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**Responses to the new right: the engagement of the  
British left with the work of Friedrich Hayek, 1989-  
1997**

**London School of Economics and Political Science  
Submitted for a Doctorate in Philosophy**

In line with University of London requirements, I certify that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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21 August 2006

## ***Abstract***

This is an examination of the context, content and significance of the surprising engagement of the British left with the arguments of Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), one of the most influential theorists of the new right and an important influence on leading figures in the Conservative Government elected in the UK in 1979. The thesis examines in detail the engagement by four thinkers on the British left with Hayek's work: David Miller, Raymond Plant, Andrew Gamble and Hilary Wainwright. Its chronological parameters are the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the election of 'New Labour' in the UK in 1997. Important contextual factors behind this engagement include the rise and fall of the British Conservative Party, the difficulties of statist forms of socialism and Hayek's own death. The engagement with Hayek's work provides a case study that demonstrates changes in political themes, in particular, the decline of statist forms of socialism with the left's embrace of the market and individual freedom, the decline in support for the paternalistic state and the search for more 'feasible' alternatives. I argue that the British left's engagement with Hayek is part of a wider intellectual break that constitutes the end of a 'short twentieth century' in political thought, and that the political landscape is now dominated by two strands of the liberal tradition. As such, the research will be of importance to anyone seeking a clearer understanding of recent changes in political thought and to the shape of the contemporary political landscape.

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would particularly like to thank my supervisor, Rodney Barker, both as a source of intellectual inspiration and for his unfailing and good-humoured support. John Gray, who advised on this thesis, also provided a valuable and enthusiastic source of advice. In addition, Tony Giddens taught me a great deal whilst carrying out research for him in the early stages of this project. Kevin Hickson and Matt Beech were kind enough to comment on an earlier draft of this thesis. My friends and family have also been a great source of support. I would like to thank Louise Thomas (above all), as well as Susan and Peter Griffiths and several friends who have picked up, read, and scrawled comments upon, various bits of the thesis along the way. Errors and omissions remain my own.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the ESRC for a studentship (PTA-030-2003-00029) which made the completion of this thesis possible. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to incorporate the following previously published material:

- 'Review of Hilary Wainwright, Reclaim the State', *Renewal*, 11 (4), 2003, pp. 89-91
- 'Market socialism in retrospect', *Contemporary Politics*, 12 (1), March 2006, <<http://www.tandf.co.uk>>, pp.25-44

## **Contents**

Chapter 1 - Introduction: engaging with Hayek.....	12
Chapter 2 - David Miller: the discovery of the market .....	77
Chapter 3 - Raymond Plant: Hayek's challenge .....	124
Chapter 4 - Hilary Wainwright: the reassertion of pluralism.....	169
Chapter 5 - Andrew Gamble: the liberal end to the century .....	218
Chapter 6 - Conclusions: responses to the new right .....	259
Bibliography.....	311

## **Detailed contents**

<i>Abstract</i> .....	3
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	4
<i>Contents</i> .....	5
<i>Detailed contents</i> .....	6
<i>Figures</i> .....	11
Chapter 1 - Introduction: engaging with Hayek.....	12
<i>I. Limits, locations and definitions</i> .....	15
Political thought after the ‘short twentieth century’ .....	15
Engaging with an argument.....	18
Locating the engagement .....	21
<i>II. Categorising political thought</i> .....	24
The left-right distinction.....	26
Changing political themes .....	35
<i>III. Hayek and the left</i> .....	42
Vienna, revolution and war-time London .....	44
Fame and controversy: responses to <i>The Road to Serfdom</i> .....	47
‘A magnificent dinosaur’: the post-war consensus .....	58
Iconic status and the rise of the new right.....	61
‘1989 And All That’ .....	64
‘A zone of engagement’ .....	67

Chapter 2 - David Miller: the discovery of the market .....	77
<i>I. State socialism, the new right and political theory</i> .....	81
The limits of statist socialism.....	82
The resurgence of political theory and the rise of the new right .....	90
<i>II. The revival of market socialism</i> .....	94
Earlier accounts .....	95
Miller's market socialism.....	97
Tentative engagements with Hayek's work .....	102
<i>III. The significance of the revival</i> .....	106
Market freedom and its ramifications .....	108
The return of radical pluralism.....	110
Markets and community .....	111
'Feasible' socialism.....	114
<i>Conclusions: the fall of market socialism and the corrosion of old categories</i> .....	116
The fall of market socialism.....	116
The corrosion of old categories .....	121
Chapter 3 - Raymond Plant: Hayek's challenge .....	124
<i>I. From Hegel to Hayek</i> .....	129
<i>II. The arguments of Hayek and the new right</i> .....	131
Negative conceptions of justice and freedom .....	133
Value pluralism and 'the mirage of social justice' .....	137
Hayek's epistemic argument .....	139

<i>III. Plant's engagement with Hayek's work</i> .....	146
Positive conceptions of justice and liberty.....	146
Social justice in a pluralist society.....	151
The epistemic argument and socialist planning.....	157
<i>IV. Influences on and significance of Plant's argument</i> .....	159
The reassertion of revisionist socialism: Crosland and Rawls.....	160
Christian socialism and new liberalism.....	162
<i>Conclusions: the closeness between new liberalism and revisionist socialism</i>	165
Chapter 4 - Hilary Wainwright: the reassertion of pluralism.....	169
<i>I. Discovering Hayek</i> .....	171
Preludes to Wainwright's engagement.....	171
The new right in Eastern Europe.....	176
<i>II. Grounding the Argument</i> .....	180
'Social' knowledge.....	181
Against the 'all-knowing state'.....	187
From tacit social knowledge to social movements.....	190
Responses to Wainwright.....	192
<i>III. Hayek and the revival of pluralism</i> .....	198
Against the paternalist state.....	198
From class to movements.....	201
The return of the 'small battalions'.....	205
The end of socialism?.....	213

<i>Conclusions: pluralist responses to Hayek</i> .....	216
Chapter 5 - Andrew Gamble: the liberal end to the century .....	218
<i>I. From Marx to the market</i> .....	219
The 1970s: ‘The crisis of capitalism’, the landslide beings .....	220
The 1980s: ‘The hegemony of Thatcherism’ .....	224
The 1990s: ‘Two sides to Hayek’ .....	226
<i>II. Engaging with Hayek on liberal terrain</i> .....	229
The limits of knowledge.....	230
Markets and entrepreneurs .....	234
The role of government and organisations .....	238
<i>III. Limits to the engagement with Hayek and the defence of new liberalism</i> ...	242
‘The iron cage of liberty’?.....	243
<i>Contra</i> Hayek: positive liberty and equality .....	249
<i>Conclusions: the revival of new liberalism</i> .....	254
Chapter 6 - Conclusions: responses to the new right .....	259
<i>I. The British left and Hayek</i> .....	260
David Miller .....	260
Raymond Plant .....	264
Hilary Wainwright.....	266
Andrew Gamble .....	268
<i>II. Contextual change and the discovery of Hayek</i> .....	269
Two responses to Hayek .....	269

Context and intellectual change .....	271
‘The importance of enemies’ .....	276
Globalisation and the end of a <i>British</i> left.....	279
<i>III. The fall of state socialism</i> .....	281
The market, individual freedom and socialism.....	282
The decline of state paternalism.....	288
The search for ‘feasible’ alternatives .....	295
<i>IV. The liberalisation of political thought</i> .....	298
The dominance of liberalism.....	299
The survival of ‘social democracy’? .....	302
The reconstitution of the left-right axis .....	304
<i>Conclusions: The dominance of liberalism and the end of the short twentieth century</i> .....	308
Bibliography .....	311

## **Figures**

Figure 1: Pages from <i>The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons</i> (Hayek, c.1950) .....	49
Figure 2: The rise and fall of market socialism.....	118
Figure 3: Classifying pluralist thought.....	211
Figure 4: The right-leaning trapezium: thematic map of British political thought during the short twentieth century.....	308

## Chapter 1 - Introduction: engaging with Hayek

Hayek has much to contribute to the renewal of the socialist project.

(Gamble, 1996e 192)

Andrew Gamble's claim seems an odd one. Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) dedicated most of his long, adult life to fighting socialism and was an important influence on the right, particularly on senior figures in the British Conservative Party. Margaret Thatcher praised the 'powerful critique of socialist planning and the socialist state' (Thatcher, 1995 50) found in Hayek's book, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). Brandishing a copy of his *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), Thatcher once told an audience, 'This is what we believe' (Cassidy, 2000). Yet, paradoxically, throughout his academic career, Gamble would have described himself, and be seen by others, as on the left of British politics, a socialist, who was firmly opposed to Hayek's conclusions.

Despite Hayek's status as an intellectual enemy, Gamble's attempt to claim elements of his work for the left was not unique. Hilary Wainwright, best known as editor of the radical, left-wing magazine, *Red Pepper*, argued that, 'Reading Hayek' should 'contribute to new foundations for the left' (Wainwright, 1994 5).

In fact, from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s several authors produced left-wing reinterpretations of arguments most obviously derived from Hayek.

This thesis is an account of how and why some members of the British left began to 'engage' with Hayek's arguments, and the significance of this engagement, in the years between 1989 and 1997. For some thinkers on the left this engagement with Hayek was limited to a tentative discussion of arguments that were closely associated with him, with only passing mention, if any, of Hayek himself; for others, the engagement was more wholehearted. Four thinkers who have engaged to varying extents with Hayek's work are examined in detail in this study: David Miller, Raymond Plant, Hilary Wainwright, and Andrew Gamble.

This is a study, therefore, in the very recent history of political thought. There is only limited discussion of the coherence of the left's engagement with Hayek or its normative relevance, and then only insofar as these reveal assumptions that illuminate the main research questions. Instead, the thesis sets out to do several related things. First, it seeks to contextualise the engagement between the British left and Hayek. There was, for example, little interest in Hayek's work by the British left until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the electoral success of the British Conservative Party after 1979, influenced in some measure by Hayek's thought, led many on the left to re-evaluate their own ideas. This thesis examines the changing contexts, explicit

and implicit, material and intellectual, which provided the conditions under which an intellectual engagement with a former enemy could occur.

Second, the thesis compares the engagement of the British left with earlier left-wing, and particularly socialist, argument in the UK, and examines the continuities and discontinuities between the old and newer arguments. This raises the question of whether it is still useful to describe the kind of arguments made by the thinkers whose work is examined in the main body of this text as distinctively 'left' or 'socialist' in the way in which those terms were formerly used, or whether there was a substantial discontinuity in overall shape and structuring of political argument around this period.

Third, the thesis examines how the British left's engagement with Hayek reflected wider changes in the political landscape at the end of the twentieth century. If the thinkers examined in this thesis are not a unique anomaly but provide a wider case study of changes taking place how should these changes be viewed? More generally, it is asked whether the conventional classification of the political landscape (into socialist, liberal and conservative camps along a left to right axis with other themes such as environmentalism, feminism and pluralism less easy to place) is still the best one to classify political thought at the end of the century. If the answer to this question is 'no', then what categorisation would better replace it?

In this introductory chapter I clarify and limit the aims of this thesis, and provide some of the historical background for the wider study. The first section, therefore, contains a discussion of the parameters of the project and a brief account of some of the assumptions about political thought made in it. The final section of this chapter contains a brief historical overview of Hayek's life, his main arguments and the changing reception given to his work, particularly by the left.

### ***1. Limits, locations and definitions***

The title of this thesis limits the project in various ways that raise questions and demand justification. Why focus on the years between 1989 and 1997? What is meant by the term 'engagement'? And at what level and where was this engagement conducted? It is to these questions that I turn in this section.

#### **Political thought after the 'short twentieth century'**

The chronological parameters chosen for this thesis are 1989 and 1997. The study commences in 1989 - a year marked by the collapse of state socialist governments in Eastern Europe, symbolised in the destruction of the Berlin Wall in November. The writings of the four thinkers examined in detail in this thesis are, to different

extents and in different ways, attempts to redefine the left in response to the collapse of Soviet Communism.

The historian, Eric Hobsbawm, identified a ‘short twentieth century’ which ran from 1914 to 1991 (Hobsbawm, 1994). Hobsbawm’s assertion sparked a wider debate over the extent to which the collapse of the Soviet Union marked an end, not just to a distinct historical period, but of a unique intellectual one as well (Hobsbawm, 1992; Mann, 1995; Therborn, 1995; Barker, 1996b). An examination of the engagement of the British left with Hayek is another way of entering this debate. If there is a substantial discontinuity between the arguments set out by the main thinkers discussed in this thesis and earlier left-wing argument, and this is reflected in wider changes to the political landscape after 1989, then the description of a ‘short twentieth century in political thought’<sup>1</sup> could be a useful way of describing this distinct period.

In testing the idea of a short twentieth century in political thought, I differ slightly in this thesis from Hobsbawm’s original periodisation. For Hobsbawm the ‘short

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term ‘short twentieth century in political thought’ as a more specific term than ‘short intellectual twentieth century’ which implies that it encompasses a much wider intellectual landscape, including scientific and cultural thought. (It also avoids the unhelpful image of a short intellectual!)

century' ended in 1991. However, he admits that 'I chose that date for reasons of expediency' (Hobsbawm, 2000 2) and that 'singling out a particular date is a convention and not something that historians are ready to fight for' (Hobsbawm, 2000 3). Whilst Hobsbawm chose the final dissolution of the Soviet Union to mark the end of the century, I chose 1989. This year marked the beginning of the immediate process that led to the end of the USSR. As such, the choice of 1989 seems at least as appropriate a date as 1991 for the 'short twentieth century' to end (Barker, 1996b 3). Just as Hobsbawm's selection of 1991 was partly expedient, so was the choice of 1989 in this thesis: it was a year that saw a cluster of works by authors on the British left which engaged with Hayek's arguments, and to accept Hobsbawm's exact periodisation would exclude them. On the substantive issue, this thesis follows Hobsbawm in identifying the collapse of the USSR as central to the end of the short twentieth century (Hobsbawm, 1994 5).

The end date for this study is just eight years later in 1997. The British general election of that year saw the election of 'New Labour' and the end of over seventeen years' rule by a Conservative Government that had been influenced, to some considerable degree, by Hayek's thought. All of the thinkers examined in the body of this thesis were hostile to the Conservative Party during the period examined. The British two-party system means that these thinkers were all, to varying extents and manners, *for* the Labour Party as the only significant party of opposition. By the time that the Labour Party was elected to government in 1997 it

had undergone a period of massive transformation. This transformation occurred partly as a response to the debates and contributions made by the thinkers discussed in this thesis (although not in ways that they would all have been supportive). As such, the end of the long period of Conservative dominance of the British electoral system and the election of a Labour Government marks a suitable finishing point.

### **Engaging with an argument**

The term ‘engagement’ in the title of this thesis needs some explanation. In what sense do the main authors discussed here ‘engage’ with their subject? Perhaps the most common use of the abstract noun, ‘engagement’ and the verb, ‘to engage’ in everyday language is matrimonial. This definition can be seen in the etymology of the term in Old French, as *en gage* or to be ‘under pledge’, first recorded in the fifteenth century. The specific sense of a pledge to marry was not recorded until the eighteenth century (Online Etymology Dictionary, nd). Engagement in this sense is always ‘engagement’ or ‘a pledge’ *to* someone and it is not particularly helpful in understanding what is meant by the term in this thesis. In fact, it has largely been a hindrance, hinting at marriage between Hayek and other writers!

A more useful account of the term is derived from Perry Anderson’s *A Zone of Engagement* (Perry Anderson, 1992). It is his usage that I draw upon when

fleshing out my own understanding of the term below. Several uses of the term ‘engage’ or its derivations provide necessary, but not sufficient, criteria for my inclusion in this thesis. A first use of the verb, ‘to engage’, means nothing more than ‘to deal with especially at length’ (Merriam-Webster, nd), and this sense certainly applies as a necessary criterion. However, although this meaning provides a useful starting point, on its own it is insufficient. The authors on the British left discussed in the following chapters were more committed to their subject than simply ‘dealing with’ his work.

A second, more demanding, use of the verb is, ‘to hold the attention of’ (Merriam-Webster, nd), as with the phrase ‘his work *engages* her completely’.<sup>2</sup> This definition is helpful in that all the thinkers examined in the central chapters of this thesis are committed to a ‘serious’ reading of Hayek. This in turn implies a degree of intellectual respect. Anderson’s account of ‘engagement’ relied partly on this definition. He noted (somewhat bombastically) that he ‘can be as hostile or dismissive – to the point of destruction – as anyone’ but that this does not constitute an engagement (Perry Anderson, 1992 ix). One of the most extended

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<sup>2</sup> This meaning developed into the use of the term that emerged in French existential thought in the 1940s, particularly in the work of Sartre, and which, by the 1950s, was imported untranslated into English as *engagé* – that is, to be ‘committed’, or ‘completely involved in political, moral or social questions’ (Ayto, 1999 273).

treatments of Hayek's thought from the left, Herman Finer's *Road to Reaction* (Finer, 1945), stands out for its hostility towards Hayek's work. Finer's account (which is discussed in more detail below) did not constitute an 'engagement' in the sense understood in this thesis. The political economist, Jim Tomlinson, commented, for example, that Finer's book 'cannot be said to get to serious grips with Hayek's arguments' (Tomlinson, 1990 xii). For much of the post-war period, responses to Hayek's work from the left, when they did rarely occur, were characterised by dismissal or outright rejection. It is, therefore, a further necessary, but not sufficient, condition of 'engagement' in the sense understood here that there is the intellectual respect that comes from taking an argument seriously in its own right, rather than simply as a 'straw man' – a representative of a body of thought which is discussed only to be knocked down.

A third common everyday usage of the term is military: to engage with an enemy is to 'enter into conflict' with it. All of the thinkers I examine in detail are, to some degree, in conflict with Hayek's conclusions. Anderson's account of 'engagement' is again useful; he writes: 'The condition of a specific engagement ... has always been respect. But I also need to feel a significant dissent' (Perry Anderson, 1992 ix). A final necessary, but not sufficient, condition therefore, is that all the authors discussed in detail in this thesis at least started out occupying a position of 'significant dissent' towards Hayek's work. Once all of the necessary conditions outlined above are met, a sufficient condition for inclusion in this thesis is reached.

The main authors discussed here, therefore, ‘engage’ with Hayek’s work in at least three ways: they deal with his arguments at length; they are committed to a serious reading of Hayek; and, finally, they occupy a position of ‘significant dissent’ from him.

### **Locating the engagement**

Political thought is expressed in many forms and through many media, from books, to paintings, films, speeches and acts. Picasso’s *Guernica* and Emily Wilding Davison’s death (after throwing herself at the King’s racehorse at the 1913 Derby to raise awareness of suffrage rights) are both expressions of political thought, as much as more obvious cases, such as Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.<sup>3</sup> This raises the question of the location of the arguments discussed in this thesis. Although attempts have been made to classify political thought, ideas or ‘discourses’ into distinct categories according to criteria such as level of communication or abstractness (Chadwick, 1997; 2000) I argue that this project is fraught with

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Political thought’, as it is understood here, is therefore a much wider category than Vincent’s definition of ‘political theory’ as ‘a specialized *self-conscious disciplinary practice (or set of practices)*, which is largely the product of a twentieth century academized profession’ (author’s italics) (Vincent, 2004 319).

difficulties. This thesis is evidence that political thought does not fall tidily into categories. Philosophers write in newspapers with high circulations (Raymond Plant, whose work is discussed in Chapter 3, was a regular *Times* columnist, for example) and politicians and journalists often produce highly abstract, rarely read, pamphlets. Attempts to classify political discourses are not always helpful, and can place unnecessary methodological limits on the study of political ideas. Thus, no formal attempt to categorise or compartmentalise the work that forms the body of this thesis is made here.

It is sufficient, I argue, to point out that most of the work discussed in this thesis lies in what Barker has described as ‘the middle principles of politics, the ideas that lie midway between philosophy and the hustings’ (Barker, 1997 11). In the case of those authors who have engaged with Hayek, the study limits itself to the published written word, and tends to occupy a broad field which contains journalism (particularly in the case of Hilary Wainwright and Raymond Plant), articles in academic journals (the main product of Andrew Gamble and David Miller), and books and book chapters (which all the authors have published) aimed at groups from policy makers to students and activists. Political ideas often cohere around political parties, and most of the work examined in this thesis seems

particularly ‘sticky’.<sup>4</sup> (This is an idea I return to in the conclusion.) Just as Hayek’s work fed into the emerging new right from the late 1960s, and influenced increasing numbers in Conservative Party in subsequent decades, the authors discussed in this thesis were writing, at least in part, as a response to the electoral failure of Labour after 1979, and so their work is often aimed at developing a programme for the Party.

The location of the arguments is limited in another way: this is a study of the engagement of the *British* left with Hayek. Implicit in much of this thesis is the idea that political debate in the UK has a distinctly British flavour, just as the mix that makes up political debate in France or the US, for example, will also have a uniquely national flavour. This does not mean that many of the ingredients are not the same in different countries, whether they are contextual, like the Cold War, or they are provided by the work of individual thinkers, like Hayek. It just means that the resulting mix will have a local flavour. A question raised in the conclusion to this thesis is how much globalisation has made the final product increasingly similar around the world.

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<sup>4</sup> The metaphor that some information is ‘sticky’ is also used in a different way in the context of management studies by Eric von Hippel in his description of information which is difficult to acquire, transfer and use for problem solving (von Hippel, 1994).

Many of the key terms used in this thesis have now been discussed. The notable exceptions are those terms which are used to categorise political thought. The thesis is, after all, an examination of the response of ‘the left’ (whatever that means) to Hayek’s work. It is to this issue that I turn below.

## ***II. Categorising political thought***

There are two broad approaches in common usage for classifying political thought.<sup>5</sup> The first approach places thinkers, groups, movements or themes on a left-right axis. In the first part of this section I examine the origin and diffusion of these terms. The brief historical account of their spread makes clear how their meaning has become increasingly mutable over time, making any simple definition difficult. Because of their increasingly protean nature of the term I largely settle, as a starting point in this thesis, for the criterion of self-definition by the authors discussed; an approach which has both limitations and benefits.

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<sup>5</sup> Tip O’Neill argued that ‘all politics is local’ and he is, to some degree, right (O’Neill and Hymel, 1994). Although the two classificatory systems raised above have widespread use, they are by no means universally accepted, as I go on to argue.

The second system categorises political thought into political themes, such as socialism, liberalism or conservatism. Whilst the ‘isms’ just given fit fairly clearly on an axis running from left to right<sup>6</sup>, other themes, such as feminism or pluralism are harder to place. I tend to use the term ‘political themes’ or ‘arguments’ in this thesis to describe these ‘isms’, rather than the perhaps more common terms ‘ideologies’ or ‘concepts’. In doing so I follow Barker, who has argued that:

Ideology suggests either something normatively and descriptively comprehensive, or suspectly instrumental. ‘Concept’ suggests something precise, even academic, but lacking the penumbra of politics, rhetoric, policy, and the aversions and aspirations which characterizes the thinking described in this book. ‘Argument’ comes closest and is

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<sup>6</sup> Hayek noted the tension between these two systems. Discussing the three main political parties in the UK (which he conflated with socialism, liberalism and conservatism) Hayek suggested an alternative schema (and in doing so offered his diagnosis of the errors of the post-war Conservative Party): ‘They are usually represented as different positions on a line, with the socialists [i.e. Labour] on the left, the conservatives on the right, and the liberals somewhere in the middle. Nothing could be more misleading. If we want a diagram, it would be more appropriate to arrange them in a triangle with the conservatives occupying one corner, with the socialists pulling toward the second and the liberals toward the third. But, as the socialists have for a long time been able to pull harder, the conservatives have tended to follow the socialist rather than the liberal direction ...’ (Hayek, 1960 398).

frequently used. 'Themes' does best of all, however, for it suggests a cohering or unifying concern, form of argument, or intellectual predilection whose character is historical rather than logical, and which has a coherence which can be rhetorical or aesthetic, as much as logical.

(Barker, 1997 7)

This thesis raises questions about the terms used to describe the engagement with Hayek, how these terms change and whether they are still useful. As such, a basic position on what political themes are, and how they can be discussed, must be established. Because of this, in the second part of this section, I turn to discuss the way in which political themes are used in this thesis. The position developed lies between the two 'poles' of essentialist and decentred approaches.

### **The left-right distinction**

The title of this thesis refers to 'the British left'. This begs the question of what it means to be, politically, part of the left. The terms left and right, as political descriptions, are now almost universal, but they only emerged during the late eighteenth century in revolutionary France. The distinction arose when the traditional pre-revolutionary arrangement of the *États Généraux* broke down under pressure from the Third Estate (which, in theory, represented all but a small percentage of the population) and a new National Assembly was formed. Some

aristocrats and much of the lower clergy joined the Third Estate situated on the left-hand side of the new Assembly. By contrast, most of the high clergy sat with the aristocrats on the right (Laponce, 1981). For a thesis focused on the recent left's engagement with an intellectual enemy, it is interesting to note that the terms left and right are relative, rather than independent. The Italian political scientist, Norberto Bobbio, has made this point:

The two terms of an antithetical distinction support each other. If there were no right wing, then there would be no left wing, and vice versa. In other words, the right exists because there is a left, and the left exists because there is a right.

(Bobbio, 1996 12)

From Versailles the language of left and right spread around the world through two main channels (Laponce, 1981 52). The first route was the language of parliamentary democracy. From the French Assembly, the terms passed into the parliament at Piedmont by the 1850s before spreading throughout Italy. In both France and Italy, the Republic, anticlericalism and support for a unitary state were on the left; whilst monarchy, clericalism, federalism and decentralisation were on the right. In both France and Italy, gradualism and compromise were at the centre (Laponce, 1981 53). Yet cracks and discontinuities in the use of the distinction also began to appear during this period. In Italy the centre right of Camillo Cavour

was anticlerical because the Church stood in the way of national unity, blurring the association of religion and decentralisation with the right. (In Britain too, the left was rarely anti-clerical, and development of the Labour Party in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century owed a considerable debt to Christian thinkers.) As the use of the left-right distinction spread through the European parliamentary democracies, its meaning became increasingly hard to pin down.

A second route in the diffusion of the distinction was the language of socialism (Laponce, 1981 54). Although, Marx and Engels did not use the left-right distinction in the nineteenth century, by the 1920s the terminology had become widely established amongst socialists. In Britain, the group that pressed for affiliation of the Labour Party to the communist Third International (which began in 1919) called itself the 'National Left Wing Committee'. In 1936, the successful *Left Book Club* was set up in order to produce cheap copies of radical books with the aim of helping 'in the struggle *for* world peace and a better social and economic order, and *against* fascism' (Victor Gollancz quoted in Laity, 2001 ix - italics in original). By this stage, in contrast to its use during the nineteenth century, the left was generally associated with internationalism and the right with nationalism.

Even those groups that rejected the left-right distinction helped to shape its meaning. Lenin rejected the description for the newly established USSR,

describing ‘left-wing communism’ as an ‘infantile disorder’ (Lenin, 1920). In doing so, he depicted ‘the left’ as radical but naïve (a caricature of the left that is still widely held). ‘Left-wing’ communism was explicitly defended against Lenin’s criticisms by the Dutch poet and socialist, Herman Gorter (Gorter, 1920). Gorter’s anti-Soviet leftism was significant in France during the inter-war period, where his *Gauchisme* inspired many organisations in favour of autonomous working class councils, placing French leftism close to anarchism. If for Gorter, communism was on the left, for Lenin, it was located somewhere other than on the left-right divide. Lenin was not alone in rejecting the left-right dichotomy, several political groups and parties have rejected the distinction (Sternhell, 1983). Yet by the middle of the twentieth century, the acceptance of the left-right dichotomy was, if not universal, certainly widespread.

It was in the post-war period that the left-right distinction gained global use. The emergence of a ‘new left’ in Europe and later in the US, which owed much to Gorter’s pre-war leftism, spread the use of the distinction further. The wide coverage of the new left in North American periodicals such as *Time* and *Newsweek* gave the terms greater international scope. As Laponce concluded in 1981:

the geographical diffusion of parliamentary institutions and of socialist ideals had rendered the left/right terminology universal. North America, notwithstanding its political

dominance, is adopting the European terminology and turning its radicals into left wingers.

(Laponce, 1981 56)<sup>7</sup>

As this account shows, the meanings of left and right are historically and geographically contingent. Laponce's summary of how the terms have evolved since the French revolution is worth quoting at length, and demonstrates the problems facing anyone searching for simple definitions for the terms:

At the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth in France as well as in the countries influenced by the French Revolution, the left was individualistic and opposed to group property. It was opposed to economic regulations and was orientated to the past as much as the future, seeking – through the temporary discontinuity of a revolution – to reset the course of events in the flow of a natural and social order thought to be as old as nature itself. By the end of the

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<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Laponce, Anderson has questioned how widespread the acceptance of the distinction in the US ever became, arguing that, 'Europe, which invented the distinction, is inclined to think it has become universal. But that is not the case. In the United States, where a close approximation to an all-capitalist society has long existed, the terms Right and Left retain a limited currency in academic literature, but have virtually no purchase in public or popular discourse' (Perry Anderson, 1998 81).

nineteenth century these characteristics had shifted to the right.

When mass democracy replaced bourgeois democracy, the left changed character. Its emphasis was increasingly on equality rather than on liberty, even if this required the use of authoritarian forms of government and the abandonment of parliamentary democracy. Under the influence of positivism and Marxism, the left became orientated to the future at the exclusion of the past; the paradise to come ceased to be seen as a revival of a paradise lost.

(Laponce, 1981 118)

By the final decades of the twentieth century the electoral success of governments explicitly influenced by Hayekian arguments, and the apparent vindication of those arguments with the collapse of state socialism, led many commentators to argue that the right is now 'the only game in town' (the phrase, but not the argument, is from Giddens, 1998 39). Obituaries of the left-right distinction had been written before,<sup>8</sup> but after the anti-communist revolutions of 1989 the mutterings that the left-right dichotomy is obsolete have become a roar. The Italian political scientist, Norberto Bobbio, summarised this challenge to the distinction:

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<sup>8</sup> Syndicalists and advocates of *solidarisme* claimed that the distinction was dead in the 1890s and Jean Paul-Sartre argued along the same lines in the twentieth century (Giddens, 1998 38).

proving the irrelevance of this distinction does not require proof of its inappropriateness ... its deficiency ... or its anachronism ... It is quite sufficient to diminish the authority of one of the terms and cease to recognize its existence ...

(Bobbio, 1996 12-13)

The real challenge to the left-right dichotomy by the end of the twentieth century was that 'all is right-wing' (Bobbio, 1996 13) and hence the division was no more. Against these claims, Bobbio defended 'the significance of a political distinction' by arguing that there was little debate between those offering different definitions. Bobbio argued that 'the criterion most frequently used to distinguish between the left and the right is the attitude of real people in society to the ideal of equality' (Bobbio, 1996 60). In short, 'the left is egalitarian and the right is inegalitarian' (Bobbio, 1996 62).

There are several difficulties in Bobbio's claim. First, Bobbio's account did not give enough information to be of use. It is too general, like driving around London with only a map of the UK for guidance. Specifically, his definition does not answer Sen's well-known question, 'Equality of What?' (Sen, 1979) Whilst 'equality of outcome' has, at least since 'mass democracy replaced bourgeois democracy' in Laponce's terms, been on the left, where should one locate equality of opportunity, gender equality or legal equality for example? One could answer

that some types of equality have tended to be on the left and others on the right, but with this qualification the term slips through our fingers and we are returned to the historical contingency and geographical specificity of the distinction.

A second problem with Bobbio's definition was its ahistorical nature. As Anderson noted, Bobbio implied that historically there has never been a time when either left or right has entirely dominated (Perry Anderson, 1998 74). In a response to Bobbio, Anderson raised the possibility of 'Politics without a Left' (Perry Anderson, 1998 79) and argued that

Bobbio's theoretical defence of the distinction between Left and Right, for all its eloquence, may thus be more vulnerable than it appears. If we ask why this should be so, the answer surely lies in the difficulty of constructing an axiology of political values without coherent reference to the empirical social world. Bobbio often writes as if he could separate his ideal taxonomy from contemporary history, but, of course, he cannot.

(Perry Anderson, 1998 79)

To Anderson, Bobbio ignored the actual historical experience of the left in Britain, France and Spain. He is worth quoting (at length) as a demonstration of the disenchantment facing the left at the end of the twentieth century. To Anderson, by the mid-1990s,

those who argued against the continuing validity of the categories of Right and Left were, of course, prompted to do so not just by the collapse of communism in the East but by the demoralized effacement of social democracy in the West . . . The terms Left and Right are themselves, of course, as [Bobbio] concedes, purely relative. A Left could survive in an all-capitalist system – purged of any residual resistance to the market – that was to the right of anything now in the centre ...

In practice, however it is doubtful how long the vocabulary of Right and Left would persist in such conditions ...

This is not to argue that the terms Left and Right should be abandoned ... But they will not be saved by shutting one's eyes to the evacuation of their content by the trend of established politics today. A purely axiological defence of the idea of the Left, bereft of any historical theory or institutional attack capable of shaking the status quo, will not pass muster ...

(Perry Anderson, 1998 80-81)

The engagement with Hayek by the British left provides one way of examining Anderson's claims and I return to this debate in the Chapter 6. Because of the mutable character of the distinction, and the difficulties which emerge in seeking any simple definition, the writers discussed in the main body of this thesis are largely admitted entry by consensus. All of the writers I discuss in detail see

themselves and are seen by others as belonging to the left - whatever they take that to mean. Most of them would for most of their careers have described themselves as socialists or social democrats. However, I chose largely to side step the issue of what constitutes 'the left' at this stage, to avoid pre-empting my conclusions on the development of the distinction and to avoid presenting a fixed model of the political landscape which fails to appreciate the fluidity of political thought. This fluidity is also an issue in discussing the themes that make up political thought, and it is to their nature which I turn below.

### **Changing political themes**

We have an old saying that's been handed down by generations of road sweepers: 'Look after your broom ... And that's what I've done. Maintained it for twenty years. This old broom's had seventeen new heads and fourteen new handles in its time.

(Trigger in 'Only Fools and Horses', Sullivan, 1996)

The response to Trigger was, 'it's not the same broom'. Change in political themes is more complicated. Not only do components change, but entirely new ones are added - a problem not raised by Trigger's broom. An issue for the study of political themes is in describing when, how and why they have changed. Trigger is, in a way, making a similar point to John Stuart Mill, who once wrote that, 'One

of the mistakes oftenest committed, and which are the sources of the greatest practical errors in human affairs, is that of supposing that the same name always stands for the same aggregation of ideas' (quoted in Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 7). Indeed, the practice of presenting political themes, such as socialism or liberalism, as possessing fixed and unchanging cores is common (particularly in introductory courses to political thought). Hobhouse's book, *Liberalism*, provides an example of the attempt to cut through the peripheral arguments and search for the 'essentials' of an ideology (Hobhouse, 1964, originally 1911 29; the example is from Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 11). To critics of 'essentialism' like Greenleaf, Hobhouse's 'exercise is a sort of Platonic attempt to transcend the contingency and vagaries of the world' (Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 11) and the attempt to define ideologies through their essential components is 'the depiction of caricature rather than a satisfactory characterization of the ideology in question' (Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 11).

At the other pole from essentialist approaches to political thought are the decentred models. The second volume of Greenleaf's series on *The British Political Tradition* is perhaps the best known example of this approach (Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983). Rather than giving an account of the core of a political tradition, Greenleaf looked to the outsides:

Instead of nuclear designation, therefore, it is necessary to establish the character of an ideology by, first, admitting

the inevitability of diversity and change and then, secondly, by delimiting this variety through observation of the extreme and opposing manifestations between which the point of view appears to be confirmed. An ideology is identified by describing the cardinal antithesis of the political disposition it reveals.

(Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 14-15)

An example of this approach can be seen in Greenleaf's account of the British pluralist-socialist, Harold Laski. Greenleaf wrote that the limits of British socialism

seem to be set by the two rather distinct, and ultimately contrasting, motives or goals ... These poles of endeavour, potentially so antithetical, are (on the one hand) organization and efficiency, and (on the other) liberty, fulfilment, and moral regeneration ... This is especially the case so far as one major question (perhaps *the* major question) of political thought is concerned: that is, the attitude to be adopted to the state and its proper role and purpose.

(Greenleaf, 1981 577)

Later Greenleaf implies a simpler definition: British socialism is divided between Fabians and 'anti-Fabian' thinkers (Greenleaf, 1981 579). However, Greenleaf's

approach can create a misleading impression of the argument he is examining. Whilst recognising the overlapping and changing character of ideologies, Greenleaf does not so much offer a ‘decentred’ interpretation of political themes, as an entirely hollowed out one.

In characterising political ideologies by describing their extremes, Greenleaf missed much that goes on in the centre, and focused excessively on their (libertarian and collectivist) extremes (which constitute only one of several possible axes). His method strained to fit into his narrative, which views recent history (at the time of his writing) as marked by ‘the rise of collectivism and its opposition to libertarianism’ (Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 15).

A contemporary version of Greenleaf’s anti-essentialist approach is found in the work of Mark Bevir. Bevir attacked what he calls a ‘reified model of ideology’, by which he means the method of turning ‘a contingent and changing product of human activity into a fixed entity, defined by an enduring core of fixed values’ (Bevir, 2000 278). To Bevir the underlying methodological problem with this approach is that it gets the causal explanation between ideologies (such as socialism or liberalism) and individual cases (such as Gamble’s engagement with Hayek) the wrong way round. For Bevir reified approaches generally begin with a decision over the content of an ideology and a view as to which are its dominant strands. To Bevir, reification occurs in this method because there are no adequate

*prior* criteria with which to decide what does and does not belong in each ideology. The historian uses previously constructed abstract models, and then classifies particular cases by their similarity to those models. Priority is thus given to the abstract models in locating particular cases rather than the other way around: 'The models effectively act as prior, given, objects in terms of which to understand particular cases' (Bevir, 2000 283). For Bevir, ideologies are 'webs of interconnected beliefs or concepts mapping on to a perceived reality at various points' (Bevir, 2000 282). Bevir argued that ideological change can occur at any level, from policy to principles:

no concept can stand on its own, so the content of any concept depends on those around it and the initial change will cause further changes throughout the ideology. Like a stone dropped in a pond, the initial change will send out ripples disrupting other parts of the ideology.

(Bevir, 2000 283)

To Bevir, the role of the historian of political thought is a limited one: it is not the job of the historian to identify ideational similarities to reified ideologies (Bevir, 2000 288), but merely to 'trace historical connections back through the immediate influences on the case we are explaining' (Bevir, 2000 285).

The approach to political themes pursued here seeks to find a middle way between 'essentialist' and 'decentred' models. A basis for this model can be found in a concession that Bevir makes when he asks why so many thinkers are drawn towards 'reified' models of ideology. A possible explanation he suggests, 'would be that we simply have to abstract from particular thinkers if we are ever to identify pattern, and so ideologies' (Bevir, 2000 283). Bevir concedes that there are 'necessary tasks of generalisation and abstraction' (Bevir, 2000 283) and even that his own 'decentred model of ideology does not preclude classification in terms of ideational similarities' (Bevir, 2000 283). Yet he is sceptical 'whether such classifications serve any useful purpose, particularly as we can find some similarities, defined sufficiently abstractly, between any two sets of political ideas' (Bevir, 2000 283). In conceding that abstraction and generalisation are 'necessary tasks' Bevir reopened the door to the kind of approaches to ideology that he is dismissing.

If ideological discussion rests, as Bevir conceded, on abstraction and generalisation from particular cases then this readmits the possibility of arguing that some ideas are more central to an ideology than others. If from reading the work of numerous political thinkers, certain concepts or values appear as central to their argument again and again, then those arguments can be grouped with others of ideational similarity as socialist, conservative, or whatever else. Bevir and Greenleaf are both sceptical of the use of abstraction and generalisation. To

Greenleaf it provides nothing more than a ‘caricature’ of an ideology. Yet a better metaphor would be drawing a map - sometimes abstraction and generalisation are useful tasks which enable us to better understand where we are.

Thus the use of ideologies in this thesis comes from the middle ground between essentialist and decentred approaches. Given Bevir’s concession that ideological discussion rests on abstraction and generalisation from particular cases, an ideological model in which some concepts are ‘more central’ than others seems appropriate.<sup>9</sup> Whilst some concepts or values will be central to an ideology others will lie at the outskirts of the web, perhaps with stronger ties to other ideologies. Concepts or values can move around the ideological web over the years, perhaps becoming increasingly peripheral. As they move from the centre to the outer areas of the web they pull other values with them changing their shape. Eventually the configurations of ideas that make up the web will have changed shape to such an

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<sup>9</sup> Given this spin, the difference between Bevir and what he sees as the more sophisticated reified models becomes one of emphasis rather than categorical break. An example of a sophisticated, reified approach, according to Bevir, is Michael Freeden. Freeden argues that ideologies are composed of both core and peripheral concepts (Freeden, 1996 75-91). A problem with Freeden’s model is the stark division between the two levels. Instead of Freeden’s stark contrast between the core and the periphery, one can argue that values or concepts can lie closer or farther from the centre of the ‘ideological webs’ which Bevir identifies.

extent, or the links to other webs will be so strong, that it no longer makes sense to classify it as being a similar enough pattern to describe it as conservative, socialist or whatever else. In some circumstances a part of the web may break as values and concepts lose their connections with one another. In such cases the ideology can disappear, almost overnight. For many commentators, including Hayek, this disappearance is what happened to socialist thought at the end of the twentieth century. It is to Hayek, and his reception by the left, that this thesis now turns.

### ***III. Hayek and the left***

the Tory paper and the Radical paper do not answer each other; they ignore each other.

(Chesterton, 1910 ch. 3)

The linchpin chosen to hold this thesis together is Friedrich Hayek. Yet Hayek was not the only thinker to undergo reinterpretation at the end of the twentieth century, nor was he a lone voice on the right in the post-war years. For example, John Anderson's article, 'The Servile State' (John Anderson, 1962, originally 1943), anticipated many of the arguments found in Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek, 1944) and Hayek had many politically sympathetic colleagues inside and outside of academia throughout his life. Similarly, there were other surprising examples of reinterpretation between left and right at the end of the twentieth century. The

engagement with the works of Carl Schmitt, a one-time Nazi, by some members of the British left in the early 1990s, is perhaps the most obvious case (Mouffe, 1999). (The discovery of Schmitt is discussed in more detail in the final chapter.)

Despite this, there is a compelling case for examining the engagement by the left with Hayek over any other figure. First, Hayek was rare in the consistency of his beliefs throughout his long academic life. Gray argued that Hayek's overall consistency means that one should avoid 'periodizing his intellectual career into distinct phases' (Gray, 1998b 4). Although the emphasis of his arguments changed, Hayek's conclusions were, from early adulthood until his death, consistently against socialism and in favour of a limited state and a free market; by contrast, the world around him, and the significance and response given to his arguments, changed a great deal. Second, Hayek provides perhaps the most intellectually coherent attempt to emerge out of the combination of economic liberalism and cultural conservatism that made up the new right and which emerged from the late 1960s onwards. Third, and related to the previous point, it is Hayek's influence that has been identified as one of the main intellectual inspirations for the changes that occurred in Britain after 1979. His influence on Margaret Thatcher and on the wider Conservative Party was noted at the start of this chapter. In this section I introduce Hayek's work and examine the changing responses to it during his life.

## Vienna, revolution and war-time London

Hayek was born in 1899 to a wealthy, intellectual family in Vienna. He was old enough to fight during the last months of the First World War, but the experience did not seem to affect him greatly.<sup>10</sup> At the time of the Russian Revolution Hayek was eighteen, and to his delight he lived long enough to see the Soviet Union's disintegration. Hayek returned to Vienna at the end of the First World War to witness a period of instability: the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which he was born collapsed; there was economic chaos marked by hyperinflation - at one stage Hayek's salary was increased two hundred times in eight months to keep up with prices (Butler, 1983 5) - and communist revolution seemed a real possibility. Béla Kun led a short-lived Soviet Government in neighbouring Hungary in 1919 and there were several revolts in Vienna. In November 1918 Hayek entered the University of Vienna. His interest was in psychology, but the war had left no one to teach it (Hayek, 1994 4). Instead he received doctorates in law in 1921 and political science in 1923 (Hayek, 1994 5). He graduated from university the possessor of 'moderate, Fabian socialist views' which were not to survive the next decade of his life (Butler, 1983 5).

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<sup>10</sup> Hayek later claimed that his only lasting memory of the conflict was of trying to recapture a bucketful of eels meant for the troops' breakfast, but which he had overturned in a dewy field (Butler, 1983 5).

The most obvious intellectual influence on Hayek's thought in the 1920s was the Austrian economist, Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973). After Hayek's graduation, Mises gave Hayek a civil service position in the temporary government economic office (Hayek, 1994 6). At the interview Mises commented that he had not seen Hayek at any of his lectures at the University of Vienna. Hayek thought it unwise to reply that he had, in fact, looked in on them, but had found Mises' views antithetical to his own mild socialism of the time (Butler, 1983 5). It was whilst attending weekly discussion groups in Mises' office that Hayek encountered, and was largely converted to, Mises' critique of socialism, found in its fullest form in Mises' book-length assault, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (Mises, 1936, original 1922).

During the 1920s Hayek established himself as an economist. His work was mainly concerned with monetary theory, and between 1929 and 1931 he combined his duties as a civil servant with teaching in economics at the University of Vienna. In 1931 Hayek was invited to lecture in London by the economist, Lionel Robbins (1898-1984). The series was later published as *Prices and Production* (Hayek, 1934). On the strength of the lectures Robbins arranged for Hayek to be appointed Tooke Professor of Economic Science and Statistics at the London

School of Economics where he remained until 1950. Hayek became a naturalised British subject in 1938, a few weeks before German forces moved into Austria.<sup>11</sup> He would most likely have stayed in London for the rest of his life had not an unpleasant divorce (after which Hayek was cut off by several close friends - including Robbins who hardly spoke to him for almost two decades) led him to take up a position at the University of Chicago.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst at LSE Hayek became friends with John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946). The friendship, and frequent agreement between the two men at this time, is often overlooked given the antagonism of their followers during the post-war period.<sup>13</sup> When war was declared, Hayek was too recently naturalized as British to be called

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<sup>11</sup> Hayek's British critics often stressed his foreign roots, referring to him by his Germanic name, 'Friedrich von Hayek'. In later life, particularly after being appointed a Companion of Honour by Queen Elizabeth in 1984, he preferred the Anglicised, 'Frederick Hayek' (Seldon, 1992 33). This thesis uses 'Friedrich Hayek' as an attempt at neutrality and for consistency with other thinkers.

<sup>12</sup> Late in his life, Hayek was to remark that the Reform Club on London's Pall Mall, which he would visit on the way from his home in Hampstead to LSE, was the 'only real home' he had known for years (Cassidy, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Keynes' views on Hayek are nicely summed up in the following diary entry: 'Hayek has been here for the weekend,' Keynes wrote to his wife, Lydia, in March, 1933. 'I sat by him in hall last night and lunched with him at Piero's today' - the Italian economist, Piero Sraffa. 'We get on very well in private life. But what rubbish his theory is' (Cassidy, 2000).

into government service, in contrast to most of his fellow economists. He commented afterwards that working for the government corrupted economists, and war service had won them over to planning (McInnes, 1998). When LSE was evacuated during the Second World War, it was Keynes who arranged for Hayek to take up residence at King's College, Cambridge so that he could continue his work.<sup>14</sup>

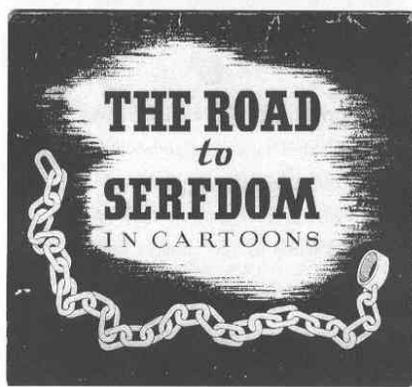
It was during the 1930s that Hayek made the contributions that established his reputation as an economist. He was also to publish work that hinted at the more overtly political and philosophical approach that marked his later work, in particular, his edited collection *Collectivist Economic Planning* (Hayek, 1935). This piece took Hayek towards much wider issues in political thought than his early narrower study of economics allowed. However, it was not to prepare him for the international renown he gained with the publication of *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek, 1944).

### **Fame and controversy: responses to *The Road to Serfdom***

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<sup>14</sup> During a stay in wartime London Hayek once joked that he jumped every time the BBC reported the number of 'Hayek-splatives' dropped by the Luftwaffe on the capital (Atticus, 1992 Features).

Unlike Hayek's earlier work, *The Road to Serfdom* was an 'explicitly populist tract' which brought its author worldwide fame (Cassidy, 2000). Most readers probably came to know it through a *Reader's Digest* condensation, prepared by the former American leftist, Max Eastman, of which over a million copies were distributed through the American Book of the Month Club (McInnes, 1998). It was even distributed in cartoon form by General Motors – the cover and conclusion of which are reproduced below (Hayek, c.1950). Hayek's argument was that democracies risked going the same way as Nazi Germany, because their intellectuals and politicians had fallen for the idea that an economy could be centrally planned, as much of it was in the UK during the war, and that the idea would soon be put into practice in the name of post-war reconstruction. For Hayek, central planning led, via cumulative attempts to mend its inevitable failures, to 'a servile state' - the metaphor was from Hilaire Belloc's book of that name (Belloc, 1912) and before that from De Tocqueville (as noted in Hayek, 1948 16). Moreover, attempts at even moderate planning, such as the 'middle way' advocated by the Conservative politician, and later Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan (MacMillan, 1938), would set the democracies on a slippery slope that would end, just as surely in that same serfdom - hence Hayek's dedication of the book 'TO THE SOCIALISTS OF ALL PARTIES' (Hayek, 1944 iv). To Hayek, the free market was not only more efficient economically but indispensable for a free society.



Originally published in *Look* magazine

Reproduced from a booklet published by  
General Motors, Detroit  
in the 'Thought Starter' series (no. 118)

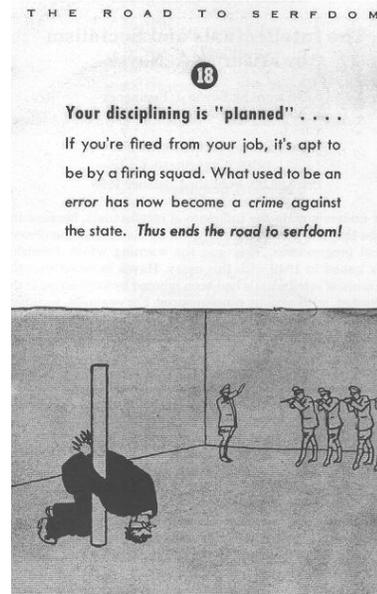


Figure 1: Pages from *The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons* (Hayek, c.1950)

Hayek began *The Road to Serfdom* with the claim that 'This is a political book', and despite its apparently non-partisan dedication, its reception was shaped by party politics. In 1979, commenting on the book's publication, Hayek noted that, 'Some of my more leftish acquaintances (with considerable cheek) gave me to understand that in their opinion I had ceased to be a scientist and had become a propagandist' (quoted in McInnes, 1998). Alvin Hansen, the American Keynesian economist, provided one example when he wrote in *The New Republic*, 'This kind of writing is not scholarship. It is seeing hobgoblins under every bed' (quoted in Cassidy, 2000). The publication of the book, shortly before the 1945 General Election, is said to have influenced Winston Churchill's controversial election broadcast about the threat of a 'Gestapo' under socialism (Brittan, 1992 19). No

one who had seen or heard the Labour leader, Clement Attlee - whom Churchill also is said to have characterised as ‘a sheep in sheep’s clothing’<sup>15</sup> - found the claim particularly convincing. In response Attlee made a withering reference to Churchill’s rehashing of the ‘secondhand ideas of an Austrian professor Friedrich von Hayek’ (Kramnick and Sheerman, 1993 482).<sup>16</sup>

‘In the 1940s’, wrote Samuel Brittan, ‘Hayek became a hate figure to those on the political Left’ (Brittan, 1992 19). With the notable exception of George Orwell, *The Road to Serfdom* was overwhelmingly rejected. Three of Hayek’s former or current colleagues at LSE published notable responses to it; two of those were of full book-length which shows the impact of Hayek’s work. Herman Finer’s *Road to Reaction* (Finer, 1945) was so vehement in its response that Hayek threatened

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<sup>15</sup> Although the phrase is popularly attributed to Winston Churchill, as an insult directed at Clement Attlee, it has since been argued that Churchill actually made the comment about an earlier British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. Others claim that Churchill was not the source at all, but that the phrase derives from the humorist, JB Morton, often known by his pseudonym, ‘Beachcomber’ (Rees, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Churchill and Attlee are both thought to have read or been familiar with the book. The effect of its publication upon the 1945 General Election is discussed by Cockett (Cockett, 1994 90-99).

legal action (McInnes, 1998).<sup>17</sup> Finer described Hayek's book as the 'arsenal of the conservative counter-offensive' (Finer, 1945 15) and argued that:

Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* constitutes the most sinister offensive against democracy to emerge from a democratic country for many decades. In writing this answer, I am not interested in winning an argument. That is far too easy. My grave anxiety is to keep the way open for democracy to make its own free, creative choices of public policy in the future. To build conservative barricades, altogether unamenable to change, as Hayek proposes, is to foment a violent explosion. Hayek and his courtiers have mistaken the nature and the temper of the times ...

(Finer, 1945 ix)

The other LSE reviewers, Barbara Wootton and Evan Durbin, were more courteous. In a second book-length response, *Freedom Under Planning* (1945), Wootton reiterated the left's faith in planning, and attempted to show how it could be combined with a free society. However, she did concede that successful planning depended upon the moral goodness of the planner. Wootton argued that

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<sup>17</sup> Herman Finer, the older brother of another political scientist Samuel Finer, preceded Hayek by moving from LSE to the University of Chicago in 1942 (Kavanagh, 2003; Qvortrup, 2004).

democratic decentralisation within a socially and economically more equal society provided safeguards against Hayekian fears of totalitarianism:

It is the citizens of a wisely planned society who are least likely themselves to fall victim to the dangers of planning ... and it is the responsible, the alert, the active, the informed, and the confident men and women in the street who hold the key positions.

(Wootton, 1945; quoted in Seligman, 1946 84)

In an article the economist and post-war Labour minister, Evan Durbin, described Hayek's book as 'a sincere, eloquent, and influential work' but rejected Hayek's arguments on the grounds that he gave an outdated account of economic planning; that there is a far greater role for reason and science in social affairs than Hayek accepted; and because he did not establish a causal link between his historical narrative of the rise of economic and of political freedom (Durbin, 1945 357-370).

In the United States the book was met by 'a tumult of acclaim and vituperation' (McInnes, 1998). In addition to an impassioned radio debate with Hayek in 1945 (Cockett, 1994 101), the left-wing academic, Charles Merriam, attacked *The Road to Serfdom* for its (mis)understanding of planning; its association of totalitarianism with the state rather than with capital; the book's 'muddled passages [which] indicate little knowledge of either the theory or the practice of administration'

(Merriam, 1944 234); and Hayek's distrust of conscious social control. Merriam concludes with a passionate defence of planning:

For out of skilful planning will come human freedom in larger measure, the growth of human personality, the expansion of the creative possibilities of mankind.

(Merriam, 1944 235)

Yet Merriam saved his harshest words against Hayek for his laudatory review of the work of his principle opponents, Finer and Wootton, two years later.

Reviewing their responses to *The Road to Serfdom* Merriam wrote:

The books are not, however, merely 'replies' to an over-rated work of little permanent value, but are positive contributions to the illumination of the whole vexed problem of the relationship between government and the economic order of our times.

(Merriam, 1946 133)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A similar position was advanced in a review article by Ben Seligman in *Commentary*, who praises the 'closely reasoned and effective reply to Professor Hayek's line of thinking' in the work of both Finer and Wootton, whilst dismissing Hayek's 'desire for an easy logic' in his earlier work, and describing him as an example of one of those economists who are 'loath to surrender the easily

The exception to the outright rejection of Hayek's arguments on the left at the time was Orwell, whose surprisingly favourable *Observer* review of the book noted that 'In the negative part of Professor Hayek's thesis there is a great deal of truth' (G. Orwell, 1982, originally 1968 143).<sup>19</sup> Orwell's prognosis of the post-war situation was bleak, as his eloquent conclusion to his review showed:

Capitalism leads to dole queues, the scramble for markets, and war. Collectivism leads to concentration camps, leader worship and war. There is no way out of this unless a planned economy can somehow be combined with the freedom of the intellect, which can only happen if the concept of right and wrong is restored to politics.

(G. Orwell, 1982, originally 1968 144)

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manipulated propositions of *laissez-faire*, for the appeal of their simplicity is quite potent' (Seligman, 1946 82).

<sup>19</sup> It demonstrates the statures of these two thinkers at the end of the chronological twentieth century to note that Orwell and Hayek both had two books in *National Review*'s list of the top ten best non-fiction books of the previous hundred years. *The Road to Serfdom* was at number four, sandwiched between Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (at three) and *Collected Essays* (at five). Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* was at number nine (National Review, nd).

Orwell's brief and solo engagement on the left with *The Road to Serfdom* perhaps tells us more about Orwell than about Hayek. Although the review only features very briefly in the main biography of Orwell (B. Crick, 1992, originally 1980 538), written by the left-wing thinker, Bernard Crick, it is likely that Crick would argue that the uncomfortable conclusion that Orwell presents his fellow socialists reflects his description of Orwell as a member of the 'awkward squad' - 'that perennial difficult fellow who speaks unwanted home truths out of order, asks embarrassing questions' and who, amongst other things, 'pricks the bubbles of his own side's occasional pomposity' (B. Crick, 1992, originally 1980 28).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> From the right, the American 'neo-conservative' Norman Podhoretz has argued that Orwell's review of *The Road to Serfdom* reflects his disillusion with socialism, and that 'Orwell did indeed defect from the left' after a youthful flirtation (Podhoretz, Jan 27, 1997; accessed 17 July 2006). Certainly, the disillusioned tone of Orwell's review is also found in his final books, *Animal Farm* (1989, originally 1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). However, Podhoretz's account is not convincing because it does not explain why 'Orwell for some reason never gave up calling himself a socialist', nor - despite his assertion that Orwell 'spilled far more ink attacking and even ridiculing socialists than he ever did in criticizing the Right' (Podhoretz, Jan 27, 1997) - does Podhoretz acknowledge in any detail that Orwell's position, even as it was laid out relatively late in his career, was recognisably socialist (see for example the arguments for socialism put forward in Orwell, 1937 esp. Part III; 1982, originally 1941 esp. Part II).

Although Orwell's review was notably more conciliatory to Hayek's position than his comrades on the left, Orwell's conclusion that 'right and wrong' must be restored to politics (G. Orwell, 1982, originally 1968 144), echoes that of Wootton and Keynes. Keynes made this point directly to Hayek in a letter after the publication of *The Road to Serfdom*, writing that:

I accuse you of perhaps confusing a little bit the moral and the material issues. Dangerous acts can be done safely in a community which thinks and feels rightly, which would be the way to hell if they were executed by those who think and feel wrongly.

(Keynes quoted in Harrod, 1951 436-437)

What Orwell's sympathetic review does reveal is the strong left-wing libertarian streak running through his idiosyncratic version of socialism, and his scepticism about paternalist forms of socialism. This libertarian strand gives some support to 'the Anarchists' Orwell' (Rodden, 1989 153) – presented, above all, in the biography of him by his friend George Woodcock (Woodcock, 1970, originally 1967). Orwell's libertarian response to Hayek presages many of the later engagements which are examined in more detail in the main body of this thesis.

Just as Hayek was attacked by socialists for failing to take into account arguments that did not come from his own side<sup>21</sup> Hayek would make the same attack upon socialists. This is interesting for a thesis involved with the idea of engaging with an ‘intellectual enemy’. Hayek responded to Orwell’s review and his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (George Orwell, 1949) by noting that:

Though the contention that socialism and individual liberty were mutually exclusive had been indignantly rejected by [socialist intellectuals] when advanced by an opponent [such as himself], it made a deep impression when stated in powerful literary form by one from their own midst.

(Hayek, 1960 256, 502)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This criticism is found, for example, in Gamble’s idea of ‘ideological closure’ (Gamble, 1996: 182) discussed in Chapter 5. This is a failing Hayek candidly admitted. As he aged, Hayek would often joke that his hearing was better in his right ear than his left (Seldon, 1992: 33). The pun is revealing for those interested in the question of how political groups decide which ideas and arguments they should engage with and which are not worth listening to.

<sup>22</sup> There were several other important reviews of *The Road to Serfdom*, which, for reasons of space I do not discuss here. A useful selection is found in the second volume of Wood and Woods’ *Hayek: Critical Assessments* (1991), which includes responses from AC Pigou, A Director, E Roll, JJ Spengler and JA Schumpeter, in addition to the Durbin review discussed above. Both Schumpeter and Roll noted that the book was written against the spirit of the age. Schumpeter’s review argued that *The Road to Serfdom* ‘takes surprisingly little account of the political structure

## **‘A magnificent dinosaur’: the post-war consensus**

After the fame of *The Road to Serfdom* Hayek’s reputation fell into decline. Samuel Brittan noted in Hayek’s obituary that ‘His brief post-war notoriety was followed by decades of neglect’ (Brittan, 1992 19). The year that the *Readers’ Digest* circulated a condensed version of *The Road to Serfdom* saw the landslide election in the UK of a Labour Party committed to the extension of the state. Labour’s retreat from further nationalisations and the Conservative Party’s acceptance of many of the post-war economic and welfare changes (Cockett, 1994 322) began a period of consensus.<sup>23</sup> The politics of the post-war period was

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of our time’ whilst Eric Roll’s comment that Hayek had written ‘a wholly unhistorical book’ was motivated by the same thought (Wood and Woods, 1991 30-68).

<sup>23</sup> The term ‘consensus’ should be used with some caution. The traditionalist reading of consensus was laid out by Addison (Addison, 1975) and explained contemporary politics at the time of writing as derived from a war generated elite consensus. However, the idea of a period of post-war consensus is increasingly contested. In *The Myth of Consensus* (1996) Jones has noted that the concept is more popular with political scientists than with historians (Jones in Jones and Kandiah, 1996 xiii-xvii). Peter Catterall has gone even further arguing that the concept is ‘an example of contemporary political perspectives skewing the understanding of contemporary history’ (Catterall in Jones and Kandiah, 1996 x). As a sketch of intellectual history, the idea of ‘a post-war consensus’ remains helpful, although recent revisionist interpretations provide a useful warning against exaggerating both the duration to which the term applies and its extent.

caricatured as Butskellism – a hybrid politician composed of the leading Conservative and Labour politicians, RA Butler and Hugh Gaitskell. During this time Hayek was seen as an increasingly marginal figure and his brand of ‘classical liberalism’ (as it was often described) appeared to be in terminal decline. In his rather hagiographic biography, the right-wing political theorist Eamonn Butler reported that:

Before and after the Second World War, the intellectual tide swept unceasingly in the direction of socialism. The consensus of the age was for economic planning, the setting of targets for economic growth, full employment policy, comprehensive state welfare services, and the redistribution of incomes. It was a consensus which Hayek never joined.

(Butler, 1983 4)

During the 1950s and 1960s, the planned Soviet economy appeared to be doing well, and the social democracies of Western Europe, with their large and growing state sectors, prospered. Whilst for Butler it was a period of planning, for the left in Western Europe (especially in retrospect) the three decades after the end of the Second World War marked a ‘golden age’ (Hobsbawm, 1994: 5-12 and Part Two).

It was during this period that Hayek, now at the University of Chicago, published *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960). The book provided a defence of individual

freedom (defined as the absence of arbitrary coercion), which it argued is needed if the social order is to develop and be sustained. Any attempt to inhibit freedom would rob society of its unique ability to allocate resources efficiently. The book contained a more detailed examination of the legal framework required to support this society than Hayek's earlier texts, and argued for the importance of the rule of law. It also examined some of the institutions which Hayek thought were necessary to build a society with the minimum of coercion, and contained a mixture of academic analysis and practical recommendations on planning, education, welfare, health and other policies.

The book also contained an interesting postscript, 'Why I Am Not a Conservative' (capitalised thus, but referring to the political theme, rather than to the British political party) (Hayek, 1960). In this section Hayek rejected conservatism because it had no principled reason for rejecting collectivism, but could only act in RG Collingwood's phrase, as a 'brake on the vehicle of progress', so that it has 'invariably been the fate of conservatism to be dragged along a path not of its own choosing' (Hayek, 1960 398). Hayek described himself as 'an unrepentant Old Whig' (Hayek, 1960 409).

In the three decades before the rise of the new right in the 1970s Keynesian demand management provided the economic orthodoxy, and Hayek was an outsider. He continued to publish, but by 1967 Hobsbawm could describe him as a

‘prophet in the wilderness’; in the same year, Anthony Quinton, the British philosopher, dubbed him a ‘magnificent dinosaur’ (Cassidy, 2000).

### **Iconic status and the rise of the new right**

Disregarded by post-war politicians Hayek rallied several thinkers sympathetic to economic liberalism to what became the *Mont Pelerin Society*, named after the site of the hotel in Switzerland chosen for its first meeting. The meetings attracted a variety of senior figures. A selection of participants at the inaugural meeting in April 1947 included Henry Hazlitt, Milton Friedman, John Jewkes, F H Knight, Ludwig von Mises, Michael Polanyi, Karl Popper and Lionel Robbins (Cockett, 1994 336-343). The Society met once every one or two years - and continues to meet (Mont Pelerin Society). Hayek was president from the first meeting until 1961 and remained honorary president until his death (Seldon, 1992 33).

Whilst preparing for the first meeting of the Society at LSE in early 1947 Hayek was visited by a young, former RAF pilot, Antony Fisher, who had read and been deeply impressed by the condensed version of *The Road to Serfdom*. Fisher later recounted that his ‘central question [to Hayek] was what, if anything, could he advise me to do to help get discussion and policy on the right lines’ (Cockett, 1994 123). Hayek advised Fisher against taking up the political career which he was then contemplating, but instead explained his view that ‘the decisive influence in

the battle of ideas and policy was wielded by intellectuals whom he characterised as ‘second-hand dealers in ideas’ (Cockett, 1994 123).<sup>24</sup> The advice Hayek gave, Fisher recounted, was that:

I should join with others in forming a scholarly research organisation to supply intellectuals in universities, schools, journalism and broadcasting with authoritative studies of the economic theory of markets and its application to practical affairs.

(Cited in Cockett, 1994 123-124)

It was Hayek, therefore, who provided Fisher with the intellectual formula for what became the *Institute for Economic Affairs* (IEA), which was formally created in 1955. In the two decades after their first meeting Fisher was to become a successful entrepreneur as the first ‘broiler chicken’ farmer in the UK. His company *Buxted Chickens* was founded in 1953 and was sold by the partners in 1968 (as *Allied Farm Foods*) for £21 million (Cockett, 1994 125). With ample funding from Fisher, and elsewhere, the IEA continued its promotion of free market ideas through the 1950s and 1960s and was later joined by other think tanks, such as the *Centre for Policy Studies*. As early as 1968 the distinctive

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<sup>24</sup> Although he might, as Barker has noted, perhaps more accurately have described these think-tank staffers as ‘dealers in second-hand ideas’ (Barker, 2006, pers. comm., 27 July).

combination of liberal and conservative arguments offered by the IEA and the individuals associated with it were being described as contributions to the “new right” (Collard, 1968).

The 1974 *Nobel Prize for Economics* came as a surprise to Hayek, and seemed to have a rejuvenating effect upon him. As Gamble points out, the choice of Hayek was doubly ironic (Gamble, 1996e 10): first, because it was for economics, a discipline in which he was no longer seen as a leading figure (and which he had largely moved away from after the Second World War); and secondly, because he had to share it with the Swedish economist and social democratic politician, Gunnar Myrdal, who later said that he would not have accepted the award if he had known he would have to share it with Hayek. After the award of the Nobel Prize, Hayek became increasingly active in the work of the think tanks associated with the new right. He had undergone a period of illness in his late sixties, but by the end of the 1970s he had produced a three volume study, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Hayek, 1979; Hayek, 1976; 1973). He later joked, ‘Some years ago, I tried old age but discovered I didn't like it’ (Cassidy, 2000).

Margaret Thatcher’s accession to office in 1979 marked a triumph for the new right, and was to prove divisive in British politics. Hayek’s work was recognised as supplying some of the underpinnings for her policies. Michael Foot, then Leader of the Labour Party, claimed that she was ‘in the clutches of a mad

professor': that professor was, of course, Hayek (Lewis, 1992). Hayek, ignored by the left for most of the post-war period, increasingly became a reviled figure for them through his association with the Conservatives, but a figure that had to be commented on, if only so that he could be dismissed.

### **'1989 And All That'<sup>25</sup>**

For many the fall of the Berlin Wall meant the vindication of liberalism. Watching the events unfolding on television an elderly Hayek would beam and comment, 'I told you so!' (Cassidy, 2000) For Hayek the events of 1989 would have marked the triumph of individualism over collectivism. The literature of the time is full of (often incompatible) claims that 1989 marked the end of one distinct ideological period. However, in the year that saw the Berlin Wall come down, the American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, captured the *zeitgeist* for many with his article, 'The End of History' (Fukuyama, 1989).<sup>26</sup> As he later recounted:

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<sup>25</sup> The phrase was also used by the Robert Tucker (Tucker, 1990) as a pun on Sellar and Yeatman's comic textbook, *1066 And All That* (Sellar and Yeatman, 1930). Both years could be said to mark the end of distinct historical periods.

<sup>26</sup> Fukuyama's argument is very different from Hayek's, and relies on a Hegelianism which Hayek would have rejected. However, both thinkers shared a commitment to political outlooks which owed much to economic liberalism, and were happy with what appeared to be a vindication of their

I argued that a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism. More than that, however, I argued that liberal democracy may constitute the ‘end point of mankind's ideological evolution’ and the ‘final form of human government,’ and as such constituted the ‘end of history.’ That is, while earlier forms of government were characterised by grave defects and irrationalities that led to their eventual collapse, liberal democracy was arguably free from such fundamental internal contradictions.

(Fukuyama, 1992 Introduction)

By ‘history’ Fukuyama was keen to point out, he did not mean ‘history in a conventional sense as the occurrence of events’ (Fukuyama, 1992 Introduction) – events would keep happening, newspapers would still have stories to fill their pages – Fukuyama meant ‘History’:

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arguments after 1989 (Gamble, 1996e 182-184). The difference between the two thinkers is discussed in Chapter 5.

This understanding of History was most closely associated with the great German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. It was made part of our daily intellectual atmosphere by Karl Marx . . . Both Hegel and Marx believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an ‘end of history’: for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society . . . It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled.

(Fukuyama, 1992 Introduction)<sup>27</sup>

Under this view societies are converging towards one liberal democratic political system and the lines that had separated left from right during the short twentieth century fell away, as the left collapsed with the Soviet bloc. Whether one agreed with Fukuyama’s claims or not, the political landscape after 1989 appeared very different to that which had existed only a few years before. Although none of the writers examined in the body of this thesis were supporters of Soviet Communism, they were all responding, in different ways and to varying degrees, to the collapse

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<sup>27</sup> More than a decade later Fukuyama was less certain about his prediction that ‘History’ has ended, citing the continuing development of science as the reason for his doubts (Fukuyama, 2002).

of the USSR and the different claims of Fukuyama and Hayek that the right had, in effect, ‘won’ the argument.

### **‘A zone of engagement’**

The new political landscape in the period around the end of the short twentieth century saw an engagement with Hayek’s thought beginning amongst some on the left. As early as 1983 Nick Bosanquet had undertaken an assessment of the arguments of Hayek and others, and began to look, as the name of his book indicated, at the political terrain *After the New Right* (Bosanquet, 1983).<sup>28</sup> In this section I briefly discuss some of the candidates who were considered for inclusion for more detailed study in the main body of this thesis, before looking briefly ahead at the argument to come.

As this thesis is an examination of the engagement of the *British* left with the works of Friedrich Hayek, work carried out by the non-British left is excluded (unless it was drawn upon in the British debate). Perhaps the best known example of an engagement with Hayek’s work outside of the UK was carried out by the

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<sup>28</sup> A claim which John Gray noted at the time seemed to be ‘distinctly premature’ (Gray, 1984a 162).

American political scientist, John Roemer. Roemer's influence is primarily in the US, from where he originates and is based. He developed an argument for 'market socialism', which has similarities to that of the British political theorist, David Miller, discussed in Chapter 2. Roemer is explicit in his engagement, claiming that he has found 'ways of reformulating the concept of market socialism in response to the Hayekian critique' (Roemer, 1994 2). Although Roemer has had some influence upon the UK debate, the influence from Miller, whose major statement of market socialism preceded Roemer's (Miller, 1989c; Roemer, 1994), was as much westwards as eastwards.<sup>29</sup>

In the UK, two thinkers in particular could have merited inclusion in this thesis: Jim Tomlinson and Robin Blackburn. Discussing Hayek, Jim Tomlinson noted that 'the number of reasonably detailed sceptical accounts of his work are

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<sup>29</sup> More recently, another American scholar, Theodore Burczak has attempted to put forward an argument for socialism that is explicitly tempered by the Hayekian critique. In an article and now in a full length book, both called *Socialism After Hayek* (Burczak, 1997; 2006), Burczak presented a 'socialist' argument that largely accepted Hayek's epistemological argument against traditional forms of twentieth century socialism. He argued that Hayek's theory of knowledge contains similarities with recent post-modern forms of Marxism – a group with which Hayek is unlikely to have felt he had much in common. Burczak then advanced a system which seems to owe much to David Miller's conception of market socialism. Burczak's work has been significantly less influential in the UK than Roemer's, and mainly dates from after the period examined here.

strikingly few’ and that his own book-length account of Hayek’s work, published in 1990, was the first by a socialist since Barbara Wootton’s in 1945 (Tomlinson, 1990 xi; Wootton, 1945).<sup>30</sup> Tomlinson described his account not as a ‘work of denigration, but of sceptical appraisal’:

It recognises the significance of Hayek’s work, and recognises its attractions as a system of thought, but tries to maintain a critical distance.

(Tomlinson, 1990 xi)

To Tomlinson, the socialist’s task is ‘one of critically engaging with the existing intellectual traditions from a position which holds to traditional socialist objectives – egalitarianism, democracy, co-operation, fraternity’ (Tomlinson, 1990 xi). The choice of the word ‘market’ in the title of Tomlinson’s book is partly because it is this concept which:

lies at the heart of Hayek’s difference with socialism, and yet at the same time is the area where socialism seems currently most unsure of itself ... Hence, to focus attention on Hayek’s account of the market is ... to discuss those

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<sup>30</sup> Tomlinson dismisses Finer’s 1945 book on Hayek for the reasons given earlier in this chapter regarding Finer’s limited detailed engagement with Hayek’s wider work (Tomlinson, 1990 xii).

issues where his ideas seem currently most politically potent.

(Tomlinson, 1990 xi)

In his obituary of Hayek, Arthur Seldon mentioned Tomlinson's engagement with Hayek specifically:

Hayek lived to see the criticism of his early and middle periods replaced by the respectful examination of his thinking by a wide range of academics, [including] younger academics like Jim Tomlinson whose *Hayek and the Market* (1990) identifies radical agreements, even the qualified acceptance of Adam Smith's invisible hand that leads men in the market to do good to others that was no part of their intention.

(Seldon, 1992 33)

However, Seldon overstated the 'radical agreements' that are found in Tomlinson's book. It is true that Tomlinson recognised the 'importance and influence' of Hayek's writing (Tomlinson, 1990 viii), but he was quick to point out that, 'This book is written by a democratic socialist, and thus someone basically out of sympathy with Hayek's ideas'. Tomlinson's argument for a decentralised form of socialism was not built upon Hayek's thought, and he was highly critical of Hayek's overall output. Tomlinson did not go on to claim

explicitly, as Gamble did, for example, that Hayek's work could contribute to a renewal of socialism. Nor did Tomlinson take up his account of Hayek in any sustained way in his other writings. As such, whilst drawing on Tomlinson's account of Hayek in Chapter 6, his wider work is not discussed in detail.

A second British candidate for inclusion in this thesis was Robin Blackburn. In 1991, when Blackburn was editor of the *New Left Review*, he argued that Hayek's epistemological argument could also be deployed, not just for the free market, but also against narrow capitalist entrepreneurship and for worker self-management (Robin Blackburn, 1991a 36). Blackburn was one of the earliest thinkers on the British left to hint that a re-evaluation of Hayek's thought could be beneficial. However (and perhaps for these reasons), Blackburn is reluctant to develop the argument he begins above.

Blackburn's reluctance to credit Hayek's originality is understandable, and instructive. Hayek's reputation as a polemicist for the new right is documented above and Hayek's anti-socialism became increasingly combative towards the end of his life (he was still alive at the time of Blackburn's article). Blackburn's unwillingness to carry through the self-acknowledged, explicit implications of this thinking on Hayek, meant that his line of argument that the left could use Hayek's

theory of knowledge was taken up by others; most obviously his colleague at the time at the *New Left Review*,<sup>31</sup> Hilary Wainwright. Blackburn's argument is returned to in Chapter 4 of this thesis, but because of the limits of his engagement with Hayek's work, and Wainwright's much more extended and full embrace of Hayek's argument, it is her and not Blackburn who is discussed in detail in this thesis.

Other thinkers on the left have also made use of Hayek. In particular, left-wing economists seem to have found it easier to set aside the ideological baggage that comes with Hayek and to pick out elements of his thought. This may also be because Hayek's main contributions to economics were early in his career, when his research was not presented in the increasingly eristic manner that marked his work after the publication of *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944. An example of the economists' use of Hayek is found in Jack Birner and Rudy van Zijp's anthology of essays, *Hayek, Co-ordination and Evolution* (1994) which featured chapters on Hayek's legacy from the economist and Labour Peer, Meghnad Desai (1994). The collection also featured a contribution from Raymond Plant, whose work is discussed in Chapter 3 (Plant, 1994).

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<sup>31</sup> Wainwright was an associate editor of the *New Left Review* at the time Blackburn's article was published.

The development economist, Amartya Sen, is perhaps the best-known economist on the left who has been prepared to engage with Hayek's work.<sup>32</sup> Sen describes himself as 'someone whose economics (as well as politics) is very different from Hayek's' (Sen, 2004 21). Yet in an article written to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Road to Serfdom* Sen argued that Hayek's ideas 'remain extremely important' to this day (Sen, 2004 21). In particular he picked out Hayek's argument against central planning:

A ... contribution of Hayek is of particular interest to those on the left of the political spectrum. Hayek's critique of state planning is mainly based on a subtle psychological argument. He was particularly concerned with the way centralised state planning and the huge asymmetry of power that tends to accompany it may generate a psychology of indifference to individual liberty.

Hayek was insightful in drawing attention to a basic vulnerability that goes with unrestrained administrative authority, and in explaining why social psychology and institutional incentives are extraordinarily important.

(Sen, 2004 21)

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<sup>32</sup> Sen, like Hayek, was awarded a *Nobel Prize* for economics. Sen's was awarded in 1998.

Sen concluded that, 'Our debt to Hayek is very substantial' (Sen, 2004 21). However, the various contributions of left-wing economists, such as Sen and Desai, on Hayek are not discussed in any detail in this thesis, which primarily focuses on political not economic thought.

This thesis focuses primarily on the work of four thinkers on the British left who have, to varying degrees, 'engaged' with Hayek's work. Chapter 2 examines the work of David Miller. Although Miller presented his argument for 'market socialism' with limited reference to Hayek, he acknowledged the influence of Hayek and others on the right upon this thought. Miller's argument is a mixture of accommodation to Hayekian arguments, and an egalitarian and cooperative radicalism. Although Miller described his account as socialist, it is argued here that it can be seen as part of the collapse of the boundaries that divided political thought into those camps that dominated the twentieth century.

Chapter 3 examines the work of Raymond Plant, whose earliest engagements with Hayek precede the dates chosen to limit this thesis. Plant made several important concessions to Hayek, particularly over the efficiency of the market system. However, Plant's philosophical engagement can also be seen as an attempt to put a marker in the ground, and to provide an argument against the onslaught of the new right which draws on and demonstrates the closeness of left liberal and democratic socialist thought.

In Chapter 4 I look at the work of the radical, green journalist Hilary Wainwright. Her writings are an attempt to account for the popularity of Hayek's thought in the new democracies of the former Soviet bloc – countries which had briefly been seen as the future of socialism after the withdrawal of the USSR after 1989. Wainwright goes further than most of her colleagues in explicitly engaging with Hayek's thought: both thinkers share a libertarian scepticism towards the state, reflecting an area of agreement between thinkers of the libertarian right and left. In Wainwright's work this is developed into an argument for democratic devolution based on Hayekian epistemology which has similarities to the pluralism of the early twentieth century.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the work of Andrew Gamble, and in particular his book-length account of Hayek's life and work (Gamble, 1996e). The chapter documents the considerable shift in Gamble's thought from his earlier Marxist approach, to his later engagement with Hayek's writings. Gamble argued that Hayek's epistemological arguments, his role for entrepreneurship, and his organisational theory can go some way towards providing a new foundation for what he continues to call 'socialism'. However, Gamble broke with Hayek over his historical meta-narrative which excluded the pursuit of equality. It is argued that, like other thinkers examined in this thesis, Gamble's account bears greater

ideational similarities with the new liberalism of the early twentieth century than to most forms of twentieth century socialist thought in the UK.

In the final chapter I summarise some of the common shifts found amongst the thinkers examined in this thesis, and, using their engagement with the works of Hayek as a case study, I conclude with some comments about the decline of statist forms of socialism and the ‘liberalisation’ of the British political landscape after the end of the ‘short twentieth century’.

## Chapter 2 - David Miller: the discovery of the market

I began in the 1970s with fairly ill-defined socialist beliefs that seemed naturally to entail an antipathy to markets as a means of economic co-ordination, a point of view which is I suppose fairly common. I was shaken out of it by encountering, in the middle part of that decade, various libertarian writings that set out polemically, but still powerfully the arguments in favour of markets. These arguments left me with two basic convictions. One was that the libertarian position in itself - the belief in a minimal state and economic laissez faire - was ill founded and untenable. The other was that the pro-market arguments found in libertarian writings were none the less strong in themselves and deserve to convince socialists.

(Miller, 1989c vii)

‘Socialism’, wrote Hayek, is in its methods concerned with ‘the abolition of private enterprise, of private ownership of the means of production, and the creation of a system of “planned economy” in which the entrepreneur working for profit is replaced by a central planning body’ (Hayek, 1944 24). Hayek’s description of socialism, found in *The Road to Serfdom*, was largely uncontroversial. The connection between socialism and economic planning was generally taken for granted across the political spectrum for much of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, within forty years of Hayek’s description, several writers on

the left of British politics had begun to debate the possibility of combining socialism with the unplanned economics of the market – arguments more commonly associated with economic liberals, conservatives and the new right, than with socialists. The attempt to combine markets with socialism achieved its most explicit support in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the revival of ‘market socialism’, a theory which, defined generally, sought to combine social ownership of the means of production with the extensive use of market mechanisms in the economy. By the mid-nineties the concept was much discussed in academia and in think-tanks on the left of British politics.

By 1997, the chronological limit of this thesis, the term ‘market socialism’ was seldom heard. This chapter offers an explanation for the rise and fall of market socialism in the UK during the final decade of the twentieth century, and examines how the concept compares with older political traditions, particularly more mainstream forms of socialism. I examine the concept through focussing on the work of one of its principle advocates: David Miller - currently Professor of Political Theory at Nuffield College, Oxford. From the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s Miller carefully constructed and sustained a case for market socialism, in particular through his participation in groups associated with the Labour Party, through the publication of a book on the subject and in a series of articles.

This chapter examines the changing contexts that led to the rise and fall of market socialism and the significance of the concept for the recent history of political thought in the UK. As with other arguments examined in this thesis, I am not primarily concerned with whether the normative arguments for market socialism can be successfully applied.<sup>1</sup> The chapter examines Miller's engagement with Hayek. In contrast to the later discussions of Hayek's work examined in this thesis, Miller's engagement is, I argue, limited and tentative given the central role that the market plays in his thought. Yet Miller is included for detailed discussion because he does explicitly recognise the role of Hayek as one of the main exponents of pro-market policies (as the epigraph to this chapter demonstrates) and because his engagement with these pro-market arguments pre-dates that of most other left-wing thinkers.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the shifting historical context behind the rise of market socialism in the late 1980s. In the second section I examine the concept of market socialism itself in more detail, focusing on Miller's own arguments. The final section compares market socialism with more mainstream forms of twentieth century socialist thought and examines its wider significance. I

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<sup>1</sup> There is a substantial literature on the difficulties which market socialism might face in practice. Gray gives a brief but useful early summary of some of these problems (Gray, 1986 174-180).

conclude by discussing the decline of market socialism, and argue that, through its adoption of the market and its jettisoning of statist forms of socialism, its significance lies in its challenge to the conventional categorisation of political thought into socialist, liberal and conservative – a categorisation which dominated the twentieth century, but which crumbled during its final years.

As with other chapters, I avoid a simple essentialist view of what commitments, aspirations or values constitute socialism. (The difficulties of discussing changing political thought were raised at a general level in Chapter 1 of this thesis.) This issue is of particular importance in any discussion of market socialism, because the argument can be made that socialism is essentially an anti-market theme in political thought. To begin with the view that markets and socialism are incompatible, which many writers have taken, is unhelpful.<sup>2</sup> Simple essentialist approaches tend to neglect the complexity of political themes, their overlapping nature, and the diversity of ways in which the ideas, aspirations, values and aversions which compose them are prioritised within each tradition and relate to one another, and make it difficult to give an account of how political thought changes over time. As Miller wrote in an early article on market socialism,

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<sup>2</sup> An example of this kind of approach is found in the work of Anthony de Jasay (de Jasay, 1990).

I do not believe that essentialist definitions of socialism are particularly helpful. Socialists are committed to the abolition of capitalism, but beyond that minimal commitment socialism stands for a diverse bundle of aspirations and ideals, together with institutional proposals intended to realise those aspirations and ideals

(Miller, 1977 473)

Even Miller's 'minimal commitment' can now be seen as essentialist and contestable; reflecting his understanding of the essence of socialism at that time and claiming a greater commitment for socialists than many have themselves made, as some of the authors discussed in this thesis show. As with other chapter, I avoid simple essentialism and focuses on the major discontinuities and continuities that the adoption of markets caused socialist thought.

### ***1. State socialism, the new right and political theory***

As the epigraph to this chapter shows, Miller dates his engagement with pro-market argument to the mid-seventies. In this section I discuss the contextual shifts around this time that made possible the engagement of some on the left with pro-market arguments. I focus, in particular, on how Miller and other market socialists perceived the context to be changing.

## The limits of statist socialism

The revival of market socialism should be seen, in part, as a response to the increasingly widespread perception on the left during the final decades of the twentieth century that statist forms of socialism have been unsuccessful. These difficulties and failures included the authoritarianism and collapse of the Soviet Union; the perceived difficulties of Keynesian social democracy in the UK (and elsewhere) and the loss of four consecutive General Elections by the British Labour Party between 1979 and 1997. I discuss these challenges (in order just given) in more detail below.

Miller is clear in his assessment that statist forms of socialism have been unsuccessful and that socialism needed to cast itself free from its association with state planning. In contrast to political thinkers on the right, who were often triumphalist about this (in the manner of Hayek late in his life) Miller presented the claim as a social and economic fact that the left must adapt to. Miller noted that 'Socialism is no longer an unsullied idea; *faute de mieux*, people will identify it with the unattractive form of statism that has emerged over the last half-century in Eastern Europe' (Miller, 1989c 6). Similarly, several contributors to Estrin and Le Grand's book on market socialism, noted that the case for market socialism rested on more than just the attractiveness of arguments in favour of markets; it

also rested on the massive difficulties found in the principle alternative: central planning (for example, Estrin and Winter, 1989).

To Miller, there were several reasons for the 'failure' of central planning. The first of these was largely about 'means', and highlights the ineffectiveness of state socialism. Miller argued that 'planned production is unable to respond as quickly and flexibly to consumers' preferences as a market', creating problems in the day-to-day production of consumer goods for state socialist systems (Miller, 1989c 6-7). The Fabian tradition, which dominated twentieth century socialism in Britain, also appealed to consumers over producers, so in this Miller's argument is not new for the left. However, the Fabians stressed the rights of the consumer in order to assert central direction, not workers' control of the kind Miller favoured. The nub of the difference between Miller and the Fabian socialists concerns their assumptions about the consumer. The Fabians viewed consumers as a homogeneous category, whose needs could be centrally determined either through expertise or representative politics, or through a combination of the two. To Miller consumers are a heterogeneous group, in which the advocacy of consumer rights is one way of expressing individual freedom. The argument concerning efficiency under socialism, therefore, has wider implications for socialists.

Miller's remaining arguments are all more straightforwardly normative. His second argument was that 'central planning negates democracy' through the

creation of a large professional bureaucracy in which power gravitates to those with specialist knowledge – one of the reasons Fabians found central planning so attractive. A third argument was that ‘central planning severely restricts the scope for workers’ self-management’ as decisions over production of goods and services are transferred to a central authority. Last, Miller argued that in any state socialist system ‘freedom to change employment will be circumscribed’ as workers’ choices are limited to those jobs that planners make available (Miller, 1989c 6-7). These concerns, regarding the asymmetric distribution of power in socialist bureaucracies between worker and state, were, by the late 1980s, more commonly associated with the right than the left. However, democratic, anti-centralising arguments provide an undercurrent in left-wing thought which runs through the works of William Morris, GDH Cole and the guild socialists and on to the post-war new left. More recently this left-libertarianism has been found in the work of David Owen, who (in his earlier writing) explicitly called for a return to the socialism of Cole and Morris (Owen, 1981), as well as in several of the authors discussed in detail in this thesis.

The failings of a planned economy in the Soviet Union marked the end of the major non-capitalist alternative. The USSR had acted as a guiding star for the British left in the middle decades of the twentieth century from which they were

able to find their own (often very different) positions.<sup>3</sup> The work of Miller and other market socialists after 1989 no longer had the USSR as an example of actually existing socialism to guide it and is part of a much wider re-examination of first principles occurring amongst the left in Britain and beyond in the post-Soviet world. Whilst Miller's account of market socialism dates from the 1970s (his first major statement is found in Miller, 1977), the spike in interest in the topic from the late 1980s shows how an intellectual encounter which began in the 1970s (largely as a response to the flaws in Keynesianism, discussed below) was largely ignored until complemented by the events of 1989. The trickle of articles on market socialism in the late 1970s, turned into a torrent after Labour's election loss in 1983 and a tidal wave after 1989.<sup>4</sup> This wave ebbed with the bloody collapse of

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<sup>3</sup> An example of this is found in the work of George Orwell and the Webbs. Whereas in the 1930s and 1940s, Orwell's socialism was, at least in part, an argument against the totalitarianism of the USSR, Sidney and Beatrice Webb's socialism was increasingly based on respect for its orderliness. The point here is that both Orwell and the Webbs used the Soviet Union as a base from which to shape their own versions of socialism. Perhaps the clearest examples of these conflicting accounts are found in the Webbs' *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization* (1937) and in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). (The earlier edition of the Webbs' book, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* (1935) tellingly retained a question mark at the end of its subtitle.)

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, despite Miller's claim in the epigraph to this chapter, Hayek seems to have had little influence on Miller's earliest work. He does not feature, for example, in Miller's 1976 book on social justice, derived from his doctoral thesis (Miller, 1976), in which Spencer is chosen to

market socialism in Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s – a point I develop in the final section of this chapter.

Miller is also candid in his rejection of Keynesian social democracy as a successful vehicle to move towards a socialist society. It is a system which is ‘less obviously flawed’ than central planning, but flawed nonetheless (Miller, 1989c 8). The widespread rejection of Keynesianism on the left dates from the economic crisis of the mid-1970s. The ‘crisis’ (Gamble and Walton, 1976) resulted in the centrist thinking - offered by the right of the Labour Party and the left of the Conservative Party - appearing obsolete. The confidence of Labour in the revisionist socialism of the 1950s now seemed ‘complacent’, as even their advocates noted (notably Crosland, 1974 44). During the 1950s Crosland had written that the state was increasingly able to control the economy; that there had been a shift of power from management to labour; that private industry was becoming humanised and that the Labour Government’s extension of the welfare state and introduction of Keynesian economics promised economic growth and full employment (Crosland, 1952; 1956: 30-32). Furthermore, the majority of the Conservative Party, at least in parliament, largely accepted the 1945 ‘settlement’. The end of the post-war economic boom destroyed this complacency. It meant, as

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represent the right-wing argument in this area. It took the events discussed above, for a fuller engagement to take place.

Andrew Gamble (whose work is discussed in Chapter 4) argued at the time, ‘the end of consensus’ (Gamble and Walton, 1976: 189-194). As Gamble noted in the late 1970s, ‘We are living through a crisis that should never have happened, the crisis that Keynesian techniques and social democratic policies and institutions were supposed to have banished for ever’ (Gamble, 1979: 1)

Miller outlined several flaws in Keynesian planning. Writing in 1989 he argued, first, that ‘it is no longer clear that Keynesian methods can be used in the desired manner to secure full employment’. Miller did not make the argument, common on the centre and left by the 1990s, that the possibility of pursuing Keynesian policies to achieve full employment is increasingly limited in a globalising economy (Gray, 1998a ch. 4). Perhaps because Miller’s arguments for market socialism grew out of debates over the future of the British Labour Party, they are generally presented as solutions on the national level, with little reference to the international context.

Second, Miller noted that ‘there is substantial evidence that the impact of fiscal measures on the overall distribution on income and wealth has so far been quite limited’. In evidence he cited research which showed that in 1985 the top ten per cent of British households had a post-tax income some ten times greater than those of the bottom ten per cent (Stark, 1988; cited in Miller, 1989c 8-9, footnote 13). Keynesian social democracy had failed as an effective vehicle for socialism’s egalitarian aims.

Last, Miller argued that the welfare state, although successful as a means of tackling poverty, ‘has been far less successful as a vehicle for overall equality [because] freely provided services . . . may be used more effectively by those who are already better off to an extent that eliminates . . . the progressive element in their funding through income tax’ (Miller, 1989c 9). This argument has continued relevance in contemporary debates in New Labour circles over ‘choice’. Sceptics have expressed concern that those with greater social, economic, cultural or symbolic capital are able to take advantage of welfare choices in a way that others are not.<sup>5</sup> Although Miller’s argument touches on these issues, he never explicitly examines the sociological challenges surrounding the ability to choose that follow from his arguments.

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<sup>5</sup> A debate between Julian Le Grand and David Lipsey recently summarised some of the key arguments for and against, respectively, New Labour’s ‘choice agenda’ (Lipsey, 2005; J. Le Grand, 2006). Contemporary concerns about social, economic, cultural or symbolic capital and the ability to chose are found in the work of Diane Reay, amongst others (Reay and Lucey, 2003). Reay’s arguments derive from a wide view of class that owes much to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992). However, within a British context Richard Titmuss had been making a similar case for many years (Titmuss, 1976).

Related to limits of Keynesian social democracy, at least in the mind of Miller and other market socialists, was the party political failure for the British Labour Party. The Labour Party lost four consecutive General Elections after 1979 and was out of office for over seventeen years. In their collection on market socialism (Estrin and Le Grand, 1989) - which included a contribution from Miller - Estrin and Le Grand described how their book originated as a specific response to Labour's loss of the 1983 General Election. The authors describe how the Fabian Society called together a group of sympathetic academics and others to describe what had 'gone wrong' (Estrin and Le Grand, 1989 v). It was agreed that the group would meet on a regular basis under the name of the 'Socialist Philosophy Group' to begin 'rethinking and reconstructing' socialist ideas (Estrin and Le Grand, 1989 v). At the first meeting of the group David Miller presented a paper on market socialism, discussions of which formed the basis for several subsequent gatherings.

It is reasonable to suggest that the electoral failure of the Labour Party in the UK affected the wider British left in a way that that has no equivalent in the multi-party electoral systems of continental Europe. Britain's two-party system meant that the Labour Party acted as the focus for the aspirations of a broad and disparate left for most of the twentieth century (although the rise of the SDP after 1981 did briefly threatened the Labour Party's role as focal point for hopes of the wider left). For example, the post-war Labour Party was the focus of aspirations for both fellow-travelling communists and moderate social democrats. During the post-war

period, the multi-party systems which dominated Continental European polities did not provide a single focus for a broader national left in that way that the British system did, and consequently, the electoral failure of any one continental left-wing party did not have ramifications for the wider left as in did in Britain. In the UK, the loss of four consecutive general elections by Labour from 1979 caused a particularly wide and far-reaching crisis on the British left not mirrored to the same extent elsewhere, and played a role in explaining the rise of radical solutions, such as market socialism during the late 1980s.

### **The resurgence of political theory and the rise of the new right**

If Miller, and other market socialists, were responding to what they saw as the multi-levelled failure of statist forms of socialism, they were also writing in a changing intellectual environment. In particular, Miller's market socialism was a response to two overlapping intellectual shifts that gathered momentum from the 1970s onwards: the resurgence of political theory; and the emergence of various pro-market arguments which came together under the heading of the 'new right'.

'The resurgence of political theory' changed the way in which politics was studied, especially in the Anglophone countries (Miller, 1990e). In particular, the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) focused debate on

normative political liberalism.<sup>6</sup> For Miller, this resurgence ‘prompts a reexamination of socialist attitudes towards the market’ (Miller, 1977 474). Writers at the centre of this resurgence, such as Rawls and Robert Nozick, provided an account of justice which was compatible with market institutions (Rawls, 1971; Nozick, 1974). Miller pointed out that Rawls and Nozick both tried to forestall criticism from socialists by arguing that ‘fundamental socialist values can be realised through a suitably ordered market’ (Miller, 1977 474). For Rawls a market society in which his two principles of justice are operational could meet many socialist aspirations. Indeed, the closeness between some interpretations of Rawlsian liberalism and socialist revisionism is an important element of the next chapter in this thesis on Raymond Plant (the similarity is made explicit in Plant, 1999a). For Nozick, socialist values, such as workers’ control and freedom from alienating forms of work, could be achieved by voluntary means through the market itself. Paul Kelly noted that the “‘political theory’ approach’ to the study of past political thought was particularly dominant at Oxford, where Miller has been based for many years, and he traced its influence back to Idealists such as TH Green (Kelly, 1999 42-43). Miller has been constantly engaged in the resurgence of political theory: first, in his teaching as a professor of political theory; and

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<sup>6</sup> Although harbingers of this resurgence are found in Peter Laslett’s announcement of the revival of political theory as early as 1956 (Laslett, 1956); and it was in 1962 that Rawls’ essay ‘Justice as Fairness’ appeared in the second series of this collection (Rawls, 1962).

second, through his published work, which includes several communitarian responses to individualism (including Miller, 1989b; 1995b; 1995c). Miller's writings since the 1970s are shaped by these debates with political liberals.

The rise of various, sustained, libertarian arguments grouped together under the heading of the 'new right' also changed the environment within which political discourse was conducted. Although the term 'new right' was coined in a 1968 Fabian pamphlet (Collard, 1968) the full force of this 'counter-revolution' (Cockett, 1994) was not felt in the UK until the election of a Conservative Government headed by Margaret Thatcher in 1979, upon which Hayek was an important influence. Writing ten years after Thatcher became Prime Minister; Miller noted the intellectual shift that the rise of the new right had entailed:

The cause of the libertarian Right ... has been aided by such works of undoubted intellectual power as Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Hayek's *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, and Oakeshott's, *On Human Conduct*, all published within a short space of time in the middle 1970s. Even if one is critical of the positions taken in these books, there is no escaping the fact that they do advance arguments of a suitably basic kind for a libertarian position in politics. They need to be taken seriously as political theory ...

(Miller, 1989c 2)

An admission of this kind was rare on the left in Britain for much of the post-war period; by making it in 1989 Miller demonstrated the extent to which a re-examination of first principles was occurring.

Furthermore, in making a statement about the intellectual challenge of thinkers associated with the new right, Miller's account of social and intellectual change is significantly different from that given by many earlier socialists. Many political thinkers on the left had drawn on an account of politics and ideology which derived from Marxism, in which arguments were seen as deriving from and serving the interests of the class location of those who advanced them. The response of socialists writing in the Marxist tradition to arguments from Hayek, Jewkes, Oakeshott, and so on, in favour of private property or the market, had been to criticise the interests that those arguments were taken to promote and the values and aspirations for which they were instrumental. If this view of political argument is held, it is difficult to give an argument for the market serious attention in its own right or to 'engage' with it (in the sense used in this thesis). Miller's understanding of political argument marks a break with the Marxist tradition. (The same can be said for all the writers examined in detail in this thesis.) It depends on a world view in which, although political thinking may interact with other forms of social life, it is neither dependent upon, nor merely derived from, them.

The result of the shifts discussed in the previous sections – the limits of statist forms of socialism, the resurgence of political theory and the rise of the new right – shook the foundations of socialist thought as it had been understood for much of the past century, as Estrin and Le Grand wrote in their collection on market socialism:

What was needed was nothing less than a rethink of socialism: a re-evaluation of its basic tenets and a reconstruction of its philosophical and economic foundations.

(Estrin and Le Grand, 1989 v)

The ‘revival’ of market socialism, which is examined below, can only be understood against this changing context and was one attempt among many to revive the left in Britain during the last decades of the twentieth century.

## ***II. The revival of market socialism***

‘It is quite possible to be for markets and against capitalism ...’

(Miller, 1989f 25)

The origins of the market socialist revival of the late 1980s and early 1990s are found in earlier debates regarding the role of the market in socialism; debates

which for much of the twentieth century occurred outside of the mainstream British political tradition. In this section I briefly discuss earlier iterations of the concept, before examining David Miller's account in more detail.

## **Earlier accounts**

'Market socialism' (or concepts very close to it) has undergone several revivals since the late nineteenth century, but the theme has only ever been a minor part of socialist thought in the UK. It is possible to identify four broad recurrences of interest.<sup>7</sup> In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill proposed an early form of what John Gray described as market socialism (Gray, 1984b 154). Mill's proposals were based on ownership and control of firms by workers and on a wider redistribution of income and wealth in society.

A second and major recurrence of the term was associated with the Polish economist Oskar Lange in the 1930s. Lange's work produced a revival of market socialism following the 'Calculation Debate', which concerned the question of

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<sup>7</sup> In a much more detailed exploration of the concept John Roemer identified five waves of market socialism in the twentieth century. Roemer did not include JS Mill in his account, and broke the calculation debate into three stages (Roemer, 1994 ch. 4).

whether successful economic planning was possible without the knowledge transmitted by market pricing that allowed for the rational calculation of costs.<sup>8</sup> Lange's market socialism contained a much greater role for the state than envisaged by later market socialists, such as Miller, with a Central Planning Board still setting prices for capital goods and productive resources outside of labour and the state still possessing exclusive control of firms. Hayek himself was engaged in this debate, editing a collection on the topic (Hayek, 1935) which contained contributions from both right and left – a sign both of how much more open political thought was before the onset of the Cold War, and how Hayek himself was less vitriolic and more open in his opinions in his early career.

A third wave of market socialism was found in the Balkans after 1950. Market socialism in former Yugoslavia grew out of the Marshal Tito's split with Stalin, which resulted in the state's expulsion from Comintern in 1948 and the subsequent Soviet blockade. Yugoslavian market socialism involved large-scale economic decentralization to workers' collectives that produced, bought or sold most capital goods and owned the residual net profits which they then allocated between wages and investment (Estrin, 1991). Several other East European states made moves away from more dirigiste forms of socialism to incorporate the market to varying

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<sup>8</sup> Although Lange is typically described as a 'market socialist', this has been contested (Ramsey Steele, 1992 154-157)

degrees during the post-war period. The term is now also often used to describe the marketisation of the Chinese economy initiated by Deng Xiaoping after 1978 (Bowles and White, 1992b; 1992a; Petras, 1988b; 1988a).

It is the fourth wave of market socialism that provides the focus for this chapter. This wave peaked with the theoretical expositions put forward by several thinkers in Britain and the US in the years after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. There are several, often quite different, variations of this argument. Important contributions were made by Joseph Carens, Alec Nove, Christopher Pierson, and by the American political scientist John Roemer amongst others (Carens, 1980; Nove, 1983; Nove, 1989; Pierson, 1995; Roemer, 1991; 1994; 1992). As Miller and Estrin pointed out perhaps the only ‘community of view’ amongst those describing themselves as market socialists was the shared belief that ‘markets are not automatically to be identified with capitalist markets’ (Miller and Estrin, 1987 359-379).

### **Miller’s market socialism**

One of the earliest, most sustained, and best developed, accounts of market socialism in the UK during this revival came from David Miller (important statements of his argument are found in Miller, 1977; Miller and Estrin, 1987; Miller, 1989c; 1991d). It is for these reasons, and his recognition of the role of

Hayek's thought in his pro-market arguments, that Miller's work was selected for more detailed examination in this chapter. In this section I examine Miller's arguments in more detail.

There are several levels of argument for the market in Miller's thought. First, Miller argued that the market has epistemological advantages over rival systems. Miller summed up his acceptance of the epistemological argument for the market concisely:

Markets serve simultaneously as information systems and as incentive systems. The price mechanism signals to the suppliers of goods what the relative demand is for different product lines, while at the same time giving them an incentive, in the form of potentially increased profits, to switch into lines where demand is currently high in relation to supply. These two functions [information and incentive] are separable, a point worth underlining.

(Miller, 1989f 30)

The argument that markets act as 'signals' between consumers and producers approximating supply with demand was most often associated with the right, and in particular Hayek (especially Hayek, 1948). Yet Miller seems reluctant to admit Hayek's direct influence, beyond an admission of the influence of the new right, such as that quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Below, when considering 'the significance of market socialism', I argue that the ramifications of accepting this

epistemological argument mean that it cannot unproblematically be incorporated into the wider socialist tradition.

At a second level Miller also argued that markets provide a structure within which free choices can be made. 'Freedom as a value' Miller claimed, 'has recently returned to prominence on the Left' (Miller, 1989f 32) and he placed this value at the centre of his argument. Miller was explicit that 'Freedom is valuable precisely because of the possibility that people may make radically different choices about how they want to live their lives' (Miller, 1989f 32). He argued that markets allow several liberties that planned systems do not. First, markets allow freedom of choice over purchases – dinner jackets or denim, opera or pop; the market allows people to 'define their own social identities . . . Nobody wants to have to justify choices of this kind to some public agency' (Miller, 1989f 33). Second, Miller argued that markets provide freedom to choose when and where to work (though this choice is obviously limited by availability). This is an argument most often associated with Hayek rather than the left (Hayek, 1944 70-72), although its heritage is not specifically acknowledged by Miller. A final freedom which markets allow, according to Miller, is freedom of expression: the market allows political protest through providing resources to propagate views counter to those of the state. There is, perhaps, a tension between Miller's views here and left-wing 'political economy' views of the media which argue that freedom of expression is often stifled in a (capitalist) market society (an example is found in Herman and

McChesney, 1997). Miller's claim that markets are linked to freedom of expression is also found in Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, which cites Trotsky on this point:

In a country where the sole employer is the State, opposition means death by slow starvation. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced by a new one: who does not obey shall not eat.

(Epigraph to Hayek, 1944 ch. 9)

A third level of argument that Miller cites in favour of markets is the close association between it and democracy. For Miller, the market economy allows industrial forms of democracy in a way that a state-run economy does not, because members of each enterprise in a market have substantial autonomy to control their work environment. They have a say, for example, in what, how much, where, how and when goods are produced. In a planned economy, on the other hand, targets are given from above. Markets also allow for democracy in decision making, in a way that state-run economies do not. At its simplest, market socialism decentralises the decision-making process. In Miller's model, decisions are not primarily made by an elite group of state bureaucrats, but within each cooperative, marking a significant break with the Fabian tradition.

For Miller, market socialism is an attempt to come to terms with the defects found in the statist models and to take advantage of the benefits of the market. The ‘key idea’ in Miller’s model of market socialism is that ‘the market mechanisation is retained as a means of providing most goods and services, while the ownership of capital is socialised’ (Miller, 1989c 10). Social ownership is to be contrasted with both state ownership and private ownership – both of which can be described as forms of ‘exclusive ownership’. Social ownership aims at large scale ownership in common – as exemplified in the cooperative. In *Market, State and Community*, Miller sketched his model of market socialism concisely enough to quote in full:

all productive enterprises are constituted as workers’ co-operatives, leasing their operating capital from an outside investment agency. Each enterprise makes its own decisions about products, methods of production, prices etc., and competes for custom in the market. Net profits form a pool out of which incomes are paid. Each enterprise is democratically controlled by those who work for it, and among the issues they must decide is how to distribute income within the co-operative.

(Miller, 1989c 10)

Miller’s market socialism had two egalitarian elements: first, it was an attempt to reduce income differentials to a fraction of what they were under capitalism and second, it would provide income supplements, in cash or kind, to those in need (Miller, 1989c 327). Miller was keen to stress that the first element did not depend

on the idea of equal allocation, an idea, he argued, which is unpopular. Miller's theory of distributive justice is largely based on desert, which he argued is mirrored in popular understandings of the concept. (This marks an obvious break with strongly needs-based conceptions, such as those derived from Marxism). If a just system is one which rewards according to desert, then the degree of inequality admitted under market socialism is, for Miller, compatible with justice. Primary income is determined largely by the market, but Miller argued the market must be framed in such a way as to ensure that incomes bear a close relation to effort and ability, and therefore, Miller claims, income differentials will be far narrower under market socialism than under capitalism.

The second egalitarian element in Miller's market socialism is, however, based on need. Miller wanted a shift from the current system, where welfare is often presented as a kind of 'collective charity', to a socialist conception where welfare is a right, owed as a matter of distributive justice and claimed free from stigma. A practical condition of the shift towards welfare rights, Miller argued, is a 'strengthening of communal ties' (Miller, 1989c 330). However, Miller's conception of community puts his market socialism outside mainstream socialist thought in the UK, as I argue in the next section.

### **Tentative engagements with Hayek's work**

Despite Miller's presentation of pro-market arguments, and his admission of the 'strength' and 'seriousness' of Hayek's work (Miller, 1989c 2 and vii), his account it is largely negative. When Miller referred to specific examples of Hayek's work it was to refute his argument, not to draw upon his work as a source of support for the market side of his socialism. For example, in Miller's fullest account of market socialism, *Market, State and Community*, Hayek is drawn upon, variously, as an example of the 'extreme thesis' (Miller, 1989c 27), to reject his views on justice and the spontaneous order (Miller, 1989c 61-67) and to point out the 'fatal theoretical weakness' in Hayek's constitutional arrangements (Miller, 1989c 273). Of all the thinkers examined in this thesis, Miller's engagement with Hayek's work is the most limited and tentative.

Several reasons can be suggested for the tentativeness of Miller's engagement; the first two, in particular, derive from that fact that Miller's explicit acceptance of the market was chronologically the earliest of the four thinkers who are examined in detail in this thesis. A first reason for Miller's circumspection was that Hayek was still alive, academically active, and increasingly vehement in his views during the period in which Miller developed his account of market socialism. As Miller noted, 'Hayek's political attitudes hardened as he grew older' and this contrasted with his early critiques of socialism, in which his tone was respectful (Miller, 1994 347). Miller's first major article on market socialism was published in 1977 (Miller, 1977), the year after the publication of the second volume of Hayek's

*Law, Legislation and Liberty*, *'The Mirage of Social Justice'* (Hayek, 1976) and Miller's major statement of market socialism came in 1989 (Miller, 1989c), a year after Hayek's last major publication, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors Of Socialism* (Hayek, 1988). Psychologically and conventionally, it is perhaps as hard to concede to an intellectual opponent in their lifetime as it is to speak ill of them after their death.

The second reason for Miller's circumspection is related to this, and concerns the dominance of the Conservative Party. The years during which Miller developed his pro-market argument closely fit the period of Conservative 'hegemony' (Gamble, 1988a 1). Hayek, as I noted in Chapter 1, was seen as an iconic figure for many in the Conservative Party, in particular, and for the right, in general, at that time. Engagements with Hayek's arguments from the left became more common and open in the years of Conservative decline, evident by the time of the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1990, as later chapters in this thesis on Wainwright and Gamble demonstrate.

A final reason for the tentativeness of Miller's engagement with Hayek's work is clear from an examination of his intended audience. Miller set out to convince socialists that the market could be combined with socialism. Given Hayek's status as a 'bogeyman' for the left, it would simply be poor salesmanship to explicitly

evoke his work. To ‘sell’ an argument, it is not wise to tell the ‘buyer’ that it is from a source of which they are, at best, deeply suspicious.

Miller’s most specific engagement with Hayek’s work was in an article entitled ‘Hayek: Dogmatic Skeptic’ (Miller, 1994), published in the radical American journal *Dissent* two years after Hayek’s death. In this article, Miller seemed almost put out by Hayek’s later writings on socialism – as if he had been prepared to go half-way and accept some of Hayek’s criticisms, whilst Hayek had stubbornly refused to compromise. Miller berated Hayek for his uncompromising view of socialism, arguing that,

Hayek seems never to have acknowledged [in his later work] that there might be forms of socialism in which central planning would play little or no part: for instance, a libertarian variant of market socialism ... or decentralized communitarian socialism of the kind now favoured by a section of the Green movement...

He relapsed into a crude identification of socialism with Soviet-style central planning...

(Miller, 1994 352)

Yet Miller is inviting Hayek to engage with forms of socialism that were never in the mainstream of twentieth century thought, as he admitted earlier in the same article, noting that in the middle of the century,

the association between socialism and planning was very strong. Although socialists disagreed among themselves about the form that planning should take, no one disputed that the transfer from capitalism to socialism was, at least in part, a tradition from market competition to social planning.

(Miller, 1994 352)

The extent to which Miller's argument for a libertarian form of socialism marks a distinctive break with the mainstream socialism of the twentieth century is the subject of the next section.

### ***III. The significance of the revival***

How should this revival of market socialism be judged against the wider political landscape? At the outside, there seem to be two possible interpretations. First, 1990s market socialism could be seen as merely part of 'the revisionary socialist project' - as Miller suggested at some points in his work (Miller, 1989b 54). In the

UK this tradition stretches back to Anthony Crosland and perhaps further.<sup>9</sup> Revisionism was, above all else, a criticism of the effectiveness or necessity of traditional economic socialism as a means of running a successful economy.

A second view interprets market socialism as something more radical, a concept alien to the socialist tradition. Under this interpretation market socialism involves a post-Hayekian suspicion that there is no defensible basis for publicly articulated and applied collective values. At some points this seems closer to Miller's argument. Market socialism is presented as a 'radical redefinition of the meaning of socialism' and an 'alternative' to other forms of socialism which are 'outdated' (Miller, 1989c 5).

In this section I examine the place of market socialism in the broader traditions of British political thought in the twentieth century, by looking at some of the major discontinuities between market socialism and the more statist forms of socialism that dominated the twentieth century. In particular, I focus on how Miller's arguments for the market rely on themes either submerged by mainstream twentieth century socialism, or found as part of non-socialist traditions. I begin

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Diamond has argued that British socialist revisionism pre-dates Crosland (Diamond, 2004). (Crosland's most important revisionist texts include Crosland, 1952.; 1956; 1974)

with an account of freedom in market socialism and how it contrasts with many earlier socialist accounts.

## **Market freedom and its ramifications**

Miller's account of freedom challenges older socialist traditions; it is explicitly the freedom of a market society: 'Individual freedom is enshrined in consumer choice, and in workers' rights to move in and out of enterprises' (Miller, 1989c 321). At his most candid Miller admitted how radically the acceptance of market freedoms affects the socialist argument. At one point Miller identified 'two strands in the socialist critique of capitalism' (Miller, 1989b 52-60). The first element of this critique focused on the 'distributive inadequacies of capitalism'. The argument was that capitalism distributes resources, freedom and power in a way that is grossly unfair. (This argument is found in Marx's theory of exploitation - the claim that under capitalism the surplus value created by the labour of the worker is systematically expropriated by the capitalists.) This critique led to an argument for distributive justice in most socialist thought. The second element of the socialist critique of capitalism concerns the 'quality of life' in capitalist society. This is a broad critique which includes the accusation that capitalism produces for profit and not for use and therefore fails to provide people with what they really need, that capitalism stifles creativity and that it fosters competitive, rather than co-operative human relations. (This line of argument is found in Marx's theory of

alienation.) Together, Miller argued, these claims ‘add up to the thesis that capitalism does not and cannot provide the good life for man’. He continued:

No matter how radically resources are redistributed, activity in a market must be governed by instrumental rationality, people must behave non-tuistically (that is, each must aim to maximise his holdings, regardless of the welfare of his partners in exchange), and so forth. The ‘quality of life’ critique seems therefore inevitably to point beyond markets ...

(Miller, 1989b 55)

Miller’s acceptance of the market, and with it the freedoms necessary to drive a market society, led him to conclude that,

if we want a feasible form of socialism, it seems that we have to accept a major role for markets, and that to that extent, we must abandon the ‘quality of life’ critique ... [which] requires us to judge some modes of human life as better than others, regardless of the preferences the people actually display.

(Miller, 1989b 55-56)

This acceptance amongst market socialists of other individuals’ choices – quirky or strange as they may seem – both for normative reasons and because individual choice is required for markets to work, is also part of an often submerged rejection

of paternalism in left-wing thought: the idea that people should make their own choices and that it is not the job of the authorities to tell them what to do. Furthermore, as Miller claimed above, advocating markets meant a dispersal of power, as a degree of decision making was taken from the state and given to individuals and (cooperative) groups.

### **The return of radical pluralism**

Miller's market socialism marks an acceptance that the state is not morally and economically sovereign. He describes both his system and its justifying theory as 'radically pluralistic' (Miller, 1989c 321). The non-statist pluralism that is a part of Miller's market socialism was often found in the nineteenth and twentieth century amongst anarchist thinkers, on whom Miller has written. However, scepticism about the state has also been an undercurrent in socialist thought, from Joseph Lane (1978, originally 1887) and William Morris (1993, originally 1889) in the late nineteenth century to the socialist revisionism of Anthony Crosland in the post-war period (1956). Miller in particular on the British left registered this scepticism about the state. His early work reflected an interest in the communitarian-anarchists of the nineteenth century (anarchism was the subject of a book length study in Miller, 1984a), and particularly the Russian anarchist, Pyotr Kropotkin (Miller, 1983b; 1990c).

Miller's argument for workers' control within the cooperative straddles other political traditions, as well as anarchism. If mainstream socialism in the twentieth century was statist, there is a strong strand in socialist thought which advocates pluralism and cooperation largely in terms of the 'quality of life' critique of socialism that Miller claims to have rejected: the argument that working together is morally desirable in its own right. This claim links Miller's arguments for cooperatives and also allows parallels with both the English political pluralism of the early twentieth century - most notably the guild socialism of GDH Cole - and the socialist pluralism of Harold Laski. A parallel attempt to revive pluralism on the left was made by Paul Hirst, who explicitly linked his argument for pluralism at the end of the twentieth century with the arguments of earlier twentieth century pluralist thinkers (Hirst, 1989 ch. 1). This is a move made by several thinkers discussed in this thesis and is part of a wider rediscovery of pluralism on the British left at the end of the twentieth century (Barker, 1999). The argument for workers' control also provided Miller's market socialism with a radicalism, and a transformative aspiration to go beyond capitalism, seldom found in contemporary left-wing debate.

## **Markets and community**

Miller's views on the market challenge some traditional socialist conceptions of community. Hilary Wainwright, whose work is examined in Chapter 4, argued that

Miller equated anti-market socialism with a 'primitive communalism' desired on purely moral grounds (Wainwright, 1994 274), and cited Miller's comment that those who support the anti-market tradition in socialism remain 'romantically attached to a pre-industrial vision of community' (Miller, 1989f 29). For Miller, she argued, such commitments among today's socialists are an unscrutinized legacy of nineteenth-century utopianism. Wainwright's interpretation of Miller's argument allows parallels between his thought and that of Friedrich Hayek, who dismissed socialism as an atavistic desire for a sense of community that was lost with the evolution of the market (Hayek, 1988 18-19).

However, Miller's actual account of community is more nuanced than Wainwright admits. His writing contains similarities with contemporary post-modern writers on nationhood, such as Linda Colley and Andrew Pilkington (Colley, 1992; Pilkington, 2002). Miller notes the importance of enemies in the construction of communal identity, arguing that the stronger the loyalty one has to a community the stronger the animosity seems to be to those outside it. Thus socialists face a trade off between small, intense communities which relate to each other in non-socialist (rivalrous or hostile) ways or more inclusive communities in which the

socialist elements, such as solidarity and simplicity of relationship, are diluted (Miller, 1989c 232).<sup>10</sup>

Miller was also critical of the view held by many socialists that communal relationships must, in some way, be unitary. He traced this view to the argument of German Romantics and cited the concern of Raymond Plant, whose work is examined in the next chapter, that their view of community ‘involved some notion of the whole man, in which men were to be met by other men in the totality of their social roles and not in a fragmented or segmental way’ (Plant cited in Miller, 1989c 231-232). Miller argued that Marx, Morris or Kropotkin would not have accepted the argument of the German Romantics either, for it leaves no room for the development of individuality. For Miller, the goal of these thinkers was to ‘reconcile individual self-development with communal solidarity, not to extinguish the former in the name of the latter’ (Miller, 1989c 233). Yet in arguing for the market, which necessarily involves partial relationships as people relate to one another as buyers and sellers of goods, Miller has tipped the balance further away

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<sup>10</sup> A similar argument has made a public reappearance recently through the controversy sparked by an article in the magazine, *Prospect*, in which the editor, David Goodhart argued that there was a trade off between ethnic diversity and a strong welfare state (Goodhart, 2004). Goodhart’s argument was rejected by several left-wing commentators (including B Crick, 2004; Parekh, 2004; Sassen, 2004).

from community and towards the individual than did the nineteenth century thinkers upon whom he draws upon to support his argument.

Miller's work on community involves a further break with earlier forms of socialism. For Miller, community is crucial in the constitution of one's sense of personal identity and in making possible the distributive arrangements that socialists support, and he argues that this sense of community can be derived from *nationality* (an argument made in greatest detail in Miller, 1995c). As Miller admits, his 'rescue operation on behalf of nationality' (Miller, 1989c 238) contrasts with earlier forms of socialism, which had, in theory if not in practice, been overwhelmingly hostile to the idea of nationhood, which were associated with aggressive forms of nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

### **'Feasible' socialism**

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<sup>11</sup> Notable exceptions are George Orwell (in particular 1984, originally 1945; 1982, originally 1941) and Robert Blatchford (1902), who both drew on nationalism as a source of support for their socialist arguments. In fact, nationalism was originally seen as a left-wing idea as I noted in the discussion of the emergence of the left-right division in the introduction to this thesis.

Miller set out explicitly to develop a ‘feasible’ form of socialism that eschews earlier utopian approaches. He argued that his writing was part of an attempt ‘to recast the principle of socialism with the aim, broadly speaking, of bringing it more closely into line with the aspirations of the majority of the people (including the majority of workers) in advanced societies’ (Miller, 1989b 51-52). Miller is not alone in stressing the ‘feasibility’ of his argument for socialism at the end of the twentieth century (Nove, 1983). The move to less utopian and more feasible forms of socialism is part of a much longer historical shift. Below I argue that market socialism’s half-way status goes some way towards accounting for its failure to remain a major part of the political landscape. It was seen as too utopian for the centre, yet not ambitious enough to placate more traditional socialists.

Market socialism is often presented as a form of socialist revisionism. Yet the central position it grants to market freedoms (and the acceptance of the results of those freedoms), its pluralism, its challenge to traditional socialist understandings of community and its explicit search for feasibility mean that it sits uncomfortably in the socialist tradition – even the revisionist one. In the next section I examine the position of market socialism in the wider political landscape further.

## ***Conclusions: the fall of market socialism and the corrosion of old categories***

In this concluding section I look at the significance of market socialism upon the wider political landscape, and situate Miller's tentative engagement with Hayek and his argument for market socialism against the wider changes which occurred in political thought between 1989 and 1997.

### **The fall of market socialism**

market socialism, once thought to be a rather timid idea, is now regarded by many on the Left as dangerously radical

(Miller, 1997c 98)

If market socialism was *in-vogue* from the late 1980s to the early nineties, by 1997 it was a concept rapidly going out of fashion – a decline in popularity which continues to this day (see Figure 2). In retrospect, the attempt of David Miller and other market socialists to provide a popular alternative to statist socialism failed. After regularly returning to the issue of market socialism for much of the two decades from the mid-seventies, the interest of Miller (and many of the other main advocates of market socialism) has now waned. Perhaps Miller's fading interest in

the idea of market socialism shows that his commitment was not as dogged as Hayek's, and he appears to have rejected his own lesson, drawn from Hayek:

At least one lesson can be learned by contemplating Hayek's life. He shows us what can be achieved by sticking doggedly to your guns, ignoring intellectual fashion, and waiting until your moment comes. Hayek had only one tune to play ... but he played it with panache.

(Miller, 1994 346)

The graph below gives some indication of how the term has also fallen out of academic debate since the late-nineties.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The many contested meanings of 'market socialism' make this kind of conceptual search problematic. A prime example concerns many of the more recent articles which use the term 'market socialism' to describe the market reforms carried out in China in recent years. These reforms owe little to the British market socialism discussed in this chapter. Nor does the graph take into account the selection of journals surveyed or the rise in the number of journals which occurred during the period examined. Furthermore, this kind of search obviously does not include works that put forward arguments with ideational similarities to market socialism, but which do not use the term. Despite these problems, the exercise provides a useful indication, if no more, of the rise and fall of academic debate on market socialism in recent decades.

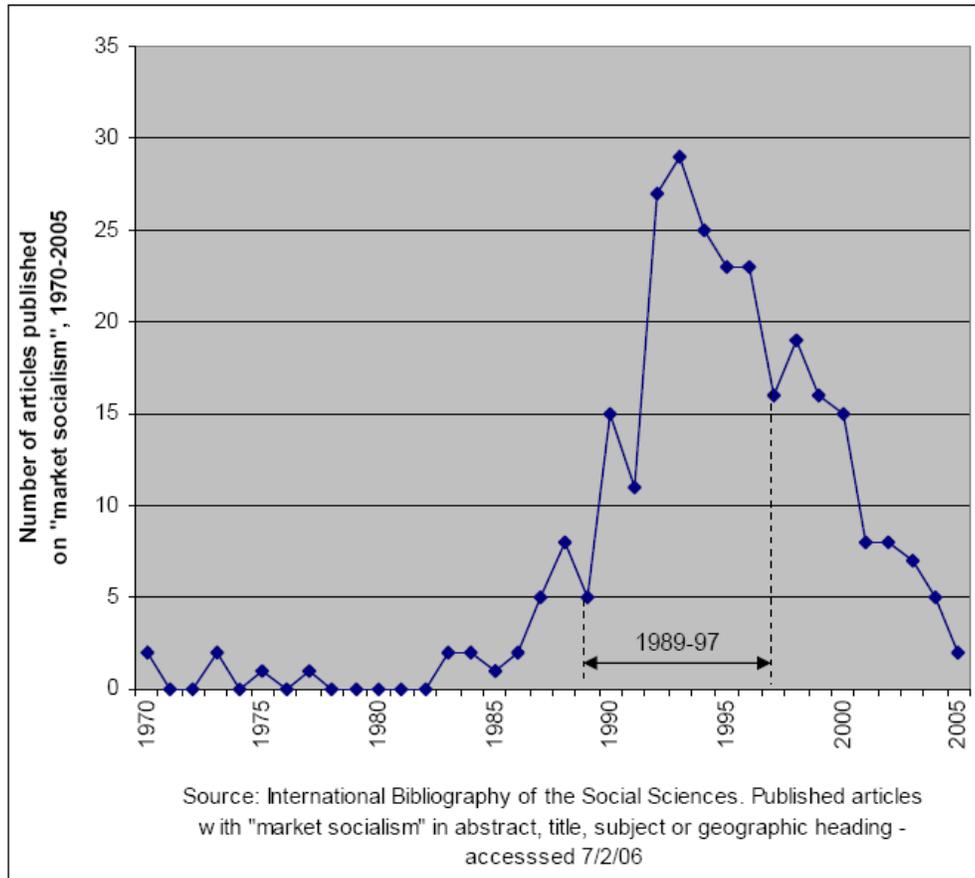


Figure 2: The rise and fall of market socialism

Several reasons can be suggested for the decline of market socialism. First, in the UK, market socialism failed to attract support on the left; whilst appearing too radical for those in the centre (as noted above). In the early 1990s the left-wing thinker, GA Cohen, dismissed market socialism as an example of ‘Adaptive Preference Formation’, by which he meant a ‘process in which, irrationally, a person comes to prefer A to B just because he believes A is available and B is not’. To Cohen, and other critics, ‘market socialism is at best second-best’. Cohen argued, for example, that market socialism is inadequate from a socialist point of

view because it failed socialism's egalitarian distributive principles, offering higher rewards to those that happened to be talented in the creation of productive cooperatives (G. Cohen, 1991 15). If market socialism fails the distributive aims of some of the left, others would reject it on the basis of Miller's admission that a feasible form of socialism must involve markets, and therefore, must abandon the quality of life critique of earlier socialists (Miller, 1989b 55).

Alternatively, for those on the centre, market socialism was too radical. As 'disenchantment' increased during the 1990s, this increasingly seemed to be the case, as Miller's quote in the epigraph to this section shows. For those in the centre, the distance between the vision laid out, for example, in Estrin and Le Grand's *Market Socialism* (1989), written as a specific response to the Labour Party's 1983 election defeat, and the policies of New Labour in office after 1997 make the radical nature of market socialism particularly clear. Market socialism offered a second best utopia: too utopian for critics near the political centre, but an uninspiring second best for many on the left.

Several former market socialists were later involved with New Labour since their election in 1997, notably Julian Le Grand, who was appointed Special Adviser on Health to Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2004 (Downing Street, 2004). The distance between New Labour in the late 1990s and market socialists a decade before is significant, but there is some continuity between Le Grand's arguments whilst

working as a special advisor (such as J Le Grand, 2003) and those found in his earlier market socialist phase. In all of Le Grand's work since he edited *Market Socialism* in 1989 there remains an explicit argument for greater 'choice' and a continued support for the market as a means of delivering better services. This consistency allows a line to be drawn between the market socialism of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which phrased its arguments in terms of freedom, and New Labour's 'reform and modernisation' agenda after 1997, which aims to bring increased freedom of choice for citizens dealing with the public services. Despite some continuity there is a gulf between the actual policies of New Labour in government and the aspirations of the market socialists discussed in this chapter.

There were other reasons for market socialism's rapid disappearance in the UK. The Yugoslavian model of market socialism (which was discussed above) underwent a catastrophic and rapid collapse in the early 1990s, which proved instrumental to the decline of the wider market socialist argument. Although Miller and other market socialists often distanced themselves from the main 'actually existing' example of their arguments, the collapse of the Yugoslavian model took with it much of the wider support and sympathy for Western market socialism during the final years of the chronological twentieth century.

Last, market socialism, only a decade from its heyday in the UK, seems curiously parochial and outdated in its concerns. Miller's discussion of the market is largely

national in its scope. Contemporary discussion of the market, especially since the rise of debates about globalisation in the mid to late 1990s, tends to view the market as global (Dicken, 1992) - or at least regional (Ohmae, 1995) - and the power of the nation-state as circumscribed.<sup>13</sup> Writing before the contemporary globalisation debate got under way in full force, Miller never fully faced the question of how market socialism could be attained when the powers of the state were increasingly circumscribed by the process of globalisation - especially as market socialism has only ever received limited popular support. By the late 1990s much of the debate on the centre and left had been refocused onto questions of how to engage with globalisation (in particular see Giddens, 1998).

### **The corrosion of old categories**

For much of the twentieth century the ideas which dominated political discussion in the UK - socialism; conservatism and to a lesser extent liberalism – were relatively stable. The dominance of this taxonomy was challenged at various times; notably by feminism, at various points in the century, and by the new right from the late 1960s. By the end of the twentieth century this taxonomy had

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<sup>13</sup> Even those on the left who were sceptical about globalisation, such as Hirst, had to engage in a debate with those who thought globalisation a real limit on the Left (Hirst and Thompson, 1996).

collapsed. Market socialism is not alone in challenging the old categorisation; but it was a notably corrosive force in breaking down the old structures, in particular the separation between socialism and liberalism. In the final years, the boundaries between many new socialist arguments, and left-liberal ones, were increasingly blurred (as I argue in the next chapter).

Market socialism is no longer a significant part of contemporary political debate. If it acted as a corrosive force in breaking down the old barriers between socialism and other ideologies, it also burnt itself out. In seeking to provide a self-described *socialist* argument for the market, the concept clung to the categories it was itself helping to destroy. Market socialism did not fit easily into the socialist tradition: its acceptance of the market, not just for reasons of efficiency (a value for which the Fabians would have felt some affinity), but often for reasons related to individual freedom, contained ramifications that challenged some of the central themes of earlier socialism. Miller's model of market socialism, through supporting freedom of choice within a market system, broke with the paternalist strand found in Fabian socialism. Market socialism also broke with mainstream twentieth century socialism through its non-statist pluralism, its rejection of a strong conception of community and its focus on providing a 'feasible' alternative.

By the end of the 1990s socialism (and conservatism for that matter), as it had been understood for most of the twentieth century, no longer played a significant

role in categorising political debate. David Miller's rejection of statist forms of socialism provided one examples of this. Contemporary political discussion takes place within a less clearly mapped political terrain, in which ideas that were often a neglected part of the major political traditions of the twentieth century are being rediscovered and reused in the construction of new arguments - for the most part free from those traditions in which they had been previously located. By the end of the twentieth century 'feasible socialism' began to appear more like social liberalism, a blurring which becomes more obvious in the work of Raymond Plant, discussed in the next chapter. The rise and fall of market socialism provides a case study of the much wider collapse in traditional political traditions that structured our understanding of politics during the twentieth century.

## Chapter 3 - Raymond Plant: Hayek's challenge

[Plant is] unusual among politically committed thinkers in his willingness to engage with contrary points of view. Lord Plant's distinctive contribution to thinking on the left has been to grapple with the intellectual challenge of the new right.

Before it became fashionable among Labour intellectuals Lord Plant accepted the liberal critique of economic planning set out by Friedrich von Hayek.

(Willman, 1993)

Raymond Plant's contribution to political studies in the UK has been significant, both through his political philosophy and his wider involvement in political life. His active role in the Labour Party is greater than that of any of the other thinkers examined in detail in this thesis. He was made a life peer in 1992, and sits on the Labour benches. In this role he has been a Party Spokesman in the Lords on Home Affairs from 1992 to 1996 and has also spoken for the Party on constitutional and welfare issues. He has sat on a variety of groups which helped to shape contemporary British politics. He chaired the Labour Party Commission on Electoral Systems, between 1991 and 1993, and the Fabian Society Commission on Taxation and Citizenship, between 1999 and 2000.

Plant's doctorate at the University of Hull was titled *Through Philosophy to Community: a Study in the Identity and Significance of the Thought of Hegel*. This reflects a life-long interest in Hegel's work, and is associated with Plant's wider interest in the relation and tensions between individual and community. Most of Plant's later career was spent as Professor of Politics at the University of Southampton, to which he was appointed in 1979 (although he was Master of St Catherine's College, Oxford from 1994 to 2000). Plant's research interests and publications range from the philosophical to the practical; major publications include *Hegel* (1973), *Political Philosophy and Social Welfare* (1980), *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship* (1984), *Citizenship and Rights in Thatcher's Britain* (1990), *Modern Political Thought* (1991b) and *Politics, Theology and History* (2001b). He was also a columnist for *The Times* newspaper between 1986 and 1988. In 2003 Plant was given the award for a 'Lifetime Achievement in Political Studies' from the *Political Studies Association* (Political Studies Association, 2003).

Unlike other commentators discussed in this thesis, Plant's work is already the subject of an extended study. Even more to the point, he is the subject of an extended analysis that compares his work in detail with that of Hayek. João Carlos Espada's book, *Social Citizenship Rights: A Critique of F.A. Hayek and Raymond Plant* (1996), is an examination of the views of Hayek and Plant on 'welfare' or 'social citizenship rights' (Espada, 1996 1). The first part of the book focuses on

Hayek – a sceptic over the existence of this type of right. In the second part of the book Hayek’s rejection of welfare rights is contrasted with Plant’s argument for them. In the foreword to Espada’s book, the sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf (who supervised the doctoral thesis from which the book emerged) wrote:

The author did not find it easy to identify one person to make the opposing case, a Hayek of the Left (if that is not too absurd an idea). Raymond Plant ... was eventually singled out

(Espada, 1996 x)

Both in terms of style and influence Plant is not a ‘Hayek of the Left’ and the implications of the description are, perhaps, unhelpful. As I argued in Chapter 1, Hayek’s work was notable - at least after the publication of *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) – for its polemical quality, and its lack of engagement with the arguments of his opponents. In return, the left largely avoided any serious engagement with him. Plant, as the epigraph to this chapter notes, is quite the opposite. His work is never eristic and comes across as quietly thoughtful in contrast to Hayek’s frequent polemicism. Plant is prepared to engage seriously with the opposite point of view, as Espada accepted when he wrote that, ‘Raymond Plant’s reflection has been developed in a critical dialogue with the thought of Friedrich A. Hayek’ (Espada, 1996 100).

Espada's summary and collation of the main arguments and their tensions are useful and I occasionally draw upon his work in this chapter. However, his approach to Hayek and Plant is very different from my own. Espada's work is a piece of political philosophy in which the two thinkers are used as a springboard from which to launch a normative analysis of social rights (which Espada does in Part Three of his book). This thesis, by contrast, is a contribution to the recent history of ideas. Espada's book is also a piece of political philosophy which focuses fairly exclusively on one aspect of Hayek's and Plant's argument: the concept of social rights. (There is no discussion in Espada's book of Plant's thoughts on Hayek's epistemic argument, for example.) In addition, although Espada engages seriously with both thinkers, he sets Hayek and Plant up as polar opposites because of their opposing views on social rights. The political categories, of which their work is selected as an exemplar - described by Espada as neo-liberalism and socialism - are seen as largely static and opposed. By contrast this thesis is interested in the changing nature of political discourses, and it is the messier middle area of partial agreement, not polarity, which is used to highlight these changes.

Plant's account of Hayek involves a systematic response to the main themes in his work, and allows me to introduce Hayek's main arguments, which are relevant throughout this thesis. My focus in this chapter is limited to Plant's engagement with Hayek and its context, content and significance. As such it does not attempt

any more detailed analysis of his wider work and, in particular, his writings on Hegel, which are extensive;<sup>1</sup> reference to these texts only arises tangentially, in looking at the wider significance of Plant's engagement with Hayek's work.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of those arguments Plant identifies as crucial in Hayek's account: his negative conception of justice and liberty; his argument against social justice; and his epistemological criticisms of planning. I spend some time outlining these, as later chapters often refer back to them. I then develop Plant's responses to these arguments. From here I examine some of the direct and indirect influences found in Plant's thought. In particular I focus on the contribution of the socialist revisionism of Anthony Crosland, the work of John Rawls, the Christian socialism of RH Tawney and the new liberalism of TH Green and others. I conclude with a brief discussion of the significance of Plant's work, which, I argue, demonstrates the closeness of left-liberalism and democratic socialism by the last decades of the twentieth century. Plant's work was reflected

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<sup>1</sup> Just a selection of the books and articles which Plant has written predominantly on the thinker includes *Hegel* (1973), 'Hegel and Political Economy' (1977a), 'Economic and Social Integration' (1978b), 'Dialectics, Politics and Economics: Aspects of Hegel's Political Thought' (1982), *Hegel: An Introduction* (1983), 'Hegel on Identity and Legitimation' (1984b), 'Is There a Future in the Philosophy of History?' (1984c), 'Hegel and the Political Economy' (1987), 'Hegel' (2000) and *Hegel* (2003, originally 1997).

in debates between ‘modernisers’ and ‘traditionalists’ within the Labour Party during the 1980s and 1990s.

## ***I. From Hegel to Hayek***

In many respects the responses made by Plant to the contextual changes of the late twentieth century paralleled those of David Miller. Particularly significant in shaping the thought of both thinkers was the Labour Party’s loss of the 1983 General Election, which was seen as symptomatic both of its wider intellectual failings and of the successes of the new right. Like Miller, Plant was heavily involved in the creation of the Socialist Philosophy Group (SPG), which was set up to rethink and reconstruct socialist ideas after the 1983 defeat (Estrin and Le Grand, 1989 v).

In contrast to Miller, Plant was far more willing to tackle the arguments of Hayek and the new right directly. Much of Plant’s earlier work had been on Hegel and on issues of community (notably Plant, 1973; 1974), and his earlier work demonstrated a familiarity with Hegelian and new forms of liberalism (Vincent and Plant, 1984) – a category to which Plant’s arguments are close, as I go on to argue. From this Idealist perspective, Hayek can appear simply as a fellow liberal, whose work can be rationally discussed, drawn on or rejected. By contrast, those thinkers who follow a materialist, or Marxist, conception of historical development

face a much larger movement *en route* to an engagement with Hayek, involving a methodological leap in addition to the psychological one.

Plant's most obviously political work during the 1970s was often in a tradition most associated with revisionist socialism. He was concerned with the inequalities of power and status that arose in the practical workings of the welfare state (Plant, 1970). His examination of the right and wrongs of selling blood provides one example (Plant, 1977b; 1978c) and deals with the same concerns and themes as Richard Titmuss' classic text, *The Gift Relationship* (Titmuss, 1970). Plant's work at this time also examined questions over the limits of the market (as Titmuss' work had done) and therefore can be seen as a prelude to his fuller engagement with pro-market arguments during the 1980s and 1990s.

From tentative debates about the limits of the market in the 1970s, the electoral success of the Conservative Government under Thatcher during the 1980s led Plant to an early and much fuller engagement with pro-market arguments. Plant's 1984 Fabian pamphlet, *Equality, Markets and the State* (Plant, 1984a) was an explicit attempt to claim freedom for the left. The centrality of freedom in Plant's argument places it very close to Miller's (examined in the previous chapter). As such the argument in *Equality, Markets and the State* marked an important break with older left-wing arguments. (Plant's argument in this pamphlet was developed in several publications during the 1980s and 1990s and is discussed in more detail

below). As the political journalist John Lloyd commented, the arguments in favour of freedom made by members of the SPG were ‘conducted necessarily on the terrain chosen by the right since for a long time the left disdained the fight, saying it was a phoney’ (John Lloyd, 1986). By the 1980s the electoral success of the Conservative Party meant that this fight could be disdained no more. Plant’s argument was particularly influential on key figures within the leadership of the Labour Party. Bryan Gould, one-time Shadow Treasury Spokesman, drew on them in his book *Socialism and Freedom* (Gould, 1985). The then Deputy Leader of the Party, Roy Hattersley, also acknowledged Plant’s pamphlet (and wider support) in his book, *Choose Freedom: the future for democratic socialism* (Hattersley, 1987). In the next section I look at the arguments of Hayek and the new right in more detail, before turning in the final section to examine Plant’s responses to them.

## ***II. The arguments of Hayek and the new right***

Hayek’s writings pose the most coherent contemporary challenge to socialism. The failure to respond adequately to the questions he posed and the agenda he set is one of the main reasons for socialism’s intellectual decline.

(Plant, 1989c)

It is significant that Plant, a socialist, bothered to write a commentary in *The Times* for Hayek's ninetieth birthday, and a demonstration of Plant's 'willingness to engage with contrary points of view' noted in the epigraph to this chapter. His claim that Hayek's challenge 'is one of the main reasons for socialism's intellectual decline' shows the importance which Plant places in his engagement with Hayek's work.

Hayek features in many of Plant's works, but the most detailed engagements with his arguments appeared in a cluster of works published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, notably two book chapters, 'Socialism, Markets and End States' (Plant, 1989e), and 'Hayek on Social Justice: A Critique' (Plant, 1994) and in his book, *Modern Political Thought* (Plant, 1991b especially 78-97), which reasserted and clarified many of the arguments concerning Hayek, presented piecemeal elsewhere in Plant's work.

One of the 1989 chapters on Hayek appeared in Julian Le Grand and Saul Estrin's book, *Market Socialism* (Estrin and Le Grand, 1989) – a concept which was in *vogue* on the British left from the late 1980s until the mid-1990s (as I argued in the previous chapter and in Griffiths, 2006). Plant never embraced market socialism as fully as other contributors to the book, and his thought is not best classified as distinctly market socialist. Plant's contribution to the Estrin and Le Grand book was not so much an argument specifically for market socialism, as Miller's was for

example, but an examination of the more general question of whether market-based views can be reconciled with ‘accepted socialist values’ (Plant, 1989e 51).

### **Negative conceptions of justice and freedom**

Plant began his contribution to Estrin and Le Grand’s book by dividing ‘procedural’ and ‘end state’ arguments (Plant, 1989e 50). Socialists, he argued, had invariably argued for end-states. These socialist end-states, such as (positive) freedom and social justice, had traditionally been derived from ethical arguments about the kind of world in which we should live. By contrast, thinkers on the new right had tended to argue that markets are procedural. Plant noted that, ‘This is certainly the position of current neo-liberal defenders of the market such as F. A. Hayek’ (Plant, 1989e 51-52). Hayek’s argument for the market is ‘negative’ or procedural, because it does not support any particular end state or patterned principle. Plant quoted the description of the market by Fred Hirsch, as ‘in principle unprincipled’ (Plant, 1989e 52; 1995).

Plant noted that it is possible to combine patterned and procedural arguments. As the introduction to this thesis showed, this is what has tended to happen in practice, in particular during the post-war period of ‘consensus’ over Keynesian social democracy. Here the market is allowed to operate within a certain framework and the government intervenes through provision of welfare to secure

certain patterned outcomes (such as equality) when they are not provided by the market. Plant pointed out two problems with the combination of procedural and patterned principles, the first was practical and socio-economic, and the second was theoretical and philosophical:

the combination of the free market plus welfare spending in the pursuit of socialist goals such as greater equality and justice had not only become very difficult to maintain in practice, but also creates, in the view of the liberal market theorists deep theoretical difficulties.

(Plant, 1989e 23)

The first, socio-economic, reason for Plant's engagement with the arguments of the new right was, in part, a response to the collapse of the Keynesian consensus from the mid-1970s onwards. The shifts documented in this thesis, expressed in the arguments of Raymond Plant, David Miller, Hilary Wainwright and Andrew Gamble, must all be seen in this context.

The second reason which Plant gives for engaging with the new right is philosophical. To Plant, the new right's distinction between procedural and end state arguments raised important philosophical challenges for socialists. For the new right justice was defined negatively – as the result of an absence of intentional action. Unintentional action can not result in injustice. To say hurricane damage is

unjust, the new right argued, would be a literal 'nonsense'. Injustice could not result from the outcomes of uncoerced market transactions because they were unintentional. Those seeking to combine the market with socialism must either accept this view of justice and markets, and abandon the argument for end state principles; or, reject this view of justice and the market to argue for socialist principles.

A parallel argument occurs when it comes to defining freedom. The new right's view of freedom (like justice) is negative - it is defined as the absence of intentional coercion.<sup>2</sup> This is a distinction made famous by Isaiah Berlin in his seminal essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (Berlin, 1998, originally 1958). Here negative liberty is contrasted with the positive freedom of being able to do or be something. For the new right there is a categorical distinction between freedom and ability. If they were not categorically different then, it is argued, any kind of

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<sup>2</sup> Negative concepts of liberty are often presumed to support right-wing argument, but freedom can be defined negatively by the left as well. The most explicit attempt to do this has come from GA Cohen, who first made a left-wing argument for negative freedom in 1979 (G. Cohen, 1979), providing an early response to the claims of the new right on this form of liberty (the paper was thoroughly revised as G. Cohen, 1991).

inability would be an unfreedom – Plant uses the example of a man’s inability to bear a child.<sup>3</sup>

This negative understanding of liberty is then applied to the market. The market, the new right argues, is not coercive because, first, it lacks agency and intentionality and second, there is a categorical distinction to be drawn between freedom (as the absence of coercion) and ability. Again the same choice faces those people who want to combine the market with socialism as in the first argument regarding justice: they must either accept this view of freedom, and abandon the argument that markets can cause unfreedom; or, they must reject this view of freedom and the market to argue for a (positive) or effective notion of freedom. The argument for liberty and the market is found, notably, for the new right, in the opening chapter of Hayek’s *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960 ch. 1).

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<sup>3</sup> In a well known response to this claim Gerald MacCallum has pointed out that freedom is always both ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’, and so it is both negative and positive. He argued that discussions of freedom, although they do not always make explicit each component, take the form of a ‘triadic relation’ encompassing both negative and positive liberty: ‘ $x$  is (is not) free from  $y$  to do (not do, become, not become)  $z$ ’, where  $x$  ranges over agents,  $y$  ranges over ‘preventing conditions’ and  $z$  ranges over actions or conditions of character or circumstance (MacCallum, 1991, originally 1967 102).

## **Value pluralism and ‘the mirage of social justice’**

Hayek’s argument against end-state conceptions of social justice is that, in so far as each end state is a ‘patterned principle’, there is the deep and intractable problem of trying to provide a justification for the nature of that end state or patterned principle. The most important target of Hayek’s argument was the socialist view of justice, which was characterised as ‘distributive’ or ‘social’. The new right called into question the criteria used to define social justice (Hayek, 1976). There are many possibilities: Plant listed ‘desert, merit, need, entitlement, etc.’ Socialists, Plant argued, ‘will want to place need at the centre of moral concern, even if they find a role for some of the other criteria too’ (Plant, 1989e 57). Placing need as central raises various questions, which would appear to have intractable answers: why prioritise need over other values? What does need consist of? How does one decide the weight of other values, such as merit in the theory of social justice? The same dilemmas arise when we come to look at socialist definitions of liberty, which, were generally (but as noted above not necessarily) defined positively. For liberty to be ‘effective’ one needed to define which set of abilities, resources or opportunities are chosen to define freedom: how do we make that choice?

Looking at this issue, Plant identified two related lines that Hayek, specifically, and the new right, in general, have taken against socialist views of justice and

liberty: the first philosophical, and the second sociological. First, it is argued that neither merits nor needs, even if we could ever know them, are commensurable. When two needs conflict, for example, Hayek argued, there is no higher principle to which one can appeal to resolve the dilemma. Hayek gave an example of this in his *Constitution of Liberty*, (Hayek, 1960 294-297), which dealt with the insatiability of basic needs for pensioners. The same problems apply when we come to rank different conceptions of merit against one another. For many on the new right dilemmas of the kind raised above can never be solved by rational argument. Hayek, as well as many of the Chicago and Austrian School thinkers, argued that values are irreducibly subjective and attitudinal. In a market, the new right argument goes, we do not pursue any set of philosophically unjustifiable ends; instead we are presented with a procedural system for following our own good in our own way.

The second line taken by Hayek is sociological. It is the argument that society is now so morally diverse in character, that the kind of consensus needed to support socialist end states could never be achieved. The only way to achieve socialist end-states, and Gray summarised Hayek's point usefully here, would be through 'the political conquest of state power and the subjugation of rival value systems' (Gray, 1983 181; cited in Plant, 1989e 59). Part of the case for the market, as it is presented by some on the left, rests on its ability to provide for individual preferences; this leaves some thinkers associated with the new right asking why

the market socialist's argument does not extend to individual *moral* preferences concerning the end-state principles of the society that the individual would like to live in. 'All of this', Plant concluded, 'adds up to a formidable critique of traditional forms of socialism and demands a response' (Plant, 1989e 63).

Plant also pointed out that arguments about the plurality of values have an impact upon socialist economic planning. If there were to be end-state values, such as equality, then there must also be government intervention in the economy to secure those values. Plant noted that, in addition to the argument from value pluralism, 'There are other arguments against the possibility of central planning ... Suffice it to say that the objections are largely epistemological' (1989e 63). These arguments are also primarily associated with Hayek, and, as they are returned to at several points in this thesis, I set them out at some length below.

### **Hayek's epistemic argument**

The journalist, John Willman, noted, in a phrase used as the epigraph to this chapter, that long before others on the left, Plant accepted Hayek's critique of economic planning (Willman, 1993).<sup>4</sup> As I have previously noted, Hayek

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<sup>4</sup> Although 'engaged with' might have been a more accurate term than 'accepted'.

understood socialism, as did most of its twentieth century proponents as largely concerned with the state planning of the economy. To Hayek, socialism meant the creation of a planned economy in which the entrepreneur is replaced by a central planning body (Hayek, 1944 24). This definition was loosely accepted by left and right for much of the next fifty years: the left was in favour of increased state ownership, the right was against. Attempts at economic planning, Hayek argued, are epistemologically flawed – they misunderstand the nature of knowledge. Hayek's argument was more sophisticated than many earlier conservative arguments about the limits of human reason. His epistemic argument against socialism, as he defined it, is that it misunderstands the nature of knowledge itself. His argument is that the 'kind' of knowledge needed to plan an economy centrally does not exist in the form that a planner would need it.

Hayek's account of knowledge, the political philosopher John Gray argued, survives much else in Hayek's thought as his 'greatest contribution to political thought' (Gray, 1998b 148). At one level, Hayek is arguing that central planning is impossible to achieve successfully because our knowledge is limited. The number of calculations needed to supply the demands or needs of every person living in a socialist economy is beyond our capabilities. Dobb pointed out that the second Soviet Five Year Plan mentioned only three hundred specific products, while the plan of 1960 had to deal with 15,000 products, produced by 200,000 enterprises

(cited in Robin Blackburn, 1991a 40). The number of calculations needed to match supply with demand increases exponentially with the complexity of the society.

If this was Hayek's argument then one could easily object that the problem could soon be solved. Technology has made socialist economic planning possible. The science writer, Ray Kurzweil, has claimed that the twenty-first century will see the emergence of machines more 'intelligent' than their creators. By 2019, it has been predicted, a \$1,000 home computer will match the processing power of the human brain, about 20 million billion calculations per second (Kurzweil, 1999). This is a processing power many times that of the supercomputers used by the Soviet Ministries in the decades before the collapse of the USSR. If complexity is the only calculation problem one could argue that technological advance could be used to the benefit of a planned economy: Bill Gates could be the saviour of state socialism.

However, Hayek's argument is more sophisticated than a conservative scepticism about the limits of human reason.<sup>5</sup> Hayek's epistemic argument against socialism as he defined it, is not just that its attempts will be contingently unsatisfactory,

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<sup>5</sup> This reconstruction of his argument is based on the arguments which he set out in his relatively early essay 'Economics and Knowledge' (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936).

based on the limits of human knowledge when he was writing; but that it radically misdescribes the nature of knowledge itself.

In making his epistemic argument Hayek drew a contrast between two approaches to political economy. Central planning is defined as the 'direction of the whole economy according to one unified plan'; whereas competition is defined as 'decentralization between many separate persons' (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 79). Hayek then argued that which 'of these systems is likely to be more efficient depends mainly on the question under which of them we can expect the fuller use will be made of the existing knowledge' (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 79).

This contrast led Hayek to argue that there are 'different kinds of knowledge' and to develop a contrast between 'scientific' (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 79) - also described as 'theoretical' or 'technical' (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 81) - knowledge and the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place. In 1948 Hayek was able to write that

Today it is almost heresy to suggest that scientific knowledge is not the sum of all knowledge. But a little reflection will show that there is beyond question a body of very important but unorganised knowledge which cannot possibly be called scientific in the sense of knowledge of general rules: the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place. It is with respect to this

that practically every individual had some advantage over all others because he<sup>6</sup> possesses unique information of which beneficial use might be made ...

(Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 80)

Socialism, therefore, is an attempt to use knowledge in a way that it cannot efficiently be used. Most knowledge cannot be collected centrally in the way that the socialist planners believe that it can; it exists in people's heads at particular times and in particular places. Hayek's examples of this knowledge are revealing in the type of economic order he envisaged:

The shipper who earns his living from using otherwise empty or half-filled journeys of tramp steamers, or the estate agent whose whole knowledge is almost exclusively one of temporary opportunities, or the *arbitrageur* who gains from local differences of commodity prices - are all performing eminently useful functions based on special knowledge of circumstances of the fleeting moment not known to others.

(Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 80)

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<sup>6</sup> Hayek, as was normal for a writer of his time, uses the male pronoun. In this thesis I have randomised my usage, in order to avoid unnecessarily ugly terms, such as 's/he'.

Influenced in his early work by Ernest Mach, Hayek argued that knowledge is composed of sense-data unique to each individual; in his later work Hayek incorporated ‘tacit knowledge’ from the Hungarian-born polymath, Michael Polanyi, into his definition. If we now return to Hayek’s question, laid out above, over which economic system is likely to be the most efficient, we are closer to his answer:

the ultimate decisions must be left to the people who are familiar with these circumstances, who know directly of the relevant changes and of the resources immediately available to meet them. We cannot expect that this problem will be solved by first communicating all this knowledge to a central board which, after integrating all knowledge, issues its orders. We must solve it by some form of decentralization.

(Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 84)

This still left Hayek with the problem of how one could communicate to ‘the man on the spot’ such further information as he needed to fit his decisions into the whole pattern of changes of the larger economic system (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 84). The answer is found in the price system of the market – ‘a mechanism for communicating information’ (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 86). It is, to Hayek, this ‘marvel’ (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 87) upon which we have been able to ‘develop that division of labour on which our civilisation is based’ (Hayek, 1948,

originally 1936 86-89). So, to Hayek, the social order arises as a 'spontaneous' by-product of the interactions of many individuals acting within a market system upon information given to them in the price mechanism.

In later work, Hayek developed the role of the state in this system. It should be limited, he argued, to protecting this spontaneous order. With this in mind Hayek advocated an upper house composed of 'men and women elected at a relatively mature age for fairly long periods, such as fifteen years' to prevent them from succumbing to the short-termism of the electorate (Hayek, 1979 113). A more frequently elected lower house would have limited powers to raise tax for basic infrastructure and social services.

This, in sum, is Hayek's epistemic argument against socialism (understood in terms of economic planning) and forms a large part of the basis for his free market conclusions. Socialism wastes knowledge, which, as we have seen, 'must be left to the people who are familiar with these circumstances, who know directly of the relevant changes and of the resources immediately available to meet them' (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936 83-84). Plant summarised Hayek's challenge to socialists thus:

[The central planner] may have better computers and better techniques of co-ordination, but this fragmented knowledge, crucial to effective action, cannot be put into

propositional form for planning purposes. The market, rather than the state and the central plan, is able to use this dispersed knowledge and will yield more efficient outcomes.

(Plant, 1989c)

### ***III. Plant's engagement with Hayek's work***

Plant's response to the arguments laid out in the previous section involved a thorough going engagement, and even a partial accommodation, with the ideas of Hayek and the new right. In this section I examine Plant's responses to Hayek in the order that the arguments were laid out above: the negative understandings of justice and liberty; value pluralism; and epistemology.

#### **Positive conceptions of justice and liberty**

Writing in his contribution to Estrin and Le Grand's book on market socialism

Plant argued:

I believe that in its most radical form market socialism will go a long way towards accepting the neo-liberal critique of

traditional socialism, based as it is upon end states and a conception of the good.

(Plant, 1989e 63)

However, Plant noted that to secure ‘the socialist element in this sort of market socialism depends upon the rejection of the neo-liberal claim that free markets are not coercive and provide a fair procedure within which individuals’ preferences can be realised’ (Plant, 1989e 63-64).

For Plant, the socialist must dispute the negative view of justice put forward by Hayek and other defenders of the free market that injustice occurs only as a result of *intentional* action. Central to Plant’s argument is the claim that although the results of the market may well be unintended, as Hayek argues, because they are *foreseeable* they do become a matter of justice. Although a version of the argument was first made as early as 1980 in a book written with Harry Lesser and Peter Taylor-Gooby (Plant, Lesser and Taylor-Gooby, 1980), the fullest expression of the argument is found around a decade later, in Plant’s contribution to Saul Estrin and Julian Le Grand’s book, *Market Socialism* (Plant, 1989e), and in his textbook, *Modern Political Thought* (1991b).

Plant presents both logical and intuitive arguments against Hayek’s negative conception of justice (1989e 65). In 1989 he presented the *logical* argument in two steps. First, Plant noted that when Hayek put forward his argument he did so in

relation to individuals, yet socialists had tended to present their arguments in relation to groups - class being the most obvious example. The claim is that there is a class of people who will enter the market and, although it is intended by no one, will foreseeably get less from it.

The second step that socialists could take, Plant contended, was to argue that we are not just responsible for our intended actions, but also the *foreseeable* results of our actions, so that these too become a matter of justice. This claim avoids a problem suffered by Hayek's negative understanding of the concept. If one accepts his view that injustice can only be caused intentionally 'there would constantly be a strong incentive continually to narrow down the characterization of intention so that it does not include the foreseeable consequences of action' (Plant, 1991b 92). To Plant, the consequence of this widening of the scope of justice is that 'those who support the market do bear responsibility for the least well off' (Plant, 1991b 92), because this group do foreseeably end up with less after entering the market. In the next section, in which I discuss Plant's response to Hayek's value pluralist arguments against social justice, I look at the question of what the responsibility for those who do least well out of the market entails.

A second argument against Hayek's negative conception of justice is derived from what Plant sees as our *intuitive* understanding of the term. Plant noted that 'we could argue against Hayek at this point that justice and injustice is not only a

matter of how a particular outcome came about or arose but is rather a matter of our response to that outcome' (Plant, 1991b 93). Plant gives a hypothetical example. He sees a frail and elderly person fall after a gust of wind, knock themselves unconscious, and end up face down in a gutter full of water. He could save that person's life at no great personal cost. The issues of justice here, he suggests, are not just how the person came to be there, but his response to the outcome – it would be an injustice to walk on by (Plant, 1994 170-171).

Plant opens himself up to difficulties when the principle is introduced to the real world. He accepts this in an account of his thoughts on a service at Winchester Cathedral, written over Christmas 1989, and published in *The Times* (Plant, 1990c). The practical difficulty that Plant's positive conception of justice raises is that if justice is a matter of our response to outcomes (not just whether they were intended) then how do we choose which outcomes we should respond to? Plant quoted *The Book of Common Prayer*, in which we are bidden to confess that 'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done'. 'This', he writes, 'has always worried me ... There are an indefinitely large number of things which I have not done. Which among them ought I to have done?' or, in philosophical terms, an indefinitely large number of outcomes to which one has not responded. This in turn raises questions of knowledge, ignorance and justice. Plant wrote:

Am I responsible for all the harm which my inaction rather than action could have prevented? If such harm is a

foreseeable consequence of my failure to act, can I limit my moral responsibility by putting myself in a position in which I am unaware of the consequences of that failure to act? To limit my moral responsibility I should not read or watch television reports of drought and disaster. I should not look at charity advertisements. Such ignorance would make for moral bliss, a limited moral responsibility, following from limited knowledge of the world and my capacity to act in it. Does watching the news or buying newspapers widen our circle of moral duty?

(Plant, 1990c)

Plant ended his article here, and the problems of overextending our conception of morality and justice were not fully answered. He is, however, more specific over the limits of our responsibilities concerning justice in his discussion of the problem of value pluralism.

Just as Plant attacked Hayek's negative conception of justice he also attacked Hayek's negative conception of freedom. As described above, freedom, for Hayek, is defined as the absence of coercion, and it is entirely and categorically distinct from our ability to carry out free actions. Plant gave several reasons why this distinction cannot be entirely sustained, and returned to this argument at several points in his work. Uppermost in his list was the claim that negative conceptions of liberty do not account for why freedom is valuable to us (Plant, 1989e 65; 1994 171-172). This was implicitly true, Plant argues, even in Hayek's account of

freedom. Hayek argued that liberty is important because it helps us to cope with the dispersed nature of knowledge (discussed in his epistemological argument above) and the unpredictable nature of human existence. To Plant, for freedom to be valuable to us, it must be 'effective'. The idea that liberty must be effective is a key concern for all of the thinkers examined in the main chapters of this thesis. They all reject Hayek's attempt to define freedom in largely negatively terms and support a view of liberty that contains positive elements in which the ability to do or be something or someone, as well as the distribution of those resources that allow one to do or be someone or something, are important issues. This is a debate I return to in the conclusion to this thesis, when discussing the continued relevance of the left-right distinction. To see what bundle of resources or opportunities that Plant argued one needed in order to make liberty effective, I now turn to his engagement with Hayek's value pluralist argument against social justice.

### **Social justice in a pluralist society**

Both the philosophical argument and the socio-economic assessment regarding value pluralism have undergone a revival in recent years. The former argument is found, for example, in John Gray's reinterpretation of Berlin's 'agonistic pluralism' (Gray, 1995). However, as I argue below, Plant largely rejected the *philosophical* case against value pluralism by arguing that there will be overwhelming agreement in favour of the provision of basic needs. By contrast,

Plant largely accepted the *socio-economic* assessment of value pluralism, and this view has an important affect on his work.

An example of how the increase in value pluralism in society affected Plant's political outlook can be found in his report on electoral reform, which he carried out for the Labour Party (Plant, 1991c; 1993a). The issue of electoral reform was deeply divisive within the Party. Neil Kinnock (who was Party Leader from 1983 to 1992) was largely in favour of a move towards some form of proportional representation, whilst Roy Hattersley, the Deputy Leader, was vehemently opposed to it. The suggestion that Plant should chair the committee came originally from Hattersley (Willman, 1993), who had found discussions with Plant helpful in writing his *Choose Freedom* (Hattersley, 1987). Hattersley's work contained many ideational similarities to Plant's own. On the left of British politics, the call for constitutional and electoral reform gathered momentum during the 1980s. This is reflected in the work of several of the thinkers discussed in this thesis, particularly Hilary Wainwright – the subject of Chapter 4. Support for electoral reform was galvanised by the pressure group Charter 88 (Mark Evans, 1995). It is ironic, therefore, that for all the passion over the issue elsewhere on the left, Plant's original 'unique selling proposition as chairman [of the report], however, was that he had given no great thought to electoral reform before and could thus be presented as having an open mind' (Willman, 1993).

The 'Plant Report', published in 1993, caused some controversy by calling for the replacement of the British first-past-the-post electoral system. Plant was described as 'an unlikely harbinger of political revolution' and it was suggested that the author 'appears to have launched an upheaval that could alter the UK political landscape irreversibly' (Willman, 1993). Plant's reasons for advocating electoral change were largely based on a sociological assessment of value pluralism. He argued that the social conditions which produced two largely class-based political parties have now disappeared and that in a more pluralistic society a voting system is needed which is not designed simply to award complete victory to the party with the highest number of seats (Plant, 1993a).

Although, Plant largely accepted the empirical claim that society was becoming more pluralistic in its values, he rejected Hayek's philosophical argument that there could be no ordering or set of just values that would command wide agreement. Plant's response to Hayek, which was first set out in detail in a book written with Harry Lesser and Peter Taylor-Gooby, *Political Philosophy and Social Welfare* (1980), was an argument for basic needs.<sup>7</sup> Plant began by asking 'are there any basic human ends that are wanted by all persons, with basic needs being the necessary means for the pursuit and realization of those ends'? He

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<sup>7</sup> In this reconstruction of Plant's engagement with Hayek's philosophical value pluralism I largely follow the reconstruction of the arguments given by Espada (Espada, 1996 ch. 4).

continued, if there are 'such ends generating such basic needs' then, following Rawls, they could be described as 'primary goods which could be the basic concern of social policy' (Plant, Lesser and Taylor-Gooby, 1980 33). Plant's contention was that every moral code, whether personal or shared, relied on people having certain moral capacities which allowed them to pursue the moral goals enshrined in that code.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the capacity to act as a moral agent becomes the basic human end which generates basic human needs, as Plant wrote, 'There are some conditions necessary for doing anything at all ... No matter what morality one adopts, these conditions will be necessary for carrying it out' (Plant, Lesser and Taylor-Gooby, 1980 38). These basic human needs, he argued, following the work of the philosopher Alan Gewirth (1982; 1978), are 'survival' and 'autonomy' (understood as the freedom to act morally). In Plant's critique of Hayek's negative conception of liberty, discussed above, the argument was made that negative liberty alone is not what humans find valuable. For Plant, it is the argument for basic needs, outlined here, that makes freedom 'effective'.

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<sup>8</sup> Plant's argument bears similarities to that of those liberals whose central concern has been individual autonomy. The canonical figure in this tradition is JS Mill (notably Mill, 1993, originally 1859), with Joseph Raz, amongst others, providing an important, more recent, expression (Raz, 1988).

However, as Plant noted, the argument that there were certain basic needs required in order to make freedom effective only provided for a residual welfare state, one that met these needs but still allowed for large inequalities:

A theory of need is central to a left critique of markets because it provides *the beginning of a justification* for arguing that there are certain goods which are so necessary for individual agency that they should be provided collectively and intentionally rather than through the market, which is the forum for which wants and preferences are satisfied ... However, the basic goods of physical survival and autonomy and the specific ways in which these are cashed ... would not take the defence of the welfare state in terms of the value of freedom much beyond the idea of the welfare state as a residual institution ...

(Hoover and Plant, 1989 210; also cited in Espada, 1996 110, italics from Espada)

The argument for basic needs, on its own, undersubscribes any distinctly socialist or left-wing argument. Hence, Plant's argument was supplemented by a further, egalitarian step. Plant's egalitarianism is still based on a defence of those basic needs required to give freedom value. However, the argument now moves from a defence of the provision of basic needs, to a case for their more equal distribution, so that liberty is of roughly equal value to all people. Plant gave several reasons for the equalisation of basic needs, but one in particular is derived straight from his

engagement with Hayek's work. Plant accepted Hayek's argument for equality before the law (laid out in Hayek, 1960 88 and elsewhere) and introduced in the discussion of Hayek's epistemological argument above, but he turned his argument that there are many conceptions of the good and that we cannot prioritise any one conception, on its head:

If this is accepted, then it could be argued that no individual merits more or less in the distribution of those basic resources which are necessary to enter the market of a fair basis and thus *those resources should be distributed as equally as possible* because, if the neo-liberal is correct, there is no other criterion which would not involve weighing up incommensurable merits and deserts.

(Plant, 1989e 68 my italics)<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Plant, in undergoing a thorough engagement with the Hayekian critique of social justice, placed the argument for equality on rational grounds, rather than on the ethical end-state principles upon which many earlier socialists had build their

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<sup>9</sup> The argument is also made in Plant's earlier work, where the authors write that equality before the law, plus the Hayekian argument for value pluralism result in there being 'no moral grounds for saying that some people deserve to have more effective basic liberty ...' (Hoover and Plant, 1989 211; also cited in Espada, 1996 112).

arguments (Barker, 1997 268). Indeed, Plant implied that Hayek's value pluralist argument had made principles such as equality of outcome indefensible (Plant, 1989e 63-74). In doing so, Plant shifted socialists' arguments from equality of outcome to a concern with the bundle of resources with which people should enter the market in order to perform effectively. The principles Plant was now putting forward were, and here he borrowed Dworkin's phrase, 'starting-gate' principles (Plant, 1989e 66).

If people are given an equal set of resources at the starting point, and then left to pursue their own lives in their own way, then inequalities will result once the starting gate has been left. Plant responds to this by arguing that 'to some degree these inequalities will have to be accepted, partly because, if we respect individual freedom, we have to respect the consequences of the choices which people make and their corresponding responsibility for them' (Plant, 1989e 68). In the final section of this chapter I examine the limits and heritage of Plant's argument for equality; first, however, I run briefly through his engagement with Hayek's argument against central planning.

### **The epistemic argument and socialist planning**

Plant argued that 'Hayek is right in thinking that the idea of social justice is central to both democratic socialism and social democracy' (Plant, 1994 164). Plant's may

be a fair characterisation of Hayek's position, but it could be argued that there was a shift of emphasis in his concerns during the course of his long career. In the work written before the end of the Second World War, the analysis is economic. Socialism was characterised as about central planning, which was inefficient (Hayek, 1948, originally 1936; Hayek, 1980, originally 1945) and led to totalitarianism (Hayek, 1944). Later in Hayek's work, his concerns moved from economics to political theory and the history of political thought, a move evident by the publication of *The Constitution of Liberty* (Hayek, 1960). (Although it should be noted that this was nothing more than a shift of emphasis: there are strong thematic similarities which run through all of Hayek's work, his economics did not end with the War, and neither did his political theory start after it.)

Plant, as a philosopher of Hegel, in the main engages with Hayek's political theory. He regards Hayek's arguments against social justice as central. Other thinkers studied in this thesis have focused on Hayek's economics. (Hilary Wainwright, whose work is the topic of Chapter 4, is the most obvious example.) Plant's account of Hayek's argument against central planning is largely presented in terms of its imposition of values, not its epistemological difficulties. His writings on Hayek's epistemological account are characterised best as concession rather than engagement. Plant noted, for example, that, 'Still the most cogent part of his critique is his attack on centralized planning' (Plant, 1989c) and he claimed that:

Socialists have recognized since the 1930s that this argument about the dispersed and fragmentary nature of human knowledge is one of the strongest arguments in favour of markets and against central planning or government strategic action in the economy.

(Plant, 1989b)

However, Plant leaves it for others to launch more detailed engagements with the Hayekian critique of central planning. He largely accepted it, although he would not accept Hayek's strongest claim, that planning necessarily slides into totalitarianism, put forward in *The Road to Serfdom* and discussed in the introduction to this thesis (Hayek, 1944). However, Plant does not go into the detail of Hayek's epistemological argument. The thoroughgoing engagement with Hayek's epistemology is set aside for later writers on the left; in particular Hilary Wainwright, whose work is examined in the next chapter. This is, perhaps, because Plant is a political philosopher whose approach to political thought is more theoretical than empirical.

#### ***IV. Influences on and significance of Plant's argument***

Plant's work owes much to earlier socialist and liberal arguments. In this section I examine the influences on Plant's egalitarian arguments: of particular note are

John Rawls and Tony Crosland, thinkers whose work, Plant argued, contained many similarities. I then look briefly at the Christian and Hegelian influence on Plant's work as it relates to his political philosophy, and note some of the ideational similarities between his arguments at the end of the twentieth century with those made by Christian socialists and new liberals a century before. I conclude with some brief comments about Plant's role in the 'modernisation' of the Labour Party during the 1980s and 1990s.

### **The reassertion of revisionist socialism: Crosland and Rawls**

Plant developed a theory of 'presumptive' or 'democratic equality' – the later phrase is borrowed from both Rawls and Crosland (Rawls, 1971 65, 75-83; Crosland, 1974 15). The idea is based on a simultaneous critique of both equality of opportunity and equality of outcome. In his work Plant focused on several arguments that had been used to undermine the idea of equality of opportunity: first, he argued it failed to take into account the moral arbitrariness of genetic endowment (Plant, 1989e 64;1990b); second, he noted that there were limits to what can be achieved with the attempt to equalise starting positions - particularly because any radical action in this direction will lead to considerable intervention within the family (Plant, 1984a 140); and, third, he argued that equality of opportunity 'takes the existing structure of equality for granted and is concerned about recruitment to it' (Hoover and Plant, 1989 220).

Plant's position on equality of outcome is largely a Rawlsian one. He admitted that there could be a 'rent of ability' on grounds of efficiency, which would be set at the amount of legitimate inequality that citizens should accept if they want 'to mobilize skills which otherwise would no longer be mobilized and without which we should be worse off' (Hoover and Plant, 1989 224; also cited in Espada, 1996 117). The difficulty often raised with Rawlsian-like difference principles by those on the left concerns the question, how much equality do they actually allow? If the trickle down of market economics really is of 'greatest benefit of the least advantaged' then Rawlsians should accept that system (Rawls, 1971 303).

Whilst Rawls, arguably, did not answer this question, Plant's *presumption of equality* turned this question on its head. His question would be how much *inequality* do we allow? Equality is the basic rule and the burden of proof lies in departures from it (Espada, 1996 118). Plant's defence of equality drew on both Rawls and Crosland. For Plant the two thinkers have many affinities, with Crosland adopting an increasingly similar position to Rawls after the publication of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 (Plant, 1999a). One way of classifying Plant's work is as an attempt to combine freedom and equality in a way that bears many similarities to earlier socialist revisionists, such as Crosland.

## **Christian socialism and new liberalism**

Plant's concern with issues of justice can also be seen as part of his wider religious outlook. He is strongly influenced by Christian thought and 'took his philosophy degree at King's College, London ... only after abandoning plans to become an Anglican priest' (Willman, 1993). Throughout his adult life he has remained involved in the Church of England and in shaping its thinking on social issues. An example of this was Plant's chairing of the Winchester Diocese Working Party on *Faith in the City*. The final report, published as *Faith in the City: A Call to Action by Church and Nation* (Church of England, 1985), came in the wake of rioting in several British cities during the early 1980s, which increased awareness of the expanding gap between the urban rich and poor. Although there is no explicit criticism of the Conservative Government, elected in 1979 (it is only mentioned in passing - Church of England, 1985 172), the report saw the troubles of the inner cities as a result of rising unemployment, cuts in public expenditure, welfare reforms and the wider economic slump, exacerbated by the decline in manufacturing industries, and would have made uncomfortable reading for many Conservatives.

The combination of the 'Christian roots' of Plant's thinking (Dahrendorf in Espada, 1996 x) and socialism raises the possibility of comparisons with earlier thinkers. The most obvious example within the Labour tradition is 'The Christian

Socialism of RH Tawney' (as it was characterised by Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 439-463). Tawney has been reclaimed by some in 'New Labour' in recent years (Diamond, 2004 29-30), and Plant's work can be seen as, to some extent, formative in the modernisation of Labour policy and the creation of 'New Labour' during the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed Plant expressed considerable interest in Tawney's position and there are affinities between the two thinkers. This was shown in Plant's summary of Tawney's work in his contribution to a review of Fabian thinkers (Plant, 2004). As Plant argued:

The achievement of this set of common and equal standards of citizenship and the recognition that we all need them and should all have equality of access to them would create a common sense of citizenship, a common sense of purpose and what he calls fellowship. This is a conception which many on the left in politics still share and which is still their inspiration.

(Plant, 2004 23)

The driving force behind Tawney's conception of socialism was a belief in common humanity, derived from his belief that we are all equal as children of God. To Tawney, this equality found expression in a common culture and the full realisation of each and every individual's capacity. Tawney's attack on the class system in *Equality* (Tawney, 1931) and elsewhere can be understood as criticism of the way it hinders those expressions (Barker, 1997 151).

Despite the influence of Christianity on Plant's work, he recognised (as did Tawney) the limits of arguing from Christian principles in making a case for socialism. This recognition was especially true in Plant's case, whose arguments were made in what he recognised to be an increasingly pluralistic and secular society. Thus whilst Greenleaf's characterisation of Tawney as a 'Christian Socialist' was accurate (Greenleaf, 2003, originally 1983 439-463), Plant is, by contrast, a socialist, who was influenced by Christianity. However, for Plant as for Tawney, the argument for equality has at, or near to, its starting point a foundation in individual capacity. For Plant this grounding, expressed as autonomy (the freedom to act morally), laid the basis for a critique of negative forms of liberty and for the argument for the rough equalisation of basic needs, which are the condition of liberty.

In both thinkers, the influence of the precursor to the 'new' liberal thought of the early twentieth century can be seen. Tawney's biographer, Ross Terrill commented that Green was one of the main influences on Tawney (1974 211; as noted in Vincent and Plant, 1984 81). Through Green the influence of Hegel can be seen in Tawney's work. For Plant, a Hegel scholar, the influence comes both directly from his scholarship and in a mediated form through Green and Tawney. In the final years of the chronological twentieth century, Plant commented that 'Major thinkers in this century ... are scarcely comprehensible without understanding

their relation to Hegel' and specifically cited TH Green, as one thinker who worked in Hegel's 'shadow' (Plant, 2003, originally 1997 3).

In an article written for *The Times* in 1990, Plant wrote:

I have commented before in these columns about the resemblance between contemporary political debates and those which took place within Liberalism at the end of the last century.

(Plant, 1990b)

The claims for a revival of the turn of the twentieth century liberalism in political thought are found throughout this thesis. To some thinkers the ideologies of the twentieth century marked nothing more than a bloody detour before the rediscovery of a path which was embarked upon a century before (Marquand, 1998). I take this argument up again in Chapter 5, in my discussion of Andrew Gamble, whose work also contains many similarities with the liberalism of an earlier age.

***Conclusions: the closeness between new liberalism and revisionist socialism***

I'm not sure if the SPG [Socialist Philosophy Group] still exists. It was formed shortly after the 1983 election, when Mrs Thatcher got in for the second time and the left seemed to be totally in disarray. I started it with Raymond Plant, now Lord Plant, and it was the first attempt to try to rethink the socialist message. In many ways it was a kind of precursor of New Labour. We said things like 'means should be separated from ends' - which is what Tony Blair picked up on later - and argued that socialism was really about values like equality and social justice, and not about planning or nationalised industries.

(Le Grand quoted in Backbencher, 2003)

Aside from Le Grand's dubious claim that the Socialist Philosophy Group provided the first attempt to rethink the socialist message (it could be argued that in returning to and reprioritising socialism's central themes it provided one of the last) his quote highlights the importance of Plant's contribution to the changes which took place in the Labour Party during the 1980s and 1990s.

Plant's engagement with Hayek's work can be seen as a limited tactical retreat for socialists. He gives up some ground, but then seeks to bolster the defences around other arguments. Plant supplemented his starting gate theory with a defence of certain end states, but, by accepting a large part of Hayek's argument regarding the problems of prioritising different versions of the good life, whilst twisting that argument's conclusion to favour equality, Plant provided a basis for a left-wing

theory that allowed for markets whilst avoiding some of the shots fired by Hayekians at more traditional forms of socialism.

Plant's attempt to provide a version of socialism that largely accepted Hayek's attack on end states was important: it showed again a re-discovered respect amongst both revisionist and market socialists for individual freedoms (though freedom that was not defined in a solely negative way). Plant attempted to offer a version of socialism that placed freedom as central and so aimed to minimise its interference with individuals' ends. Plant's socialism values equality, but a form of equality that owes more to Crosland and Rawls than to more statist socialist thinkers. Here Plant finds himself outside the dominant strand of socialist thinking, arguing that:

The socialist seeks a distribution of rewards, status, and privileges egalitarian enough to minimise social resentment, to secure justice between individuals, and to equalise opportunities. . .

(Plant, 1989e 113)

In defining socialism thus, Plant followed Crosland, who argued for a broadening of the conception of equality amongst socialists from equality of outcome to equality of status and privilege. In accepting this broadened conception of equality, Plant continued a liberalisation of socialist thought that placed

'democratic equality' rather than equality of outcome as central, and which can be found in an important, but often submerged strand in socialist thought that links Crosland's mid-century revisionism to Plant's own arguments at the end of the century.

## Chapter 4 - Hilary Wainwright: the reassertion of pluralism

Reading Hayek ... should, I will argue, contribute to new foundations for the left.

(Wainwright, 1994 5)

Since the early 1990s the left-wing journalist, academic and campaigner, Hilary Wainwright, has provided an explicit and extended attempt to claim aspects of Hayek's thought, notably in her 1994 book *Arguments for a New Left* (Wainwright, 1994). Wainwright is now perhaps best known now as the editor of *Red Pepper* - the 'independent magazine of the green and radical left' but has been academically active since the late 1970s.

In the first section of this chapter I look at what it took for Wainwright to discover Hayek as a source of intellectual inspiration for the left, and at the work of Robin Blackburn, who anticipated aspects of Wainwright's argument, without fully developing them. I argue that Wainwright's engagement with Hayek's work can be seen as an attempt to understand the popularity of the new right in post-Soviet Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. In an attempt to understand the popularity of the new right, Wainwright undertook an in depth discussion of Hayek's

arguments, and was surprised to find areas of agreement between herself and someone she had previously considered only as an icon of the new right (or ‘neo-liberalism’, as she more often describes his thought).

The second section of this chapter examines Wainwright’s engagement with Hayek’s work. Her conclusion is, in effect, that Hayek is right in his attack on the forms of knowledge that underpinned most earlier socialist argument, but wrong about the alternatives his own understanding of knowledge gives us. Knowledge is not irremediably individual, but can, Wainwright argues, be shared between individuals in imperfect but useful ways. Wainwright offers a ‘socialised’ version of Hayek’s epistemology. To Wainwright, the most important site of socialised knowledge is in social movements.

In the final section, I look at the wider significance of Wainwright’s thought. I argue that her engagement with Hayek led her to a form of political pluralism. This pluralism, based as it is largely on social movements, takes her argument outside the dominant traditions of the British left during the twentieth century: notably, a statist, paternalistic and narrowly class-based form of socialism. It is argued that Wainwright’s thought can be seen as part of a wider attempt to revive political pluralism – which was last an important theme in left-wing thought in Britain during the first decades of the last century. However, the pluralist revival that resulted from Wainwright’s engagement with Hayek reintroduces into the

debate many of the same questions that faced earlier pluralists but remained unresolved by the waning of pluralism and the rise of statist forms of social democracy in the twentieth century.

## ***1. Discovering Hayek***

Whilst David Miller's market socialism (discussed in Chapter 2) develops an argument for the market that owes much to Hayek, but is reluctant to admit how much and Raymond Plant's engagement with Hayek's work (discussed in Chapter 3) can be seen as a tactical retreat and the development of a left-liberal / revisionist socialist barricade against the onslaught of the new right, Wainwright's engagement with Hayek's thought is longer, less defensive and more explicit. In this section I look at why Wainwright began her examination of Hayek in the early 1990s. First, however, I look briefly at Robin Blackburn's earlier and more tentative engagement with Hayek's work. Blackburn anticipated Wainwright's argument to a certain degree, and Wainwright acknowledges his encouragement to read Hayek in her own writing (Wainwright, 1994 xix).

### **Preludes to Wainwright's engagement**

In 1991, between the revolutions in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the left-wing British sociologist Robin Blackburn wrote:

So far as I am aware no-one pointed out that Hayek's argument from the dispersed nature of knowledge could also be deployed against a narrow capitalist entrepreneurialism by advocates of social and worker self-management.

(Robin Blackburn, 1991a 36)

Blackburn was one of the earliest thinkers on the British left to note *explicitly* that a re-evaluation of Hayek's thought could contribute towards rejuvenating what he describes as 'socialism after the crash' caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall. Blackburn's left-wing 'credentials' are evident - a self-described leftist, a frequent and long-term contributor to the *New Left Review*, and its editor at the time the article was published. His article hints at an earlier period of engagement between left and right, before the polarisation of politics during the middle decades of the twentieth century. His article attempts to reconstruct 'a subterranean dialogue in which arguments [are] passed from Bakunin to Kautsky, or from Trotsky to Hayek...' (Robin Blackburn, 1991b 4).

In support of Blackburn's argument, Hayek's earlier writings provide (as noted in the discussions of other thinkers in this thesis) some evidence of the greater

engagement between elements of the left and right during the interwar years. Hayek's earlier work was more prepared to deal in detail with arguments of his opponents than anything written during his later career. For example, he concluded his article, 'The Use of Knowledge in Society' (1980, originally 1945) with a claim that there is an area of agreement between left and right over the role of the price mechanism:

When we find Leon Trotsky arguing that 'economic accounting is unthinkable without market relations'; when Professor Oscar Lange<sup>1</sup> promises Professor von Mises a statue in the marble halls of a future Central Planning Board; and when Professor Abba P. Lerner rediscovers Adam Smith and emphasizes that the essential utility of the price system consists in inducing the individual, while seeking his own interest, to do what is in the general interest, the differences can indeed no longer be ascribed to a political prejudice. The remaining dissent seems clearly to be due to purely intellectual, and more particularly methodological, differences.

(Hayek, 1980, originally 1945 89)

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst Hayek anglicises Lange's name, I have elsewhere kept with the Polish spelling, 'Oskar', to remain consistent with other non-English names used in this thesis.

Similarly, the book Hayek edited towards the end of the 'calculation debate' over how prices were set in a planned economy, *Collectivist Economic Planning* (Hayek, 1935), contains contributions on common questions from all sides of the debate - from the Italian economist, Enrico Barone, to the anti-socialist thinker, Ludwig von Mises (an important early influence on Hayek, as I noted in the introduction). The tone is friendlier, and the extent of detailed engagement with those of opposing views is higher in Hayek's writings before the Second World War than after.

If there was greater engagement between elements of the left and right between the wars, it was not to last. As Blackburn wrote, 'The calculation debate petered out in the forties without achieving resolution. The critical points made by each side were, perhaps, stronger than their arguments for the economic systems they themselves favoured' (Robin Blackburn, 1991a 35). Blackburn noted that 'The syndicalist strain within socialism was particularly weak in the forties, and belief in the big battalions particularly strong' (Robin Blackburn, 1991a 36). In the post war years the planned Soviet economy appeared stronger than its capitalist rival and in Britain the post-war nationalisations seemed to have been largely successful. Until the collapse of the Soviet empire the Cold War dichotomised political thinking from the Second World War until the end of the short twentieth century and, literally and metaphorically, erected political and ideological barriers to engagement between left and right.

Having noted this, it may be the case that the extent to which there was an engagement between left and right in the years before the calculation debate is easy to exaggerate. After noting Mises' arguments against socialism as a 'exclusive action of the government' Blackburn conceded that 'Most on the Left chose to ignore this critique, pointing to the palpable evidence of capitalist failure and apparent Soviet success'(Robin Blackburn, 1991a 32).

Blackburn was reluctant to develop the argument he began above (that Hayek's arguments concerning the epistemological limits of planning could be used in support of the left) or to credit Hayek with much originality. This reluctance to take his engagement with Hayek further means that parallels can be drawn with the work of Miller, discussed in Chapter 2. Whilst Blackburn argued that the left pre-empted much of Hayek's work, Miller presented pro-market arguments most obviously associated with Hayek without often admitting their heritage. Blackburn wrote, for example, that Hayek's argument based on the limits of knowledge 'parallels' earlier work from Leon Trotsky (Robin Blackburn, 1991a 35) or is a more strongly formulated version of that put forward by the Polish socialist Abba Lerner (Robin Blackburn, 1991a 35, footnote 51).

One could say that a problem with Blackburn's attempt to recover the left's early discussions of the epistemological problems of central planning is that they were never in the mainstream of its thought. Hayek was not misguided in his belief that

socialism was largely about economic planning – as I discussed in Chapter 1 and elsewhere. This was the dominant strand of British socialism for most of the twentieth century. As a result Blackburn’s skilful reconstruction of a ‘subterranean dialogue’ over the limits of epistemology, composed of carefully selected and positioned quotations, read a little like a ransom note - words cut and pasted to form a line which has little resemblance to the meaning of the pieces from which they are cut. Blackburn did not admit how deeply buried these arguments were in the century’s socialist traditions. Blackburn’s reluctance to carry through his thinking on Hayek, meant that it was Wainwright, his colleague at the *New Left Review*,<sup>2</sup> who took up his challenge - most explicitly in her 1994 book, *Arguments for a New Left*.

## **The new right in Eastern Europe**

Hilary Wainwright writes that reading Hayek made her ‘conscious of a dimension of the left movements in which I had been active . . . It should, I will argue, contribute to new foundations for the left’ (Wainwright, 1994 5). Wainwright’s claim that Hayek can help to provide foundations for, what she still describes as, a

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<sup>2</sup> Wainwright was an associate editor of the *New Left Review* at the time Blackburn’s 1991 article making use of Hayek’s thought was published.

new left would have been a shock to both Hayek and the older representatives of that doctrine, such as EP Thompson and Raymond Williams, who would have vehemently disagreed that Hayek's legacy was something to fight for.

If Blackburn's tentative suggestion about the possible implications of Hayek's work for the left was a precursor to Wainwright's arguments, then the success of the new right in post-Soviet Eastern Europe provided the immediate historical context. Wainwright presented her engagement with Hayek as attempt to explain the popular success of parties inspired by the new right in what had been the Eastern bloc after 1989.

Wainwright began her book *Arguments for a New Left* in 'the autumn of 1989' as a direct response to the collapse of the Soviet bloc:

From an armchair in the television room of a university hall of residence, I applauded the demonstrators on the streets of Leipzig, Prague and finally Bucharest.

(Wainwright, 1994 2)

Wainwright supported these 'Eastern oppositionists' because,

it seemed that a significant number of them had arrived by very different routes and often with a distinct and fresh use

of language at concepts very similar to those of the movements that challenged the Cold War from the Western side of the Wall.

(Wainwright, 1994 2)

Wainwright mentioned Vaclav Havel, Jaroslav Sabota and George Konrad as examples of the kind of thinkers she was referring to.

Wainwright's initial optimism that the revolutions of 1989 could lead to a new form of socialism was shared by many on the left. The academic and Labour MP, Tony Wright, wrote:

I remember meeting with a young Hungarian academic, just at the moment that these momentous changes were in motion, in which my enthusiastic suggestion that here was the opening towards the socialist 'third way' (I remember waving a copy of Alex Nove's *Feasible Socialism* at this point) was met by the sharp message that I could forget all about that kind of thing. Socialism in western Europe might be in trouble but there was no rescuing cavalry coming over the hill from the east.

(T. Wright, 1995 101)

In the main, the revolutions of 1989 ushered in governments that owed far more to the new right than to the left. Wainwright's 1994 book, which includes her fullest

engagement with Hayek, is a response to the successes of the new right, and more specifically the success of parties influenced by the new right in Eastern Europe after 1989. As such, the book can be read as an attempt to explain the popularity of the new right for the people of Eastern Europe after 1989. Wainwright recounts her surprise at meeting students in Prague during the uprising of 1989 for the first time:

Here were organizers of a civic movement who had mobilized on the streets and in the factories and believed passionately in the continued importance of democratic ‘civic initiatives’, expressing a deeply held belief in the philosophy of the free market. It was not that they were drawn to particular pragmatic economic prescriptions. It was the moral and philosophical notions of neo-liberalism, above all its challenge to the all-knowing state and party, which attracted them.

(Wainwright, 1994 2)

It is because Wainwright’s book is best understood as an attempt to explain and counter the popularity of the new right in Eastern Europe after 1989, that she turns to Hayek, as ‘the main guru of neoliberalism’, to ‘comprehend how its appeal in Central and Eastern Europe could be answered’ (Wainwright, 1994 ix). Although Wainwright’s conclusions differ greatly from Hayek’s it is a surprise the extent to which her work is both an ‘appreciation and critique of Hayek’s theory of

knowledge' (Wainwright, 1994 13). The extent to which Wainwright engages with Hayek's arguments provides another interesting example of the new fluidity of political thought – of the melting of the post-war allegiances and enmities that were beginning to occur by the start of the 1990s. Wainwright wrote that

Reading Hayek's early work on the economic uses of knowledge produced an eerie sense of recognition. Here was this arch right-winger, guru of General Pinochet's Chile and spiritual tutor to Margaret Thatcher, writing about knowledge in ways which I had come across already amongst radical shop stewards, in the consciousness-raising groups of early women's liberation movement and amongst critical socialist philosophers. Here was this right-wing philosopher giving credence to tacit skills and capabilities ignored by conventional philosophers.

(Wainwright, 1994 4)

## ***II. Grounding the Argument***

Wainwright sought to retain, what she saw as, the insights in Hayek's thought: his account of the 'tacit skills and capabilities ignored by conventional philosophers'. In this, Wainwright builds on Hayek's epistemic argument against planning (which was laid out more fully in Chapter 3 on Raymond Plant). In this section I examine Wainwright's engagement with Hayek's work in more detail. Central to

her argument is a claim about knowledge: Wainwright accepts Hayek's attack on the dominant understanding of knowledge implicit in twentieth century socialism; but she breaks with Hayek over the smallest repository for this knowledge. To Hayek, knowledge is individual; Wainwright attempts to socialise Hayek's understanding of knowledge and in doing so grounds a pluralist argument. In the second part of this section, I examine some of the tensions in Wainwright's argument. These occur, I argue, when she moves from the economic examples that she gives of tacit knowledge to her argument that social movements can be the site of that knowledge, and should have political power. This shift becomes clearer through a discussion of some of the responses that greeted Wainwright's argument, which I discuss in the final part of this section.

### **'Social' knowledge**

Wainwright argued that Hayek was wrong in his conclusions; however, the extent to which she engages with Hayek's arguments provides another example of the new fluidity of political thought – of the melting of the post-war allegiances and enmities that were beginning to occur by the start of the 1990s. Whilst rejecting Hayek's free market conclusions Wainwright accepts a large part of his epistemological argument against the central economic planning advocated by the

dominant strands of socialism and social democracy for much of the previous century.<sup>3</sup> The British post-war state, Wainwright argued, was based ‘on a restrictive conception of knowledge in which the only valid knowledge is scientific knowledge’ (Wainwright, 1994 160). However, she continued that the free market conclusions that Hayek drew from this epistemological argument were the result of a flawed individualism. Wainwright saw a ‘fundamental inconsistency’ in Hayek’s theory

between the value he places on individual liberty and human agency on the one hand, and his theory of evolution and the value this leads him to place on social order on the other. His denial of some direct, even if incomplete, connection between human intention and social outcome, and his contention that the outcome of human activity is entirely haphazard, in effect make accident the main mechanism of social control.

(Wainwright, 1994 56)

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<sup>3</sup> The argument is laid out several times in Wainwright’s work (notably in two book chapters Wainwright, 1992; 1993b) and there are differences of emphasis in each presentation, but by far the fullest account is found in her 1994 book, *Arguments for a New Left* (Wainwright, 1994).

Wainwright argued that by prising open, what Andrew Gamble (who is discussed in the next chapter) would call the 'ideological closures' in Hayek's epistemology. Hayek's argument can be reapplied to form an epistemological foundation already existing, though rarely stated explicitly, in many left-wing political movements. This epistemological argument can, Wainwright believes, provide a new foundation for the left.

Beneath Hayek's denial of the link between human intention and social outcomes is what Wainwright takes to be a 'crucial assumption': 'it is vital to Hayek's conclusions that we are socially blindfolded, and hence that accidents rather than conscious social projects are the mechanisms of social evolution' (Wainwright, 1993b 118). This, Wainwright argues, leads Hayek to treat knowledge as 'an individual attribute, rather than as a social product' (Wainwright, 1994 57). The individualism of Hayek's theory of knowledge is summed up, for Wainwright, in Hayek's comment that, 'all man's mind can effectively comprehend are the facts of the narrow circle of which he is the centre' (Wainwright, 1994 57). The examples of economic knowledge which Hayek gave when he laid out his epistemic argument (summarised in Chapter 3) seem to confirm his individualist assumption: the shipper, estate agent or *arbitrageur*, are all examples of individuals working alone with their individual knowledge of the market. To Wainwright, this statement is significant, not because it implies that there are limits on reason (an implication she accepts), but because it excludes the possibility 'of social action to

share information and extend the knowledge of individuals through associating for that purpose' (Wainwright, 1994 58). Knowledge is best understood, therefore, to Wainwright not as an individual attribute, but a 'social product':

If knowledge is understood as a social product, the foundation of Hayek's case for the free market begins to crumble. For if knowledge is a social product then it can be socially transformed through people taking action - co-operating, sharing, combining knowledge - to overcome the limits on the knowledge that they individually possess.

(Wainwright, 1994 58)

Wainwright gives several examples of how this knowledge can be used as a social product. The first example concerns a central economic networking institution which is part of the Japanese Ministry of Information and Technology, which, for example, shares information on technological development and international markets amongst the economic elite. These networks of knowledge sharing, Wainwright argues, have been successful for the wider Japanese economy, but, she writes, *contra* Hayek, 'no one could ever call them spontaneous' (Wainwright, 1994 58). The second, quite different, example involves the state textile cooperatives of Modena, which have set up a Textile Centre to gather information about the international market, and to share it amongst all those cooperatives that affiliate to it. To Wainwright this cooperation demonstrates a use of knowledge that is not individualist in the way that Wainwright understands Hayek's

epistemology to be individualist (i.e. consisting of the un-centralisable knowledge of individual entrepreneurs); but neither does this cooperation rely on what Wainwright sees as the traditional socialist assumptions of an 'all-knowing state':

There is no presumption to be all knowing. But there is a determination to share and combine the insights of individual experiences, in order to meet shared goals.

(Wainwright, 1994 59)

It could be argued that actual practice of economic decision making under capitalism also involves the pooling of information imperfectly articulated and fleeting. As Rodney Barker has argued, the sharing of information needed to make economic choices amongst the board of ICI, for example, seems as far from Hayek's ideal as the sharing of information by the Japanese Ministry of Information and Technology or the textile cooperatives of Modena (Barker, 2003, pers. comm. 18 Feb). In all cases, groups do the best they can with the information available to them at the time.

The belief that knowledge is a social product, and not an individual attribute, leads Wainwright to call for 'the democratization of knowledge' (Wainwright, 1994 60) and to reject other understandings of it. On the one hand she rejects the scientism or positivism of Fabianism and Leninism - the 'powerful fantasy at the back of many a socialist mind' of the 'all-knowing state' (Wainwright, 1994 61) - on the

other, she rejects Hayek's 'dogmatic assumption that this knowledge is constitutionally and irredeemably individual' (Wainwright, 1994 60).

Recognition of the social character of knowledge implies that people can, through social co-operation, increase their understanding of the social consequences of their actions, even though they can never know these consequences in every detail for certain. To Wainwright, this implies that people can purposefully influence society with some (albeit limited) knowledge of the outcome, and that this knowledge can always be improved upon. Any particular arrangement (for example the organisation of the economic market) thus becomes not the 'haphazard outcome of individual activity' that Wainwright dismissed in Hayek's work, but an outcome whose relation to the intentions of the human actors involved must be open to empirical inquiry. To Wainwright, the result of recognising that knowledge has a social character and can be used to inform collective decision-making was not the assumption of full predictability (which existed under the old socialist models of 'scientific' knowledge), but was the possibility of a 'more or less intended outcome' - depending on how comprehensive the understanding of the actors and the extent of their sources of power to act was (Wainwright, 1994 60). So Wainwright re-established the connection between 'human intention and social outcome' which she believed was missing in Hayek's work, but recognised the limits of human intention, arguing that

social evolution is the outcome of attempts by people rationally, if never perfectly rationally, to construct/design social projects which are then the subject of trial and error.

(Wainwright, 1994 60)

For Wainwright, with this understanding of the scope of knowledge, we are not led to Hayek's free market conclusions: 'we move the private market from the realm of the sacred – God's finger, as the Czech economist<sup>4</sup> describes popular conceptions of the market – to the profane: particular historically shaped and historically transformable institutions' (Wainwright, 1994 60-61).

### **Against the 'all-knowing state'**

Below I look at how the conception of knowledge Wainwright developed from Hayek, and found in social movements, differs from theories of knowledge implicit in what she pejoratively called the 'social engineering state' – a term that encompasses capitalism, social democracy and Soviet communism.

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase is generally attributed to the nineteenth century French economist, Frédéric Bastiat (cited in Mises, 1957 168)

First, Wainwright argued that the ‘social engineering states of post-war years’ were grounded on ‘Taylorist principles of management, based as they are on a restrictive conception of knowledge in which the only valid knowledge is scientific knowledge’ (Wainwright 1992 160). Wainwright went on to write:

The implication of course is that those with scientific knowledge know best and the ordinary person is ignorant.

(Wainwright 1992 160)

‘Taylorist principles’, Wainwright argued, ‘underlie the management of the welfare state: the users of services are treated as passive client/victims, with nothing to contribute to the process of diagnosis or service improvement. This is, in part at least, what the new social movements have been reacting against.’ Wainwright argued that, against this conception of knowledge, movements had ‘asserted forms of knowledge that are generally unacknowledged in public policy-making’ (Wainwright 1992 160-161). She gave examples of these unacknowledged forms of knowledge: women’s movements raise consciousness; workers’ movements campaign on health and safety; and the green movement has warned against environmental damage.

Second, Wainwright reacted to the view found in the social engineering states, the 'positivist notion that scientific knowledge is cumulative' (Wainwright 1992 161).

Wainwright argued that this is:

an assumption that tends to mask theoretical innovation and exaggerate consensus. It resists scientific pluralism and experiment, produces a cautiousness and conservatism in policy research, and does little to encourage the development of alternative sources of information. All this was apparent not only in the state administrations but also in the Social Democratic, Labour and Communist parties, reinforcing structures based on hierarchy and generating rigid, paranoiac responses to challenges from outside the elite.

(Wainwright 1992 161)

Third, Wainwright rejected the 'instrumental forms of reasoning' found in engineering states: first because instrumental reasoning supposed or presumed a 'purely external relationship between ends and means. Ends are given by politicians and means prescribed by technocrats. This implies that the process of bringing about change has no internal relation to the goals of change'; second, because this implied that 'the policy-making and policy-implementing institutions of the state are neutral, as if the means chosen do not favour one group over another' (Wainwright 1992 162).

## **From tacit social knowledge to social movements**

When Wainwright sets her engagement with Hayek aside, she tends to shift her argument from the economic (the Japanese Ministry of Information and Technology and the Modena textile cooperatives) to the social - although rather than relying on actual case studies, the transition to social movement is by analogy only. She argued that

social movement activists, in much of their more innovative practice, have pioneered an approach to knowledge which, like Hayek, appreciates its practical and tacit aspects but, unlike Hayek, treats these and its theoretical aspects as social products. The democratisation of knowledge runs through their methods.

(Wainwright, 1994 13)

So Wainwright's argument shifted from economic examples (the cases of Japan and Modena) to 'social projects' then shifted again, to 'social movement activists'. She argued that individuals within social movements hold information, which they share imperfectly, amongst themselves about the conditions they experience. It is this knowledge that was neglected by the post-war socialist planners:

The consequences are visible in the often well-intentioned legacy that post-war social democratic governments left to

those who grew up during the post-war boom and since; a legacy for which these latter generations have appeared at times rudely ungrateful: university campuses on bleak parklands miles from city life, designed with little practical knowledge of students' needs and desires; medical training and hospital organizations developed with little knowledge of the particular concerns of women; transport systems worked out as if children did not exist; employment legislation passed as if the passing was enough, and the implementation could be left to the courts, without thought that the knowledge of the workers affected should be built in; investment grants made to keep jobs in a poor region, without consideration given to the inside knowledge needed to monitor their use.

(Wainwright, 1994 279-280)

There is a problem in Wainwright's argument here. Although she shifts the focus of her argument from economic projects, to social projects, to social activists, the examples of knowledge, which she gives in the above quote, do not seem necessarily to fit into any of those groups. The patients of a particular hospital, the students of a particular university, and so on, do not look like social movement activists. Instead their knowledge seems to be something rather more immediate, contingent, local and particular, and their ability as individuals to organise in order to share it is likely to be rather more problematic than the ability of activists already cooperating with one another in close networks or organisations.

A further question remains of how Wainwright links this view of knowledge to political organisation above the local level. Here, Wainwright's argument relies on work carried out by Diane Elson (Elson, 1988), with whose case for co-operative planning between autonomous enterprises in a socialised market she seems to be largely in agreement (Wainwright, 1994 153, 170-172). Here Wainwright's argument meets up again with that of Robin Blackburn, discussed above, who is also sympathetic to Elson's model (Robin Blackburn, 1991a 47-48).

## **Responses to Wainwright**

Wainwright's work has been greeted with some scepticism, from both left and right. One notable critique of Wainwright's position, raised by Paul Anderson, is that Wainwright 'overestimates the potential of social movements in civil society' and that it is unclear 'that social movements are flourishing' (Paul Anderson, 1994 45). If participation in social movements is limited then it becomes unclear how the whole scheme gets off the ground in the first place. Underlying Wainwright's argument is the presumption that social movements in Britain are thriving -

leading Tony Wright to make the jibe that ‘her world is peopled entirely by “movements”, “networks”, and “activists”’ (T. Wright, 1995 102).<sup>5</sup>

Wainwright presented an argument for participatory democracy, which she argues is needed in order to access the knowledge held by social movements. In a representative democracy with a state that possessed a scientific view of knowledge, participation ‘remains exclusively moral and exhortatory’ (Wainwright, 1993b 115):

Like going to Church participation is good for you . . . If participation is to take root, it must have some positive relation to efficiency. Unless the public authority has a clear sense of the limits of its knowledge ... its participation schemes will just be new forms of benevolent paternalism: ‘Now children, you must all join in ... you’ll see why in a minute ...

(Wainwright, 1993b 115)

Elsewhere Wainwright writes, ‘Representative government cannot bring forward the full extent of human capacity’ (Wainwright, 1994 280). Representative

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<sup>5</sup> Although Wright does give her ‘full marks for intellectual cheek’ for her ‘ambitious’ and ‘quirky adoption of Hayek’ (T. Wright, 1995 102).

democracy alone neglects knowledge that can be accessed through participatory democracy.

Anderson is sceptical about Wainwright's rejection of the knowledge of the expert in favour of the knowledge of the participant, writing that for 'most of the social movement networks that have survived over a long period . . . Power is concentrated in the hands of paid professionals who make their primary task persuading legislators' (Paul Anderson, 1994 45). This constitutes a threat to Wainwright's view, which is centred on 'breaking the 'expert' monopoly on knowledge' and a call for its democratisation (Wainwright, 1993b 114). However, Anderson argued, as social movements become professionalised and institutionalised, the expert who knows how to bend the ear of legislators is reinstated, now in the guise of the paid lobbyist, trade union negotiator, fundraiser, lawyer and so on.

Wainwright was vague when it comes to the details of the link between parties and groups, although she did call for 'political parties of a new kind' (Wainwright, 1994 190). She noted that 'non-state forms of public action need a supportive and independent relationship to political power if they are to be effective agents of economic and social change' (Wainwright, 1994). Wainwright suggested that these new parties included the German Greens, the Danish Socialist People's Party and the Dutch Green left. These parties provided 'a means by which the practical

knowledge shared and accumulated by people to define and find a solution to their needs' can influence 'the exercise of political power' (Wainwright, 1994 198).

Britain provides an exception to this kind of national organisation. No major party has arisen influenced by post-war social movements, and the Labour Party, Wainwright argues, has remained impervious to opening itself up to movement politics (an argument which Wainwright returned to several times in her writings: Howe and Wainwright, 1989; Wainwright, 1987a; 1987b; 1989c):

British exceptionalism is thus closely bound up with the particularly undemocratic character of its parliamentary system: the centralization of power in the hands of the Westminster executive, the first-past-the-post electoral system, a second chamber based in part on the principles of inheritance and, protecting all of these, the unwritten character of its constitution at the heart of which are the powers that the Prime Minister wields through the royal prerogative.

(Wainwright, 1994 205)

There is a further concern with Wainwright's optimism about social movements here. Anderson writes that

Some of the most effective organisations in British civil society today are, moreover deeply reactionary: the groups

pressing for Islamicist schools, racist tenants associations  
and so on.

(Paul Anderson, 1994 45)

This raises a larger problem of the relation of social movement to party or government. Anderson continues:

The problem is that one person's empowering, enabling network is another's self-interested, self-perpetuating, unaccountable clique. If the state is opened up to the myriad organisations of civil society, who represents all those people who do not belong to such organisations – and how does the state resolve competing claims?

(Paul Anderson, 1994 45)

A second critical line against Wainwright's argument came from John Grahl. Grahl found Wainwright's epistemological argument compelling, but wrote that 'she diminishes the force of this argument when she comes to draw practical conclusions. She feels that action within civil society will often be frustrated by the indifference or hostility of government, or by the absence of public financial support' (Grahl, 1995 157). Grahl located this pessimism about government in Wainwright's own, personal experiences of decentralised social action – the most notable being her time working at the Popular Planning Unit of the GLC before the

Council was abolished in 1986 (an experience recounted in Wainwright and Mackintosh, 1987):

In consequence she is led, in spite of the theory she has herself developed, to insist on a very close relation between social movements and political power. The 'new type of party' which she considers essential would have the active support of social movements as its own central objective. . . . This advocacy of symbiosis between parties and movement seems both dangerous and unnecessarily pessimistic. It is dangerous because it could undermine the integrity of political representation and the autonomy of civil associations if the latter, which are necessarily special interest groups, become the clients of government.

(Grahl, 1995 157)

In short, Grahl's concern is that Wainwright's argument results in 'a new clientalism' between movements and parties (Grahl, 1995 157).

A lacuna in Wainwright's engagement with Hayek is her failure to tackle these questions (Griffiths, 2003 89-91): which groups should the new type of party be trying to attract, or should the state be granting rights to? What rights are conferred on those who are not members of social movements (or as Grahl has it, are not clients of the state)?

### ***III. Hayek and the revival of pluralism***

Wainwright's engagement with Hayek led her into an account of groups that was both part of, and drew upon, a wider move away from a class analysis in the intellectual transitions at the close of the short twentieth century. An obvious parallel with Wainwright's argument can be drawn with Paul Hirst's argument for associational democracy, which seeks to revive the English pluralism which reached its zenith around eighty years earlier. In this section I discuss how Wainwright's engagement with Hayek led to her rejection of the paternalist state, her move away from traditional accounts of class and her part in the pluralist revival (which calls into question how her thought is best categorised).

#### **Against the paternalist state**

In the main, the view of British socialism and social democracy, for much of the twentieth century, has been resolutely statist; it has been dominated by a Fabian strand concerned with organisation and efficiency. Barker has written that the 'mainstream of British socialism has been social democratic' and when it came to questions over state power, British social democracy was optimistic. This became especially true after 1945 when the election of a majority Labour Government created the possibility of 'a people's state'. 'In consequence of their friendly

attitude towards the state', Barker concluded, 'socialists have tended to have little to say about its reformation' (Barker, 1994 81-83). Indeed, as I noted in the introduction to this thesis, most critiques of Hayek and the new right from socialists and social democrats merely reiterated the left's faith in the state. Barbara Wootton, whose work was introduced in Chapter 1, for example, famously argued in 1945 that there could be 'freedom under planning' provided that there was parliamentary democracy and a substantial private sector, and to Wootton it was *central* planning by the state that was relevant (Wootton, 1945).

Wainwright's work is part of a break with this tradition. In an article written to defend the constitutional pressure group Charter 88, she argued that the dominance of Fabianism on the British left has 'tethered' labour and socialism to the British state (Wainwright, 1989c) and wrote that 'the instruments of the benevolent state have been tried and found wanting' (Wainwright, 1994 285). Wainwright's argument is part of a much wider challenge to the dominant conceptions of socialism, a bubbling to the surface of a submerged libertarian, anti-Fabian stream in British socialist thought. I argue that there was only a significant move in this direction once the problems of state planned socialism became apparent, but, as we shall see later, this side of the socialist argument has risen to the surface several times over the last century.

Wainwright was explicit in berating earlier socialists for failing to provide an adequate non-statist theoretical response to Hayek. She targeted Wootton and, 'more indirectly', Crosland as 'the last sustained responses to Hayek's neo-liberalism' (Wainwright, 1994 3).<sup>6</sup> Yet to Wainwright, these authors are irremediably statist: they require 'us to place undue faith in the benevolent expertise and good judgement of people like themselves' (Wainwright, 1994 4).<sup>7</sup> These comments note a paternalist element in British socialism that is discussed at various points throughout this thesis. This paternalism corresponds to a dominant view of the state on the British left as paternalistic but benevolent.

To a large degree in Hayek's thought, and perhaps more so for some 'new right' influenced parties of the ex-Eastern bloc, there is an anti-paternalistic, libertarian strand. It is this idea, Wainwright believed, that partly accounted for the popularity of Hayek in the newly open Eastern Europe (Wainwright, 1994 ch. 1) - a contrast

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<sup>6</sup> There were a few others, such as Jim Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 1990) - whose study of Hayek came out three years before Wainwright's main engagement - as discussed in the Chapter 1, but these are not mentioned.

<sup>7</sup> Wainwright is dismissive of Wootton, who provided an earlier limited example of engagement with Hayek in the immediate post-war period. (Wootton's work was discussed in the Introduction.) However, Wootton is not as paternalist as Wainwright describes, allowing a vital role in her thought for the responsible citizen as a break on the misuse of the state.

to the heavy paternal hand of the Soviet state. Wainwright also saw herself as a libertarian, although a libertarian of the left. Explaining the idea behind the choice of name for a new political magazine, *Red Pepper*, which launched in 1994, Wainwright wrote that the original *Red Pepper* had been an anti-bureaucratic, satirical, socialist Russian magazine which closed in 1926. The new *Red Pepper* would aim to revive its tradition: 'Our aim is to develop its libertarianism, satire and commitment - unashamedly left, but dissenting, open and democratic' (Wainwright, 1993c 2). It is this link between libertarians within very different ideologies that produced 'an eerie sense of recognition' and led Wainwright to write about Hayek. This is the same link that, in part, led Orwell to write the surprisingly sympathetic review of Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, which was discussed in Chapter 1. To Wainwright, the point is, as Grahl puts it, that 'the role of government is now seen as limited in a way which draws on, although it does not replicate, notions of limited government in the liberal tradition ...' (Grahl, 1995 157).

### **From class to movements**

By viewing social movements as the key actors (rather than individuals, as Hayek did) Wainwright undertook, in Wood's phrase, a 'retreat from class' at least in its simplest form (Ellen Meiksins Wood, 1986). More specifically, she distanced herself from the narrow economic understanding of class that dominated socialist

thought for much of the twentieth century. Instead she presented an argument seemingly more content with the increasingly pluralistic society of late twentieth century Britain. Wainwright was presenting a broadened conception of class in her writings as far back as 1979 arguing that the increasingly organised 'fragments' - 'women, gays, blacks and youth' (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1979 3), but particularly the women's movement - were connected, though at a distance, from a narrow economic understandings of class disadvantage based solely on economics:

There might be some logic in this if all the inequalities and sources of exploitation and oppression which the women's movement, the trade union movement, the black movement, etc., are up against were separate, unconnected to each other. If workers were simply up against bosses, women up against the sexual division of labour and sexist culture, blacks against racial repression and discrimination, with no significant connection between these forms of oppression, no state power linking and overseeing the institutions concerned, then strong independent movements would be enough. But it is precisely the connections between these sources of oppression, both through the state and through the organization of production and culture, which makes such a piecemeal solution impossible.

(Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1979 4)

To understand class in this way hints at post-modern interpretations which developed in the *academe* during the last decades of the twentieth century (such as Skeggs, 1997). The groups Wainwright mentioned were to be described, in the context of the ‘new urban left’ of the mid-1980s, as a ‘rainbow coalition’. In a rainbow the colours seem distinct, but are all caused by the sun’s refraction through water. Similarly, as Barker noted, to Wainwright and the other authors of *Beyond the Fragments*, ‘Class remained the comprehensive category’ that inspired the various movements (Barker, 1997 262). As such, class held the various groups together and provided a narrative which placed the new urban left in the modernist and socialist camp; although their conception of class was both subjectively felt and fragmented, rather than objective and monolithic, as it had traditionally been perceived on the left.

By the time she wrote *Arguments for a New Left* Wainwright had moved further from class as an explanatory tool. Reiterating her objection to the ‘Marxist-Leninist’ conception (Wainwright, 1994 97-98), Wainwright focused on ‘movements’. Indeed Wainwright’s book is probably unique as a work on political theory in ending with a thirteen page ‘Directory of International Campaigns, Networks and Newsletters’. Wainwright’s focus on movements caused much chagrin for those on the more traditional left. Sheila Cohen asked,

whether these different ‘social movements’, if such is the correct term, do in fact spring from one unified impulse

towards 'democracy', 'egalitarianism' 'radicalism' or any of those oft-repeated buzz-words with which Wainwright studs her analysis. By contrast the term class is notable for its absence, in which words like 'socialism' or indeed 'capitalism' also make but infrequent appearance.

(S. Cohen, 1995 162)

Cohen argued that Wainwright's approach 'totally overlooks the issue of how the workers' independent class interests . . . shape forms of organisation and resistance which have less to do with "radicalism" than with an incipient – and in this case transitional – socialism' (S. Cohen, 1995 163) and criticised Wainwright for her 'free floating radicalism' (S. Cohen, 1995 163). From a different political angle, John Gray raised a related question: once class no longer binds the various social movements together what are the 'coherence conditions' that hold a society together? Is the state reduced to a battle ground for competing social movements? (Gray, 2003, pers. comm. 18 Feb)

Yet one can overstate the claim that Wainwright has abandoned economic conceptions of class all together. Many of the groups which are central to her argument can be related back to economic understandings of class fairly straightforwardly – for example, the practical examples raised above of Japan and Modena are of economic, and in some cases economic producer, groups or associations. It is, however, more difficult to see the links Wainwright makes

between other groups, such as those based on local, single issue, activism and class.

### **The return of the ‘small battalions’**

The engagement with Hayek’s work by the thinkers examined in this thesis forced most of them onto liberal grounds, and is part of a wider dominance and division of the political landscape between the social and economic strands of liberalism. However, other, older political themes are also making a comeback and have a more marginal place on this landscape. Wainwright’s engagement with Hayek, involving a rejection of a paternalist state and a move from an obvious class analysis to a variety of radical social movements, has several similarities with the revival of the English political pluralism of the early twentieth century, most notably the guild socialism of GDH Cole and the socialist pluralism of Harold Laski (Barker, 1999).

In 1989, Paul Hirst argued that there was a need ‘to put an important body of work back on the political agenda’: English pluralism (Hirst, 1989 1). The links between Wainwright and the early pluralists become clearer as Hirst defines this pluralism. It was, he noted,

a critique of state structure and of the basis of the authority of the state. The English pluralists challenged the theory of unlimited state sovereignty and of a unitary centralized state embodying such sovereign power in a hierarchy of authority

(Hirst, 1989 3)

Hirst found, in the works of the English pluralists, similar themes to those that emerge in Wainwright's engagement with Hayek. He wrote,

Central to pluralism were the belief in the vitality and the legitimacy of self-governing associations as means of organizing social life and the belief that political representation must respect the principle of function, recognizing associations like trade unions, churches, and voluntary bodies. In the pluralist scheme it is such associations that perform the basic task of social life. Pluralism is strongly anti-statist in its basic principles. Respect for the autonomy of associations freely formed of citizens and the principle of functional representation both involve a limitation and not an enhancement of state power.

(Hirst, 1989 2)

Hirst attempted to resell the English pluralism of the first decades of the twentieth century in his own contemporary packaging as 'associational democracy' (Hirst,

1993; 1994b). Wainwright supplemented Hirst's account of 'associations like trade unions, churches, and voluntary bodies' that were the concern of the earlier English pluralists, with, amongst others, movements for racial and sexual equality, for disabled people, cooperative movements or those of and for the unemployed.

Pluralism, which remained long dormant and only occasionally stirring seems to be making something of a recovery. Hirst argued that pluralism failed 'because it could not compete in given political conditions with collectivism and centralism' (Hirst, 1993 114). The wedding of social democrats and socialists to the benevolent state for much of the twentieth century seemed suitable when it created the possibility of a 'people's state'. The use of the same powerful state in the last two decades of that century to roll itself back, and to attack institutions that hindered the implementation of an agenda that owed a great deal to the new right, did much to bring about both the divorce between the left and the state and the revival of pluralism. The influence of the English pluralists of the first decades of the twentieth century seemed to die out completely in the mid-twentieth century, but its occasional reappearances were influential for Wainwright, as Eisfeld noted:

Laski's death in 1950 seemed to make 'the exhaustion of a hope and a temper' . . . for more than a decade. In the late 1960s, however, socialist pluralism was rediscovered by Euro-communist parties (particularly the PCI), by dissenters from the ranks of their more orthodox sister organizations, by Yugoslav and Czechoslovakian

communists. During the short-lived Czechoslovakian 'reform communist' experiment of 1968, workers' councils, political, producers' and consumers' associations were projected as 'multiple autonomous subjects' of the economic and political process...

(Eisfeld, 1996 276)

Wainwright's pluralist engagement with Hayek was filtered through, amongst other things, the protests of May 1968 and the Czech dissidents who created *Charter 77*, which argued against centralised control. The pluralist influence on Wainwright becomes still more obvious during its brief revival during the 1974-79 Labour Government: as Barker wrote, the 'early 1970s have been characterised not only by the resurgent interest in workers' control but by a general engagement in participatory politics and direct, functional groups' (Barker, 1975 253). The pluralism of both Wainwright and Hirst met again in their joint involvement in the creation of *Charter 88*, and its commitment to decentralise power away from for the state under a written constitution.

Wainwright's engagement with Hayek appears to be part of a larger shift towards a revival of pluralism. Grahl wrote of,

an increasingly prevalent view on the Left that voluntary association within civil society . . . is to become itself a terrain of social transformation, while state action,

although it will often remain necessary, becomes a secondary aspect of the advance and one which is continually dependent on civil society as its support.

(Grahl, 1995 156)

The political scientist Cecile Laborde would concur, arguing that:

As liberal-democratic states find themselves plagued by problems of over-centralisation, democratic deficit, widespread inequalities, social break down and political apathy, the ‘group basis of politics’, to recall Earl Latham’s seminal expression, is being rediscovered.

(Laborde, 2000 1)

Laborde presented a classification of the early twentieth century political pluralists (Laborde, 2000 ch.1), which I argue is helpful in assessing the revival of pluralism at the end of the twentieth century. I set it out below because the engagement with Hayek by several of the political thinkers discussed in this thesis has forced their arguments towards pluralism of one kind or another. Laborde divided pluralist thinkers according to their views social regulation and the role of the state:

- *On social regulation: organic versus contractual.* Organic thinkers ‘were scornful of any attempt to explain associations primarily through individual wills and interests. Groups, in their view, emerged naturally out of social life

and could not be reduced to their individual components.’ Contractual theorists were self-proclaimed socialists, ‘stressing the role of grassroots groups, notably trade unions – to inject socialism with a voluntarist, participatory, libertarian, sometimes openly anarchist spirit. Their pluralism was a celebration of individualism within socialism.’

- *On the role of the state: co-ordination versus integration:* ‘the co-ordinating state both neglected overall discussions of the political community and reduced the state to a minimal role’. Proponents of an integrative state were ‘concerned to solve the problem of overall societal regulation and ensure the achievement of basic common purposes by the state’. They sought to escape the Hegelian and Rousseau-inspired theory of the state, but never rejected ‘the need for a state’.

These two axioms allow pluralist thought to be presented in a four box taxonomy (which I have depicted in Figure 3 below), and which is of use in the discussion of the engagement with Hayek by the writers discussed in detail in these chapters. Laborde describes the classification as made up of: organic integrators (who in practice have tended to be ‘corporate pluralists’ such as Duguit); organic-coordinators (which include ‘Whig pluralists’ like Figgis); contractual coordinators (such as ‘anarchist pluralists’ like Berth and Leroy); and contractual-

integrators (who have tended to be socialist pluralists, such as the later Laski and Cole).

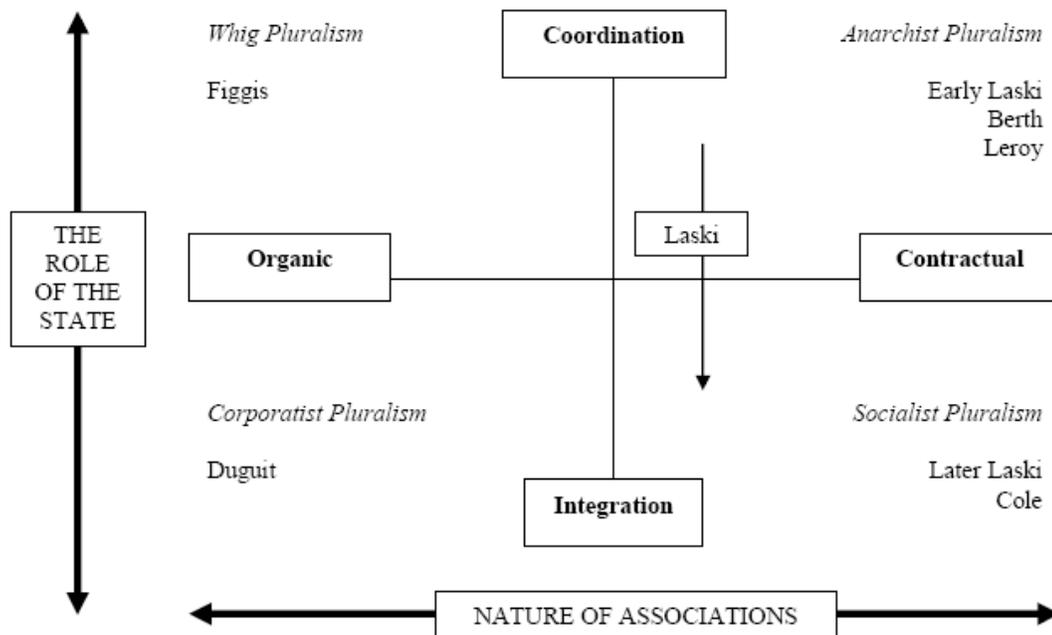


Figure 3: Classifying pluralist thought

(Derived from the account in Laborde, 2000 ch. 1)

A more accurate classification of Wainwright’s pluralism would seemingly place her in this last group: *contractual-integrators*. Her view of associations is largely contractual. They tend to be social movements to which membership is voluntary (although these movements are often based on identity, such as sexuality, ethnicity or gender, which is far less open to choice). It seems also that at times, whilst holding to a contractual account of social movements, Wainwright could be said to

waver between a co-ordinating and an integrating view of social regulation. When presenting her argument for a 'socialised market' it seems that the state has a substantial role in promoting equality between the various associations.

David Miller, whose work was examined in the second chapter, also advocated a pluralist argument. Like Wainwright he could be described as a 'contractual-integrator'. The groups in Miller's argument are worker co-operatives, membership to which is contractual. However, for Miller the state has far more of a role in integrating the various cooperatives that form the basis of a market socialist society, and in developing forms of community that sustain egalitarianism, than Wainwright allows it.

Andrew Gamble, whose work is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, is more circumspect in his pluralism. If he is classified as a pluralist at all, he is perhaps best described as an 'organic-integrationist'. His engagement with Hayek led him to argue that some organisations have emerged through spontaneous process and that the knowledge which coheres within them should be protected from central government. However, it is the central state which has the final say in deciding which local organisations continue to operate.

Wainwright's engagement with Hayek pushed her in the direction of an account of knowledge as social. However, in conceptualising that 'social' she drew on a very

different, and left-wing or socialist pluralist tradition. This is ironic given that Hayek had specifically rejected syndicalism in *Collectivist Economic Planning* (Hayek, 1935 240). Yet Wainwright was not alone on the left in finding that an account of Hayek could be developed into an argument for pluralism in the final years of the chronological twentieth century. Several of the thinkers discussed in the main body of this thesis presented arguments based on a scepticism about the state which manifested itself in support for a devolution of power, not to the individual (as Hayek argued) but to a variety of groups (often of an organic, or ‘spontaneous’, kind in Hayek’s terms) within society.

### **The end of socialism?**

There is much continuity in Wainwright’s thought with the submerged socialist tradition concerned with liberty, fulfilment, and moral regeneration. However, one can ask whether the term socialism remains suitable to describe an analysis largely stripped of the traditional understanding of class and of central planning. As other thinkers examined in this thesis have shown, Wainwright’s flight from central planning is part of a much larger move: she is just one swallow in a summer, and by no means the first.

By the 1990s, the future of ‘socialism’ became uncertain against historical shifts that meant that the right, electorally and intellectually, was dominant and Eastern

bloc socialism had collapsed. Once the Union of Soviet *Socialist* Republics was gone, the idea of ‘socialism’ appeared less certain, and was uttered with decreasing assuredness.

Reticence about the use of the term ‘socialism’ is a feature of Wainwright’s work; her words are those of a doctor who cannot promise a healthy future to a patient. Anticipating the arrival of the ‘new kinds of institutions’ that she advocated, Wainwright wrote, ‘Whether the result will always and everywhere be called ‘socialism’ is an open question’ (Wainwright, 1994 285). Wainwright’s work is open to the possibility that the left she advocated is unknown (and for epistemic reasons is partly unknowable) and that it may not be known as socialist. She quoted William Morris in *The Dream of John Ball*, who wrote that ‘if the folk . . . have tried many roads towards freedom, and found that they led nowhither, then they shall try another’ (Wainwright, 1994 284) and argues that

This book [*Arguments for a New Left*] has explored the ways in which there is a left influenced by different movements which *did*, in a variety of ways, anticipate that existing roads ‘went nowhither’, and *did* begin to map out alternatives.

(Wainwright, 1994 284)

Wainwright's journey is in many ways a journey into the unknown, both logically, as a result of her epistemological argument, and historically, because it is with a note of uncertainty that she ends. Surveying the world around her and seeing unemployment, international instability and 'poverty caused by international finance', Wainwright concluded: 'In these circumstances it is not utopian to explore new roads to freedom, and to pick up maps which have not yet been completed'. If it is uncertain that 'socialism' is on the map Wainwright uses<sup>8</sup>, the use of the term 'left' seems more clearly defined as a wider and more embracing category. I return to these questions in the concluding chapter.

Wainwright's scepticism about the term is reflected in wider left-wing debate during the 1990s. For about a year after his election as leader of the British Labour Party, Tony Blair would refer to himself, not as a socialist, but as a 'social-ist'<sup>9</sup>. The last sighting of this hyphenated construction in print may have been a year

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<sup>8</sup> A similar fate seems to have undergone conservatism, although perhaps there is in Britain a 'Constantine relationship' where conservatism, at least in name, remains more of a term in contemporary debate than socialism through the survival of the Conservative Party. (Claims for the 'death of conservatism' are made by John Gray (Gray and Willets, 1997). The phrase 'Constantine relationship' is from Barker (Barker, 1996a) and is developed in the conclusion below.

<sup>9</sup> David Selbourne coined this term in his communitarian tract (Selbourne, 1994) and it was first used by Blair in 1994 speech to a *Guardian/Whatever Next?* Conference (later issued as Blair, 1994 - this time spelt with no hyphen).

later, in his lecture on the 50th anniversary of the Labour landslide of 1945. Blair later settled, *via* ‘communitarianism’ and ‘stake holding’ on describing his project as part of ‘a third way’, accepting Anthony Giddens’ account of the concept (Giddens, 1998). For Giddens, the third way lies between socialism and ‘market fundamentalism’. This period was replete with references to a third way, option or path. Wainwright, using the phrase ten years earlier, was arguing for ‘a third option’, by which she meant a politics which draws on socialist and republican traditions marginalized by social democracy and official communism’ (Wainwright, 1988b 34). Giddens explicitly attempted to locate his work as social democratic, rather than socialist – and he tellingly entitled the first chapter of *The Third Way*, ‘After Socialism’ (Giddens, 1998 3).

### ***Conclusions: pluralist responses to Hayek***

Wainwright’s engagement with Hayek is illustrative of several wider themes and shifts in British political thought that occurred by the mid-1990s. Her engagement, rather than outright rejection of the Hayek’s arguments, demonstrated the increased fluidity of the traditional categories of political thought by this period. Wainwright drew on a submerged, anti-Fabian, strand of twentieth century socialist or social democratic thought, rejected the paternalist or benevolent state, and viewed social movements, and not class, as the key actors. This allowed her thought by the mid-1990s to be best categorised as part of a largely ‘post-socialist’

left. Lastly, Wainwright's epistemological engagement with Hayek led her to argue for a form of social movement politics which allows one to draw parallels with both the English political pluralists of the first decades of the twentieth century and with her contemporaries, notably Paul Hirst. In this move, Wainwright's radical movement-based, participatory politics is one part of a wider revival of pluralist thought at the end of the twentieth century.

## Chapter 5 - Andrew Gamble: the liberal end to the century

There has always been a tendency for people on the centre and left of politics to belittle the achievements of Friedrich Hayek, the great Austrian-British economist. He is usually regarded as a right wing ideologue. This is a pity, because his work is rich in insight, and has a lot to teach those who do not share his preconceptions.

(Gamble, 1996a)

Throughout his career Andrew Gamble would have described himself, and been seen by others, as on the left of British politics. His academic life began in the early 1970s with a series of articles in the Marxist tradition, and by the mid-1990s he was a key figure behind the idea of stakeholding, which became associated with New Labour. Gamble – who is now Professor of Politics at the University of Sheffield - remains in close contact with several senior figures in the Labour Party and has for many years jointly edited *The Political Quarterly* with senior Labour MP, Tony Wright. Given this background, Gamble's comments during the 1990s (such as those made in the epigraphs to both this chapter and to the thesis as a whole) that Hayek could be a source of insight for socialists seem surprising.

Gamble's journey from Marxism to the market provides a case study that illuminates the way the wider political landscape has changed. It should, I argue, perhaps even more so than with the other thinkers discussed in this thesis, be seen as part of the end of a 'short twentieth century' in political thought and the beginning of a new period, in which liberalism, divided between its economic and social (or new) strands, is dominant. As such the first section of the chapter contains a discussion of Gamble's early work and examines the contextual changes that influenced his shift away from the broadly Marxist position in the mid-1970s to an engagement with Hayek by the mid-1990s. The second section reconstructs Gamble's account of Hayek's work and contrasts Gamble's position with mainstream twentieth century socialism. The third section examines the limits of Gamble's engagement with Hayek. I argue that Gamble's writings in this area shifted the debate onto liberal grounds, marked a categorical break with those forms of socialism which dominated in the twentieth century and bore many similarities with early twentieth century new liberalism.

### ***1. From Marx to the market***

Marxism ... is a living theoretical tradition; and we owe any addition this book may make to its understanding to our involvement in that movement

(Walton and Gamble, 1972 v)

This section examines Gamble's early academic work and the changing context within which it was developed. In particular, I look at how an early interest in Marxist studies developed into an account of Thatcherism after the 'crisis' of the 1970s. Gamble's account of Thatcherism led to an interest in the new right and, by the end of the 'short twentieth century', an engagement with Hayek.

### **The 1970s: 'The crisis of capitalism', the landslide beings**

Gamble's early academic work came during the final years of a period of extraordinary economic growth in the West. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Hobsbawm described the period from 1947 to 1973 as 'the golden age' at the centre of the 'short twentieth century' and, I argue, his framework is particularly helpful in understanding the shifts in Gamble's thought after the mid-1970s (Hobsbawm, 1994 5-12 and Part Two). Gamble's first full-length academic book *From Alienation to Surplus Value*, written with Paul Walton in 1972, was completed before the end of the 'golden age'. It was the culmination of a string of articles written as a result of an engagement in debates on Marxist studies (Walton, Gamble and Coulter, 1970a; 1970b; 1971). The central argument of *From Alienation to Surplus Value* was that 'Marx's theory of capital accumulation, based on his labour theory of value ... is still the only theory which provides a completely consistent account of the genesis and reproduction of capitalism'

(Walton and Gamble, 1972 227). Given the context of the post-war boom, *From Alienation to Surplus Value* avoided discussion of the immiseration of the working class, and made ‘no pronouncements about the likelihood of revolution’ (Walton and Gamble, 1972 227). The book was awarded the *Deutscher Prize*, given annually for a work that ‘exemplifies the best and most innovative new writing in or about the Marxist tradition’ (Deutscher Prize, nd). The recipients of the prize are invited to deliver the annual Deutscher Memorial Lecture, which Gamble did, with his co-writer Paul Walton, in 1973 (Gamble and Walton, 1976 Preface).

By the time Gamble and Walton had developed the content of the Deutscher Lecture into a full-length book, which appeared in 1976, the long post-war boom in the West was over. Following Hobsbawm’s typology ‘the golden age’ had ended and ‘the landslide’ had begun. Writing in 1994, Hobsbawm described the ‘landslide’ years pessimistically, as a time of ‘decomposition, uncertainty and crisis’ (Hobsbawm, 1994 6). Gamble’s assessment of the new context during the early years of the ‘landslide’ supported Hobsbawm’s later interpretation, and was reflected by the title Gamble and Walton chose for their book, *Capitalism in Crisis* (Gamble and Walton, 1976). The authors noted that,

the scale and the seriousness of the crisis cannot be doubted. Since 1945 governments have generally set themselves four basic economic objectives – full employment, economic growth, a balance or surplus on

foreign-trade payments and price stability. It was common to fail to achieve one out of the four in any one year, but it is now common to achieve none.

(Gamble and Walton, 1976 5)

Still writing from within the Marxist tradition, Gamble and Walton argued that the crisis was caused by obstacles to the growth of the capitalist economy. Governments' attempts to maintain prosperity by expanding money supply and credit in order to finance their own expenditure only led to rising inflation. The realisation of the results of this strategy led to the introduction of an alternative approach to kick start prosperity, aimed at removing obstacles to the growth of the capitalist economy by cutting back on both the money supply and public expenditure. To Gamble and Walton, writing in 1976, this 'also means breaking up the mixed economy that has established and underpinned the prosperity and the long boom since 1945' (Gamble and Walton, 1976 32). Governments' attempts to impose an alternative economic strategy to revive the economy did not reduce workers' wage demands. The result was, for Gamble, that 'The state is obliged to step in directly to confront the working class on behalf of capital. The political struggle is beginning in earnest. The calm of the long boom is over' (Gamble and Walton, 1976 33). The end of the post-war boom changed the nature of political discourse – particularly in the UK, where its effects were exacerbated by a more general relative decline (this was later examined at length in Gamble, 1981a).

The difficulties facing Keynesian social democracy by the mid-1970s caused a rethinking of accepted approaches to politics, in which all of the thinkers examined in this thesis were involved. The centrist path no longer appeared navigable and political debate in the UK seemed to have reached a T-junction, offering the choice between turns to the right or left. Gamble's writing at this time provided an example of this interpretation. He argued in 1976 that, 'The impasse of the mixed economy is such that mere patching is no longer enough. On the left, as well as on the right, solutions for breaking out of the impasse have emerged' (Gamble and Walton, 1976 198; alternatives to the impasse are also discussed in Gamble, 1981a chs. 5-6). A turn to the right would continue the direction taken by Heath in the early years of his Government. In the Conservative Party, Gamble associated this path with Enoch Powell. It would mean an end of 'interventionist' government and the abandonment of the full employment commitment.

At the time, Gamble argued that a turn to the right was less likely than a turn to the left. He wrote that 'unemployment in the low millions' is 'hardly compatible with regular elections, because it promises the kind of social upheavals that many countries faced in the 1930s. Hence it could only be maintained in practice if the political market were closed down, an authoritarian regime established, and trade unions effectively suppressed' (Gamble and Walton, 1976 197). More likely, Gamble argued, is a 'left turn'. In 1976 Gamble and Walton followed Tony Benn, then the Labour Government's Energy Minister, in developing a strategy of

enlisting workers' support for the extension of public ownership, with pressure from trade unions central in making this strategy succeed. To Gamble, 'the logic of events' pointed in the direction of this form of radical social democracy (Gamble and Walton, 1976 197-200). With hindsight, Gamble and Walton were wrong in their prediction of a left turn. The Conservative Government elected in 1979 held power for over seventeen years and largely followed the first strategy Gamble had identified, turning to the right, but managing to combine the suppression of trade union power and rising unemployment with regular elections.

### **The 1980s: 'The hegemony of Thatcherism'**

During the years Thatcher was Prime Minister (1979-90) Gamble became an established political commentator whose work often displayed a fascination with the politics of - or issues most often associated with - *The Conservative Enemy* (Crosland, 1962). Gamble's examination of Britain's decline in the post-war period relative to other Western nations provides one example, echoing one of the key concerns of Thatcher's Government (Gamble, 1981a). His article, 'The Free Economy and the Strong State' published in *The Socialist Register*, and substantially developed and updated some years later into a book of the same name, became one of the most influential accounts of 'Thatcherism' (Gamble, 1979; 1988a). The decision to concentrate on conservative politics and issues is unusual for a writer on the left, but the article had its prequel in one of Gamble's

earliest books, *The Conservative Nation* (Gamble, 1974), a study of the opinion of the Conservative Party in the post-war period.

Gamble's fascination with conservatism and the Conservative Party continued with his analysis of 'The Politics of Thatcherism' in his 1988 book, *The Free Economy and the Strong State* (Gamble, 1988). Gamble now viewed 'the crisis' he had earlier discussed in *The Crisis of Capitalism* as the time when a 'new kind of politics' began (Gamble, 1988a ch.1). By 1988 Gamble – still relying on a terminology derived from Marxist thought - argued that the crisis of the mid-1970s was the result of the breakdown of one 'hegemonic project', whilst Thatcherism should be interpreted as creation of a new one. As Gamble explains:

Hegemony exists when the political leadership of a group or a nation is exercised with minimal dispute and resistance. Constant work and struggle is required to achieve and to maintain it, for no hegemony is ever complete, and many attempts to achieve hegemony are never realised. That is why hegemonic projects are encountered much more frequently than hegemony itself.

(Gamble, 1988a 1)

The concept of hegemony is derived from the Italian communist leader, Antonio Gramsci. As such the concept is an important analytical tool in the Marxist tradition. The term was first used in a sustained manner in the British context by

Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn and other contributors to the *New Left Review* in the 1960s and 70s, and the idea of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project was developed by several authors in *Marxism Today* during the 1980s, notably Stuart Hall (Hall, 1980; Gamble, 1988a particularly ch.6).

During the 1980s and 1990s Gamble continued to develop his thinking about conservatism and the new right in a series of reviews, articles and books (he documented the politics of the new right and the rise and fall of Thatcherism in Gamble, 1983; 1986; 1988a; 1989f; 1993b; 1995c) However, his commentary on conservatism and the new right during the 1980s and early 1990s remained interpretative and critical, predating any engagement with Hayek's work.

Gamble's work from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s reflected one possible response to the end of the period of growth, the economic crisis and the rise and fall of Thatcherism that marked British politics in the last third of the twentieth century. His discovery of Friedrich Hayek as a source of inspiration can also be understood, in part, as a response to the success of the Conservative Party under Thatcher's premiership. It is to this discovery of Hayek which I turn below.

### **The 1990s: 'Two sides to Hayek'**

Gamble's claim, cited as the epigraph to this thesis, that 'Hayek has much to contribute to the renewal of the socialist project' (Gamble, 1996e 192) was part of a long political journey. In this part I examine Gamble's intellectual discovery of Hayek in the mid-1990s.

Gamble's early engagement with Hayek is limited, despite writing in his early article-version of *The Free Economy and the Strong State* that Hayek's 'writings repay careful study' (Gamble, 1979 6). It is notable, for example, that there is no significant mention of Hayek in Gamble's overview text, *Introduction to Modern Social and Political Thought* (Gamble, 1981b). Before the mid-1990s, where Gamble did discuss Hayek, it was as a thoughtful contributor to the new right, not as a writer whose work had insights with wider applicability. This approach to Hayek is taken, for example, in Gamble's book note on Hayek's *Collected Works* in 1992, which shows a scholarly familiarity with Hayek's arguments, but no engagement or accommodation with their content (Gamble, 1992). Gamble suggested, for example, that the addition of previously unpublished and little known pieces in the *Collected Works* 'will be of considerable interest to all students of Hayek and twentieth-century liberalism' but he does not write, or even imply, that they will be of interest to other groups (Gamble, 1992 760). By the mid-1990s, however, Gamble's view of Hayek's wider significance had begun to change.

It was not until a 1995 review that Gamble argued that there were ‘two sides to Hayek’. The review was of Jack Birner and Rudy van Zijp’s collection of essays, *Hayek, Co-ordination and Evolution: His Legacy in Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and the History of Ideas* (1994) – a collection which included contributions from both right and left and featured chapters on Hayek’s legacy by the Labour Peers, Meghnad Desai and Raymond Plant, amongst others. It was in his review of this book that Gamble noted that: ‘Hayek’s reputation as a political theorist has often been hard to separate from his reputation as an ideologue’ (Gamble, 1995a 278). Later Gamble was to write of, ‘the contrast between Hayek the ideologue and Hayek the social scientist, and the extent to which he failed to develop many of his insights because of the ideological closures he imposed on his work’ (Gamble, 1996e x). A consequence of Hayek’s Janus-face, Gamble argues, is that Hayek had generally only been studied by his ideological sympathisers: ‘His critics have not thought it necessary to study him in detail’ (Gamble, 1995a 278). Gamble claimed that it was Hayek’s reputation as a social scientist, not as an ideologue, that would be remembered. Gamble developed the concept of ‘ideological closure’, a concept with some previous use in the study of literature, but not in the social sciences.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A search using the *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences* revealed no uses of the term in the social sciences before Gamble’s own.

Once Gamble established a second side to Hayek (as a political theorist or social scientist), one that even Hayek himself never fully considered due to the ideological closures that he imposed on his own work, then Gamble's engagement with the author began. Gamble now described Hayek as a 'thinker of extraordinary range and subtlety ... whose best work raises questions and identifies problems which are immensely fertile' (Gamble, 1995a 278). Gamble, still describing his political thought as 'socialist', had travelled a long way from his earlier Marxism. By the time Gamble published his full account of Hayek's work, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty* (1996e) he was arguing that 'Hayek turns out to have been more right than wrong' (Gamble, 1996e 4) and 'has much to contribute to the renewal of the socialist project' (Gamble, 1996e 192).

## ***II. Engaging with Hayek on liberal terrain***

Gamble's engagement with Hayek's work is developed most fully in two pieces: an article, 'Hayek and the Left', and the final chapter of his book *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty*, both published in 1996 (Gamble, 1996d; 1996e).<sup>2</sup> Below I discuss three areas of Hayek's thought (concerning epistemology, markets and the state)

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<sup>2</sup> Hayek's 1996 article was abridged and reprinted in *Prospect Magazine* under the tongue-in-cheek title 'Comrade Hayek' (Gamble, 1996a).

which, Gamble argued, offered insights for the left. To Gamble, writing in 1996, Hayek could be of use to *socialists*. However, I argue that Gamble's engagement with Hayek involves jettisoning too much of what was traditionally understood as socialism in the twentieth century for it still to be usefully categorised as such. Instead, I contend, the debate has now shifted on to largely liberal grounds.

### **The limits of knowledge**

Gamble argues that, 'One of Hayek's most important contributions was to revive the anti-rationalist, sceptical tradition' associated with Bernard Mandeville, David Hume, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson (Gamble, 1996d 49).<sup>3</sup> Arguments that emphasise the limits of human reason are historically associated with the right, and are rooted in ideas of human imperfection. Noel O'Sullivan argued that the British conservative tradition, for example, was grounded on an outlook which viewed human reason as limited (O'Sullivan, 1976 ch. 4). There is also an important strand of anti-rationalist liberalism. In the twentieth century, this was most clearly found in Isaiah Berlin's value pluralism and Karl Popper's 'piecemeal social

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<sup>3</sup> Gamble draws an important distinction between 'anti-rationalism' and 'irrationalism' (Gamble, 1996d 49). The former, he argues, does nothing more than place *limits* on the extent of effective planning, it does not rule it out *in toto*.

engineering' (Berlin, 1998; Popper, 1945 vol. 1, ch. 9 and vol. 2, chs. 15 and 24) and has more recently featured strongly in the work of John Gray (Gray, 1995; 2006).

By contrast, the left have not been so concerned with the limits of knowledge. Hayek argued that socialism, and an important strand within liberalism, relied upon 'constructivist rationalism', which knew no theoretical limits to the scope of human reason and provided the basis for 'false individualism' (Hayek, 1948 ch. 1). It was the constructivist rationalists, Hayek believed, who instigated a tradition of thought that threatened the very existence of civilisation (Hayek, 1944). Hayek characterised constructivist rationalists as prepared to bulldoze established institutions if they do not fit in with rational plans. Gamble's flirtation with anti-rationalism, marked a jettisoning of a central, although often unstated, epistemological assumption in mainstream socialism as it existed for much of the previous century.

Hayek's anti-rationalism is predicated upon the theory of knowledge presented in Chapter 3. For Hayek, knowledge could not be collected centrally in the way that the socialist planners, and other constructive rationalists, believed; instead, it existed in people's heads as knowledge of time and place. Individuals communicated decisions through the price system – in Hayek's terms, a 'marvel' upon which we had been able to develop the division of labour upon which our

'civilisation' was based (Hayek, 1980, originally 1945 87-89). For Hayek, the social order arose as a 'spontaneous' by-product of many individuals acting within a market system upon information given to them by the price mechanism. Hayek often used the term 'catallaxy' to describe the spontaneous order of the market. To Hayek, the protection of this order should be the main role of the state.

Gamble argued that the idea of tacit knowledge should be appropriated by the left, yet his engagement with Hayek in this area has several implications which challenge traditional socialist views. A first implication concerns the devolution of power away from the state. As Gamble wrote:

The logic of Hayek's approach - even if he himself does not always follow it through - is that there should be constant efforts to reform organisations to allow the specialised knowledge held by each individual to be utilised in the way in which decisions are taken. Centralised models of decision-making are likely to be much more error-prone, and therefore less efficient in achieving objectives and maximising welfare.

(Gamble, 1996d 50)

Gamble argued that his acceptance of the tacit nature of knowledge led to a scepticism about the state that 'reinforces those parts of the socialist and liberal traditions which have always argued for autonomy and independence of agents

and strict curbs on centralised power' (Gamble, 1996d 50). Yet this acceptance of tacit knowledge breaks with the Fabian tradition which dominated socialist thought for much of the twentieth century. Gamble's decentralism marked a significant break with the 'powerful fantasy at the back of many a socialist mind' of the 'all-knowing state' that was often implicit in twentieth century British socialism (Wainwright, 1994 61).

A second, and related, implication of Gamble's appropriation of tacit knowledge concerned the retreat from public ownership. Writing in 1996 Gamble noted that:

A great deal of socialist planning in the twentieth century assumed that an order could be rationally designed whose outcomes would be superior to those of an order which had arisen spontaneously. But that implied that those designing the order had enough knowledge to perform the task. Hayek's single most important contribution was his theoretical argument as to why they would not.

(Gamble, 1996d 49-50)

In conceding that the left had rejected state ownership Gamble explicitly marked a radical break in the history of twentieth century political thought and jettisoned the dominant means supported by socialists to achieve their goal.

## **Markets and entrepreneurs**

Gamble's engagement with Hayek also broke new ground by embracing the idea of entrepreneurship. He argued that Hayek's account of the market as a discovery processes, and the role of the entrepreneur within it, should provide a further insight for the left. As the previous section showed, Gamble's acceptance of much of Hayek's epistemology led him to accept the market as a discovery process for revealing people's wants, and therefore as the most efficient method of distribution (Gamble and Kelly, 1996b 69-71).

One implication of the argument for tacit knowledge, which Gamble explicitly picked out, was the idea that some agents must be proactive in finding out what other agents actually wanted, if the economy and society were not to stagnate. Consequently, Gamble argued that,

There is a crucial role for institutions which promote entrepreneurship, identifying new wants, new products, new forms of coordination and new types of association. The emphasis placed on centralised knowledge and administration in collectivist thought had tended to lead to the importance of entrepreneurs being downplayed.

(Gamble, 1996d 50)

The argument that entrepreneurship is a worthy activity marks another break with older left-wing argument. I argue that in engaging with Hayek, Gamble again dragged the debate onto predominantly liberal grounds, and away from socialism, as it was understood for much of the twentieth century. Entrepreneurship was admired by a strand in conservatism which stretched from the later works of WH Mallock to Enoch Powell (Mallock, 1918; 1908; Powell, 1991) and by most liberals, from Herbert Spencer (Spencer, 1884) to Hayek (if that is how one classifies his thought). The language of entrepreneurship became particularly politicised during the 1980s. The entrepreneur became a symbolic hero to the new right. The left, on the other hand, had tended to be sceptical about entrepreneurial values. To Tawney, for example, the entrepreneur pursuing profit above all else was morally questionable and contributed to an ethos of acquisitiveness in society (Tawney, 1921; 1931). However, for Gamble by contrast, ‘The implication of this insight in Hayek is egalitarian’ (Gamble, 1996d 51). This is certainly not the conclusion that Hayek would have reached, but Gamble would argue that Hayek is committing ‘ideological closure’ here:

Within his own thought there is a strong case for redistribution of both power and property rights in order to create a more flexible and dynamic society, and also to ensure that all individuals are full participants in the market order, taking responsibility for themselves and learning how to be self-reliant.

(Gamble, 1996d 51)

Two aspects are particularly worth highlighting for the present discussion in the way in which Gamble presents his account of entrepreneurship and the market. First, Gamble's mention of individual responsibility in the above quote is part of the move away from a simple paternalist discourse, which had been powerful in socialist thought, to a more nuanced relationship between the individual and the state based on individual autonomy and its moral counterpart, personal responsibility. The move to discussions of individual personal responsibility is found amongst several of Gamble's contemporaries on the left. Anthony Giddens, for example, presented his arguments in these terms, arguing that a new individualism meant that government could no longer treat rights as unconditional claims, but that they should be matched by new obligations: that there should be no rights without responsibilities (Giddens, 1998 34-37, 65-66). The focus on the individual gives Gamble's account a liberalism lacking in many older socialist arguments.

Second, to Gamble and many others, private ownership is a necessary consequence of advocating the market and entrepreneurship. By the mid-1990s, at around the same time as his writings on Hayek, Gamble was arguing that the left needed to 'develop a distinctive approach to private ownership' (Gamble and Kelly, 1996b 63). Yet discussions of private ownership marked another new departure for the left, as Gamble, writing with Gavin Kelly, noted:

This is a very difficult agenda for many parts of the left because so much of its culture has been formed around hostility to markets and private property rights due to the concentration of ownership in capitalist societies. The dominant tradition of the Left in this century has always thought in terms of using the powers of democracy and political action to constrain and control the forces of the market, and has neglected the powerful egalitarian weapons which markets could provide.

(Gamble and Kelly, 1996a)

Gamble went further than most of his colleagues on the left in embracing private ownership. Even those of his colleagues who have gone furthest in arguing for the market, such as David Miller (discussed in Chapter 2) and the other market socialists, sought to combine the market with predominantly 'socialised' (i.e. communal) ownership of the economy (Miller, 1989c esp. 49-53). Whilst Miller's attempt to present an argument for market socialism clung (just about) to its socialist roots, Gamble's embrace of private ownership takes the argument further onto liberal grounds.

Gamble argued that to discuss private ownership was not a 'capitulation to the new right' (Gamble and Kelly, 1996b 64), although he would not deny that he was taking the debate onto new areas for the left to fight on. Ownership mattered to

Gamble largely because it related to questions of inequality (Gamble and Kelly, 1996b 68-69). Gamble's engagement with Hayek is one way of approaching this issue. Gamble argued that a more egalitarian distribution of private ownership could lead to a more flexible and dynamic society, in which individuals participated in the market and took responsibility for themselves.

### **The role of government and organisations**

A final area of Hayek's work which Gamble argued the left can draw upon concerned the nature of governments and organisations. As Gamble wrote, 'Hayek's revival of that strand of modern thought which analyses how spontaneous orders can arise without being intended by anyone is one of his most important legacies to social science' (Gamble, 1995a 279). Gamble argued that Hayek's concept of the spontaneous order (or catallaxy), which was examined above, is a fruitful one for the left in considering the role of the government. Gamble did not accept Hayek's claim that the state's role should be as limited as possible. In fact, he argued that there are times when 'made orders' are superior to spontaneous ones. For example, the made order can provide a 'speed of response' to crises such as famine, war or environmental catastrophe that the spontaneous one cannot (Gamble, 1996d 51). What is important to Gamble is 'to ensure that government is making use of both catallaxies and made orders in order to tackle the problems it faces effectively' (Gamble, 1996d 51).

Gamble argued, 'Much of the growth of government in the 20th century is ... an evolutionary growth, sparked by the interactions of many groups and individuals. Modern government itself is a catallaxy, a network of exchange and interdependencies' (Gamble, 1996a). Government cannot claim any special expertise, derived from a rational account of knowledge, as Hayek held, but Gamble argued, what it can claim is 'knowledge about the general properties of the social system and the general conditions for institutional change and development' (Gamble, 1996d 51). This knowledge can be used to steer public and private catallaxies in innovative and flexible directions, where power is dispersed as widely as possible in order to make most efficient use of the knowledge that actors within these catallaxies contain. Gamble concluded that:

What Hayek offers us is a way of thinking about how the state can assist in the process of institutional change without imposing its own designs and trying to determine the outcomes of the process. Instead, the state sets the framework and helps point institutions in particular directions. It adopts an experimental approach, using trial and error in an attempt to establish new types of organisation.

(Gamble, 1996d 52)

To Gamble, a first implication of this view is that those in government no longer believe that they can use the lever of state to bring about socialism for all, as, for example, the Fabians did. Instead they act like gardeners, providing the right soil and carrying out the occasional bit of weeding in an experimental manner, but letting the plants do the rest. In Gamble's account, the role of the state is now closer to organic new liberal understandings found in the early twentieth century than it is to that found in most twentieth century socialism.

A second implication that Gamble drew from this view of the state is one of devolution of power towards those individuals who possess the (tacit) knowledge to operate most efficiently. If the modern state is itself a catallaxy then national government should encourage pluralism by devolving power, because a great deal of important knowledge simply cannot be collected at the top. There is 'no vantage point above the fray from which the state can direct the process of social evolution. The state cannot lay claim to any special enlightenment or superior wisdom' (Gamble, 1996d 52). For Gamble, one consequence of this was that the left should be 'seeking to empower certain organisations within civil society, such as foundations or trusts' (Gamble, 1996d 52). These organisations can pursue long-term goals in a way that political planners cannot.

As with other thinkers examined in this thesis, Gamble's engagement with Hayek led to the development of a notably pluralist argument. In this, Gamble's work

parallels that of David Miller and Hilary Wainwright, discussed in earlier chapters. Writing with Tony Wright in 1997, Gamble argued that the New Labour project relied upon pluralism to succeed. Labour's first priority must be to establish itself as the normal party of government. In order to achieve this, Labour must build majority support for a programme of radical reform. The complaint was that in the UK this support has always been 'impeded by the workings of the constitution – particularly the electoral system and the unitary state. Changing the balance of the constitution is crucial to make possible more pluralist and participative forms of politics' (Gamble and Wright, 1997 126). Although Gamble's pluralism does not take him as far from the state as Wainwright, Miller, or other pluralists such as Paul Hirst (Hirst, 1994a), his argument still marks a break with the socialist state of the twentieth century. His work reflects a move towards pluralism found in all of the thinkers examined in this thesis, and discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Many of the ideas that arise in Gamble's engagement with Hayek are found in his argument for stakeholding. Gamble's writing in the mid-1990s, with many other left-wing intellectuals, was often concerned with supporting and advising the Labour Party in the run up to its 1997 general election victory. Again, writing with Labour MP Tony Wright, Gamble noted that stakeholding is, 'the most interesting idea that has been associated with New Labour' (Gamble and Wright, 1997 126)

and with Gavin Kelly he claimed that ‘stakeholder capitalism appears to be an idea whose time has come’ (Gamble and Kelly, 1996c 23).

The key ideas behind stakeholding are derived from a wide variety of sources, including the nineteenth century English conservative thinker, Edmund Burke (who was cited by several authors attempting to 'reinvent' the left in Miliband, 1994).<sup>4</sup> However, some of the themes of stakeholding can be found in Gamble's engagement with Hayek. The central idea in stakeholding is that every individual citizen and important interest has a stake in society and the way it should be run. A second idea behind stakeholding is that, in order to make the first proposal possible, firms must be reorganised so that all stakeholders (such as shareholders, consumers and employees) are able to participate in their decisions. Both of these claims are supported by Gamble's argument for devolution away from both the state and other concentrations of power.

### ***III. Limits to the engagement with Hayek and the defence of new liberalism***

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<sup>4</sup> This engagement with Burke is in itself an interesting example of how former enemies were conscripted as allies at the end of the twentieth century.

The limit of Gamble's engagement with Hayek's work involved a dispute about the values that characterise modern society. For Hayek, it is liberty which makes the modern world possible; the pursuit of other values – notably equality – will lead to 'serfdom'. In this section, I reconstruct Gamble's Weberian interpretation of Hayek and examine his ambiguous description of Hayek's thought as an 'iron cage'. I then examine the limits of Gamble's engagement with Hayek's work, and his defence of equality.

### **'The iron cage of liberty'?**

To Gamble, 'underpinning all Hayek's work is a particular conception of modernity, which owes much to Max Weber' (Gamble, 1996e 177). Hayek had, with many other thinkers of his scope, an account of the move from traditional to modern societies. In this respect, Hayek's argument is not unlike nineteenth century accounts, such as Ferdinand Tönnies' description of the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*; Herbert Spencer's portrayal of the move from militant to industrial societies, or the description of the change from societies

based on status to contract in the work of both Spencer and Henry Maine<sup>5</sup>. However, to Gamble, it is comparisons with Max Weber which are the most fruitful. The significance which Gamble places in his Weberian interpretation of Hayek is demonstrated by the subtitle he chose for both his book on Hayek and the title of its concluding chapter: 'The Iron Cage of Liberty' (Gamble, 1996e) - a reworking of Talcott Parsons' translation of Weber's account of the 'iron cage' of capitalism and modernity (Weber, 1930 181).<sup>6</sup>

Yet, although both thinkers possessed an account of the move from traditional society to modernity, the similarities between Hayek and Weber are not obviously clear. The choice of the rewording of Weber for the subtitle of Gamble's book led

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<sup>5</sup> Comparisons between Hayek and Spencer seem particularly apt, given their shared narrative of a progressive rise in individualism subverted by collectivism (Spencer, 1884; Maine, 1959, originally 1863). The comparison was also noted by Gamble (Gamble, 1996e 181).

<sup>6</sup> It has been argued that Parsons' rendering of the *stahlhartes Gehäuse* concept through the metaphor of an 'iron cage' to describe the human-being under capitalism, would have better been translated as the 'shell as hard as steel'. In this new metaphor 'steel' - as a human-made, flexible product - becomes emblematic of modernity. The metaphor of a shell also suggests that capitalism has created a new kind of being, whereas a cage leaves the subject confined, but with his powers intact (Baehr, 2001). Following this argument (and disregarding the iconic nature of Parsons' translation) Gamble's book might have been better alternatively titled, *Hayek: the Steel Shell of Liberty*.

to varying interpretations as to the significance of the phrase amongst reviewers. This ambiguity is not made clearer, as one reviewer notes, because, after the subtitle, Gamble uses the phrase only once more in the book (as the title of his concluding chapter) and does not explain it further (Klein, 1997 258). This leaves the reader with limited evidence as to Gamble's meaning, especially given that a Weberian interpretation of Hayek is unusual. As Gamble admitted, Weber only features rarely in Hayek's overall output (Gamble, 1996e 82), so the prominent allusion to him seems an unusual choice by which to characterise his writings. (Weber is not mentioned at all, for example, in Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* and only in rare footnotes in *The Constitution of Liberty*.)

Given this room for ambiguity, several interpretations of Gamble's subtitle have been made. One reviewer, Billy Jack, argued that the phrase was chosen because Gamble believed that Hayek failed to appreciate Weber's insight into the tragic implications of modernity (Jack, nd). A second reviewer, Daniel Klein (without much further explanation) took Gamble to mean that 'Hayekian liberalism scores poorly in achieving socialism's 'historic aims of liberty, equality, and solidarity' (Klein, 1997 258). The most convincing interpretation, I argue, was made by Norman Barry, and it is this interpretation that I follow, and expand upon, below (N Barry, 1997 44).

Gamble claimed that one of the main reasons 'for rethinking Hayek is to assess his work as an account of the nature of modernity' (Gamble, 1996e 4). Underlying all of Hayek's work, Gamble argued, is a meta-narrative about the evolution of modern society which was 'key to many aspects of his thought' (Gamble, 1996e 31). For Gamble, Hayek largely accepted Weber's account of the processes that create modern society. Weber identified rationalisation of both means and ends (*Zweckrationalität*) as the key process in the progression from traditional to modern society. Traditional societies were characterised as possessing communal values where relationships were face-to-face. Rationalisation of this kind undermined traditional societies and created modern ones where values were individualist and relationships were impersonal. In this view, there are similarities between Hayek and Weber.

However, whilst Hayek accepted Weber's account of modernisation, he broke from Weber in his evaluation of modern society. Unlike Hayek, Weber's understanding of the modern world was, as Gamble noted, a tragic one. Weber argued that the process of rationalisation, which brought about the modern world, was initially liberating, as traditional and 'enchanted' ways of life (notably, the commitment to religion) were questioned. However, for this sense of liberation from traditional constraints to continue, the institutions that provided the norms from which individuals were breaking free needed to remain. The process of rationalisation undermined the traditional order and created new institutions that

were efficient and bureaucratic – two characteristics of modern societies. For Weber, with bureaucracy came the ‘disenchantment of the world’ as individuals became locked into vast impersonal organisations that sought to rationally maximise efficiency and where the meaning of individuals’ actions were devalued, resulting in spiritual poverty (Weber, 1948 155). To Weber, this processes of rationalisation, and the disenchantment which it brings with it, are ultimately inescapable: that is why to Weber modern capitalism has created an ‘iron cage’ (Weber, 1930). The only way in which individuals could apply meaning to their lives in this impersonal, disenchanted world, is to invent their own values – to ask, in Weber’s phrase, ‘Which of the warring gods should we serve?’ Politically this could mean a choice between socialism or conservatism, but to Weber this choice would be essentially arbitrary, at best based on consequentialist arguments (Weber, 1948 152-153).

By contrast, for Gamble, although Hayek accepted Weber’s characterisation of the processes by which modern society emerges and the narrative of movement from an enchanted to a modern world, the two figures have a very different evaluation of modernity. As Gamble wrote, ‘The structures of modern civilization, in Weber’s view, constantly erode and marginalize individual freedom and autonomy. For Hayek, however, these structures, properly understood, are the expression of liberty’ (Gamble, 1996e 181). So, whilst for Weber these structures are rational, bureaucratic ones, for Hayek the ‘iron cage of liberty’ allows modern

civilisation to emerge within it. This difference between Weber and Hayek ties in with a criticism of Hayek raised, in passing, by Wainwright in the previous chapter. She pointed out that whilst Hayek claimed that the prime problem for economics was identifying the mechanisms for full use of knowledge, the examples of economic agency that he drew upon seemed limited to the self-employed entrepreneur, and excluded those engaged in wage labour (Wainwright, 1994 55). More generally we can say that Hayek neglected the problems of bureaucracy in modern society. It is difficult to see Weberian bureaucracy as a Hayekian spontaneous order because Hayek assumed that the main actors are individual entrepreneurs, and not those labouring in Weber's 'iron cage'. It is partly because of his focus on the individual entrepreneur that (as I noted in the introduction) many dismissed Hayek as a classical liberal from a bygone age during the mid-twentieth century.

A further break between Hayek and Weber concerns their understanding of socialism. Whereas Weber viewed socialism as a part of modern society, Hayek saw it as an atavistic attempt to return to a lost, pre-modern, more communal society (Hayek, 1988 18-19). Hayek detested the Marxist claim that socialism represented a stage beyond liberalism (Gamble, 1996e 58-59). To Hayek the commitment to a particular kind of liberalism was the only commitment that one could make – the alternative, socialism, would lead to 'serfdom', as he famously put it (Hayek, 1944). To Hayek the liberty that developed with the processes of

modernisation provided the basis for modern civilisation, and modern civilisation would not survive without it. Whilst Weber believed that the processes of rationalisation and secularisation that created liberty and the modern world led to the iron cage of bureaucracy, Hayek, in Gamble's phrase, believed that these processes of modernisation created an 'iron cage of liberty'. Hayek and Weber described the same iron cage: for Weber it initially offered freedom, but soon locked us into disenchantment; for Hayek the initial promise of freedom remained and the cage protected modern, civilised individuals from a return to the barbarism outside it. Seen in this way Hayek is one of the most passionate advocates of modernity. The spontaneous orders upon which modern society rests rely upon the unintended consequences of countless free interactions between individuals. To prevent individuals acting as they freely want to, will prevent the structures that characterise modern society – such as language, law and the market - from arising. Liberty is the 'iron cage' that protects these institutions.

### ***Contra* Hayek: positive liberty and equality**

Gamble did not accept Hayek's argument that a particular kind of negative liberty is the only viable modern value. He argued that a positive conception of liberty was part of the modern world too. In order to demonstrate the limits of his engagement with Hayek, Gamble contrasted Hayek's argument with Francis Fukuyama's claim that liberal democracy was 'the end of history' (Fukuyama,

1989). These arguments have some similarities: both Fukuyama and Hayek are anti-socialist thinkers, who see forms of liberalism as the only viable option. However, Fukuyama differed from Hayek in arguing, not that socialism had been defeated, but that it had been superseded – its insights had been absorbed. Hayek, by contrast, saw liberalism and socialism as polar opposites. Fukuyama, according to Gamble's interpretation, recognised both socialism and liberalism as part of the same egalitarian-individualist modernist project, initiated by the French revolution (Gamble, 1996e 185).

Fukuyama argued that liberal-capitalism was triumphant, but he did not argue that its form was fixed or invariable. He argued that societies with large public sectors and welfare programmes were as legitimate as those with minimal state intervention. To Fukuyama history has 'ended' because there was no longer any issue that could not be sorted out within the institutional framework that has been established. (This framework provides a Hegelian end-point, because it can provide for all human needs and reconcile all contradictions.) For Fukuyama, socialism had been superseded: what was valuable in it had been absorbed; the rest had been rejected. To Fukuyama, writing in 1989, a plurality of types of liberal-capitalism existed incorporating different levels of state intervention.

On Gamble's reading, Hayek's argument was more uncompromising than Fukuyama's. Whereas Fukuyama accepted state intervention, to Hayek, almost all forms of state intervention were illegitimate. As Gamble noted,

Hayek has no real answer to Fukuyama. He continued to believe to the end that no compromise is possible, and that the welfare state poses as great a long-term danger to the survival of individualistic Western civilisation as central planning and state socialism.

(Gamble, 1996e 184)

This reading of Hayek can be found, particularly in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), in which Hayek argued that almost any state intervention would lead to serfdom. However, in later work Hayek often seemed more pragmatic than Gamble here suggested (an example of this later work is Hayek, 1960 ch.15: s.12 in which the author lists those service activities in which government can legitimately intervene).

Gamble uses Fukuyama to show how narrow and one-sided was Hayek's liberalism – based as it was on the claim that the role of government is largely to facilitate a particular kind of liberty. To move beyond Fukuyama, Gamble follows the arguments of Jeffrey Friedman. Friedman argued that Hayek's critique worked well against central planning, something Gamble acknowledged, as I noted above,

but the critique had been much less successful against the welfare state (Friedman, 1989; 1990).

For Gamble, Hayek's narrow, negative account of liberty is justified by a false dichotomy between true and false individualism (as we saw above) – a dichotomy of the kind common during the short twentieth century. Gamble argued that given Hayek's evolutionary moral views, he never convincingly explained why the 'false' or 'constructive' side of individualism was not an authentic part of the Western tradition, whilst 'true individualism' should survive. This led Gamble to conclude that:

Hayek's attempt to delegitimize one side of the Western tradition is one of the most significant ideological closures in his work. It prevents him from seeing the close ties which exist between liberalism and socialism.

(Gamble, 1996e 182)

Following Friedman, Gamble argued that 'the attempt to confine liberalism to negative liberty and proscribe other forms, as Hayek tries to do, is a hopeless task, which misconstrues the character of the cultural and ideological project of modernity. Negative liberty cannot be limited to property owners' (Gamble, 1996e 185). Still following Friedman's argument, Gamble wrote that:

Once individual freedom becomes an end in itself, the principles of self-determination and self-realization become central. Self-interest is condemned as being narrow and restrictive. *True freedom is conceived as liberation from the selfish appetites which lead to materialism and inequality.* The ideal of a community of citizens who are all responsible agents and equals is thus not rooted, as Hayek thinks, in some atavistic pre-modern impulses. It lies at the heart of the project of modernity which has developed within Western civilization.

(Gamble, 1996e 185-186 my italics)

What is interesting in Gamble's account is that equality is now derived from a view of freedom (in the same way that it is for Plant, for example, discussed in Chapter 3). In this Gamble firmly rejected Hayekian conceptions of liberty in favour of something more akin to the new liberalism of TH Green a century before. Green's account of freedom as 'a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something *worth* doing or enjoying and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others' (my italics - cited in Miller, 1993c 21) bears striking resemblance to Gamble's in its rejection of atomistic and selfish interpretations of the concept.

Gamble also followed Friedman in his criticism of Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis (a concern returned to in Gamble, 2000). Friedman argued that 1921 was a more significant date than 1989. He argued that the failure of 'war communism' in

the Soviet Union and the introduction of the *New Economic Policy* (NEP) in that year marked the collapse of the Soviet project. (The NEP restored small scale private ownership and reintroduced financial incentives by allowing the sale of some surpluses on the open market.) To Friedman, these events did not just mark the defeat of communism, but also of liberalism. He argued this because he believed that the goals of the communist revolutionaries were the ultimate expression of the goals of egalitarian-individualism, which guided both liberalism and socialism, and therefore the logical expression of the modernist project. To Friedman the failure of communism in 1921 meant that ‘the attempt to launch a real experiment entailing an alternative to capitalism was abandoned’ (Gamble, 1996e 185). If he accepted this, Gamble made another substantial break with the Marxism of his earlier writings, such as *Capitalism in Crisis* (1976). Capitalism is now seen as part of the modern world, something that must be tamed, but which there is nothing beyond.

In following Friedman’s account of freedom and his identification of the pre-Soviet era as a time when alternatives to capitalism were possible, Gamble’s argument is reminiscent of the British new liberals. I expand upon this point in the final section of this chapter.

### ***Conclusions: the revival of new liberalism***

It is deeply gratifying to us Liberal Democrat trade unionists to see that Andrew Gamble and Gavin Kelly ... have re-discovered principles set out by the Liberal Party nearly 70 years ago in the Yellow Book...

(Pam Sylvester, letter in *The Guardian*, 1996)

By 1996 Gamble was arguing that ‘Hayek’s approach has much to offer both liberals and conservatives, but ironically, perhaps most to socialists, as they seek to rethink their historic aims of liberty, equality, and solidarity’ (Gamble, 1996e 194). Yet the examination of Gamble’s argument carried out in this chapter might instead lead us to ask how useful terms such as socialism, liberalism and conservatism are in describing the political landscape in the final decades of the twentieth century.

Gamble did not examine these questions specifically, but at the end of his book on Hayek he did ask what ‘the future of socialism’ might be (Gamble, 1996e 190-191). Following Perry Anderson, Gamble looked at four possibilities for socialism: oblivion (which Gamble noted was Hayek’s hope); transvaluation; mutation; and redemption (Perry Anderson, 1992). Aside from ‘oblivion’ and ‘redemption’, the terms need some explanation. ‘Transvaluation’ entailed a complete historical break following demoralisation, only for the ideas to re-emerge later in a new form. Gamble gave the example of the Putney debates on representation and suffrage that were lost from the seventeenth, until the end of the nineteenth, century.

‘Mutation’ meant that although memory was not lost, a limited legacy was handed down, found only as part of a new tradition. Gamble argued that socialism would have a future because ‘there are common conditions of human existence which can be sustained only by collective and democratic means’ (Gamble, 1996e 191), but aside from this made no further prediction as to which of Anderson’s four possibilities seemed most likely.

Using Gamble’s own political thought as a case study, I argue that ‘mutation’ of the socialist tradition has occurred.<sup>7</sup> A limited legacy from the socialism of the twentieth century survived Gamble’s engagement with the works of Hayek. For example, Gamble advocated a conception of equality that had ideational similarities with Crosland’s socialist revisionism (Crosland, 1956; Plant, 1999a

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<sup>7</sup> The metaphor of ‘mutation’ is an evolutionary one. In that theory the term has been used in at least two quite different ways. Darwin argued (in Spencer’s slightly misleading phrase) for the ‘survival of the fittest’ (i.e. the best able to promulgate in a particular environment). In contrast, the early nineteenth century French naturalist, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck argued (incorrectly in biological terms) for the ‘inheritance of acquired traits’ – species mutate through their own efforts. Metaphorically, this thesis has largely documented a Lamarckian mutation of socialism. Although some socialists have remained attached to earlier forms of socialism (and are often depicted metaphorically as ‘dinosaurs’ or as a ‘species on the verge of distinction’), it has been, in the main, socialists themselves who have been seeking to adapt or mutate their thought in order to fit with the changing world.

also draws upon Crosland's conception of equality) - a conception that empowered individuals to pursue their own projects and attempted to combine freedom with something greater than simple liberal equality of opportunity.

However, Gamble's engagement with the works of Hayek led many of the concepts that had been most closely associated with the mainstream, Fabian form of twentieth century socialism to be jettisoned. Gamble rejected socialism's paternalism, its statism, its desire for a planned order and much of its collectivist basis. His belief in private ownership, markets, entrepreneurship, pluralism, personal responsibility and the concentration on the individual owed more to the new liberalism of the early twentieth century than to any other tradition.

Running through the whole of Gamble's work is a commitment to liberty defined in large part in positive terms and which Hayek would have vehemently rejected. For this reason it would be wrong to see Gamble's thought as a capitulation to the new right. In his reiteration of 'individual-egalitarianism' Gamble echoed the claim of new liberals that true freedom relies upon a high degree of equality to be 'effective'. To the new liberal, LT Hobhouse, writing in 1911, 'Liberal Socialism' (as he called it) must be democratic and 'make its account with the human individual. It must give the average man free play in the personal life for which he really cares. It must be founded on liberty, and must make not for the suppression but for the development of personality' (Hobhouse, 1964, originally 1911 ch. 8).

Gamble's belief in individual freedom and his argument that individuals must participate and take responsibility echoed Hobhouse's claims.

Gamble's engagement with the works of Hayek demonstrates the mutation of all of the main categories of political thought that dominated the twentieth century. Socialism, conservatism and liberalism are still in widespread currency but are changing fast, and decreasingly play a useful role in mapping contemporary discourse. In place of these categories the political landscape in the UK is increasingly dominated by the liberal inheritance. For Andrew Vincent, the debate in the late 1990s was not between socialists and conservatives, as it had been for much of the previous century, but between two strands of liberalism: classical (or economic) and new (or social) (Vincent, 1998 57). The engagement of Gamble with Hayek's work provides one case study of this, as his argument for a pluralist, new (or social) liberalism faces Hayek's (economic) liberalism across the left-right political divide.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusions: responses to the new right

Thus, in summary, we have seen not a debate between conservatism and socialism, but a debate between heterogeneous factions of liberalism, in fact, between variants of classical and new liberalism.

(Vincent, 1998 57)

The engagement by some members of the British left with Hayek's work marked a novel and substantial departure in political thought in the final decades of the chronological twentieth century. In this chapter, after comparing and contrasting the thinkers discussed in Chapters 2 to 5, I draw on the left's engagement with Hayek to make some tentative and general comments about the role of context in intellectual change. In the third and fourth sections I look at the way in which this engagement acts as a case study that demonstrates wider changes in political thought in Britain between 1989 and 1997. In particular, I argue that the work of the thinkers examined in this thesis reflects a wider decline in statist forms of socialism and a division of political thought between two sides of the liberal tradition in the years after the end of the short twentieth century.

## ***I. The British left and Hayek***

The engagement by the left with Hayek's work focused on different aspects of his thought and resulted in differing conclusions. Although this engagement was wider than the four thinkers discussed in the main body of this thesis (as I noted in the introduction), in this section I focus on the thinkers I used as case studies and compare and contrast some of the most salient points arising from their different responses to Hayek.

### **David Miller**

The earliest thinkers on the British left to engage with Hayek's work were the most tentative. Although 'engaging' with Hayek's arguments, in the way set out in the introduction to this thesis, their careful handling of his work was, at times, like someone extracting a precious element from a dangerous substance. Of the thinkers discussed in detail in the main body of this thesis, David Miller's encounter with Hayek's work best fits this description. Miller largely accepted many of the pro-market arguments associated with Hayek, but, except in crucial passages (such as that cited in the epigraph to Chapter 2), he seemed reluctant to discuss the source from which these arguments were most obviously derived. This must be, in part, because Miller was attempting to 'sell' his egalitarian argument

for the market to mainstream socialists. Whilst generally accepting the market as part of a mixed economy, socialists in the UK had tended to argue that it should be limited in scope and its 'excesses' constrained. More specifically, Hayek's reputation as an important influence on Thatcher and a key figure in the new right, sullied the pro-market arguments with which he was associated in the eyes of socialists.

Miller's account of market socialism was part of a significant shift on the left away from the state. For Miller this move encompassed both a rejection of moderate social democracy and Soviet communism. The difficulties facing Keynesian social democracy in the UK from the mid-1970s onwards demonstrated its limits as a vehicle to a socialist society (of the kind that socialist revisionists, for example, had envisaged). Whilst the limits of social democracy at home might have led many to look abroad for a more radical answer, the evident limitations of Soviet communism in meeting many Western socialists' aspirations, and its rapid collapse after 1989, closed off a route which had appeared attractive to many on the left earlier in the century. Miller's upfront acceptance of the problems of both Keynesian social democracy and of the *dirigiste* communism of the Soviet Union marked a rejection of statism which had dominated socialism during much of the twentieth century. Miller was not alone in rejecting statist forms of socialism (in both its very different Keynesian and Soviet forms). This critique is also found in this thesis in the work of Plant, Wainwright and Gamble.

Miller also had to contend with two further contextual changes which developed, in particular during the 1970s and 1980s and became increasingly prevalent in the *academe*: the rise of both the ‘new right’ and of political theory. Both of these factors forced ‘liberal’ issues onto the agenda. The rise of the new right, of which Hayek was perhaps the most significant influence, and the election of a Conservative Government, under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979 forced discussion in the direction of markets, entrepreneurship, the limits of the state and freedom (largely defined negatively, as freedom from economic interference). The state was increasingly associated with inefficiency or, following Hayek’s attack, with servitude. The rise of the new right shook the framework within which politics operated for all of the thinkers discussed in the body of this thesis. Whilst Miller and Plant provided early attempts to deal with its success and that of the British Conservative Party in the early 1980s, Wainwright’s engagement with Hayek was, in part, a reaction to the success of the new right in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. Similarly Gamble’s work was shaped by a reaction to the rise of ‘Thatcherism’. The related rise of political theory in the *academe* was also dominated by discussions between political liberals of the right and left, notably Nozick and Rawls. Of the thinkers examined in this thesis Plant and Miller were most obviously influenced by these debates. As Professor of Political Theory, Miller’s work constitutes an important communitarian engagement with these different liberal arguments.

Given these contextual changes, Miller's argument for market socialism, first put forward in the mid-1970s, was an understandable, but quite rare, departure for a member of the British left at that time. Market socialist arguments were most obviously associated with the non-aligned countries of the Eastern bloc during the post-war period, but a similar argument had been put forward in the liberal tradition around a century earlier by the British liberal thinker, John Stuart Mill. Miller's work was specifically described as an attempt to update the 'outdated' socialist tradition, but his argument hovered at the edges of socialism, as it was understood for much of the twentieth century. Freeden has described this as the 'perimeter problem of market socialism' (Freeden, 1996 477), yet market socialism was not a stationary body of thought located at the outskirts of the socialist tradition, it was a brief stopping point for many socialists in their move away from the statist traditions of the twentieth century.

By placing individual choice, understood both negatively (in part, as freedom from interference in the market) and positively (in part, as freedom to spend money in a way that enables one to do or be a certain sort of person) market socialism undermined many of the central values of older forms of socialism. Market socialism fitted uneasily with traditional socialist moral arguments, based on community or a critique of conspicuous consumption, for example. Miller, along with several of his colleagues, also presented the argument for combining the

market with socialism as a form of 'feasible' politics, which grated against the radical aspirations of many earlier socialists. Miller's argument for market socialism is best seen as a corrosive force, wearing away the barriers between those categories which had dominated the twentieth century.

## **Raymond Plant**

Whilst Miller was often tentative in his engagement with Hayek, Raymond Plant met Hayek's critique of socialism head on. Like Miller, Plant can be seen as reacting to both the intellectual success of the new right and to the electoral success of the Conservative Party after 1979. The Conservative victory in the 1983 General Election against an often statist Labour Party, was particularly influential upon both thinkers. Plant's willingness to engage with Hayek marked a notable break with Miller. Plant's academic background made this engagement easier for him than for many of his colleagues on the left - his earlier work owed more to Hegel than to Marx and because of this influence he did not have to make the same break with materialist approaches to political thought that some of his colleagues had had to in order to arrive at his account of Hayek. Plant's head-on engagement with Hayek's work was based around a defence of positive notions of freedom and justice against Hayek's critique. He went further than Miller in explicitly accepting elements of Hayek's attack on socialism (which is set out in greater detail in Chapter 3). Plant was, for example, notably sympathetic to

Hayek's socio-economic claim that the increasing diversity of society raised difficult questions for mainstream forms of socialism. Plant also accepted a large part of Hayek's epistemic argument to the effect that efficient planning was impossible (although he did not accept Hayek's claim that planning led to serfdom). Of all the elements of Hayek's work it is this epistemic argument against planning that has been most attractive to the left. Miller, Plant, Wainwright and Gamble all accepted aspects of it, and sought to claim or to reinterpret it for use in their own thought.

Despite its different tone, Plant's work displays many ideational similarities with Miller's. The writings of both thinkers demonstrated the influence of revisionist socialism and, in particular, of Crosland's separation between socialist ends and the means used to achieve them. Both thinkers were also reacting to the rise of political theory in the *academe*. Plant, in particular, made a link between socialist revisionism and Rawls' political liberalism, claiming Crosland as a British proto-Rawlsian thinker. Plant's work, in placing freedom as central, also showed the influence of the new liberals of the early twentieth century. In this respect his work is located at the nexus of various political themes and is a continuation of the breaking down of barriers between them also demonstrated by Miller's writings. Plant's work can be seen as a challenge to the Hayekian view that liberalism and socialism are polar opposites and demonstrates the closeness of left-liberalism to many democratic forms of socialism.

## Hilary Wainwright

Whilst Plant and Miller presented their arguments as primarily led by a combination of intellectual shifts (such as the rise of the new right) and political changes (for example the success of the Conservative Party in the 1980s), Hilary Wainwright presented her engagement with Hayek as initially led by a more journalistic, sociological and psychological investigation. Wainwright's account of Hayek came chronologically later than both Miller's and Plant's and was justified as an attempt to explain the success of parties influenced by the new right or 'neo-liberalism' (as she often wrote) in the newly independent countries of Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. Wainwright's purported interest in Hayek derived from his influence upon these parties and his attraction to their activists.

Wainwright's engagement with Hayek involved an ingenious attempt to socialise his epistemic theory. She went further than other thinkers discussed here in seeking to twist and reinterpret Hayek's arguments for the left. (In contrast to Wainwright, the other thinkers examined here did not try to reformulate Hayek's epistemology; instead they embraced its libertarian aspects and drew limits to the inegalitarian consequences of accepting it.) Wainwright's argument, in sum, was that knowledge was not irremediably individual, as Hayek argued, but could be shared imperfectly between groups. The examples she initially gave of this

knowledge-sharing were economic – cooperatives or government ministries, for example - but she shifted her argument to focus on social movements when she came to make her own case (her prime example being women's groups). Thus social movements become the key actors in Wainwright's theory. These groups possessed knowledge that the state cannot centralise and this should give them a privileged position within society. Wainwright then related these social movements to central government in a way that evokes the socialist pluralism of the early twentieth century.

As with the other thinkers examined in this thesis, Wainwright's thought marked a decisive break with the political thought that dominated the twentieth century. Paralleling a move found in Miller's argument for market socialism, Wainwright broke with the paternalism of earlier socialist thought. She largely abandoned class as a useful category (at least in any simple economic sense) in favour of 'free floating' radical social movements and admitted, quite candidly, that her argument in favour of the 'small battalions' was a rejection of earlier statist forms of socialism. Wainwright (whose background is largely in feminist thought) seemed to be comfortable with the possibility that the radical changes that she supported might not continue to be described as 'socialist' and her argument is, therefore, more obviously 'post-socialist' than that of the thinkers discussed in this thesis' earlier chapters.

## **Andrew Gamble**

The final thinker discussed in detail in this thesis is Andrew Gamble. Gamble's public engagement with Hayek did not begin until the mid-1990s – slightly later than the other thinkers discussed here. As with those thinkers, Gamble presented his engagement with Hayek as an attempt to find new foundations for socialism. His early work was in the Marxist tradition, yet Gamble is unusual for a thinker on the left in his long-term interest in political thought antithetical to his own position (one of his earliest published books, for example, was on the political thought of the British Conservative Party - Gamble, 1974). Gamble's work in the 1980s extended his interest in the political thought of the British right and he became known as one of the most influential commentators on 'Thatcherism'.

Of the thinkers examined in this thesis, Gamble went furthest in his engagement with Hayek. As with Miller and Plant, he largely accepted Hayek's epistemological argument and he was prepared to admit the extent to which this idea challenged earlier forms of socialism. Gamble argued, for example, that the left should claim the role of the entrepreneur – an activity of which earlier socialists were often deeply suspicious. He also argued that Hayek was right to point out the importance of spontaneous orders (although his view over when these orders should be protected is much more limited than Hayek's). In his defence of spontaneous orders Gamble's work can be seen as a pluralist response to Hayek. In

this respect, Gamble's argument follows Wainwright's and Miller's (although his pluralism is more limited than Wainwright's in particular). Gamble's work is perhaps best seen as a new (or social) liberal response to Hayek's (economic or classical) liberalism. His defence of a largely positive form of liberty against Hayek's critique shifted the debate away from socialism as it was understood for much of the twentieth century and generated a pluralist and left-liberal argument in its place.

## ***II. Contextual change and the discovery of Hayek***

The engagement with Hayek by the British left occurred as a result of major contextual shifts which shook the framework of political thought in the last decades of the twentieth century. Below, I argue that the engagement with Hayek came in two broad waves, made up firstly of 'market socialists' (broadly defined) and later of 'left-wing Hayekians'. In the second part of this section I examine the broader role of context in the British left's engagement with Hayek.

### **Two responses to Hayek**

The first wave on the British left to engage with Hayek's arguments were 'market socialists' from the early 1980s onwards (taking a broad definition of the term as

someone seeking to combine the market with socialism).<sup>1</sup> David Miller is a key figure in this group. Although drawing on ideas most obviously associated with Hayek, these thinkers often seemed reluctant to cite his influence. The creation of the Socialist Philosophy Group (SPG), set up in response to Labour's loss of the 1983 General Election, provided an early impetus to this wave. The group were active in the 'modernisation' of the Labour Party under the leadership and deputy leadership of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley respectively between 1983 and 1992. The publication of Alec Nove's *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (Nove, 1983) provided an important early contribution and influence to this wave. The crest of the wave came with the SPG's text on market socialism, edited by Estrin and Le Grand in 1989 (Estrin and Le Grand, 1989), to which Raymond Plant also contributed.

Plant was relatively unusual amongst the 'market socialists'. Although he was heavily involved in the Socialist Philosophy Group, his work could only be classified as 'market socialist' in the loosest sense (as I argued above). He was also far more prepared to engage with Hayek's arguments than other thinkers in the group. In part, I have suggested that this may be due to his background as a political philosopher specialising in Hegel, which allowed him to engage with the

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<sup>1</sup> Distinctive pro-market arguments on the left do have a limited older heritage than this. I discuss the earlier iterations of market socialism in Chapter 2 on David Miller.

arguments of a political 'enemy' in a more purely rational way than many of his colleagues - the Idealist's trip from Hegel to Hayek is shorter than the materialist's journey from Marx to the market. This first wave passed with the decline of market socialism in the mid-1990s.

The second wave was notable for its much more direct engagement with Hayek's thought. These 'left-wing Hayekians' were prepared to draw on Hayek's work directly to support and develop their own arguments. This wave began with Jim Tomlinson's book-length riposte to Hayek in 1990, which was arguably the first serious, major response by a 'socialist' since Barbara Wootton's in 1945 (as I noted in the introduction) (Tomlinson, 1990; Wootton, 1945; the historical rarity of Tomlinson's account was also noted by Nafissi, 2000 210). Tomlinson's book was followed by a series of left-wing articles on Hayek by Robin Blackburn, Hilary Wainwright and Andrew Gamble. It peaked with the publications of Wainwright's and Gamble's in-depth analyses of Hayek's work in 1994 and 1996, respectively (Tomlinson, 1990; Robin Blackburn, 1991a; Wainwright, 1994; Gamble, 1996e). This wave of engagement still continues to some degree, particularly in the work of Wainwright (Wainwright, 2003; Griffiths, 2003).

## **Context and intellectual change**

What did it take for the left to start writing about Hayek? Using the four thinkers examined in detail in this thesis, as a case study, I argue that four events stand out in particular. Each of these thinkers responded to these events in different ways. Combined, these events provided the conditions for a reconstitution of the political landscape in the UK. The first two events challenged the understanding of what it is to be a socialist (a label which all four thinkers would, to varying extents at one time, have accepted); the second two events involved a change in the status of the enemy. The engagement with Hayek's work is one possible response to these changing conditions at the end of the twentieth century.

The first important contextual change was the rise and dominance of a popular new right, intellectually and electorally. This shifted the grounds of debate in the UK, and elsewhere. The hopes for radical change, which many socialists held as a response to the 'crisis' of the 1970s were dashed, and aggressively right-wing arguments were increasingly voiced as the solution. These arguments had an important influence on the Conservative Government elected in 1979.

Second, the collapse of Soviet communism and with it the end of the Cold War further shook the political landscape. The division of the world between communism and capitalism shaped the political thought of the short twentieth century. The intellectual historian Perry Anderson has written that:

Polemical zeal can produce an [*sic*] fixation on the other side, or sides, or purely hostile intent. The Cold War was full of that kind of literature, as ephemeral as it was instrumental.

(Perry Anderson, 2005 xi)

The collapse of USSR after the revolution of 1989 led to a crisis in socialist thought, even for those who had never supported Soviet communism. The ending of the most obvious manifestation of the ‘long ideological conflict’ in which Hayek (and the four thinkers examined in this thesis) had been engaged did not just mean the collapse of statist communism, but the space that it generated for non-capitalist alternatives. The electoral failure of social democratic alternatives, particularly the Labour Party in the UK, when coupled with the fall of the USSR, led many on the left to rethink their positions. The end of the Cold War and the wider crises in socialism enabled a more open political dialogue than that which had existed for much of the previous century. These two events were important in leading to the market socialists’ often tentative engagement with the arguments of Hayek, which constituted the first response outlined above.

A third important contextual change was the Conservative Party’s decline from around 1990. The first left-wing Hayekian’s riposte aimed specifically at Hayek - that of Jim Tomlinson - did not come until 1990, after the unpopular introduction of the ‘poll tax’ and the year Margaret Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister

(Tomlinson, 1990). Other left-wing re-evaluations of Hayek, such as Gamble's, did not come until even later in the decade, by which time the Conservative Party was in 'crisis' – 'in office, but not in power' as the resigning Chancellor, Norman Lamont, memorably put it (Lamont, 1993 10).<sup>2</sup> By 1995, Gamble could ask whether the Conservative Party had reached 'the end of an era' as the 'pillars of Conservative hegemony' that had existed since the late Victorian era collapsed. The impending electoral collapse of 'the Conservative Enemy' (which eventually occurred with the general election of 1997) made an engagement with the works of one of their intellectual supporters possible on a more equal basis. Engagement with an intellectual adversary seems easier if they are also bowed, and a charge of capitulation can be avoided.

Ideas and institutions are mutually supportive. This is a relationship, as I noted above, which Barker elegantly described as Constantine, after the Emperor whose conversion to Christianity lent support to, and in turn supported, the Roman Empire (Barker, 1996a). A prime example of the Constantine relationship was the survival in the UK of the description 'conservative' as a political theme through the institution of the Conservative Party. A less elegant metaphor for describing this relationship between institutions and ideas would be to refer to their

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<sup>2</sup> Gamble used the phrase as the title of an article on Conservative decline (Gamble, 1993c).

'stickiness' (a term introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis). Hayek's ideas cohered, first, around various right-wing think tanks and, then, around increasingly powerful groups within the Conservative Party. The electoral decline of the Conservatives after 1990 acted as a solvent, freeing Hayek's ideas for more general use. It was only after this date that the left-wing Hayekians began to work with them.

Last, Hayek's death, in 1992, was significant. Hayek became less willing to engage with the arguments of his rivals in his final years, and more acerbic in his condemnation of socialism. One sees this in Hayek's gleeful comment, late in life, that it is time to 'cry from the rooftops that the intellectual foundations of socialism have all collapsed'. One can compare Hayek's harsh assessment of socialism in his last book (Hayek, 1988), when he was writing as intellectual hero for many on the new right, with the more open engagement in his early work. Neither Gamble's nor Wainwright's engagement with Hayek's work began until Hayek's death. Gamble's engagement with Hayek came, for example, in his review of Birner and Zipp's collection, written (as the title suggests) to debate Hayek's legacy and published two years after Hayek's death. An engagement with an intellectual enemy - such as Hayek - is easier once one is dealing with a finite text.

During the short twentieth century thinkers, ideas and institutions would often cohere together. The changing contexts outlined above ‘unstuck’ many of these connections and allowed former enemies to be drawn on as a source of support. Political thought became freer in its influences and dialogues. The engagement of the left with Hayek is perhaps the prime example of this, although there are several other important (and equally unlikely) examples. The revival of Carl Schmitt by the left in the same period (discussed in the introduction to this thesis) is also instructive; as is the use of pluralist thinkers, such as Anglican theologian, JN Figgis, by socialists seeking to revive the pluralism of the early twentieth century.

### **‘The importance of enemies’**

It seems odd, on the face of it, that many of the changes which seem to provide the conditions for the left, to write about Hayek involved a change in the status of the ‘enemy’ (a factor highlighted in Barker, 1997 279; 2000 233). It took the rise of the new right, the collapse of a statist form of communism to which none of the thinkers examined in detail in this thesis ever subscribed; Hayek’s own death and the fall of the Conservative Party, before figures on the British left began to write about Hayek in earnest.

The historian Linda Colley has written that ‘men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not’, and this phrase seems a particularly

apt place to begin an explanation (Colley, 1992 6).<sup>3</sup> In the discussion on political themes in the opening chapter of this thesis, it was noted that they are based on aversions (as well as affinities) and changes to a theme can be caused by changes outside it, as aversions shift. Barker has often noted ‘the importance of enemies’ in political thought (Barker, 1997 279; 1996b 16) writing that, ‘The identity of any set of political beliefs will frequently be defined as much by who are regarded as enemies as by who are thought of friends and allies’ (Barker, 1997 279). The engagement of the British left with Hayek cannot simply be viewed as part of the recent history of socialism. It occurred as a result of the changing status of the enemy and must be placed in the context of wider changes to the political landscape.

There are parallels in the work of the thinkers examined in this thesis on Hayek with the left’s engagement with the work the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt – an engagement primarily associated with Chantal Mouffe (Mouffe, 1999). Schmitt, in large part because of his connections with the Nazi Party, was vilified by the left for much of the post-war period and there was no detailed assessment of his work. A change in the way in which Schmitt’s writings were received occurred during

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<sup>3</sup> Colley used the expression as a description of the rise of British identity in relation to the French. A similar argument was put forward by Andrew Pilkington and was discussed in light of Miller’s conception of community above (Pilkington, 2002).

the 1990s when Mouffe, who is normally described as a ‘post-Marxist’, argued that there is much in Schmitt’s thought that can usefully be reclaimed by the left.

Mouffe’s writings on Schmitt contained a second parallel with the left’s engagement with Hayek, which is particularly relevant here. This parallel arises out of Schmitt’s account of ‘the political’ as consisting of friend–enemy relations. Schmitt was opposed to liberal, democratic, legally rationalistic ideas of what constituted ‘the political’, which viewed the state as conceptually prior to struggles within it. To Schmitt the state emerges out of struggle, which he argued was the essence of the political (Schmitt, 1996). The political, therefore, only comes into being when different groups are in a relation of enmity to one another.<sup>4</sup> Without endorsing Schmitt’s account of the political, his recognition of the role of groups, group identity and the necessity of enmity in political thought is pertinent to any discussion of how former political enemies come to engage with one another’s thought.

Both Colley and Mouffe, in different ways, argue that identity is formed in response to some ‘Other’- arguments that owe much to post-modernism. Changes

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<sup>4</sup> Although in Schmitt’s account, as Mouffe eventually recognised, this enmity existed between polities not within them, and so defined the polity but cannot, *pace* Schmitt’s own arguments, define politics.

in that 'Other' can, therefore, lead to changes in one's own identity. This seems to be the case particularly with Gamble and Wainwright (of the thinkers discussed in detail above) whose engagement with Hayek's work did not occur until after Hayek's death in 1992, and the decline of the Conservative Party during the 1990s, and whose own views changed and developed through undergoing that engagement.

### **Globalisation and the end of a *British* left**

By the end of the period examined, the question can be asked whether it makes sense to talk of a distinctly British left at all. Commenting on the socialist revisionism of the 1950s, the Labour politician, Denis MacShane, wrote that,

In the 1950s, British Labour did not need to learn from abroad. One of the oddest absences from [Crosland's] *The Future of Socialism* is any discussion of what is happening in other countries. Island Britain still existed alone unto itself.

(MacShane, 2006 15)

The scope and content of political debate was changed by the process of globalisation, led by a revolution in communications (Giddens, 2002, originally 1999). By the end of the period examined political debate was decreasingly

contained within national borders, or even by reactions to capitalism and communism as it was during the Cold War (the globalisation of political issues is discussed in Beck, 1992). As the scope of political debate widened geographically, so the content changed. One element of this 'widening' was a change to what socialists' thought could be achieved by the state at a national level. Globalisation, it was often argued, limited the state's power and, as a corollary to this, diminished the radical hopes of many on the left.<sup>5</sup>

The work of the thinkers examined in this thesis provides a useful illustration of the globalisation of political issues. During the 1970s and 80s both Andrew Gamble and Hilary Wainwright, for example, wrote about issues that, in the main, were parochially British: the Conservative Party; British decline; Thatcherism; the Labour Party and British feminism and trade union disputes (Gamble, 1974; 1979; 1981a; 1988a; Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1979; Wainwright and Elliott, 1982; Wainwright, 1987a; Coulson, Magaš and Wainwright, 1975).

During the 1990s, as the Cold War structuring of political thought collapsed and both Gamble and Wainwright broadened their horizons. Wainwright's most

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<sup>5</sup> By contrast, other thinkers have been more sceptical over the claims of globalisation, arguing that the term is used by many on the left to justify the narrowing of earlier hopes (Hirst and Thompson, 1996).

detailed accommodation with Hayek can be read as an attempt to explain the electoral success of parties influenced by the new right for Eastern Europe. Gamble in the 1990s was concerned, amongst other things, with debates about 'regionalism' in the world order (Wainwright, 1994; Gamble and Payne, 1996).

By the start of the new century the debates that the two thinkers were engaged in had broadened geographically still further. In 2003 Wainwright published a book – still drawing on Hayek - that can be read as an attempt to provide a theoretical basis for the anti-globalisation movement and contained case studies 'from Beswick to Brazil' (Wainwright, 2003; Griffiths, 2003). Gamble was by now concerned to argue against the 'Endism' associated with, amongst others, the American thinker Francis Fukuyama and with the relationship between Europe and the United States (Gamble, 2000; 2003).

The period between 1989 and 1997, which provides the focus of this thesis, is one where an account of a distinctly British tradition of political thought became decreasingly useful. The debates that occur in Britain may have a local flavour, but that flavour is just one of a more global set of ingredients now constituting an increasingly global political dish.

### ***III. The fall of state socialism***

What have been the consequences of the understandings and misunderstandings represented by the Fabian tradition for British socialism? Not only a failure to develop a socialism which shares any of the libertarianism, anarchist, or even liberal attitudes towards the state which have certainly at times touched its attitudes to work, to art, or to civil liberties. But also, and especially from 1979 onwards, a total vulnerability to those on the new right who, with phrases directly derived from F.A. Hayek, assert that socialism means coercion by the state, and that the melange of cultural conservatism, military toryism, and economic liberalism, which they express means 'liberty'.

(Barker, 1984: 36)

The engagement with Hayek provides one example of wider shifts occurring on the British left after 1989. Below I look at how this engagement is commensurable with these wider shifts. In particular, I argue, first, that it reflects the centrality of the market and of individual freedom; second, that it reflects a wider rejection of state paternalism and third that the accommodation with Hayek can be viewed as part of a move towards a more 'feasible' alternative.

### **The market, individual freedom and socialism**

There is something even deeper that has gravely weakened the Left. Economically, it concerns consumer society.

Intellectually, it is the identification of freedom with individual choice, without reference to its social consequences. In this sense, there has been a rift with the shared traditional universe of the Left. In the past, it wasn't thought that fighting for individual freedom was incompatible with the struggle for collective emancipation. At the end of the twentieth century, it has become increasingly clear that there is a conflict between these two needs.

(Hobsbawm, 2000 104)

The Fabian tradition, exemplified by the writings of George Bernard Shaw and the Webbs, supplied the mainstream of British socialist and social democratic arguments for much of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The new directions taken by the left after 1989 jettisoned much of this tradition. The acceptance of the market as economic coordinator provides one example of the rejection of twentieth century Fabianism.

The acceptance of an epistemological argument for the market is often presented as a merely technical discussion about efficiency. Miller's discussion of central planning's ineffectiveness in responding to consumer demands provides an

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<sup>6</sup> The influence of the latter is seen in the pun that, 'Socialism was once defined as a great spider with a little Webb at its centre' (Harte, 1986 159).

example of this line of argument (Miller, 1989c 6-7). However accepting the argument that a tacit and individual account of knowledge drives the market system contains social ramifications that shake the foundations of twentieth century socialist and social democratic thought. These occur because to accept the market as a coordinating system is to accept the free and unpredictable decisions that individuals make within it.

Twentieth century socialist and social democratic thought often contained a moral critique of some of the freely-made choices of individuals in the market. WG Runciman, pointed this out (perhaps with Tawney in mind) noting that:

For a very long time, British people have spent their money on accessories that moralising commentators regard as unnecessary and activities that those same commentators regard as harmful if not downright wicked.

(Runciman, 2006 20)

The concept of freedom was not central to the early Fabian socialist tradition, and the idea was rarely discussed explicitly. Their focus was on efficient organisation as a means of securing and promoting a collective well-being whose character was assumed to be un-contentious. Wells wrote that:

the fundamental idea on which Socialism rests is the same fundamental idea as that which all real successful scientific work is carried on . . . It is an assertion that things are in their nature orderly, that things may be computed, may be calculated upon and foreseen.

(Wells, 1908 ch. 2)

Similarly GK Chesterton derided Well's fellow Fabian, George Bernard Shaw, for viewing modern society as an 'untidy room' (Chesterton, 1910). An implication of Chesterton's jibe was that socialists were more interested in order and tidiness than the messier value of freedom.

Despite the moral Puritanism of the early Fabians, for example, there has always been a libertarian current, or at least undercurrent, to socialism. Indeed, Robert Berki has argued that libertarianism is one of the four core components of socialism (Berki, 1975 ch. 1). This libertarian undercurrent can be seen in different ways in the works of William Morris, the Guild Socialists, George Orwell, Anthony Crosland and the new left. Crosland entitled a section of his book, *The Future of Socialism*, 'Liberty and Gaiety in Private Life; the Need for a Reaction against the Fabian Tradition' (Crosland, 1956, ch. XXV, s. IV). Orwell too sums this current up when he writes approvingly of the English belief in the 'liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from above' (Orwell,

1982, originally 1941 Part II). It is this view of freedom that has come to the fore in the writers examined in this thesis.

As David Miller claimed above, freedom has recently returned to prominence on the left (Miller, 1989f 32) and he placed this value at the centre of his argument. The acceptance of the market on the left entailed a newfound respect for free individual choices – quirky or strange, as they might seem. As Miller wrote, ‘Freedom is valuable precisely because of the possibility that people may make radically different choices about how they want to live their lives’ (Miller, 1989c 32). The market can allow one the freedom to pursue a wide variety of lifestyles. The free choices that occur in the market also reflect and help to create an increasingly individualistic society and undermine the moral argument for solidarity that was a part of socialist and social democratic thought throughout the twentieth century. (This ‘new individualism’ was, according to Giddens, one of the main social changes challenging left-wing thought at the end of the twentieth century - Giddens, 1998 34-37.)

In the last decades of the twentieth century the decline of manufacturing industry in Britain led to a decline in ‘class’ as a unifying category for the left. The decline of class identity (Pierson, 1995 ch. 1) led to the collapse of the main condition that thinkers on the left had relied upon to make socialism coherent. (The same changes also led to the decline of the tory tradition within conservatism, as I

discuss below.)<sup>7</sup> As class-based politics declined, the politics of identity increasingly took their place. Perhaps the best summary of these changes is found in the work of Raymond Plant, when he wrote in 1989 that:

These values within the Labour movement are not theoretical but are rooted in working-class experience, in the solidarity of the neighbourhood, the workplace and the union. But with the numerical decline of such communities, and the consequent decline in such values, we seem to be entering what *Marxism Today* has called New Times in which individualistic values have displaced those of the community. There is a dire need on the left to accommodate to this change, of which free markets seem to be the best institutional embodiment.

(Plant, 1989f)

In accepting the market, socialists and social democrats have accepted a mechanism that allows the expression of identity politics, but also a mechanism that undermines the homogeneity of the working-class communities the left has relied upon for its electoral support.

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<sup>7</sup> At its most radical this thesis claims 'The Death of Class' (Pakulski and Waters, 1996).

Miller and Plant, in particular, explicitly recognised that the value of solidarity is undermined for socialists and social democrats by this new individualism. Miller argued that there was a historical tension in socialism between a modernising commitment to industrial society and a nostalgic attachment to pre-industrial forms of community. This attachment paved the way for the later identification of socialism with state planning. Socialists must face this tension and ‘discard components of the tradition which closer analysis reveals to be untenable’ (Miller, 1989f: 29). Plant explicitly sought to develop a left-wing argument that accepted the increasing diversity, both in terms of community and individuality, of British society in the late twentieth century. The British left in the last decades of the twentieth century was more individualistic than the forms of socialism and social democracy that dominated the twentieth century.

In placing individual liberty as a central to their arguments (most explicitly in the case of Plant and Miller) the thinkers I have examined in this thesis are drawing on a liberal strand, that was lacking in much twentieth century socialism. But an acceptance of individual liberty also sets limits at what can be done by the state, the actions of which for most of the twentieth century many British socialists’ presumed would be benign.

### **The decline of state paternalism**

The state is neither a term nor a concept which is very familiar in British politics

(Barker, 1984 28)

The powerful and successful association of state intervention with slavery popularised by the new right (and particularly by Hayek, 1944) led mainstream socialists and social democrats to re-examine their attitudes towards the state. As the epigraph to this section indicates, for much of the twentieth century, 'the state' was seen as an unproblematic concept. Gamble, writing with Gavin Kelly, noted that the 'the political economy of the Left has always aimed at combining social justice and economic efficiency ...

For much of the twentieth century, the favoured means has been a single measure, the common ownership of the means of production. ... But increasingly common ownership came to be equated with state ownership ... and this became the accepted definition of what socialism meant in practice for both its friends and enemies.

(Gamble and Kelly, 1996b 62)

The engagement with Hayek's arguments amongst the thinkers I have examined in this thesis marks a radical challenge to the assumptions that underlay the dominant view of the state on the British left mainstream socialists and social democrats.

If the acceptance of the market entails an acceptance of certain freedoms (quirky or not), it also means the rejection of a particular kind of state paternalism. This state paternalism is most associated with the Fabian tradition of socialism, which was not always confident in the rationality of the citizen. Wainwright disparagingly cites Beatrice Webb, who famously remarked that ‘the average sensual man can describe his problem but is unable to prescribe a solution’ (Wainwright, 1994 109). Webb’s associate, George Bernard Shaw also demonstrated the paternalist strand in Fabianism, when he argued that:

All Socialists are Tories . . . The Tory is a man who believes that those who are qualified by nature and training for public work, and who are naturally a minority, have to govern the mass of the people. That is Toryism. That is also Bolshevism.

(Shaw, 1921 15)

However, it was Douglas Jay who stated Fabianism’s paternalist strand most bluntly, when he wrote that ‘in the case of nutrition and health, just as in the case of education, the gentleman in Whitehall really does know better what is good for people than the people know themselves’ (Jay, 1937 ch. 30).<sup>8</sup> The acceptance of

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<sup>8</sup> Jay’s *Times* obituarist wrote that this statement was, ‘a classic statement of Fabian arrogance and elitism’ (cited in Toye, 2002 188) and Margaret Thatcher attacked the phrase in her autobiography.

the forms of knowledge that underlie the market means the rejection of a strand of moralistic or paternalistic intervention by the state.

The British new liberal LT Hobhouse was prescient over the paternalist strand of Fabianism when he argued that:

In the socialistic presentment, [the expert] sometimes looks strangely like the powers that be – in education, for instance, a clergyman under a new title, in business that very captain of industry who at the outset was the Socialist's chief enemy. Be that as it may, as the 'expert' comes to the front, and 'efficiency' becomes the watchword of administration, all that was human in Socialism vanishes out of it.

(Hobhouse, 1972, originally 1905 230; also cited in Barker, 1997 28)

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The sentence was picked up in the late 1940s and 1950s by the Conservative Party and used in their election propaganda. Jay's comment also made it into Matthew Parris' book, *Read My Lips: A Treasury of Things Politicians Wish They Hadn't Said* (Parris, 1997). However, Richard Toye has noted that Jay's comment has been taken out of context. Toye argued that the polemical use of the phrase by his political enemies meant that 'Jay's views on economic planning and consumer choice have frequently been misrepresented' (Toye, 2002 187).

The Fabians simply wanted to replace the capitalist with the manager and the preacher with the schoolteacher – nothing changed in the overall power relationships. Beatrice Webb demonstrated the moral paternalism of Fabianism comparing its leadership to Jesuits.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, part of the reason that the Webbs admired Soviet Russia was for its moral austerity and the Puritanism of a country in which ‘European dancing is taboo’, ‘promiscuity is banned’ and there was ‘singularly little spooning in the Parks of Rest and Culture’ (Webb and Webb, 1937; also quoted in Bogdanor, 2001). The paternalism of the Fabian state did not simply extend to economic advice, but was strongly socially moralistic as well.

Despite the dominance of the Fabians’ faith in the benevolence of the state there has long been a sceptical undercurrent of socialism. This was found at the turn of the century in Joseph Lane’s *Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto* (Lane, 1978, originally 1887) and in the work of William Morris. Morris wrote that:

it is necessary to point out that there are some Socialists who do not think that the problem of the organisation of life and necessary labour can be dealt with by a huge national centralisation, working by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible; that on the

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<sup>9</sup> HG Wells was even more vehement in his beliefs on leadership, arguing for an elite guardian class, or ‘Samurai’ as he sometimes referred to them (Barker, 1997, 50).

contrary it will be necessary for the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them; that individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other

(Morris, 1993, originally 1889 358)

Yet for much of the twentieth century socialists and social democrats were in thrall to the state, and it is significant that Crosland felt it necessary to remind his fellow socialists that they ‘should not forget that they have anarchist blood in their veins’ (Crosland, 1956 165). By the end of the twentieth century, there were thinkers on the left who were registering this reminder.

The move away from the benevolent state took several forms after 1989. One result of the rise of scepticism about the state and of individualism was the newfound importance of individual rights and a constitution that would safeguard them from an over powerful state. The most obvious example of this development is the support amongst many on the British left for Charter 88 – a pressure group created in 1988 to obtain a written constitution for Britain (Mark Evans, 1995). Charter 88 gained popularity in response to the Conservative Government use of the ‘strong state’ (Gamble, 1988a) that stripped away existing tiers of democracy, the most obvious example being the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1985. It was the closure of the GLC, which was dominated by a broad coalition of

left-wing groups clustered around the Labour Party, which led many on the left to question more explicitly their optimism in the constant benevolence of the state. By the 1980s the state could be viewed as ‘tethering’ the progress of socialism, rather than pulling it forward (Wainwright, 1989c). The acceptance of some form of market as primary economic coordinator implies a decentralisation of power from state to individual and the importance of individual freedoms that, it could be argued, needed constitutional protection. The debate had shifted from comrades or subjects under the socialist state, to citizens protected against the misuse of state power by a written constitution.

In drawing on the constitution to protect the individual from the misuse of state power, as the supporters of Charter 88 did, the heritage of the argument was more obviously liberal than socialist and owed much to Thomas Paine. Again this reflects a wider move to an agenda which would previously have been described as liberal. In his influential account, the journalist, Jonathan Freedland reminded his British readers that American radical liberalism started in the UK: Paine was both British and liberal and it was, he argued, time to ‘Bring Home the Revolution’ (Freedland, 1998 esp. ch. 9).

The left’s scepticism about the paternalist state resulted in the rediscovery of pluralism. This move also shows how the left at the end of the short twentieth century drew on traditions outside of mainstream twentieth century socialism and

social democracy. Paul Hirst argued, for example, for the revival of a pluralism that was explicitly derived, not only from Cole and Laski, but also from Figgis in the early decades of the twentieth century. Although the intellectual debt of other thinkers is less explicit, a discussion of pluralism can be found amongst many on the left after 1989 (Gamble and Wright, 1997; Hirst, 1989; Miller, 1995b; Wainwright, 1994; the rise of pluralism is noted by Barker, 1999; Laborde, 2000). The pluralist revival is found in more or less radical forms. For Hirst and Wainwright it marked a radical departure towards associational forms of democracy. For more centrist thinkers, a more limited form of pluralism (such as Giddens, 2002 43-47) was a response to a view of globalisation which saw that (in Daniel Bell's phrase) 'the nation state is becoming too small for the big problems of life, and too big for the small problems of life' (Bell, 1997 14). This led to calls for a 'new localism' (although not, as I have argued, all that 'new') on the left (e.g. Corry and Stoker, 2002). The revival of pluralism can be seen as a symptom of a wider rejection of twentieth century conceptions of the role of the state after 1989.

### **The search for 'feasible' alternatives**

Over the last quarter of a century something very large, and not entirely understood, has happened to politics in western Europe . . . It's a cultural, indeed a psychological, shift. A kind of spirit has been extinguished.

(Jacobs, 2002)

The thinkers whom I have examined in this thesis can be viewed as part of a movement in left-wing and socialist thought away from the 'utopian'. The seeds of this movement can, perhaps, be traced back to the recognition by Alexander Herzen and Karl Marx (in his later writings) that revolution would not be immediate. However, it is in the decades after the end of the Second World War that the left has constantly narrowed its hopes in the name of 'feasibility'.

The failure, in the eyes of the left, of a number of socialist institutions and hopes created a wariness of earlier socialists' visions of the future – there was a moderation of hopes. First, the world wars were themselves partly responsible, creating a suspicion of theory (as found for example in the account of 'piecemeal social engineering' in Popper, 1945 vol. 1, ch. 9 and vol. 2, chs. 15 and 24). By the last decades of the century this suspicion had reached its zenith with the arrival of postmodernism, with its rejection of all grand theories (Lyotard, 1985). Second, there was increasing disenchantment with the Soviet Union, which had provided a guiding star for many on the British left in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Stalin's show trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Khrushchev's secret speech and, particularly, the crushing of the Hungarian and Czech uprisings meant that this star quickly faded. It was extinguished with the collapse of the Soviet Union after the revolutions of 1989. Third, in the West, there were also a series of

disappointments for the left: the lack of long-term change following the student demonstrations of 1968; the electoral popularity of governments inspired by the new right and, perhaps most importantly, a disenchantment with socialist and social democratic governments once in power. The abandonment of a radical programme by the French Socialists in 1983 symbolised this disenchantment more than any other event (Grahl, 1995 152). By the early 1980s, the words ‘feasible’ or ‘viable’ are used constantly by socialist thinkers in putting forward their arguments, most famously by Alec Nove in his contribution, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (Nove, 1983). Miller’s work provided an example of this approach, as I argued above. Last, as I noted above, globalisation has limited the power of individual states. However, for much of the twentieth century the state was for mainstream socialists the means by which their policies would be implemented.

The engagement with the epistemological argument employed by Friedrich Hayek by the thinkers examined in detail in this thesis can be seen as part of this search for a ‘feasible’ alternative. The engagement with Hayek leads to the acceptance of a far more limited scope for human reason than that which had dominated socialist and social democratic political thinking for much of the twentieth century. As I have documented in this thesis, an accommodation with Hayek’s account of knowledge led to a rejection of the state as the primary economic coordinator, as it was perceived by the socialist and social democratic mainstream for much of the

twentieth century (this account of the state is put forward in Shaw and Wilshire, 1891). The rejection of the state as primary economic coordinator is a common theme in all thinkers examined in this thesis. The result of accepting a view of knowledge that leads to the rejection of this conception of the state is the acceptance, by all the thinkers examined in depth in this thesis, of some form of market as a coordinating institution. It is the consequences of this more humble, or 'feasible' account of knowledge and its consequences on state and market to which I turn below.

#### ***IV. The liberalisation of political thought***

The death of socialism is frequently reported. What is less often noticed is that conservatism has suffered the same fate and that liberalism too, in any form which the nineteenth century would have recognised, has ceased to exist.

(Barker, 1995 129)

In this section I examine the dominance of liberalism, divided between left and right, over the political landscape. I look at the survival of older themes and conclude with some comments about the survival of the left-right distinction.

## The dominance of liberalism

Socialism has increasingly been rejected as the description of most left-wing politics in Britain. Wainwright's increasing reluctance to use the term or to predict its survival provides one example of this rejection. A similar decline has occurred, though with less discussion in the UK, in conservatism (Gray in Gray and Willets, 1997). Just as in the period after the First World War it was possible to talk about the death of liberalism (Dangerfield, 1980, originally 1935) by the last decades of the same century it was possible to talk about the 'deaths' of both socialism and conservatism at least in their statist or tory forms (respectively). As Shaw's comment, cited earlier in this chapter, shows, both 'Tory' conservatism and Fabian socialism shared a common paternalism in the twentieth century, built upon an understanding of society as hierarchical and class-based. Both themes were elitist, and argued that leadership involved responsibilities to those less well off. The rise of the new right, significantly inspired by Hayek, led not only to the decline of paternalism for the left<sup>10</sup>, but for the right as well. The decline of the tory tradition in conservatism, illustrated by the purging of 'wets' in the early Thatcher

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<sup>10</sup> The view that left-wing paternalism has declined was recently challenged by Guy Standing. He argued that the language of duty and responsibility, closely associated with New Labour, constitutes a 'new paternalism' different from the older statist forms (Standing, 2002).

governments, meant that conservatism, as it had been known in the twentieth century, joined socialism in having its components stripped for salvage.

This thesis reflects the wider revival of liberalism after the end of the short twentieth century, and its increasing division into social (or new) and economic (or classical) strands. The engagement of the British left with Hayek forced the debate onto liberal grounds. Rather than demonstrating a capitulation to classical liberalism (of the type that Hayek, loosely defined, was proposing) the left reasserted a social form of liberalism. Thus, the debate between these new 'new liberals' and Hayekians bears many similarities to the debates between new (and before that Hegelian) liberals with Spencerian liberals around a century before. Indeed, all of the four thinkers I looked at above placed freedom at the centre of their arguments, but they were also concerned with a more equal distribution of effective forms of that freedom. (By contrast, socialists during the twentieth century, by and large, tended not to place freedom at the centre of their argument.) Thus the engagement of the British left with Hayek marks a liberalisation of political debate in the final decades of the chronological twentieth century. This liberalisation can be seen with the election of 'New Labour' in 1997 on a platform which owed much to earlier new liberal arguments. The historian, Steven Fielding, summed this shift up well, when he noted that the 'incorporation of elements from another party's past' was the 'most intriguing feature of New Labour's tradition' (cited in Reeves, 2004).

To several thinkers the intellectual landscape after around 1989 had much in common with the period before the short twentieth century began. They saw the short twentieth century as a long historical diversion and debate in the new intellectual century as carrying on where it had left off before the creation of the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> An example of this view, expressed several times in this thesis, is the claim made by several authors of New Labour's indebtedness to British new liberalism. David Marquand wrote for example that:

New Labour has not advanced into astounding new territory, never before glimpsed by a political thinker's eye; rather, it has picked up, after the British left's 80-year detour, where Asquith and Lloyd George left off.

(Marquand, 1998 26)

Yet despite many parallels with earlier periods, this view is an oversimplification which neglects the novelty of political thought at the end of the twentieth century. In particular, globalisation has transformed political debate (as discussed above) so that many aspects of it would be unknown to a contributor from the start of the

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<sup>11</sup> For these thinkers the description of the 'Soviet century' (of 1917-1989 or 1991) is particularly apt, and loosely fits Hobsbawm's 'short twentieth century' (or 1914-1991).

short twentieth century. Discussion of gender is also now central in political thought and marks a departure from the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

### **The survival of 'social democracy'?**

If socialism and conservatism, at least in their statist varieties, struggled to survive the twentieth century, 'social democracy' is a term that is still widely used (Marquand, 1999). One reason for this might be that whilst socialism is now indelibly associated with the Soviet Union and with state planning, social democracy seems to have avoided this fate (despite the Fabians' use of the term). To make this historical break clear the term is now often prefixed with 'new' (for example in Gamble and Wright, 1999) or in David Held's case 'global' (Held, 2003). The old, statist and paternalist, social democracy of the Fabians seems largely to have disappeared (Gray, 1997).

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<sup>12</sup> Other themes also now constitute an important part of political debate, although they have not been a central feature of theses. The centrality of gender and the immediate global reach of both environmental problems and economic markets in political discourse are perhaps the most significant differences between the terrain before and after the short twentieth century.

The survival of 'social democracy' is another example of the Constantine relationship, introduced above. Social democracy has survived at least partly for institutional reasons: the creation of the Social Democratic Party in 1981 in the UK, which split off from the right of the Labour Party and the survival (and even success) of parties with that name elsewhere in Europe, especially in the years between Labour's election in the UK and the millennium, when several Social Democratic Parties were in power in Continental Europe. The German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), elected to office in 1998 after a long period of opposition, is the most obvious continental example of institutional support for the term and enjoyed a fruitful intellectual collaboration with New Labour, at least in its early years in office (demonstrated, for example, in the publication of joint documents between the two party leaders on the Third Way / *Die Neue Mitte* - Blair, 2003).

The survival of 'social democracy' is one demonstration of the continuities that exist at the end of the twentieth century. It allows political thinkers to draw on those traditions within socialism that are still conducive to their thought – particularly Croslandite revisionism. Yet, as I argued in the final stages of Chapter 3 on Raymond Plant, social democracy, purged of its statist elements, bears closer resemblance to new liberalism than to the statist forms of socialism which dominated the British left during much of the twentieth century.

## **The reconstitution of the left-right axis**

Whilst the future of many of those themes that formed the British political landscape during the twentieth century appears increasingly uncertain, the left-right dichotomy seems more resistant to erosion. The division has gone through several stages since it developed in revolutionary France at the end of the eighteenth century, as the sketch of the development of the terms in Chapter 1 showed. During much of the twentieth century the issue of ownership was the shibboleth dividing left and right. Gamble described it as the ‘the lode star by which left and right defined their attitudes towards economic and social organisation’ (Gavin Kelly and Gamble, 1998 344). The other authors discussed in detail in this thesis would tend to agree. Wainwright, writing with Stephen Howe, made a similar claim when she noted that:

Divisions between the left and the right used to be based on how big a state there should be: and in particular, how much nationalisation?

(Howe and Wainwright, 1989 16)

For many thinkers the rejection of state ownership marked the triumph of the new right. The rejection of large-scale state ownership by the thinkers examined here was part of a much wider shift that gathered speed during the ‘the landslide’ from the mid-1970s onwards. Gamble and Kelly wrote in 1996 that, ‘In the last twenty

years regimes based on central planning have collapsed, state ownership has been in retreat, and even Keynesianism has been widely discredited as a reliable tool for steering capitalist economies' (Gamble and Kelly, 1996b 63). If socialism was essentially about state ownership then Hayek's claim that the intellectual foundations of socialism collapsed appears feasible (cited in Gamble, 1988a 27). However, although the rejection of planning did mark a break with socialism as it had been understood for much of the twentieth century, as Hobsbawm noted, 'there have been various phases in the Left-Right distinction' and it is possible that the debate about planning is only one (Hobsbawm, 2000 96). The principled rejection of *dirigisme*, which is central to all the thinkers examined in detail in the chapters above, constitutes the end of one phase of that distinction.

Given the collapse of calls for state planning and the embrace of the market outlined in this thesis, does the left-right distinction have any continued significance? A tentative answer can be gained from returning to Bobbio's problematic claim, raised in the introduction, that the left is egalitarian, whilst the right is inegalitarian (Bobbio, 1996 62). A problem identified with Bobbio's distinction, is that it did not answer Sen's well-known question 'Equality of What?' (Sen, 1979) This thesis suggests an answer to that question, and the emergence of a possible new phase in the left-right distinction. During the period

examined here, the left in Britain tended to be concerned with equality of liberty, defined, at least in part, positively, whereas the right tended not to be.<sup>13</sup> This division can be seen, for example, in Plant's argument for democratic equality (based as it is on roughly equal distribution of those basic goods needed to make liberty 'effective') and in Hayek's negative understanding of the term (with its categorical distinction between freedom and its distribution).

The second line of criticism I suggested against Bobbio's distinction, came from Anderson, who questioned the use of a purely axiological defence of left and right. The distinction will only survive (in the form I have suggested) if arguments continue to be made along the lines of those discussed in this thesis: if arguments for equality of some form of positive liberty are not continually presented then the distinction will either die away or a new one will emerge, perhaps as yet unseen or predicted.

Some of the developments outlined in this thesis are sketched and summarised in Figure 4. The British political landscape of the short twentieth century is depicted as a right-leaning trapezium. Disenchantment and the acceptance of compromise on the left increasingly led to the acceptance of ever more feasible alternatives,

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<sup>13</sup> Although, as I noted above, it is possible to develop a 'left-wing' argument in terms of negative liberty, as Cohen did (G. Cohen, 1979, 1991).

sloping political debate to the right as the century went on.<sup>14</sup> The middle point in that century was dominated by socialism and conservatism (the end of the Second World War in 1945 is marked by a dotted horizontal line). At this time liberalism is depicted as a declining body of thought in the British political landscape. Towards the end of the century liberalism began its revival – hence it is shaped as an ‘upended dumbbell’ on the figure below - but became increasingly split between its social (or new) and economic (or classical) elements. It is this division which the debate between Hayek and the British left demonstrates.

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<sup>14</sup> The level of generalisation in this figure gives it severe limitations. It does not, for example, show the overlapping nature of political themes and it neglects other themes which fit less easily on to the left-right divide. (These themes are sometimes presented as hyphenated combinations, such as socialist-pluralism or liberal-feminism.)

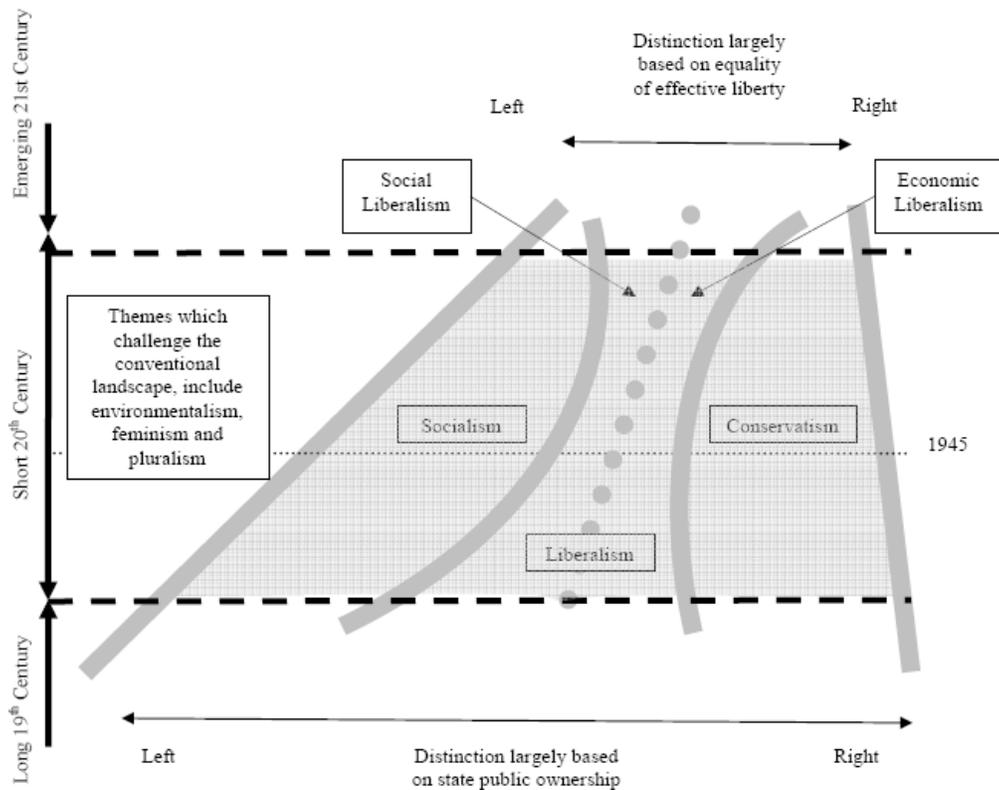


Figure 4: The right-leaning trapezium: thematic map of British political thought during the short twentieth century

***Conclusions: The dominance of liberalism and the end of the short twentieth century***

Sometime after 1989, one century in political thought ended and a new one began. In the UK statist forms of socialism (and conservatism) and with them the old divisions between left and right died away, although many of their components

can still clearly be seen as contributing to a political landscape dominated by the two sides of the liberal tradition. The thinkers discussed in this thesis provide an example of these shifts. David Miller stepped outside of the statist traditions which had dominated socialism in the UK by seeking to revive debates about market socialism that owed something to the liberalism of JS Mill, but which primarily dated from the European debates of the 1930s (in which Hayek was involved) and evoked the post-war Yugoslavian experience. Plant's early embrace of the market and his attempt to recast socialism in terms of liberty shifted the debate further onto liberal terrain. Gamble's rejection of paternalism, statism and the necessary superiority of the 'made' order, hollowed out many of the central, statist components of mainstream twentieth-century socialism, whilst his advocacy of private ownership, markets, entrepreneurship, personal responsibility and his focus on the individual owed more to the new liberalism of Hobson and Hobhouse than it did to earlier socialists.

The liberal landscape was complemented by other traditions, both old and new. The move away from class in favour of a free floating radicalism based on social movements in the work of Hilary Wainwright, more obviously evoked early twentieth-century pluralism than the work of any mainstream socialist thinkers; whilst the globalisation of political thought and the proliferation of arguments based on the politics of identity provided a largely new departure. Yet liberalism, at the end of the period examined here, dominated the political landscape. Whether

the (long or short) twenty-first century will remain predominantly liberal, or whether entirely new themes will emerge (perhaps as the result of as yet unknown global issues) remains unclear.

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