politics again; but it is an opportunity that remains extremely difficult to seize. They take comfort in the movement from protests to politics they see in both North America and Greece, and from the growing sensibility of protesters to the class-based nature of the inequalities that so offend them; but being more Gramscian than Leninist in their analysis of the sources of capitalist stability, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin are well aware of dangers of social democratic incorporation if the Left does not create, as it moves from protest to power, new political parties that “more than ever, keep their feet in the movements, and far from trying to direct them, remain the central site for democratic strategic debate in view of their diverse activities”. As non-social democratic socialists, they remain committed to the importance of what they term a “democratic socialist strategy for entering the state through elections, to the end of transforming the state” itself, while recognizing the enormous difficulty associated with that kind of politics. The future of the Left will not be smooth, they insist, “ruptures, or extended series of ruptures, are inescapable”.

V

The final essay in the collection is by Matthew Watson, co-editor of the series *Building Progressive Alternatives* that this volume is helping to launch. His essay is a reflection upon the reflections – an initial response to the essays gathered here, by a leading intellectual of the rising generation to whom academic and political leadership is now beginning to shift. The great hope that I had, in calling this collection together, was that it might act as a bridge between progressive generations – one that might facilitate the transmission of valuable reflections on the Left’s past into the collective memory of those who must now shape its emerging future. The best response to the collection gathered here will therefore be one of critique – a calm and careful mapping and measuring of what can usefully be extracted from the past, and an equally careful mapping and measuring of what cannot. Mat’s final essay has been designed as a first and tentative example of that critical process of review.

NOTES

1. Ingo Schmidt (ed.), *The Three Worlds of Social Democracy: A Global View* (London: Pluto, 2016).
2. Christian Schweiger, *Progressive politics: permanent austerity stranglehold?* Posted 29 May 2015. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2015/05/progressive-politics-permanent-austerity-stranglehold/> (accessed 7 July 2017).
3. Neal Lawson, *Social democracy without social democrats? How can the left recover?* Posted 13 May 2016. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/05/social-democracy-without-social-democrats-how-can-the-left-recover/> (accessed 7 July 2017).
4. Jon Cruddas, *Labour’s future: why Labour lost in 2015 and how it can win again* (London: Labour Party, 2016), 8.
5. Jeremy Corbyn, 29 April 2017: quoted on the BBC’s “General Election 2017” website.
6. Árni Árnason, *Is 6% the new norm for the progressive left?* Posted on 27 March 2017. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/03/6-new-norm-progressive-left/> (accessed 7 July 2017). Perhaps not: social democracy in Iceland has recently made its own unique contribution to that low score. On this, see Thorvaldur Gylfason, *Spineless social democracy*.

- Posted on 5 April 2017; <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/04/spine-less-social-democracy/> (accessed 7 July 2017).
7. Sheri Berman, *Europe's centre-left risks irrelevance?* Posted 6 February 2017; <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/02/europes-centre-left-risks-irrelevance/> (accessed 7 July 2017)
 8. Patrick Diamond, *The new "progressive" conservatism in Europe*. Posted April 2011; http://www.policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=3985&title=The+new+%22progressive%22+conservatism+in+Europe+ (accessed 7 July 2017).
 9. Asbjørn Wahl, *Reactionary working class?* Posted on *The Bulletin* as e-bulletin No. 1383, 16 March 2017; <https://socialistproject.ca/bullet/1383.php> (accessed 7 July 2017).
 10. Robert Ford, "The new electoral map of Britain: from the revenge of Remainers to the upending of class politics", *The Observer*, 11 June 2017.
 11. Jean Pisani-Ferry, *Progress Abandoned*. Posted on 18 January 2017; <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/01/progress-abandoned/> (accessed 7 July 2017).
 12. David Bailey, Jean-Michel De Waele, Fabien Escalona & Mathieu Viera (eds), *European Social Democracy during the Global Economic Crisis: Renovation or Resignation?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 12.
 13. Wahl, *Reactionary working class*.
 14. On the complexities of Danish social democracy, in which Bernie Sanders was clearly not well briefed, see Christoph Arndt & Kees van Kersbergen, "Social Democracy after the Third Way: restoration or renewal?", *Policy and Politics* 43:2 (2015), 203–20.
 15. See, for example, James Cronin, George Ross & James Shock (eds), *What's Left of the Left: Democrats and Social Democrats in Challenging Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Olaf Cramme & Patrick Diamond (eds), *After the Third Way: The Future of Social Democracy in Europe* (London: Policy Network, 2012) and Ingo Schmidt (ed.), *The Three Worlds of Social Democracy*.
 16. Not least the Labour Party election manifesto, 2017.
 17. Including one recently by Tony Blair, arguing for a revival of "the progressive centre" and floating the idea of his returning to UK public life to help generate it! On this, see Jason Cowley, "Tony Blair's Unfinished Business", *New Statesman*, 24 November 2016.
 18. For the UK, see, for example, *Renewal*; for the US, *The American Prospect*; more globally, *The Socialist Register*.
 19. For the UK, see for example *Policy Network* and *Soundings*; for Europe, *social.europe.eu*; for the US, *Alternet.org* and *The Nation*; and more globally, the Socialist Project's e-bulletin, *The Bulletin*.

20. Patrick Diamond, *Endgame for the Centre Left?* (London: Policy Network, 2016), ix.
21. *Ibid.*, ix.
22. Lawson, *Social democracy without social democrats?*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Diamond, *Endgame for the Centre Left?* 99.
25. Patrick Diamond, *Can Labour Win? The Hard Road to Power* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).
26. Cruddas, *Labour's future*, 9–10.
27. Jeremy Gilbert, *A Progressive Alliance: The Progressive Case* (London: Compass, 2017); accompanying notes to his Compass publication, *The Progressive Alliance: Why Labour Needs It*.
28. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London: Verso, in association with *Marxism Today*, 1978, 1979 & 1981).
29. Dean Baker, *If Progressives Wanted To Win*. The Huffington Post, 8 February 2011; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dean-baker/if-progressives-wanted-to_b_819871.html (accessed 7 July 2017).
30. Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).
31. Colin Crouch, *From Defensive to Assertive Social Democracy*, UCL SE Journal number 1, December 2013.