

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has addressed at least four of the five gaps in the existing literature on the British Left and European integration that were identified in Chapter 2. First, unlike previous studies it has analysed the European policies of a whole range of left-wing institutions, many for the first time. Second, unlike previous studies it focused on the post-war period as a whole. This more holistic approach enabled the thesis to survey the diversity that is the British Left, rather than using the Labour Party or the TUC as proxies for the British Left as previous work has done. This approach allowed the thesis to identify patterns over a long- rather than just short-term time horizon. Third, its attention to historical materialism incorporated a class-based analysis frequently lacking in the existing literature. Fourth, its adoption of the Coxian approach permitted the thesis to analyse the European policies of the British Left with reference to the social forces engendered by the production process within the changing structure of the world order. As such, it provided a coherent and integrated analytical framework, incorporating the institutional, discursive and political economy dimensions of policy formation and policy change.

Employing the method of historical structures expedited the testing of the four hypotheses set out in Chapter 1. It specifically facilitated an analysis of both how *and* why the European policies of the British Left changed over the 1945 to 2004 period. Using the Coxian approach, the thesis was able to synthesise the discursive, institutional and political economy dimensions of the British Left's policy-making on the EU, and so account for the changes in European policies over this period. Furthermore, its attention to dialectics, identifying both the dominant and dissenting forces, explained why the 'nationalisation' and Europeanisation processes, in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, were far from complete.

While the British Left can agree on a whole range of issues – equality and human rights, anti-imperialism, anti-militarism, social policy, trade unionism, public ownership, defence of the welfare state, workers' rights, etc. – the issue of European integration has, historically, divided the British Left. This begs the fundamental question: why? Two interrelated answers, one more abstract and the other more practical, can be advanced to explain this conundrum. The former concerns the agency-structure debate, whilst the latter refers to the changing structure of the world order, specifically the question of whether to pursue a national or a European strategy to achieve socialist objectives.

The thesis found that the British Left, taken as a whole, generally supported European integration in the early post-war period, opposed it from the 1960s until the 1980s, and supported it again following the end of the Cold War. As Chapter 10 demonstrated, these changes were due to fundamental changes in the structure of the world order, particularly the perceived and actual ability of the nation-state to advance socialism.

The British public, of which the left is obviously a part, is divided on the issue of European integration. A Foreign Office memorandum in 2005 discussed the public's attitude towards the EU. People feel that the EU is 'too distant to have any relevance to their everyday lives', and 'people forget that the European Parliament even exists. Changing this cultural attitude will take decades.' It stated that 'British people, particularly the English, do not feel European or a part of Europe' and that 'support for EU membership is volatile and can easily become 'don't know' or negative' (quoted in Newman, 2005). Such concerns explain why pro-EU forces have, to date, repeatedly resorted to organising propaganda campaigns in an, arguably successful, attempt to shape public opinion on the EU. According to Tucker, one of the architects of these campaigns, 'the battle' for public opinion on the EU 'will never be over' (British Management Data Foundation, 2000). Such concerns also led the *Guardian* (2005) to publish an editorial stating that governments had 'a duty to keep on selling the EU's benefits to their doubting and apathetic people.'

European integration, or more precisely further European integration, looks set to remain a divisive issue for the British Left, in both the short and long term. The British Left is divided on the question of whether to adopt the euro and whether to ratify the European Constitution. In the short term it faces fundamental choices on these issues, as New Labour and the Conservatives have promised a referendum on both. While it seems likely that these polls will witness further pro-EU propaganda campaigns, there are a number of important differences between the balance of forces in the 1975 Referendum and the likely configuration of forces in future referenda. In the 1975 Referendum pro-EU forces were defending the status quo of continued membership. In the current period, however, they are seeking to change it, advocating ratification of the European Constitution and euro entry, both of which have significant constitutional, economic and political consequences. Furthermore, unlike in 1975, anti-EU forces have access to substantial financial resources, whilst the business sector, media, political parties and trade union movement are more evenly divided on the issue of the European Constitution and the euro. Nevertheless, there are similarities, not least that, as in 1975, pro-EU forces currently enjoy the backing of the government and the considerable power resources of the state.

In the longer term, division on the British Left about European integration looks set to persist, for three reasons. First, as the EU aggrandises more power over the British economy and policy-making process, the potential the conflict between Brussels and Westminster increases. This begs the question as to whether a future, socialist Labour government or a progressive coalition including the left would accept rulings from the EU that effectively undermined its programme? Second, if the EU continues in a neo-liberal direction – manifest in policies such as the Single Market, the euro and the recent liberalisation of services directive – a direction which the European Constitution seeks to encode, it is likely that left opposition to the EU will grow. Third, the British Left faces the question of what is the ultimate objective of the European integration process? Will the EU develop into a single European state, a federal United States of Europe, or some form of hybrid of these? Neither the British people, nor any of the publics on the continent, have been asked for their opinion on this fundamental matter. Benn argued that a federal United States of Europe, with a supreme parliament, senate and president, ‘could not be faulted on democratic grounds.’ However, ‘the problem is that it would be totally cumbersome.’ Furthermore, ‘the idea that the British people would accept a vote of an elected European Parliament that might be a hung parliament, on the basis of the vote of the Albanian Greens is too remote.’<sup>1</sup> Likewise, whether the British Left would accept such an eventuality is also doubtful. What is clear, however, is that the British Left has been, and remains, divided on the issue of European integration.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Tony Benn, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.