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1

Introduction

The Progressive Century: Ours to Make

Neal Lawson and Neil Sherlock

This book is based on three important propositions. The first is that neither the social democratic nor the liberal tradition can deliver a 'progressive' century by themselves. The second is that progressive politics in Britain cannot rely on the whims of senior politicians, no matter how well intentioned. The third is that without the right combination of leaders, ideas and movements, the next shift in political power in Britain is more likely to be towards the forces of 'conservatism' than the forces of progress. We face a choice: to create the conditions for a progressive century out of the joint strengths of liberalism and social democracy, or to witness another hundred years of Tory hegemony.

The Blair paradox

Four years ago, it felt as if that choice had been made. On the night of 1 May 1997 the hearts of progressives soared. How could they not? For the first time since 1974 the Conservatives had lost a general election – and they had not just lost, they had been thrashed. In particular, hopes had been raised by the fact that people had voted intelligently to inflict damage on a party that had done so much damage to the country over the previous 18 years. For a fleeting

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moment there was the promise of a new dawn – not just a new government but a new way of doing politics. At its heart was ‘the project’ – an approach that promised to be non-tribal and pluralist through a realignment of the centre-left. It was epitomised by the pre-election deal struck between Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown, which would have seen Liberal Democrats in government for the first time since the early part of the century.

The ‘project’ to realign British politics had been prepared in advance. Blair and Ashdown were unusually close for leaders of competing parties. Blair had also come to rely on the wisdom of Lord Jenkins, the doyen of British liberal/social democracy. Playing Obi Wan to Blair’s Luke Skywalker, Jenkins had instilled in his apprentice a belief that the great rupture of radicals at the turn of the twentieth century was unnecessary and unwarranted. The divorce of Liberal and Labour had served only as handmaiden to a Conservative century.

The pre-election manifestation of the ‘project’ was the Robin Cook/Robert MacLennan agreement on constitutional reform that established parameters for far-reaching change in the political system if the Tories were kept out. Deep behind the scenes, election organisers from both parties were identifying the seats that could be targeted to maximum effect. Explicitly, both parties fought every seat; implicitly, resources were targeted and blind eyes turned to tactical campaigning. The results were spectacular, none more so than Enfield Southgate where Stephen Twigg replaced Michael Portillo on the basis of unprecedented tactical voting.

But it was an illusion to think that a new politics could be delivered from the top down. The commitment to it was probably sincere enough but was confined to too few leaders. It had never been sufficiently grounded in a deep-rooted account of the repeated failure of the centre-left in Britain. Meaningful and lasting political advance is only ever secured when the ambition and capability of leaders chimes with ideas and movements outside of Westminster. A progressive century will be created from the bottom up or it will not be created at all.

The illusion is revealed in contemporary accounts of the Blair–Ashdown courtship,¹ which identified a level of misunderstanding and a lack of nerve at the crucial moment. Despite the failure to reach a deal, advances have since been made, primarily in the field of constitutional reform where the devolution of power to a Scottish

Parliament and a Welsh Assembly has seen the biggest shock for more than 150 years to the UK's sclerotic political system. The Scottish coalition was able to introduce a number of progressive measures such as free tuition for university students and better freedom of information legislation. At the time of writing, a new Welsh coalition also offers a ray of hope to progressives. Charles Kennedy has rightly refused to shut the door left open by Paddy Ashdown's departure and there has been some extension to the work of the Joint Cabinet Committee into European defence and security policy, as well as United Nations reform. Nick Harvey, Liberal Democrat Spokesman on Health, made important contributions to the NHS plan launched in summer 2000 by the Prime Minister and Health Secretary. But given the promise of Blair's implied deal with the Liberal Democrats, progress has been disappointing. Ashdown has left the stage. Lord Jenkins' elegant report on electoral reform gathers dust on the shelf. The hopes of electoral reformers became channelled into the lesser campaign of seeing the referendum pledge make a reappearance in the 2001 election manifesto. Vivaly, Blair has failed to muster support among Cabinet colleagues and in the rest of Labour. Even more importantly, there has been a failure to 'do' politics differently. The opportunities of 1 May 1997 were slipping through the fingers of the centre-left.

It is easy to feel frustrated and demoralised by the lack of progress and the timidity of party leaders. But crying 'betrayal' only takes progressives down a political cul-de-sac that has proved a desolate haven for the centre-left over the past century. Leaders will play a pivotal role and their visions, hopes and fears will be crucial, but they are frequently constrained by their respective parties, by the media and by the intellectual community that supports them. Paddy Ashdown was driven to ask whether Blair was a 'control freak' or a 'pluralist'. The real answer is that he is a complex and fluid mixture of both. But the narrowness of the question shows that there is much work to do before a broad base of support can be built for a decade – let alone a century – of progressive politics. The drive and enthusiasm of the leaders of both parties is a necessary but not insufficient condition for a new progressive politics of the twenty-first century. It is the world beyond Westminster to which progressives must appeal and from which they must draw strength if the promise is to be realised.

Progressive principles

A progressive century will not come about just because the Tories lost in 1997, even by a landslide. Indeed, it will not come into being just because they lose again. It will not come about because one or two leaders will it, or because electoral arithmetic demands it. It will not happen without the recognition that the traditions of liberalism and social democracy are two sides of the same progressive coin. The task of progressives is to create the context – the analysis, ideas, policies and forces – in which leaders, parties and other social forces can play their part in delivering a progressive century.

Roy Jenkins once made a famous call for the strengthening of the ‘radical centre’. This is at the heart of the progressive cause and his historical analysis is the inspiration for this book. But it is inspired, too, by our own experiences working alongside politicians and activists in both parties and by the potential for reform that we believe remains under the lock and key of tribalism.

The dictionary definition of progress is ‘to move forward or bring nearer to completion or perfection’. By definition, then, progressive politics identifies restlessness and dissatisfaction with the world as it is. It is the opposite of conservatism. Progressives look around them and see levels of inequality that should not be tolerated in a decent, affluent society. They see vital public services such as health and education choked by years of underfunding and creeping marketisation. They look back to J.K. Galbraith’s sense of ‘private affluence and public squalor’ and see the challenges still to be faced. They share a sense of outrage at a political system that permits a ‘culture of contentment’ for some and denies a decent living for so many. They feel the lifeblood drain from the body politic, as a system invented for the nineteenth century struggles to contend with the demands of the twenty-first. They share the anxiety of environmentalists that the current rate of growth is unsustainable. They believe that their own parties are still run by the few rather than the many. They are temperamentally internationalist and proudly European. They know that, left untamed, capitalism will deny for the majority the life chances and opportunity that should be every citizen’s right.

Social democrats and liberals share, as Polly Toynbee has argued, certain fundamental positions: a presumption in favour of the underdog; a belief that things can always get better; a trust in reason;

taxing as much as you dare; tolerating almost anything except intolerance; striving for a more equal society; siding with the consumer; celebrating diversity; and regarding sex and family life as no business of the state. Above all, they both believe that all humans are redeemable.

The obstacles to reform

All of this begs the obvious question, if social democrats and liberals share such strong values, why the split in their organisational forces, and what are the themes that will unite them in working towards a progressive century?

Over the past hundred years unnecessary divisions left radicals weaker and paved the way for the 'Conservative century'. The roots of the division go back to the turn of the last century when the Liberal Party was groping for a way to humanise and moralise the market. The emerging forces of labour, both inside and outside of Parliament, saw this task as unnecessary. The newly industrialised workers, and intellectuals and politicians who represented their workerist interests, believed history was on their side and would ultimately sweep away the whole capitalist system. Why try to tame a beast that was already condemned to the dustbin of history? It was an assumption without foundation that with hindsight was to prove costly to both parties.

The Liberals were to be proved right. Capitalism was not going to be swept away but the divisions remained, enforced by tribalism and cultural animosity. Tribalism, in particular from Labour, saw interest take precedent over ideas and a defined identity in which adversarialism became an inherent part of the party's practice and ethos. Cut off from their radical roots in the emerging industrialised society, the Liberals lost their sense of purpose, compounded by the schism between Lloyd George and Asquith. During much of their wilderness years the social liberalism of T.H. Green was relegated to the margins. It was Jo Grimond who laid the groundwork for the party to embrace the progressive cause once again. During the 1960s, Grimond revived the modern Liberal Party as the gathering point for local action and national realignment. His successors, from Jeremy Thorpe to Charles Kennedy, have built on that.

Labour had to wait for Tony Blair to explicitly force the party to recognise that replacing capitalism with state-driven socialism was

neither achievable nor desirable. The problem is that, in ditching the party's former anti-capitalist stance in favour of a 'humanising' approach, Labour appeared to swallow the demands of global capitalism hook, line and sinker in order to win in 1997. This is not to criticise New Labour's path to power. Electoral pragmatism was essential to deny the Conservatives a fifth election victory. After the 1992 defeat it was time to do or say almost anything to win. Nearly all on the left and centre-left felt that enormous pressure to win and shared the relief when it was achieved. But the victory was secured at a high price. In effect, it was a short-cut to power secured through a ruthless repositioning of Labour in order to destroy a Conservative enemy desperately clinging to power. The price was that Labour failed to develop a progressive philosophy of governance that would underpin and direct the new government through good times and bad. In New Labour's rush to power, fundamental ideological issues were glossed over. Cracks in the thinking of the centre-left were papered over.

The reality of New Labour

Paradoxically, the very success of the landslide victory in May 1997 constrained the potential for progressive politics. First, the majority was too big. New Labour was left defending constituencies and people who had little in common with the goals of the centre-left, let alone any aspirations for a progressive century. The fragile collective psychology of New Labour seemed to lead them to believe that the electorate was a pack of regimented dominoes – if one vote or one seat tumbled, they all would. A party that had become the 'It girl' of modern British politics, successful because it was successful, was unable to countenance any failure. In the pursuit of a bogus 'one-nation' politics, New Labour painted itself into a corner by trying to be all things to all people. But satisfying no one for fear of offending anyone would prove to be unsustainable. Worse, Labour was made timid by the fear that Britain really was a 'Conservative country' and was reluctant to engage with the public and win the case for policies on tax-and-spend and electoral reform. Where it has been essential for Labour to look at the big issues necessary to build a progressive country, short-termism has always won out. The most striking example is over the single European currency. If the vote had been

held in the first year of the new government it could have been won. We have lost count of the number of times advisers have whispered in our ears that in the second term it will be 'different'. But ends have a habit of being shaped by means. The tap of radicalism cannot just be turned off and on at the whim of party leaders. Radical politics requires support within civil society, the voluntary sector and local communities, support that needs to be built, nurtured and encouraged.

Second, despite the rhetoric, Labour did not win as 'New Labour'. It won as 'not the Tories'. There is no shame in that. The old adage that it is governments that lose elections not oppositions that win them, became a maxim because it is largely true. New Labour, to its credit, made itself safe by identifying what it wasn't, but not by defining what it was. So the mantra 'we won as New Labour and we will govern as New Labour' imposed constraints that were simply unnecessary. As long as they didn't govern like the Tories, anyone winning the 1997 election had the opportunity to create a new vision for Britain. And governing in terms of 'what you are not' has obvious limitations. New Labour had moved beyond the neo-liberal worship of the market but had failed to define an alternative. The slogan 'Opportunity for All' spoke to a still live social democratic instinct to provide a level playing field, but the field turned out to be rampant global capitalism. But the government never questioned the notion that there would be deserving winners and undeserving losers. The very concept of taming the beast of capitalism had become strangely alien to a party that still contained the word 'Labour' in its title. New Labour became a permanent balancing act, courting Middle England but with an instinctive impulse to help the 'failures' in a marketplace defined by a zero sum game. Redistribution was a feature of budget decisions, but it was practised by stealth for fear of offending those with something to lose. Liberal Democrats have been braver. Charles Kennedy advanced the idea that those earning more than £100 000 should pay 50 per cent tax and that the money would go to improving pensions. Despite the fact that even at 50 per cent the rate is lower than it was for the bulk of Lady Thatcher's premiership, it was not received warmly by the government. Yet progressive income tax has always been at the heart of a progressive society and must remain so if growing social inequality is going to be reversed and public services rebuilt. This has been the case since Lloyd George's

'People's Budget'. Politics had come full circle. The Liberals were still trying to humanise capitalism, but now Labour was trying to appease it. New Labour has managed to invert the traditional social democratic model, fitting people to the needs of capitalism not capitalism to the needs of the people.

In many ways New Labour was simply a more pragmatic and smarter version of traditional labourism. It challenged and changed some issues such as Clause IV, uncosted tax-and-spend policies and its party structures. What it ducked, either through lack of time or inclination, was the difficult stuff, the culture of labourism. What was never 'modernised' was the notion that there was only one party, one history and one future – that Labour knew it all and could do it all. The winner-takes-all approach embedded in our adversarial politics was never questioned. It was still assumed that the institutions of the state could simply be inhabited by the left and redirected to deliver 'what works' from the top down. As such, New Labour was always going to be constrained by a view of its own uniqueness. Even where decentralisation was enacted, in Scotland, London and Wales, it was grudging and preceded in two cases by heavy-handed and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to impose candidates from the centre.

In reality, New Labour's leaders recognised the shallow nature of the power they held and that there was still little positive support for what the party in its heart of hearts really stood for – a more equal society. They were right. But, crucially, the lessons they drew were the wrong ones. Their answer was to circle the wagons even tighter, to demand even greater control over Ministers, the party and MPs. The courtship of a sceptical media intensified and Labour sacrificed progressive values like liberty, equality and fraternity rather than take on the searing scorn of a right-wing press. A command and control regime was instilled across all Whitehall departments right down to the local delivery of key public services such as education and health. Targets became sacrosanct and, despite devolution of power to the nations, local authorities were further undermined, bypassed and castigated. Like all army generals, they were guilty of fighting the previous war, doing in the late 1990s what they felt should have been done in the late 1970s. All of this was bound up with the most dispiriting issue of all, the fact that if you had asked any senior Labour politician what the goal of a first term in office was, the honest answer of most would have been 'a second term'. Through excessive electoral

pragmatism New Labour made a virtue of perceived necessity by elevating the desire for a second term into a principle. In so doing it denied opportunities to lay firmer foundations for a third or fourth term, the catalysts of a progressive century.

Instead of its fixation on short-termism, New Labour should have recognised that you can't cheat history for long. You have to do things properly or you get found out. That requires a theory of modern capitalism (and its failures), the state and democracy. By the autumn of 2000 New Labour was being found out. The fiasco that engulfed the Millennium Dome confirmed nationwide suspicion that Labour's modernisation-without-purpose was merely vacuous. A crisis over pensions identified the failure to make, let alone win, the redistributive case for tax-and-spend. The 'fuel protests' in the autumn of 2000 sent shock-waves throughout the political system for a government that looked out of touch. In three years, politics had returned to 'normal', with New Labour saved only by retaining the benefits of the electorate's doubt and the poverty of the Opposition it faced. This was a government, and in particular a leader, full of good intentions, but as John Major might have told us, 'fine words butter no parsnips'. With the Clinton era squandered in the US, the limits of a managerial approach to politics, on both sides of the Atlantic, were being heavily felt.

New democracy, new politics

What the social democrats had failed to learn and what liberals could teach them was that a purely mechanical reform has its limits. The statist tendency inherited from Old Labour is a conservative creed. It is akin to the Tory faith in a natural order and in settled hierarchies. Within Labour's modernising ranks there were two competing views of how a progressive century could be realised. The still dominant position around the Cabinet table was that an inclusive new Labour Party could be the home for all anti-Tory progressives. We don't believe this is the case. If the shift to a new politics is to be made, the DNA of labourism needs an infusion of diversity and pluralism that comes, not from merely absorbing (and suffocating) diverse political strands, but from co-operating with others outside the confines of the party and drawing strength from difference.

A modern and progressive nation will thrive only on the basis of real inclusion, autonomy and empowerment. As Charles Kennedy

wrote in *The Future of Politics*, 'the challenge is to build a truly civic Britain, where power has been devolved, where people no longer expect changes to come slowly and inefficiently from Westminster, but have power within their own communities and exercise it themselves'.²

Yet New Labour made a pact with the forces of conservatism over the implementation of public service change. They knew that in education and health in particular they had to deliver a step-change in public services and decided this could only be done quickly through greater centralisation. This may work, but only in some areas and only for a while. Only local empowerment, participation and autonomy will really transform the way in which our health service operates. Political, social and economic systems are just too complex to be 'run' from an all-knowing, all-powerful centre. By the end of Labour's first administration in almost two decades, it was becoming clear that instead of active modernisation, we were seeing passive managerialism that neither worked sufficiently nor inspired the institutions and agents for change.

Most frustrating is the fact that the mind-set of single-party hegemony now fails to win even on its own terms. New Labour sat on a 178-seat majority after 1997; king of its parliamentary castle, but unable to deflect the tides of globalism and populism that swept against it. Power is now diffuse. It resides in the media, with consumers and pressure groups. The genie has left the Westminster bottle and swirls around in new sites; in Brussels, in the regions, on the internet, on the talk shows and down the mobile phone. Parliamentary majorities of any size are worthless unless they are energised and endorsed by the legitimacy of public accountability. But democracy without ideology becomes a meaningless choice. If political institutions refuse to reflect the real choices and interests of society then it is no surprise that they are increasingly ignored or bypassed. Indeed, the growth of rootless opportunist politics outside of Westminster is reinforced by the way in which politicians behave.

The world we live in has an increasingly complex social order that is multilayered and multifaceted. In this dense web of identities, cultures and habits, getting things done means winning and renewing the consent of the electorate. Failure to do this will create in Britain an American-style politics where comfortable conservatives dominate and the disadvantaged opt out. More money will be spent on negative

politics to encourage fewer and fewer to vote. Progressive politics is ultimately about empowerment; it is about helping people to help themselves. The clever approach is to go with the grain, to make people want what you want – not to use the mechanical might of the state to force people against their will. The simple fable of the bet between the sun and the wind over who could get the coat off a man explains it best. The wind blew and blew and tried to force the coat off, but all the man did was to button his coat up tighter. The sun then beamed down, and with the rising temperature the man took his coat off.

Progressive politics is about letting go and allowing people to make their own decisions. There is a risk that people will make the wrong decisions, but the biggest risk lies in thinking that the centralised state can do it all. To cite one example: has the sky fallen in because the Scottish Lib-Lab coalition has abolished university tuition fees? To give another, surely it would have been far better to allow a national debate on the conclusions of the Jenkins Commission on electoral reform than keep it to a few senior figures in both Labour and the Liberal Democrats? There are few more important debates than how we elect our parliamentary representatives. This debate should not have been ‘managed’ and shelved, it should have been encouraged.

The process of politics must be about interpretation, negotiation, empowerment, autonomy, risk, mutualism and tolerance. The process is as political as the policy. Pluralism is not the easy answer; it is the most difficult. But it is the right answer. It is about leading and having a vision but also having the confidence for that vision to be tested and negotiated. Pluralism makes delivery possible. But it also builds moral legitimacy and support for a set of progressive values and outcomes. If it is ‘their’ political system, not ‘ours’, and ‘their’ public services, not ‘ours’, then the electorate is much more likely to abandon the institutions of social solidarity when the going gets tough during an economic downturn. This means going beyond the instrumental value of collective action towards an understanding that there is an intrinsic value in solidaristic activity. We are social animals, able to understand ourselves only through our interaction with each other. Without institutions and mechanisms to mediate our need to socialise, we deny a key facet of our identity.

Even within the progressive camp there is much to debate. We should welcome the ongoing tension between equality and liberty,

solidarity and diversity, and efficiency and empowerment. To negotiate these and other debates the revival and reform of Parliament is crucial, but so too is that of local government. At the same time, the media, civil society and the opportunities presented by the dot.com age for democratic dialogue need to be recognised and encouraged as spaces for engagement, debate and interaction.

A progressive agenda

The contours of a progressive politics are rough but ready. David Marquand sketched them out in his insightful *Progressive Dilemma*³ and they are themes that have run through the pages of *Renewal* and *Reformer*, in the work of the IPPR, the Fabians, Demos and the Centre for Reform as well as the speeches of leading progressive politicians and commentators:

1. Its economic goal is egalitarian and therefore essentially social democratic.
2. The means of achieving it are politically pluralist and therefore essentially liberal.
3. Its instincts are socially liberal and anti-establishment.
4. It is for capitalism but recognises the collective constraints necessary on powerful corporate interests – as such, there is a broad acceptance of the stakeholder model.
5. It has learnt the value of political professionalism from the US Democrats, but its heart and future lie with the political and moral economy of Europe.

Blair and New Labour have the propensity to embrace or reject all these key facets of a progressive reform agenda not short on priorities. They include embedding democratic reform; winning the case for redistributive tax-and-spend policies; building support for Europe; reforming welfare; making the case for sustainability, and being passionate about the need for women and people from ethnic minorities to play a greater role in the running of Britain. But while the theory and policy of progressivism is crucial, so too is the practice. The Conservatives created their own hegemony. They shaped the political contours of Britain through a series of political values, rewards and institutions. The centre-left has always been too timid

and too reactive, trying to fit its values to the world rather than the world to its values. As this was always an essentially capitalistic world then the grounds for meaningful reform were always limited. There now needs to be some sense of what constitutes progressive institutions. This should be centred above all on the role of civil society as the space between the market, the state and the family where individuals can create their own opportunities for empowerment. There also need to be progressive agents for change that act as outriders for a new social order, prefiguring the politics and practice of a radical century. They should be encouraged and facilitated in civic institutions, progressive business, and the third sector as well as the mutual and co-operative movements.

The goal of a progressive century starts in the here and now. It begins with the realisation that 'conservatives' are not just found in the Conservative Party. They lurk in Labour's undergrowth, eager to fix their way to power. They can be found, too, among Liberal Democrats, vainly rejecting power and the compromises necessary to achieve it. The Pavlovian response of those unable to see beyond tomorrow's headlines or who are suspicious of the new politics is to distract the debate from why to how. They ask, 'Do you mean a pact, a deal or a merger?' This misses the point. Form follows function. The crucial issue and the real political point is a discussion on function – the creation of a philosophy of governance that is progressive and enduring. What form it takes can only be a question of secondary order.

The options on political form are as wide as our imagination. At this point in our political history we need to be the champions of 'co-opetition', a mixture of co-operation and competition. In areas where Labour and the Liberal Democrats agree they should co-operate, even if this goes beyond Europe and constitutional reform. But where Labour and the Liberal Democrats disagree, that should be equally clear. Of course, this does not fit the old Westminster model – and nor should it, because that is the mould we need to break. But, by definition, the sweep of agreement must be pluralist, empowering and decentralised. We have talked in the past not of one 'big tent' for progressives, but of a 'camp site' where values are shared and defined but where there is space for constructive differences to be aired. What is important is that the desire for a progressive century is not driven by

political arithmetic or jobs for the boys (although more jobs for the girls would be a welcome part of a more progressive politics).

Where do we go from here?

The journey to a new politics will only be possible if we challenge some of the key assumptions that underpin British politics. The adversarial nature of our Parliament must go, and along with it the short-term pragmatism it inspires. Here we get to that old chestnut of fair votes and electoral reform. If we put aside the fact that 'first past the post' (FPTP) has been the mechanism that delivered a Conservative century, the real issue is moral. The debate about electoral reform speaks volumes for a moral as opposed to a mechanical view of politics. Electoral systems are too often seen as a zero sum game between effectiveness and fairness. More of one means less of the other. But a system that lacks legitimacy increasingly cannot function efficiently as its power is usurped and bypassed. Politics is ultimately about different concepts of morality and, for liberal and social democrats, ends often cannot justify means. If we live by a rigged and unjust system then it will be rigged and unjust to us. If we proclaim a mandate in 1997 for Blair, how could we deny one for Major in 1992 or Thatcher in 1987 or Heath in 1970? In the meantime the rotten core of the system infects the rest of the body politic. It turns people off. Why vote when your vote doesn't count? Why shout if no one is listening? If you're a woman or black, then what do rows of white men indicate to you? Disillusionment and cynicism are the corrosive forces that are slowly draining the life out of 'democracy'. The way we cast our votes for representation at Westminster is not the only reason for the cynical turn-off from politics but it is a crucial cog in the wheel. As turnouts continue to decline we should recognise that the problem is with our democracy and not with the people.

For progressives, the problems of FPTP are made worse by its distorting effect. As things stand, the wants, hopes and dreams of a few mainly middle-class people in a few mainly Middle England seats outweigh the wants, hopes and dreams of millions of people in hundreds of seats across the whole of the country. The fact that general elections are now decided by swing votes in swing seats by around 100 000 people brings into question the very term 'general'.

A pledge to hold a referendum on electoral reform, just like a vote on the euro, is a vital staging post for progressives. The embrace of electoral reform and the acceptance of Europe as our ideological home will help make or break the prospects for a progressive century. It is therefore inconceivable for the referendums on the euro and electoral reform to be prolonged beyond the next Parliament. The government and wider progressive forces need to make the weather on these key issues – not just float on populist tides.

Party reform

The strongest objections in Labour's ranks, not just to greater collaboration with the Liberal Democrats but more importantly to an embrace of pluralism, comes from both the old right and, ironically, the traditionalist left. The old right epitomises the doomed politics of command and control and is the natural opponent of a liberal and pluralist approach to political process. But the animosity of the traditional left is harder to fathom given the Liberal Democrats' essentially radical policies on tax, civil liberties, public services and the environment. And yet what we know is that views among Labour and Liberal Democrat rank and file members towards each other are far from cold. Consider the work of Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd from Sheffield University, who set out to measure party members' affiliation to left–right ideological views. Scoring interviewees along a nine-point scale where 0 is extreme left and 9 extreme right, the two researchers found the mean score for Labour members was 3.5 and that for Liberal Democrats was 4.1. This contrasted with a mean score for the Conservatives of 6.7.

The fact that members share basic values is one reason why both parties should address the issue of internal reform, to allow such ideological proximity to find expression. While in opposition, Blair staked his claim as the leading moderniser through his tough stance on 'one member one vote', but in government he has allowed the party fixers and block votes to win elections against the wider views of the party in London and Wales. The Liberal Democrats need to ensure that the wider membership is involved in key policy decisions and internal elections. Charles Kennedy was brave to raise this early in his leadership. He should not allow the voices that argue for an activist 'democracy' to prevail. Such reforms are not only right in

themselves but they reduce the impact of tribalists on the culture of our parties and open the way for progressive advance.

From the Liberal Democrat standpoint, 1997 was the best Liberal result since Lloyd George. It was bolstered by the Ashdown move away from 'equidistance' to explicitly support Labour over the Conservatives. This was the message of his Chard speech in 1992 when he said that the Liberal Democrats 'must be less exclusive in our approach to politics ... more inclusive to others'. Those voices in the Liberal Democrats who call for a return to equidistance and the ending of any co-operation with New Labour should be clear who would benefit – Hague, Portillo and Widdecombe. An all-out war between Liberal Democrats and Labour would most put at risk the very seats that Liberal Democrats won in 1997 and hope to win again. While such fighting talk may go down well with some party activists, the great causes that the Liberal Democrats desire – electoral reform and euro entry – would be put off for a further generation if the Conservatives reclaim their traditional place in government. Indeed, even a modest Conservative recovery could delay for another four or five years the referendums on electoral reform and the euro. Tactical voting and the bounty of seats it brings has made its mark. It is not unimportant in the grand scheme of things that almost half the Liberal Democrats' seats at the 1997 election and one in seven of Labour's were won on the spoils of tactical votes. At the next election, if the tactical vote fails to materialise, Labour's majority could be cut to 60 even if the Tories fail to get one extra vote.

A time to dream again

Against the many obstacles outlined above, the call for a progressive century is a tall order. But the time is ripe for tall orders. Free from the constraints of guilt by association with communism and the electoral domination of neo-liberalism, the centre-left can dream and be inspired again. Labour needs to step out of the shadows of its own failures and the political trauma of Thatcherism. Liberals need to move beyond old glories. Meaningful political advance requires sacrifice, but sacrifices are made for crusades not managerialism. The far-reaching benefits of proactive collaborative and pluralist politics are there for all to see. We are demonstrably made stronger when the strands of progressivism come together. Think of the early part of the

last century when the Liberal government, encouraged and supported by the new Labour Party, reformed trade union law and began to look after the disadvantaged. Think of Labour's post-war construction of the welfare state, inspired by the Liberal minds of Keynes and Beveridge. We do not pretend that there aren't substantial differences between social democracy and liberalism. But those differences are both bridgeable and pale into insignificance against the values and threat of the right.

One of us sees himself as a new social democratic, forging a link between the goal of a more equal society but achieved through the new politics: the heart of Roy Hattersley and the head of Charter 88, if you like. The other is looking for the rebirth of the New Liberalism that threatened hegemonic rule in the early part of the last century but was thwarted by the division of the radicals as the Labour power base grew. Although we stand under different banners, we believe in virtually the same things. We are not alone in recognising the potential of finally mending the false division among progressive radicals. Tony Blair is fully aware of what can still be achieved:

When it was formed, out of the dissent from the Liberal Party ... the Labour Party suffered as a result. It was narrower in its base, it was more doctrinaire in its views, and it lost an essential Liberal strand of radical thought. And the truth of the matter is that people like myself in the Labour party today and people like Charles Kennedy and the Liberal Democrats, we are basically driven by the same value systems. There may be differences of policy but that's almost the accident of being inside different political parties than some great division of ideas. So I think it's important that we move closer together. I've never given up on that goal.⁴

Charles Kennedy, in his speech to his party conference in September 2000, said the Liberal Democrats were not to the left of Labour, not to the right of Labour, but ahead of New Labour. This suggests that he believes that the two parties are on the same kind of trajectory. Indeed, he has made clear a number of times that 'Labour is the competition and the Tories are the enemy', while emphasising that he and Tony Blair can do business together. But, as we have stated from the outset, the attitude of leaders is a necessary but insuf-

ficient ingredient of progressive success. It is behaviour that matters, and wider forces than the personal intent of leaders govern behaviour.

Labour reinvented itself to move from opposition to power. It now needs to reinvent itself again and accept that a progressive century cannot be built inside an inclusive New Labour tent. Liberal Democrats have to accept that the constructive part of 'constructive opposition' is as important as the opposition part.

Philip Gould, in his post-election analysis of the march of the modernisers, recognised that in 1997 New Labour had won an election, not a century.⁵ Now that historic rupture with Labour's radical stablemate has to be mended. We refuse to be constrained by the intellectual and political limitations imposed on us by a century-old rift of progressive forces. We are both deeply rooted in our respective parties but our attachment to a set of values and goals, which transcend party loyalty, go much deeper and are much stronger.

We do not yet live in a progressive land. People are still tired of the Tories but they are already growing tired of New Labour. The case for a progressive politics has not yet been put. It won't just happen. We live in a country that can face both ways – conservative or progressive. Centre-left politicians need to be confident that they can appeal to the progressive side of the nation rather than timidly ameliorate the conservative tendencies. The challenge in politics is to strike the right balance between power and principle. A coalition of radical forces allows the balance to be struck for a popular and progressive politics. It is time to have faith in the people and believe that given a meaningful choice they will opt for a progressive over a conservative path.

This book is an attempt to bring together some of the important strands of progressive thinking. It does not attempt to cover all the policy bases. It is structured into four parts. Part 1 analyses the philosophical foundation of 'liberal socialism', the historic and contemporary relations between Labour and the Liberals, the lessons from abroad about collaboration and the state of the electorate. Part 2 examines the structures, institutions and culture necessary for progressive politics to flower. Parliament, the reforms in Scotland, local government, the wider constitution, the third sector and the sociological foundation of pluralistic politics are all scrutinised. Part 3 looks at policy. From the economy to welfare reform, from global-

isation and the environment, to health and family policy the central themes of progressive politics are examined. The final part of the book consists of a roundtable discussion in which a group of commentators, thinkers and politicians committed to progressive politics outline what they consider to be the key issues before us.

There are tough words in this book for our colleagues on both Labour and Liberal Democrat benches. But we hope the emphasis is on constructive criticism. For the reality is that without a new politics, the next most likely shift of power will be to a Conservative majority. We do not want to see another period of Conservative rule before members of both parties agree to learn the lessons of the historic failures of progressives. Now is the time for a truce in the hundred-year war between progressives, with the combined fire turned on the real enemy – the forces of conservatism.

Notes

1. See in particular Andrew Rawnsley's *Servants of the People*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000; and Sir Paddy Ashdown's first volume of diaries, *The Ashdown Diaries, Volume One, 1988–1997*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 2000.
2. Charles Kennedy, *The Future of Politics*, London: HarperCollins, 2000.
3. David Marquand, *The Progressive Dilemma: From Lloyd George to Blair*, (2nd edition), London: Phoenix, 1999.
4. Quoted in the *Guardian*, 23 May 2000, and taken from the unpublished parts of an interview with Robert Harris which appeared in the US in *Talk Magazine* in early 2000.
5. Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, London: Little Brown, 1998.

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