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THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF MINDS: THE CASE OF TONY CROSLAND*

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ABSTRACT. *This article uses the broad concept of ‘improvement of minds’ to refer to the idea of improving people’s sense of morality, their ability and willingness to reason, and the depth of their emotional experiences. Such an objective has been little explored in the context of the history of the British Labour party. Yet, discussion of it is worth integrating into histories of the party for two reasons. First, the goal of improving minds was a strand – though often unsystematically developed – in the agendas of many Labour party politicians, activists, and thinkers. Secondly, the very fact that it was an unsystematically developed strand, the very limits of the party’s attention to, and success in achieving, ‘mental progress’ amongst the twentieth-century British population – that is to say, simply, the limits to the party’s pursuit and achievement of the objective of making people more caring, rational, and sensitive – is one important explanation for many of Labour’s failures. The article begins to explore the aims, processes, and outcomes of Labour’s attempts to improve minds, as well as to explain and examine the consequences of the limits of the party’s attention to this goal, through the case study of Tony Crosland.*

I

Throughout the Labour party’s history, its members and leaders have pursued various aims, their progress towards which has been correspondingly chronicled by historians, including to: win elections;¹ secure internal victories for particular factions;² differently run, or better manage the economy;³ create egalitarian social structures and institutions;⁴ fulfil personal ambitions (numerous biographies have

* I should like to thank David Marquand for supervising the doctoral thesis on which much of this article is based, and Gerard Alexander, Brian Brivati, and Kenneth Morgan for commenting upon the article in draft form. I should also like to thank Susan Crosland and David Higham Associates (on behalf of Tony Crosland and Jonathan Cape) for permission to quote from Tony Crosland’s papers and major books respectively.

¹ See, for example, R. McKibbin, *The evolution of the Labour party, 1910–1924* (Oxford, 1974), and K. Jefferys, *The Labour party since 1945* (London, 1993).

² S. Haseler, *The Gaitskellites: revisionism in the British Labour party, 1951–1964* (London, 1969).

³ S. Brooke, ‘Problems of “socialist planning”’: Evan Durbin and the Labour government of 1945’, *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), pp. 687–702.

⁴ N. Ellison, *Egalitarian thought and Labour politics: retreating visions* (London, 1994).

charted the course of these ambitions);⁵ implement policy;⁶ or think or write about socialist ideology.⁷ Much enlightenment has resulted from these historiographical focuses, but two sets of questions, on which this article concentrates, have been neglected. First, to what extent, why, how, and with what results have people in the Labour party genuinely (this word is used advisedly) sought to promote an increase or improvement in citizens' morals, intelligence, and sensitivity (or depth) as part of their pursuit of reform? These three admittedly diverse aspects are grouped together in this article under the broad heading 'minds'. Secondly, to the extent to which they have not sought to promote such an improvement, or have been unable to achieve it, why has this been so, and how important is it in explaining the party's failures?

Themes which could illuminate these questions have certainly been explored. For example, there have been many criticisms of Labour's limited development of ideas and thought, perhaps unsurprising from academics,⁸ and the theme of the relationship between intellectuals and the Labour party has received attention.⁹ Aspects of the party's attention to values have also been investigated, including the moral dimension of the Nonconformist contribution to Labour,¹⁰ and the ethical approach of the Socialist Union in the 1950s, an approach which informed both its ideas and the personal behaviour of its members.¹¹ Perhaps most closely related to the themes of this article, *England arise!*, by Fielding, Thompson, and Tiratsoo referred to 'Labour's belief [in the 1940s] that individual moral transformation was one of socialism's two prerequisites', and noted that the 1945–51 governments sought unsuccessfully to 'transform people from private individuals uninterested in wider events into active citizens seeking to influence public affairs'.¹² Turning to our third theme of emotional or cultural sensitivity, the above book also discussed Labour's attitude to popular culture, and referred to the "'improving" agenda', and desire 'to promote finer feelings' of many in the party at the time.¹³

However, the issues of how much or how little the Labour party has sought to improve minds, and the consequences of this, have not been placed at the centre of historical narratives, or analysed systematically. Elections, structures, economic policies, and other aspects of the party's history outlined at the start of this article are seen to form the essential components in historical writing. Furthermore, the

⁵ For example, B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992).

⁶ K. O. Morgan, *Labour in power, 1945–1951* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 174–9.

⁷ G. Foote, *The Labour party's political thought: a history* (3rd edn, London, 1997).

⁸ Such as in D. Howell, *British social democracy: a study in development and decay* (London, 1976), pp. 245, 251, 255, and 283.

⁹ R. Desai, *Intellectuals and socialism: 'social democrats' and the Labour party* (London, 1994).

¹⁰ P. Catterall, 'Morality and politics: the free churches and the Labour party between the wars', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 667–85.

¹¹ L. Black, 'Social democracy as a way of life: fellowship and the Socialist Union, 1951–1959', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (1999), pp. 499–539.

¹² S. Fielding, P. Thompson, and N. Tiratsoo, *'England arise!': the Labour party and popular politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 212, 213, and 218.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

particular role of individual attitude and character in the process of attempts to change minds has been neglected. This is true of the individuals whose minds are changed, or prove resistant to change, and also of the Labour politicians or activists trying to change minds, whether through personal example, or particular choices. The latter case takes us back to the importance of the word ‘genuine’. For example, as G. A. Cohen has argued in relation to one socialist objective, equality:

Egalitarian justice is not only, as Rawlsian liberalism teaches, a matter of the rules that define the structure of society, but also a matter of personal attitude and choice; personal attitude and choice are, moreover, the stuff of which social structure itself is made. These truths have not informed political philosophy as much as they should inform it.¹⁴

As with political philosophy, so too with Labour party historiography. And, as with Labour historians’ treatment of values, so too with their treatment of intellect – there has been more interest in the quality of books of socialist ideology than in, say, how teachers in the party have worked personally with children to try to improve their capacity and desire to reason.

The purpose of this article is primarily to suggest a new historiographical path in relation to Labour, exploring both the process of attempts to change minds and the reasons and consequences for not wanting, or failing, to. The process might be divided into aims, techniques, and outcomes. Did Labour seek to improve minds with the aim of creating socialists, or so as to empower people to make ‘better’ moral or intellectual judgements, or were these two goals seen as identical? How were minds to be improved, through personal example, legislation, persuasion, education, or cultural opportunity? How did liberal arguments against such techniques, or the deep-rooted nature of existing psychologies undermine the intended outcomes of attempts to improve minds? The reasons for, and consequences of, Labour not paying more attention to improving minds are equally important, because the desire to improve minds was only one of many competing strands in thinking and actions within the party, and rarely an explicitly expressed and systematically explored one. Why were other aims, including changing the economy or social structures, often considered more important? To what extent did Labour suffer, both electorally, and from the point of view of reforming society in the way it wanted, from the inadequacy of its attention to improving minds? To what extent did it suffer similarly from the failure of its leaders and members to improve their own minds, from their own deficiencies of character or intellect?

This article seeks to highlight the importance of these questions, but only to begin to answer them. It offers a case study, that of the Labour thinker and politician, Tony Crosland (1918–77). Crosland, like the party he joined, has been examined in terms of various aims and contexts, but not in relation to the aim of improving minds. His wife Susan’s biography of him, published in 1982, examined him from the perspective of his own personal history and aspirations.¹⁵ The years

¹⁴ G. A. Cohen, *If you’re an egalitarian, how come you’re so rich?* (London, 2000), p. x. See also K. Soper, ‘Socialism and personal morality’, in D. McLellan and S. Sayers, eds., *Socialism and morality* (London, 1990), ch. 7. ¹⁵ S. Crosland, *Tony Crosland* (London, 1983) – though first published in 1982.

of New Labour's rise since 1994 have seen a revival of interest in him, including an exploration of his egalitarian ideas and policies,¹⁶ two books focused primarily on his economic and social policies,¹⁷ a collection of articles exploring his relevance to New Labour,¹⁸ and, in 1999, the second biography, by Kevin Jefferys, which set Crosland more firmly in the wider electoral and political history of the Labour party than its predecessor.¹⁹ Representative of his party, Crosland did not systematically seek to improve minds. However, first, he was unusually interested in the choices of priorities between different socialist aims, and so sheds light on the limits to the attention given to improving minds. Secondly, he exhibited an important tension, as an upper-middle-class socialist eager to win working-class approval, but also with a Victorian radical Liberal's instinct to improve them. Thirdly, his lifespan serves as a useful time period for analysis, incorporating lingering radical Victorian and Nonconformist ideas of moral improvement in the interwar years; in the 1950s, when full employment and the welfare state facilitated more socialist focus on 'non-material' aims; and in the 1970s, when Labour lost the first of four elections and its confidence in Croslandite, statist, social democracy, and also suffered from the longstanding inadequacy of its approach to promoting, or, indeed, even exhibiting, social democratic hearts and minds.

II

This section explores the period 1918 to 1951. As the Liberal party gave way to Labour as the major progressive party, and as Crosland developed his socialist ideas, British radicalism, and Crosland personally, displayed less explicit attention to the goal of improving minds. This partly reflected an uncertainty over the relative importance to socialism of good individual character and effective state policy, the greater usefulness to socialism of the latter apparently demonstrated by growing state welfare provision. Yet, the inability of the Attlee governments to 'make socialists' showed the resilience of existing mindsets to mere changes of government or welfare policy.

In the later nineteenth century there was less reluctance amongst radicals, and the educated middle class generally, to talk openly about the goal of intellectual or moral improvement than in the subsequent century. By the late Victorian period, not just economic and technological, but also intellectual and moral growth were seen as part of the inevitable march of 'progress'.²⁰ A connection was often drawn between personal moral improvement and the improvement of society.²¹ Nineteenth-century socialists, and some in the early Labour party, were explicit about

¹⁶ Ellison, *Egalitarian thought*.

¹⁷ D. Reisman, *Anthony Crosland: the mixed economy* (London, 1997); and D. Reisman, *Crosland's future: opportunity and outcome* (London, 1997). ¹⁸ D. Leonard, ed., *Crosland and New Labour* (London, 1999).

¹⁹ K. Jefferys, *Anthony Crosland* (London, 1999).

²⁰ S. Collini, *Liberalism and sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and political argument in England, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 160.

²¹ R. Bellamy in R. Bellamy, ed., *Victorian liberalism: nineteenth-century political thought and practice* (London, 1990), p. 132.

the goal of improving morals or the quality of the inner self. Sidney Olivier wrote in the original *Fabian essays* (1889) that whilst social organization was an essential guarantee of the satisfaction of 'primary' desires such as nutrition and protection, 'much more are the existence and health of society indispensable conditions for the common birth and satisfaction of the secondary desires, the desires which have created all that is most valuable in civilization and which find their satisfaction in art, in culture, in human intercourse, in love'.²² Labour's future prime minister Ramsay MacDonald, had insisted in 1905:

The whole subject of the vital condition of the people is too often supposed to be thoroughly dealt with when satisfactory figures of death rates and enticing photographs of improved houses are given, and thus the fact is obscured that, in spite of all sanitary and similar improvements, the vital energies, the stamina, the mental cleanliness, the moral robustness of our people are suffering.²³

Given Labour's new status as the leading progressive party, increasingly evident from the general election of 1924, it became the obvious vehicle for thinking young radicals to join.²⁴ The teenage Tony Crosland was one of these, who joined Labour in the mid-1930s. One could point to several origins of Crosland's own 'inner' qualities: parental love;²⁵ family membership of the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren; or education at Highgate public school and Oxford. In some striking teenage essays he placed, like radicals influenced by Nonconformity before him, an explicit emphasis on the importance of the mind. One, entitled 'Liberty', noted that

slavery and other forms of political, economic and social servitude concern men's bodies and actions: a far more elusive freedom is that of the mind, and perhaps it has been even more difficult to achieve than that of the body. Yet just as the mind is more important than the body, so mental serfdom is a far more terrible crime than physical slavery; and just as our bodies were not given to us merely to be controlled by others, so even less were our minds; rather it is by them that man can assert his individuality and decide the governing principles of his life.²⁶

Another, 'Eccentricity', which reflected the influence of John Stuart Mill who wrote about the importance of 'eccentricity' in *On liberty* (1859),²⁷ stressed that it is 'eccentricity and independence of mind which marks off man from the animal'.²⁸

Two thousand years ago Lucretius preached that true piety did not lie in outward show, but in the ability to face life with a mind at rest; and Socrates conceived life as one long search for the truth that would put our minds at rest. If in our search for truth we find ourselves in disagreement with the great majority, then it is our bounden duty to be eccentric; if we are hypocritical enough to practice conformity while thinking non-conformity, then we are betraying the most sacred truth that nature has reposed in us.²⁹

²² Sidney Olivier in G. B. Shaw, ed., *Fabian essays* (London, 1962), pp. 145–6.

²³ J. R. MacDonald, *Socialism and society* (London, 1905), p. 3.

²⁴ D. Marquand, *The progressive dilemma* (London, 1992), p. 24.

²⁵ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, pp. 4–5.

²⁶ London School of Economics, Crosland papers (C) 1/7, 11.

²⁷ J. S. Mill, *On liberty* (London, 1985), pp. 125–40.

²⁸ C 1/7, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Yet, whilst the older Crosland was to continue to display iconoclasm, this early explicit emphasis on the importance of the mind was not repeated in his adult socialist writings, and, significantly, he switched from Classics to PPE at Oxford. The twentieth century, less religious and confident than its predecessor, was progressively less conducive to preaching about the importance of one's inner world, and Crosland, who was an agnostic from his teenage years onwards,³⁰ possessed an ex-puritan's determination not to be perceived as moralizing, noting in 1962 that 'a pharisaical attitude to the lives of others is revolting'.³¹ Crosland and his new party were also diverted from the goal of reforming minds by the twentieth-century focus on the state as a reforming instrument.³² The revisionist socialism Crosland was to advocate from the 1950s, like other varieties of twentieth-century socialism, in David Marquand's words, 'assumed that if revisionist ministers pulled the right Whitehall levers, the desired results would follow'.³³ Yet, as a reviewer of *The future of socialism* in the *Bournemouth Daily Echo* noted, given Crosland's definition of socialism in terms of certain values and human characteristics, 'may it not be that teachers and preachers, psychologists and mystics, theologians and philosophers will have as much to do with bringing it about as politicians?'³⁴ The very choice of the political system, and the state, as one's major reforming sphere implied a preference for the aim of changing systems and structures more than changing minds, and the technique of pulling government levers rather than educating, or setting role models of 'good' character.

Crosland remained confused in his attitude to the question of how important 'good' character was, both personally and theoretically. Personally, he reacted against the puritanical restrictions of his childhood (no opera, ballet, or theatre, and pleasure, love, and grief to be curtailed),³⁵ and developed, especially in the later 1940s and 1950s, a hedonism of heavy drinking and smoking, and sexual promiscuity.³⁶ One of his notes, probably made during the Attlee governments, claimed that it was 'nonsense to say people can't be perfectly happy on sex, gin and Bogart – and if that is what they want under Soc.[ialism], well & good. I know many cultured people who want just that (e.g. me)'.³⁷ Labour party thinkers long had relatively little to say about the role of personal sexual morality in socialism, and the related issue of the family. The early revisionist socialist thinker, Evan Durbin (1906–48), in his *The politics of democratic socialism* (1940), a book unusual in its attention to psychological aspects of socialism, had hinted at the importance of

³⁰ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, p. 8.

³¹ C. A. R. Crosland, *The conservative enemy* (London, 1962), p. 129.

³² Skidelsky asserts that the duty of caring was transferred from the individual to the state, in R. Skidelsky, *Interests and obsessions: selected essays* (London, 1993), p. 9.

³³ D. Marquand, *The new reckoning: capitalism, states, and citizens* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 11. See also pp. 24–5 for Marquand's discussion of 'moral' and 'mechanical' reformers.

³⁴ Gordon Sewell, *Bournemouth Daily Echo*, 12 Oct. 1956, C 13/9, 55.

³⁵ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, pp. 4–7; and BBC radio interview, 1973, C 13/36.

³⁶ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, pp. 43–5 and 63; and Jefferys, *Crosland*, pp. 26, 30, 39–41, 52–3, and 70.

³⁷ Notes, n.d., C 13/21, 78.

children's upbringing to the state of society and politics: 'I believe it to be almost certain that if children were actually brought up more freely they would be much happier, much more reasonable, and much more sociable. It is obvious that social and international relations would greatly benefit if people were happier, more reasonable and more sociable.'³⁸ But he went on to assert the centrality, again, of the levers of government: 'we have not the time nor the opportunity to do these things. It would take decades to affect the course of political relations by emotional education ... What therapy cannot cure, government must restrain.'³⁹ There is a suggestion that, in later life, Crosland was not especially fond of children as a species,⁴⁰ apart from his own step-children after his second marriage in 1964, and his egalitarianism did not extend to much interest in gender equality.

However, Crosland's neglect of the relationship between socialism and moral issues in the sexual and private spheres was accompanied by a more considered and manifestly moral approach to public affairs. Crosland recalled that his Brethren background 'gave me a permanent puritan conscience about certain things ... about work in particular'.⁴¹ He possessed a strong sense of public duty, which manifested itself in 1942, when, although it was widely known that there was a high casualty rate, Crosland volunteered to join a Parachute Brigade (admittedly following an address by General 'Boy' Browning, and along with all but one of the other officers in his company), and joined the Sixth Battalion of the Royal Welsh Parachute Regiment.⁴² Between 1943 and 1945 he was on active service, including in Italy, and he experienced sustained close combat.⁴³ This sense of public duty also partly explains his choice of a political career over an academic one (he had stayed on at Trinity College, as, briefly, an economics lecturer, and then a Fellow, until 1950), as he wanted, in his own words, 'to have a job in which you don't just write about things, but you actually can do things'.⁴⁴

Turning from Crosland's personal character to his very occasional written explorations of the role of morality and character, we see a similar mixed picture. In the 1930s, in the context of international economic depression and the rise of the Nazis, some of the British left's leading intellectuals, including Laski and Strachey, turned to Marxism. At Oxford in the late 1930s, Crosland, as fellow student Denis Healey, himself a communist at the time, explains, 'considered himself a Marxist, but could not nerve himself to join the Communist Party outright'.⁴⁵ But he moved, in the first half of the 1940s, to ethical socialism, noting in his diary on 2 April 1946 that Marxism's 'relative morality' made it 'a savagely dangerous creed'.⁴⁶ In his notes for a speech in 1950 to a selection meeting at South Gloucestershire (his first constituency, 1950–5), he emphasized that the 'ultimate ideal of Soc.[ialism] seems to me essentially a *moral & not a material one*'.⁴⁷ On 13 July

³⁸ E. F. M. Durbin, *The politics of democratic socialism: an essay on social policy* (London, 1940), pp. 68–9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70. ⁴⁰ S. Williams, *Snakes and ladders: a political diary* (1996), BBC tape.

⁴¹ BBC radio interview, 1973, C 13/36. ⁴² Jefferys, *Crosland*, pp. 11–12 and 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 20. ⁴⁴ BBC radio interview, 1973, C 13/36.

⁴⁵ D. Healey, *The time of my life* (London, 1990), p. 36. ⁴⁶ C 16/1, 7. ⁴⁷ C 13/21, 9.

1944, while serving in Italy, he noted in his diary that ‘the Italians are the most difficult race to make up one’s mind about’.

What I have mainly against them boils down to one thing: they lack a social conscience: the common good so seldom takes precedence over the individual good ... I feel this social selfishness is sufficiently prevalent to justify me in saying that Italy needs not merely a political, but also a moral revolution: not merely a change of government at the centre, but a complete alteration in the way the country is run. Its greatest need is honest altruistic leaders.⁴⁸

A similar attention to character was evident in a jotting later in the year, on 22 November:

I have read a quite intelligent article on George Eliot by V. S. Pritchett ... He praises her because in comparison with other Victorian novelists, who are shapeless & confused by innumerable plots & melodramatic sub-plots, she ‘marks out an ordered world & enunciates a constructed judgement’ ... Above all I do agree that in clarifying our minds about human character, & helping us to judge the effects of good & weak characters (& so good & bad actions) on the world outside, George Eliot ranks with the great writers of all time.⁴⁹

The connection made here is interesting: good and weak characters produce good and bad actions respectively.

Yet, it does not seem that Crosland in the 1940s made a further connection between this and a need for socialists to devote more systematic attention to the role of character in furthering or retarding their ideology. He was not a sufficiently contented individual in his own personal life⁵⁰ to feel able to moralize too much about the characters of others. Famously, Crosland criticized the Fabians Beatrice and Sidney Webb for their asceticism, complaining in a diary entry for 4 September 1949 of their ‘almost unnatural morality’,⁵¹ yet also recognizing ‘that they had achieved (tho’ B.W. only after great struggles) a happiness & peace of mind that was far beyond my powers & comprehension: ... [recognizing] indeed that they were saintly where I was sinful’.⁵² The nineteenth-century socialist William Morris, in a lecture in 1887, had assumed the existence of a clear relationship between socialism and an improvement in people’s ‘inner’ lives: ‘I am bound to suppose that the realization of Socialism will tend to make men happy.’⁵³ Writing nearly seventy years later, in *The future of socialism*, Crosland argued that whilst equality would increase social contentment, he could not be sure that it would increase the sum of personal happiness.⁵⁴ This pessimistic view was, again, partly connected to twentieth-century socialism’s choice of reforming tool, the state. It was difficult to say with precision how pulling the levers of government could directly improve happiness, and even more difficult to see how it might improve character, as Crosland recognized in *The future of socialism*: ‘a change in social character, altering

⁴⁸ C 3/1, 51-2. ⁴⁹ C 3/1, 75-6. ⁵⁰ Interview with author (Int.): Ian Little, 16 Nov. 1999.

⁵¹ C 16/1, 53.

⁵² C 16/1, 52.

⁵³ W. Morris, ‘The society of the future’, in A. L. Morton, ed., *Political writings of William Morris* (London, 1984), p. 191. ⁵⁴ C. A. R. Crosland, *The future of socialism* (London, 1956), pp. 205-7.

the underlying balance between self-regarding and other-regarding instincts, cannot, I suppose, be ruled out as a matter of theory ... But of course we know too little about the determinants to say anything very useful when it comes to practical policy.⁵⁵ This demonstrated Crosland's realism – it would have been extraordinarily difficult, and arguably illiberal, for government to have constructed policies crudely to 'improve' people's morals. But the comment also showed the limits to the scope of his reformist agenda. The Christian socialist Frank Pakenham (Lord Longford), reviewing the book, contrasted Crosland's 'marked economic optimism about the British economic future and his equally marked social pessimism about the possibility of drawing on higher motives to build a new society'.⁵⁶

The Conservatives had been the dominant party in interwar politics, as the other two parties swapped places. But in the 1945 general election Labour received its first overall majority, with a landslide victory. The first Attlee administration's wide-ranging welfare policies have led many to conclude that this was Labour's most successful government. Yet, at the time, some in the party had hoped for more than the creation of new structures and institutions, important as these were. Fielding et al. write that 'due to the effects of the Second World War, many Labour leaders and activists believed that the British people had become uniquely responsive to ethical socialism'. But Labour were unable 'to make socialists on the scale anticipated in 1945 ... Whilst Labour's promise of full employment and social security encouraged voters to support the Party in unprecedented numbers few were willing to embrace its ethical vision.'⁵⁷ In any case, what did 'making socialists' mean? Did a socialist mindset entail an emotional faith in nationalization, a belief in being co-operative and caring, or rationality and sensitivity? Crosland's revisionism, developed in the 1940s, and articulated in the 1950s, rejected the first. *The future of socialism* rejected 'the co-operative aspiration',⁵⁸ because, again, it was difficult to see how it could be promoted, and 'a wholesale effort to suppress the motive of personal gain' might be damaging to incentives to work.⁵⁹ Would the newly emerging socialist revisionism of the 1950s, if not offering a highly co-operative or caring form of socialism, at least pursue the more liberal goal of making people more rational, and more conscious of the 'secondary pleasures', through the tools of education and 'high' culture?

III

Two themes present themselves in the 1951–70 period, years in which relative economic prosperity seemed to present progressives with the opportunity to devote more energy to non-material reforms. First, there was considerable inconsistency in Labour's, and specifically Crosland's thinking over the relative importance of material and non-material, including 'mental', progress. Secondly, this partly

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁶ Frank Pakenham, *Fabian Journal*, Nov. 1956, C 13/9, 26.

⁵⁷ Fielding et al., 'England arise!', pp. 213–14.

⁵⁸ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 105.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

reflected uncertainty as to the usefulness of certain qualities of the mind, for example, over how important it was for people to engage in ‘high’ rather than commercial culture, or how useful thinking was in politics.

The hole in Labour thought created by the fulfilment of much of its traditional programme by the Attlee governments⁶⁰ was partially filled by the writing in the 1950s of intellectuals such as Crossman, Strachey, and Crosland himself. Crossman wrote, as editor, in *New Fabian essays* (1952), to which Crosland also contributed, that ‘the Labour Party has lost its way not only because it lacks a map of the new country it is crossing, but because it thinks maps unnecessary for experienced travellers’.⁶¹ Here, he was criticizing not just the party’s tendency to rely on instinct, but also its tendency, when it did choose to move beyond instinct, to prefer empirical evidence to ideas and theories, a preference characteristic of the British as a whole. Despite Crossman’s warning, in the 1950s and 1960s, to some in the party, the growth in research in the social sciences appeared to reduce the need for social and political ideas. As Jose Harris notes, whereas, in 1945 two of the country’s three most prestigious university chairs in political philosophy were held by Laski and Cole, ‘the younger generation of “academic” Labour theorists was largely made up of economists, sociologists, statisticians, and social-policy experts’.⁶²

In one sense, Crosland fitted the above description of the younger generation. *The future of socialism* was brimming with economic statistics and sociological observations, and the logical positivist author of *Language, truth, and logic* (1936), A. J. Ayer claimed, in a review, that ‘the great merit of his [Crosland’s] book is that its approach is wholeheartedly empiricist’.⁶³ Crosland had an anti-theoretical streak, which predisposed him to favour hard evidence. His book referred to ‘the lack of ... practical wisdom amongst so many contemporary intellectuals’,⁶⁴ and claimed that ‘the intuitions of Keir Hardie proved a more reliable foundation than the theories of Lassalle and Kautsky’.⁶⁵ Bill Rodgers, a fellow Gaitskellite MP in the 1960s and 1970s, who was an admirer and later a critic of Crosland, partly because he believed that his intellectual qualities made him lack the decisiveness of the person of action, recalls that Crosland liked less intellectually minded people, who, he felt, ‘brought the son-of-the-earth understanding, which he believed he lacked’.⁶⁶ He also admired the political fixing qualities of Wilson and Callaghan, and, reflecting on history in his personal jottings in early 1968, he noted that in the 1929 general election, ‘as usual’, the ‘dazzling (& correct) intellectual performance of Libs. brought zero electoral result. Lab. P. always needs a Henderson or Morrison. Should Call.[aghan] assume this posn. now?’⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Jefferys, *Labour*, p. 33.

⁶¹ R. H. S. Crossman in R. H. S. Crossman, ed., *New Fabian essays* (London, 1952), p. 2.

⁶² See J. Harris, ‘Labour’s political and social thought’, in D. Tanner, P. Thane, and N. Tiratsoo, eds., *Labour’s first century* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 29–30.

⁶³ A. J. Ayer, *Encounter*, Dec. 1956, C 13/9, 32. ⁶⁴ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, pp. 269–70.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶⁶ *Int.*: Bill Rodgers, 25 Apr. 2000.

⁶⁷ C 16/7, 10.

But Crosland was confused rather than unambiguously dismissive about the value of ideas and intellect to socialism, and in politics. To return to Crossman's comment, it was *The future of socialism* that came closer than perhaps any post-war British socialist work to providing a new socialist map, a broad vision, based on the goals of social equality and social welfare, alongside detailed policy prescriptions. The book was, after all, about the future of socialism, a subject area one could not describe as too narrow, and it promised to 'take the plunge and attempt a view of the whole subject',⁶⁸ with the exception of its conscious exclusion of foreign affairs. And, as a politician, Crosland's wife notes that 'he thought it criminal to take decisions without the case for them being made intellectually'.⁶⁹ Crosland's outside adviser in the 1970s, David Lipsey, recalls that Wilson's failure to think 'that objectives mattered very much in politics' was 'a foreign world' to Crosland.⁷⁰ There was a linked uncertainty in Crosland's assessment of how important it was to behave 'well' in politics. As he noted to himself in 1973: 'I've been obsessed by theoretical need for deviousness in pols. [politics] for last 2 yrs. ...: but in fact must spend less time thinking tactically than any other major politician.'⁷¹

Confusion over how useful intellect and morals were in politics was accompanied, in Crosland and the Labour party, by uncertainty (though not as a result of systematic attention to the issue) over the priority that should be given to improving the above, especially relative to economic objectives. The economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s seemed to offer the opportunity to take at least half of one eye off the economy, and re-focus it on less narrowly materialist aims. *The future of socialism* distinguished between periods of 'economic politics' and 'social politics', the former characteristic of periods of economic depression, when economic concerns were the main factor in political attitudes, the latter of periods of prosperity (such as the 1950s) when the focus switched from economic to social questions.⁷² The desire not to neglect non-material issues was strengthened, amongst revisionist socialists, by the belief that Marx had placed too much stress on materialist forces in history, as well as by the rise of the academic disciplines of psychology and sociology. Durbin had used concepts such as regression and projection as explanations of political characteristics,⁷³ and at a Fabian Conference in 1950, the sociologist, Michael Young, who, as a friend, stimulated Crosland's own interest in these disciplines, emphasized that 'people's needs ought to be thought of psychologically as well as materially'.⁷⁴ Crosland, in *New Fabian essays* reflected a wider Gaitskellite concern to move beyond an exclusively material definition of equality,⁷⁵ claiming that 'perhaps even more disturbing' than the 'residue of objectively measurable social inequality was the persistence of a deep-seated sense of an unequal society'.⁷⁶ This interest in the psychological dimension

⁶⁸ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, p. 283.

⁷⁰ Int.: David Lipsey, 24 Nov. 1999.

⁷¹ Cited in Reisman, *Anthony Crosland*, p. 48.

⁷² Crosland, *Future of socialism*, pp. 196–7.

⁷³ S. Brooke, 'Evan Durbin: reassessing a Labour "revisionist"', *Twentieth Century British History*, 7 (1996), pp. 37–8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–1.

⁷⁵ Haseler, *Gaitskellites*, p. 89.

⁷⁶ Crosland in Crossman, ed., *New Fabian essays*, p. 62.

of inequality was repeated in *The future of socialism* (which claimed that ‘the worst economic abuses and inefficiencies of modern society have been corrected; and this is no longer the sphere, in which reforms are most urgently required’),⁷⁷ alongside a strong interest in two other aspects of socialism related to the ‘mind’, educational and cultural policies.

Education was one of the few policy areas in which the 1945–51 Labour governments had not introduced their own distinctive policy. Instead, they had concentrated on implementing the 1944 Butler Act, which assumed the division of children into grammar and secondary modern schools at what some socialists regarded as the early age of eleven.⁷⁸ Education had long been seen as a major issue in Labour local government politics, where industrial policy questions did not arise, but at national level, and in terms of its treatment in major works of socialist thinking, it had not usually ranked as a policy area of primary importance, with the exception of the writing of Tawney.⁷⁹ For some on the Labour left, problems of economic and political control seemed more pressing.⁸⁰ Harold Laski wrote in 1935 that ‘the economic factor ... is the bedrock upon which the social superstructure is built’.⁸¹ Even the early revisionist Douglas Jay wrote in 1937, that ‘the case for socialism is mainly economic’,⁸² and Durbin, in *The politics of democratic socialism*, for all the book’s exploration of the psychological roots of social and political problems, claimed that education spending was one of a number of ‘ameliorative measures’, and that democratic socialist parties should ‘be willing to place further ameliorative measures in their order of priority after, and not before, the socialization of industry [Durbin’s italics]’.⁸³

However, in contrast to its predecessor of 1889, *New Fabian essays* (1952) included a chapter on education, that by Margaret Cole, and in 1951 Labour became fully and publicly committed to comprehensive schools for the first time.⁸⁴ Barker writes that ‘one central aspect of labourism was henceforward to be a concern, not with the structures of economic control, but with the shape of society, and even with the quality of life’, and that ‘as sociology replaced economics, education held a central position’.⁸⁵ This exaggerates – economics remained Labour’s primary focus in the 1950s and 1960s, and up to the present day. But national educational policy, and the education department, in its various forms, did increase in perceived importance in the second half of the twentieth century. In *The future of socialism*, Crosland insisted

⁷⁷ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 113.

⁷⁸ See Morgan, *Labour*, pp. 174–9.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Shaw, ed., *Fabian essays*; MacDonald, *Socialism*; J. Strachey, *The theory and practice of socialism* (London, 1936); and D. Jay, *The socialist case* (London, 1937). G. D. H. Cole, in his *The next ten years in British social and economic policy* (London, 1930), devoted a substantial section to education, but the main focus of the book was still on economics.

⁸⁰ R. S. Barker, ‘The educational policies of the Labour party, 1900–1961’ (PhD thesis, London, 1968), p. 391.

⁸¹ H. J. Laski, *The state in theory and practice* (London, 1935), p. 122.

⁸² Jay, *Socialist case*, p. 352.

⁸³ Durbin, *Politics*, p. 298.

⁸⁴ R. Barker, *Education and politics, 1900–1951: a study of the Labour party* (Oxford, 1972), p. 96.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

that ‘the ideal of social equality requires the first priority to be given to educational reform’.⁸⁶

Only if performance really matches promise – only if, that is, the Labour Party gives education a much higher priority than in the past, and comes to see it as of far greater significance to socialism than the nationalization of meat-procuring or even chemicals – only then will the reality take shape in the form of bricks and mortar, more and better teachers, a longer school life in ample, imaginative surroundings.⁸⁷

This interest in education was matched by a side of Crosland which sought to ‘improve’ people. In his second major political book, *The conservative enemy* (1962), he referred to

the theory behind the post-war BBC Light, Home, and Third Programmes; it was hoped that over time, with increasing education and discrimination, listeners would graduate from the first through the second to the third. This was too simplistic and categorical an approach; and the programmes were not particularly suited to the end in view. But the *principle* is surely right.⁸⁸

He felt that the process of ‘improvement’ had benefited him personally: ‘I was not conscious, at the age of eighteen, of an innate want to enjoy opera or painting; then the want was stimulated in me by outside influences, much to my subsequent contentment: is the want less real because I once was not aware of it?’⁸⁹ And he noted a connection between good education and high cultural standards, as well as reduced vulnerability to the commercial media.⁹⁰ In Crosland’s case, theoretical advocacy of better education was sometimes joined by personal provision of it. Marcia Falkender highlights his role as ‘teacher and adviser’ to colleagues.⁹¹ One councillor in his Grimsby constituency recalls that he provided ‘stimulation’. ‘You could certainly find three days later you thought, “Wish I’d said that”’.⁹² He reprimanded colleagues for intellectual and moral ‘frivolity’, one of whom, Roy Hattersley, suspected that ‘the reason I wrote *Choose freedom: the future for democratic socialism* [published in 1987], was to prove to the ghost of Tony Crosland that I wasn’t frivolous’.⁹³

Yet, there were limits to Crosland’s prioritization of education. In reviewing *The conservative enemy*, Bryan Magee, author of *The new radicalism*, also published in 1962, correctly observed of *The future of socialism* that ‘although on his own showing education more than anything else was the key to the future of socialism, he devoted only twenty pages to it out of the book’s 529’. Magee noted that this pattern appeared again in *The conservative enemy*.⁹⁴ Although *The future of socialism* was stressing that education should be given a higher priority, and economics a lower one than before, it talked much more of economics than of education. The elite

⁸⁶ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 518. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 277. ⁸⁸ Crosland, *Conservative enemy*, p. 208.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99. ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁹¹ M. Falkender, *Downing Street in perspective* (London, 1983), p. 244.

⁹² Int.: Muriel Barker, 17 July 1998. ⁹³ Int.: Roy Hattersley, 12 Jan. 2000.

⁹⁴ Bryan Magee, *Socialist Commentary*, Jan. 1963, C 13/12, 19.

Labour party as a whole also talked more about economics than education. The sociologist A. H. Halsey, who was an outside adviser to Crosland when he was secretary of state for education between January 1965 and August 1967, suggests that there was even a feeling that Crosland's appointment to this post was a punishment from Wilson, because of Crosland's status as a Gaitskellite.⁹⁵ He feels that Crosland's awareness that education was not considered a policy area of primary importance was being reinforced 'by the opinions of his fellow members of the Cabinet, especially Wilson – Wilson never gave any thought to it at all'⁹⁶ (although Wilson's enthusiasm for the Open University was a clear exception to this). James Callaghan had asked Wilson for the education portfolio following his resignation in 1967 over devaluation, but Wilson regarded the post as too minor for someone of Callaghan's status.⁹⁷ Roy Jenkins had been offered the education post before Crosland, but had rejected it, suspecting the more highly ranked position of home secretary might soon be offered to him instead.⁹⁸ Jenkins records: 'I was not vastly attracted by the Department of Education. My mind was not on its problems, and I was not stimulated by the thought of them.'⁹⁹

The minds of many of the electorate were also not much stimulated by educational issues. Halsey recalls that Crosland 'recognized quite clearly that if you put down twenty points and presented them to the average voter to arrange in order of priorities, education would have been twelve or thirteen'.¹⁰⁰ But was part of the purpose of socialism not to persuade people to change their priorities? This was unlikely to happen if many of the Labour elite themselves were not convinced of the importance of education. The argument could be adopted that the Treasury was more important than the DES because it determined how much was actually spent on education (Crosland felt that 'every social objective I believe in depends on getting the economy right'),¹⁰¹ but often this theoretical point merely legitimized ambition for jobs of traditionally high cabinet status, and an assumption that economics, not education, mattered most. The difficulty of creating a 'better' society without educating people to create a more intelligent one was little considered by the 1964–70 governments, in their frenetic attempts to manage the economy more effectively than their Conservative predecessors. Crosland, although more enthused by education policy questions than Wilson or Jenkins, when asked in a BBC radio interview in 1973 whether, if allowed to choose his own office in a future Labour government, it would be the chancellorship, replied that 'for most of my life I'd have said, unequivocally, "yes"'.¹⁰² It is revealing both about Labour's prioritization of economics, and the limited interest of the party and its historians in the relationship between ideological theory and personal practice, that Labour politicians have tended to aspire to similar cabinet

⁹⁵ Int.: A. H. Halsey, 9 Mar. 1999.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ K. O. Morgan, *Callaghan: a life* (Oxford, 1997), p. 277.

⁹⁸ J. Campbell, *Roy Jenkins: a biography* (London, 1983), p. 86.

⁹⁹ R. Jenkins, *A life at the center: memoirs of a radical reformer* (New York, 1992).

¹⁰⁰ Int.: Halsey, 9 Mar. 1999.

¹⁰¹ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, p. 187.

¹⁰² C 13/36.

positions to Conservatives, with the chancellorship as the most desired post, and that this fact has been so little remarked upon.

Crosland's prioritization of educational reform in the 1950s was joined by a stress on the importance of culture to socialism. In his notes for his speech to the South Gloucestershire selection meeting in 1950, he insisted that the ultimate ideal of socialism was 'nothing to do with nationalization of means of production, nothing to do *c.* [with] any one particular economic policy', but should 'mean a state of affairs in wh. every single citizen has the chance to live the same sort of graceful, cultured, comfortable life that only the lucky few can live to-day'.¹⁰³ *The future of socialism* argued that there was a need to make Britain 'not only a more prosperous, not only a more just and equal and contented, but also a more beautiful and civilized country to live in', and that 'material standards are rising to the point where we can spare more energy, and more resources, for beauty and culture'.¹⁰⁴

But what sort of culture did Crosland want? His combination of moral responsibility and irresponsible hedonism was accompanied by, and connected to, a simultaneous commitment to 'high' and 'low' culture. Crosland, who 'fell in love' with opera in Rome in 1944,¹⁰⁵ enjoyed literature, and, above all, had a lifelong passion for architecture, had a degree of the cultural improver in him, yet he also had a utilitarian sense that 'low' culture was perfectly legitimate if enjoyed (he himself enjoyed *Match of the day*). Thus, *The future of socialism* claimed, 'the proper pursuits' could be 'elevated, vulgar, or eccentric'.¹⁰⁶ It cited the words of a Chartist touring northern England in 1870, who lamented the leisure choices of those, 'like idiots, leading small greyhound dogs, covered with cloth. They are about to race, and they are betting money as they go.' Crosland's response was: 'and why not, indeed?'¹⁰⁷ Yet, even whilst defending low culture, the book based the defence partly on the standards set by high culture, claiming, for example, in defence of Hollywood (Crosland was a strong admirer of America), that its output was 'much less standardized than non-film-going intellectuals suppose'.¹⁰⁸

The tension in Crosland's approach was also a wider one for socialists and the Labour party. There was a strand in socialism, represented by William Morris, that valued art and beauty.¹⁰⁹ Some were concerned about the threat to the appreciation of these posed by materialism, especially given the increase in consumer goods and commercial entertainments in the post-war period. Bevan complained in 1952 that 'the virtues of contemplation and of reflection are at a discount. Aesthetic values attend upon the caprice of the financially successful.'¹¹⁰ For Raphael Samuel, writing in a Fabian tract in November 1959, 'Labour's primary task is to create a climate of socialist and radical opinion to oppose the

¹⁰³ C 13/21, 9.

¹⁰⁵ S. Crosland, *Crosland*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 341 (the Chartist was quoted in M. Beer, *A history of British socialism* (2 vols., London, 1919–21), II, p. 221).

¹⁰⁹ W. Morris, 'How I became a socialist', *Justice*, 16 June 1894, in Morton, ed., *Political writings*, pp. 245–6.

¹¹⁰ A. Bevan, *In place of fear* (London, 1978; first publ. 1952), p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, pp. 527–8.

¹⁰⁶ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 520.

¹⁰⁸ Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 246.

ethos of the acquisitive society.¹¹¹ But numerous pressures acted against an unambiguous commitment by the party to the objective of a more sensitive, 'cultured' society. One was the fear that such a commitment would make the Labour party seem boring and dictatorial, especially allied to the party's association with the austerity of the immediate post-war years, Crosland noting in September 1949 that many feared the socialist state would be a 'dull functional nightmare'.¹¹² As a middle-class intellectual socialist, Crosland did not want to seem too remote from Labour's largely working-class supporters, and in his self-styled 'populist' phase in the 1970s¹¹³ he cultivated an image for himself based on good relations with fishermen in his Grimsby constituency, and his support for Grimsby Town Football Club, one Labour councillor recalling that he idolized some local people excessively.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, cultural questions were entangled in the left-versus-right factional warfare of the 1950s and 1960s, with many on the left instinctively hostile to Americanization and commercialization, and some on the right, including Crosland, focusing on exposing the exaggerations of the left's attitude to these 'evils' to the extent of themselves displaying complacency about them. Crosland claimed in 1962 that 'any normal socialist will wholeheartedly rejoice at the spread of material affluence',¹¹⁵ and, going further still, at an international seminar in Tokyo in April 1972, he asserted that 'there is nothing immoral about working class materialism'.¹¹⁶ Both Crosland and Denis Healey, who had a striking range of 'high' cultural interests, possessed a strong liberal strand, Healey reflecting that rising living standards 'open the gates to an immense variety of new pleasures from which every individual should have the right to choose what he likes best, though middle-class intellectuals may sneer at this as rank materialism'.¹¹⁷

But there is a danger here of creating the misleading impression that cultural issues were to the fore in the Labour party of the 1950s and 1960s. There was a 'New Left' intellectual interest in the mindset and cultural attitudes of the working class as an important determining factor in the achievement of socialism,¹¹⁸ but this did not form part of mainstream Labour thinking. Moreover, in the more alarming economic context of the 1970s, Crosland's call in *The future of socialism* for a greater attention to cultural matters came to seem like an indulgence, including, apparently, to Crosland himself. There was a strikingly explicit chronology in his progressive agenda, which he seems to have shared with Keynes, whom he cited near the end of *The future of socialism*: 'when the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be great changes in the code of morals ... I see us free to return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue.'¹¹⁹ The book also cited Matthew Arnold (1822–88), the advocate

¹¹¹ R. Samuel in *Where: 5 views on Labour's future*, Fabian tract 320 (Nov. 1959), p. 35.

¹¹² Diary, 4 Sept. 1949, C 16/1, 53. ¹¹³ Crosland, *Sunday Times*, Mar. 1971, C 13/20, 224.

¹¹⁴ Int.: Barker, 17 July 1998. ¹¹⁵ Crosland, *Conservative enemy*, p. 125. ¹¹⁶ C 4/12, 4.

¹¹⁷ Healey, *Time of my life*, pp. 583–4.

¹¹⁸ See L. Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 27.

¹¹⁹ Keynes, in *Essays in persuasion* (1931), pp. 371–2, cited in Crosland, *Future of socialism*, p. 528.

of 'sweetness' (beauty) and 'light' (intelligence), whose adult life spanned over most of the Victorian phase of industrialization and material improvement:

In spite of all that is said about the brutalising influence of our passionate material progress, it seems to me indisputable that this progress is likely, though not certain, to lead in the end to an apparition of intellectual life; and that man, after he has made himself perfectly comfortable and has now to determine what to do with himself next, may begin to remember that he has a mind, and that the mind may be made the source of great pleasure.¹²⁰

In both the above there existed an optimism that material satisfaction would be followed by moral or intellectual improvement. But in both the assumption was that this *post*-material improvement would or should *follow*, not accompany, material improvement. A logical implication of this was that a renewal of economic problems would necessitate setting post-material issues aside.

IV

The 1970s were a decade of disillusionment for progressives. Labour was surprisingly defeated in the 1970 election, returned to office in 1974, but was then defeated again in 1979, and did not return to government until 1997. Economic growth under Wilson had not been as fast as had been hoped, and in the 1970s the economy experienced stagflation. There was also a growing suspicion, articulated by Roy Jenkins, in a speech in Anglesey in January 1976, as home secretary, that consistently increasing levels of public expenditure were not achieving the desired level of social progress.¹²¹ Crosland, more than any other post-war thinker, seemed to represent a confidence in the characteristic features of post-war policy and government thinking, belief in the mixed economy and an expanding welfare state. So Foote rightly comments that the disappointing performance of the economy had 'dire results for Crosland's revisionism'.¹²² Amongst these were the electoral success of Margaret Thatcher and a loss of confidence in centre-left ideas that has not yet been reversed.

However, these results were not only a product of the relative decline of the British economy. Insufficient generosity and uninformed views amongst the public were hindering social democracy as much as inadequate levels of economic growth or mistaken policies. As secretary of state for the environment in August 1974, Crosland reflected that it was 'now clear: redistn. of RSG [Rate Support Grant] morally & socially absolutely right, but pol. [itically] definitely wrong. Good & Socialist policies *not* electorally popular.'¹²³ He wrote in his third major political book, *Socialism now*, published in 1974, that increasing public discontentment was 'often (and naturally enough, given the fact of inflation) selfish and negative rather

¹²⁰ See citation from Arnold's *Essays in criticism* (1895 edn), p. 17, in Crosland, *Future of socialism*, pp. 291-2.

¹²¹ Campbell, *Jenkins*, p. 175.

¹²² Foote, *Political thought*, p. 228.

¹²³ Reflections, Aug. 1974, C 16/8, 12.

than radical and positive'.¹²⁴ This perspective, which suggests that, in explaining the failures of social democracy by the 1970s, one must look to public mindsets as much as government levers, was displayed again in a Fabian tract published in December 1975, just over a year before his death, which noted that 'people make more and more incompatible (and often unreasonable) demands on government'.¹²⁵ Bevan had focused similarly, though more pessimistically still, on public mindsets at the time of the 1959 general election, which produced Labour's third successive defeat. He

greatly feared that the British working class on whom he had pinned his hopes had been seduced by their televisions and consumer goods from the path of socialism and that it might now be impossible to get them back to it. 'History gave them their chance – and they didn't take it', he told Geoffrey Goodman during the [1959] election. 'Now it is probably too late.'¹²⁶

But if part of the 'problem' lay with public mindsets, what were Labour thinkers or politicians doing to change them? Giving priority to educational improvement may have gradually produced a more informed politics. Yet Bevan, not least because he himself had 'hated school', 'could hardly listen patiently to a discussion of formal education'.¹²⁷ In the 1970s, Crosland lowered education in his list of priorities for the Labour party.¹²⁸ Major reforms in education had already been carried out in the 1960s, including the move towards comprehensives, and the promotion of polytechnics, by Crosland himself. But there were also more fundamental reasons for this reprioritization. During a radio interview in April 1974 he pointed to research 'which suggests that we were inclined, 20 years ago, to exaggerate the effect of education, taken alone, on people's life chances, and so on'.¹²⁹ Crosland had been influenced by research, such as that in Jencks's *Inequality*, published in America in 1972, which had stated that 'children seem to be far more influenced by what happens at home than by what happens in school'.¹³⁰ Not only was it difficult for politicians to change minds, but it was difficult even for teachers, who sought more consciously to do so. In this sense, to shift focus away from policy on schools to other apparently more effective means of improving minds might have been intellectually coherent. However, Crosland's reprioritization was not just about means, but also reflected the fact that improving minds was not his central aim. He had seen the reform of the structure of education as a way of increasing social mobility, promoting mixing between social classes, and increasing economic efficiency, but was less explicit about the role of education in improving

¹²⁴ A. Crosland, *Socialism now and other essays* (London, 1974), p. 54.

¹²⁵ See A. Crosland, *Social democracy in Europe*, Fabian tract 438 (Dec. 1975), pp. 13–14.

¹²⁶ J. Campbell, *Nye Bevan and the mirage of British socialism* (London, 1987), p. 364.

¹²⁷ M. Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: a biography*, 1 (London, 1962), p. 20.

¹²⁸ Jottings, Aug. 1975, C 16/8, 23.

¹²⁹ Interview with George Gale, Apr. 1974, C 13/20, 327.

¹³⁰ C. Jencks, *Inequality: a reassessment of the effect of family and schooling in America* (London, 1973), p. 255.

minds, though this aim was sometimes implicit in the other objectives.¹³¹ Shirley Williams, who served under him as a minister of state at the DES in the 1960s, commented that ‘in some ways you could say, I think, that he was quite a lot more interested in school organization than in school content’.¹³² There was a flexibility in the degree of importance Crosland attached to education which differentiated him from his fellow egalitarian Tawney, for whom education had been, in itself, a lifelong passion.¹³³

It was not only the public who were not ‘genuinely’ social democratic. The same was true of much of the Labour party. For if a more social democratic society was fundamentally one made up of more caring, thoughtful, and sensitive individuals, then part of the reason the Labour party had failed to focus enough on promoting such a society was that many of its own members and leaders were not themselves sufficiently caring, thoughtful, and sensitive to help others to be. This seems an obvious point, but has rarely been made. It reduced the importance to the Labour party of the aim of improving minds. But it also reduced the importance to the party of the reforming technique of setting a good personal example. Of course, one cannot calculate the precise beneficial, progressive impact of good personal example, or the related display of consistency between words and actions, nor the importance of these relative to other reforming techniques, such as policy changes or economic reforms. But that does not mean historians can afford to ignore them. Cohen makes the valid point that the relationship between egalitarian ideas and the actual choices of professed egalitarians has not been considered a subject for serious intellectual analysis:

I remember the late Harold (eventually Lord) Lever, a Manchester millionaire and right-hand man to Harold Wilson, replying to callers on a phone-in show in the Seventies, when the topic, momentarily, was the Labour Party’s then danger of insolvency. One caller asked Lever what I thought was a good question, whatever its answer should have been. Why, Lever was asked, did he not personally wipe out Labour’s debt, by giving it the few millions that it needed, after which he’d still have plenty left? What struck me was that Lever did not answer the question, and that his talk-show host did not think that he should. They treated the question as ridiculous and its poser as impertinent.¹³⁴

Labour thinkers have not thought enough about attempting to answer the monetarist Milton Friedman’s point that ‘equality of outcome can be promoted on a do-it-yourself basis’. ‘You can, if you are an egalitarian, estimate what money income would correspond to your concept of equality. If your actual income is higher than that, you can keep that amount and distribute the rest to people who are below that level.’¹³⁵

¹³¹ For examples of Crosland’s (unsystematic) attention to the aims of education see Crosland, *Future of socialism*, pp. 134, 193, 208, 215, 234, 236–7, 260, and 274, and Crosland, *Conservative enemy*, p. 176.

¹³² Int.: Shirley Williams, 27 Mar. 2001.

¹³³ R. Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and his times: socialism as fellowship* (London, 1974), pp. 37, 63, 99–100, and 117.

¹³⁴ Cohen, *If you’re an egalitarian*, p. 152.

¹³⁵ M. and R. Friedman, *Free to choose: a personal statement* (London, 1980), p. 141.

The issue is not only one of personal expenditure. To rephrase the title of Cohen's book, so as to pose some different questions to Labour politicians: *If you're an egalitarian, how come you're so personally politically ambitious to rise above colleagues, or how come you allow devotion to political work to mean neglect of your family, who presumably warrant as much attention as other people's?* In 1952, Labour's leader and ex-prime minister, Clement Attlee, had claimed that it was 'a thing you cannot emphasize too much – that socialism demands a higher standard of conduct than capitalism ... our movement is judged very largely by what our people are like'.¹³⁶ Writing ten years later, Crosland called for 'a savage and sustained offensive, conducted by all socialists in all their personal and political activities, and by example as well as precept, against the national vices of materialism, philistinism, and social separatism'.¹³⁷ Crosland liked words to be reflected by actions, sending his own step-children to comprehensive secondary schools, and rebelling against the wearing of what he considered overly formal dress at official functions, partly, as Ian Little suggests, in the belief that if he 'refused to wear a dinner jacket he was promoting social equality'.¹³⁸ Yet there were both theoretical and personal limits to the reforming value Crosland attached to personal example. His criticism of the Labour left was based partly on a feeling that their admittedly highly principled actions 'have a purely exemplary value'.¹³⁹ Crosland was a man of action who wanted rapid results, but also a man of considerable personal ambition, although this was more restrained than that of most colleagues by his greater reluctance to promote himself.¹⁴⁰

Like many senior politicians, Crosland experienced a tension between work and family commitments in the 1960s and 1970s, when, however, his personal life became more settled, due to the success of his second marriage in 1964. His moral, puritan side came a little more to the fore. In the second half of 1967, he noted to himself of *Dr Zhivago* that 'I have not read a novel wh. evoked a clearer sense that it was a work of genius', 'most of all' because of 'the wisdom & compassion, the totally legitimate sentiment, the overpowering moral force, the sense of love, of personal relations, of family, of domesticity, of all that is enduring as against what is transient & fashionable'.¹⁴¹ And in a speech given in Greenwich on 1 July 1972, admittedly at the Festival of International Co-operation, he insisted that a successful prices and incomes policy to combat inflation required 'a return to the old Co-operative Rochdale spirit – a sense of obligation to a wider good, thought for others as well as for ourselves, and a more puritan self-government of our own desires and lives'.¹⁴² Crosland, as we have noted, retained specific puritanical characteristics, but the nearest he came to having a god was in his loyalty to the Labour party. As his friend, Roy Hattersley points out, 'the Labour party was, in a sense, the abiding feature of his life. It was the church, the chapel, the belief'.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Cited in Black, 'Social democracy', p. 523. ¹³⁷ Crosland, *Conservative enemy*, p. 27.

¹³⁸ Int.: Little, 16 Nov. 1999.

¹³⁹ See Crosland, *Conservative enemy*, pp. 143–4.

¹⁴⁰ Int.: Hattersley, 12 Jan. 2000.

¹⁴¹ C 16/7, 5.

¹⁴² C 13/24, 96.

¹⁴³ Int.: Hattersley, 12 Jan. 2000.

He had placed his faith in an institution in which caring was a strand rather than a guiding light.

V

Three concluding points emphasize the limits of this article as well as clarify its purpose. First, it is necessary to explore the attitudes of a wider range of Labour figures to the issue of the improvement of minds, including those operating at grassroots level, in order to integrate the theme into general histories of the party. Comparisons with the Conservative party could usefully be drawn. In some post-war ideological battles the right has seemed more concerned with the 'inner life' than the left, defending traditional moral codes against 'permissiveness',¹⁴⁴ or academic excellence in education.¹⁴⁵ Its concern, though, has usually been less ambitious: to preserve what 'goodness' and intelligence exist, more than to increase the number who possess them. Yet Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s clearly sought to transform assumptions and aspirations. As Jenkins notes she '*taught* [my italics] more people to want to own their homes'.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, the article groups together morals, intellect, and emotional sensitivity. In future these could be usefully separated, and the tensions between them and sub-divisions within them in relation to the Labour party more fully explored. Thirdly, this article does not suggest that issues of the mind offer a master key to an appreciation of Labour party history. Labour's weaknesses stemmed from many factors, some of them contradictory. It suffered from wrong economic decisions, mistakes of electoral strategy, institutional constraints, too much connection to the trade unions, too little connection to them, and too little willingness to resort to nastiness in contrast to some of its opponents. But it also suffered because its members and leaders, and the British people, were not caring, thoughtful, or sensitive enough to achieve its professed aims, and this causal factor requires closer scrutiny.

¹⁴⁴ Soper, in McLellan and Sayers, eds., *Socialism*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁵ N. Annan, *Our age: the generation that made post-war Britain* (London, 1995), p. 491.

¹⁴⁶ P. Jenkins, *Mrs Thatcher's revolution: the ending of the socialist era* (London, 1989), p. 379.