3

Doubling Back to Utopia

“Unlike market-driven politics, a politics of the common good

invites us to think of ourselves less as consumers, and

more as citizens” – Michael Sandel[[1]](#footnote-1)

“We need to remake the argument about the nature of the public

good. This is going to be a long road. But it would be irresponsible

to pretend there is any serious alternative” – Tony Judt[[2]](#footnote-2)

“Utopia entails refusal – the refusal to accept that living beyond the present

is delusional, the refusal to take at face value current judgements of

the good or claims that there is no alternative” – Ruth Levitas[[3]](#footnote-3)

“The idea that ‘there is no alternative’ is never the statement of an economic fact;

it is always the perpetration of a political fiction” – Colin Hay & Anthony Payne[[4]](#footnote-4)

“You have to behave as if the revolution is here. That’s

how it will happen” – A H Halsey[[5]](#footnote-5)

“Nothing is more otherworldly than the assumption that the

world as we know it is here to stay” – Terry Eagleton[[6]](#footnote-6)

“People with strong intrinsic values must cease to be embarrassed

by them. We should argue for the policies we want not on the

grounds of expediency but on the grounds that they are

empathic and kind” – George Monbiot[[7]](#footnote-7)

Political apostasy

In the period 1995 to 2008 I ceased ideologically to self-identify as a Marxist, embracing instead a mode of social democratic revisionism, the public face of which was called ‘New Labour’. These years of political apostasy, which is how I now regard them, like my original embracing of communism, had both emotional and intellectual roots. Emotionally, they were linked to the miserable aftermath of electoral defeat, specifically the Labour Party’s failure to win each of the 1983, 1987 and 1992 general elections;[[8]](#footnote-8) while intellectually they coincided with the emergence in the mid-90s of an influential form of political argument which shunned the kind of traditional Left-Right, either-or, dichotomies which, at the time, mistakenly, I was also beginning to doubt the continuing relevance of.

Even a weak Labour government is preferable to a Tory one, entirely because it is far more likely to adopt policies that favor the interests of society’s most disadvantaged members. For this socialist activist, the idea of uninterrupted Tory rule therefore constitutes a kind of waking nightmare. And, in 1993, this dystopian vision represented a highly likely prospect. For Labour was then a party in disarray, leaking both members and general support on an industrial scale, making it implausible to imagine that any time soon it might again enjoy general electoral success. It is one thing for me calmly to assume that the Labour Party can never inaugurate socialism through parliamentary means, quite another to contemplate dispassionately the idea that its progressive influence might not be fully felt at Westminster. It was obvious therefore that Labour would need fundamentally to re-invent itself if it was reasonably to anticipate a return to office. ‘New Labour’, of course, was what ultimately made the difference five years later, in 1997. However, my conversion to New Labour’s so-called ‘modernizing’ agenda was made possible less by the market-driven perspectives that lay at its heart, which I never found convincing, and rather more by the philosophy of the so-called ‘Third Way’, a freshly-minted version of social democracy, with which it was initially associated by some of its in-house academics, which I did find both plausible and persuasive.

At the heart of Third Way thinking is the notion that today’s high-modern society eschews class conflict and social collectivism in favor of an individualized culture in which people make things happen for themselves. Labour’s renewed petition to the electorate accordingly must be pitched away from a politics based on factionalism and social dependency towards one grounded in self-help and personal enablement, to which is allied the idea of the citizen as consumer rather than user of public services.[[9]](#footnote-9) A key theoretical architect of this way of thinking was the prominent British sociologist, Anthony Giddens, whose writings about it I found very attractive at the time,[[10]](#footnote-10) even publishing two essays of my own in which the concept of the Third Way features prominently.[[11]](#footnote-11) I began to mimic Giddens’ view that helping people to ‘make things happen’ requires a re-constituted state that downplays its role as monopolistic provider of welfare services, strengthening instead its capacity to create regulatory frameworks within which public, private and voluntary sectors co-operate. And, like Giddens, I became noted for arguing in favor of a politics that was ‘beyond Left and Right’, soaring effortlessly above historic clashes of interest, creating a society in which citizens live together harmoniously, constructing a culture in common through new forms of participatory democracy.

I was easily beguiled. But then such a vision is very attractive, not least because it is based on an acute analysis of the changing nature of society, including crucially the impact of new forms of communication, leading to alterations in modes of production and wealth creation and human relations generally.[[12]](#footnote-12) The mistake I made was to equate this analysis, which has many insightful features, with New Labour’s economic vision, which has none. Whatever was I thinking of? I am sure I was thinking too much about electoral politics, and Labour’s failure to win three successive general elections, which is deeply paradoxical, given my negative assessment of what can be achieved through parliamentary majorities, suggesting therefore on my part a momentary loss of political and economic intelligence, not to mention ideological understanding.

And it’s not as if there weren’t enough warnings around at the time about the poverty of analysis contained in both New Labour and the Third Way, emanating from commentators whose views normally I take very seriously, but which inexplicably I foolishly failed to heed. Eric Hobsbawm and Will Hutton, for example, criticised Giddens’ Third Way, and by inference New Labour’s interpretation of it, for lacking a sufficiently robust political economy capable of taking on the narrow vested interests of capitalism;[[13]](#footnote-13) while Stuart Hall, one of my foremost intellectual parents, condemned it for failing to grasp the most basic of political points – that serious attempts to make societies fairer always entail struggle between competing centres of power and influence. As he said at the time: “a project to transform and modernise society in a radical direction which does not disturb any existing interests and which has no enemies is not a serious political enterprise.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

But New Labour found it all very serviceable, reconstructing its image as a centrist (neither Left nor Right) party, appealing directly to the so-called ‘middle-ground’ of British politics. And it worked, the penny fully dropping at the 1997 general election, when, led by Tony Blair, the Labour Party inflicted on the Tories its worse defeat since 1906, achieving an unprecedented overall majority in the House of Commons of 188 seats, capturing over 43% of the popular vote on the back of a swing in its favour of nearly 9%.[[15]](#footnote-15)

I don’t mind admitting I was ecstatic at such an extraordinary outcome, made all the more pleasing by the fact I had for three weeks campaigned energetically to bring it about in London’s Poplar & Canning Town constituency, where I then lived.[[16]](#footnote-16) My excitement was grounded entirely in the knowledge that, after eighteen uninterrupted years, the Tories were at last out of government. Something new was about to happen in British politics. But what this would look like was not at all clear from the set of policies New Labour had fought the election on, and which I had enthusiastically door-stepped in support of in East London.

Election manifestos are rarely read by electors, including most party activists. That does not make them unimportant, however, for they represent a statement of priorities. Labour’s manifesto of 1997, which had seven, several of which strike me still as significantly progressive, such as the promise to introduce a national minimum wage; to hold devolution referenda for Wales and Scotland; and to get a quarter of a million under 25-year olds off benefit and into work.

More routinely, Labour also pledged to cut both school class sizes and hospital waiting lists; more controversially, it gave an undertaking to fast-track persistent young offenders. However, as far as economic policy is concerned, there was a huge lacuna, apart from vote-winning assurances not to raise income tax and to reduce VAT on fuel to 5%. As to the state ownership of the means of production, Tony Blair was unequivocal, saying bullishly during the campaign that the “presumption should be that economic activity is best left to the private sector".

In 1997, Labour thus made a virtue of identifying as a party that would not rock the boat, particularly on the economy. It re-branded itself as ‘new’, but there was nothing in its approach, either to fiscal or social matters, to suggest a major break with the past. What it had cleverly invented instead was a strategy to get itself elected, purposely leaving out of consideration arguments about the necessity to redistribute wealth away from the most well off towards society’s poorer sections. I write that now, but at the time, shamefully, I did not notice this regressive omission. What the Labour Party historian David Coates says in what follows describes accurately the gap in my thinking at that juncture: “It was not that Labour had formulated a new and telling platform that drew the electorate to some qualitatively distinct and novel position on some ideological map. The rise of New Labour to power in 1997 was much more the product of Labour chasing an electorate that was shaped by ideological forces other than that of Labour itself. New Labour won more through the quality of its market research team than the sharpness of its break with previous political orthodoxies.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

New Labour’s manifestos for the 2001 and 2005 general elections[[18]](#footnote-18), at each of which it again enjoyed electoral success, albeit with diminishing return,[[19]](#footnote-19) continued the middle-of-the road trend set in 1997, but with one significant difference – on both occasions it was able to extol its role in helping to create untroubled political and social conditions across much of the country, including a seemingly effectively managed economy bursting at its seems, the tax income from which had been heavily invested in the UK’s public services, especially education and health.

While I know now that this contentment and prosperity were each based on unreliable cash flows from high finance, including a house-price bubble waiting to burst, it didn’t seem like that at the time. Like most Party members, I allowed myself to be persuaded that the money from both sources would flow forever, and without causing long-term harm, which explains why I continued to give Labour my support, though this was worn very thin, ultimately to snapping point, by the time of its defeat in the 2010 general election.[[20]](#footnote-20)

5 out of 10

How then did New Labour use its power between 1997 and 2010? Rather than chronicle closely what it successfully achieved and failed to realise,[[21]](#footnote-21) which isn’t my purpose here, I will comment instead on my memories of it all, reflecting in particular on the way in which specific initiatives and measures caused me either to feel very pleased or extremely disappointed.

Like many people, I have a tendency to remember things in 3s. However, on this occasion, my memory extends to ‘two 5s’ – five positive memories of New Labour rule, and five negative ones of it. Positively, I recall its New Deal for the unemployed, which levered hundreds of thousands of young people and single-parents into work; its attempt to get to grips with child poverty; its creation of a minimum wage; its tenacity in beginning to sort out Northern Ireland; and its increased investment in health care. Negatively, I call to mind its divisive policies for the re-organization of state schooling; its complete failure to encourage significant new house builds; its disastrous interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq; its failure adequately to subordinate the financial services sector; and its limited success in making British society a more equal and fairer one. Of the five negatives listed here, it is last one that ultimately tipped me out of the Third Way and back into utopian socialism.

Funded by £5 millions obtained from a windfall tax slapped on the privatised gas and electricity giants and BT, which were each making huge profits, Labour’s ‘tough but tender’ New Deal put in place procedures to help 18 to 25 year olds over obstacles to finding work. And it succeeded, at least in the beginning, so that by 2005 over five-hundred thousand long-term-unemployed young people found a job. The scheme was extended subsequently to lone parents, whose employment rate rose from 45% in 1997 to nearly 60% twelve years later. This was Labour at its best, I thought.

Also meritorious was its ambitious stab at reducing child poverty. In 2000, Blair, in a moment of astonishing political hubris, promised to abolish it completely within twenty years, reaching half the target by 2010. While aspiration proved easier than attainment, New Labour’s system of tax credits and its increases in child benefit did make a dent in the problem, helping nearly two million children to live better lives than might otherwise have been the case. The overall rate of poverty was also reduced, though not by very much, a mere 3%, from 25.3% in 1997 to 22.5% in 2008. Like many on the Left, I wish New Labour had achieved a lot more in this area of social policy. The truth is it failed to throw sufficient money in its direction, which would have required middle income earners to be taxed more, a sector of society the leadership was fearful of antagonizing. This was sadly typical of New Labour’s pusillanimous attitude to increasing state revenues via redistributive effort.

I admired far more its introduction in 1998 of the minimum wage. Starting at £3.60 an hour for adults, it immediately pushed up the pay of 1.2 million low-paid workers, most of them women. When New Labour left office in 2010, the rate was £5.91, an achievement of sorts, I suppose, though it needs to be said that this sum is hardly sufficient to constitute a ‘living wage’, which most campaigners in the field say should be at least £7. Once again, New Labour had the right idea, but not the necessary political will to carry it off properly.

It showed greater energy in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement in March 1998, which started normalizing life in that benighted part of the UK, was a personal triumph for the PM, who showed enormous resolve in making good the deal, bringing together, against considerable odds, the various disputing factions, eventually making them sign up to it. It was maybe Blair’s finest hour, the events of which I enjoyed watching unfold through live TV coverage, not least because it connected with that part of my identity which is Irish (my father was born in the Republic), and the fact I had worked in Belfast for a while in the 70s, at the height of the ‘Troubles’, retaining strong emotional and personal links with the city as a result.

My feelings about the need for a vibrant and flourishing national health service were given a boost as well by New Labour’s regular investments of cash into the sector - annual 7% increases in funding, enabling additional hospitals to be built, staffed by a welter of newly trained doctors and nurses, not to mention a related huge increase in the number of GPs, whose numbers grew by four thousand. Overall, NHS staff was boosted by an incredible 26% from 1997 - 272,000 more in a decade. The result was plain for all to see: a better and more efficient service. What was less obviously visible however were the misguided PFI deals brokered by New Labour with private investors to help fund the building of new hospitals, the cumulative effect of which is that the NHS is currently economically hamstrung by over £80 billions of loan unitary charges which will take decades to repay. Indeed, as I write, dozens of NHS trusts are crippled by these PFI repayments, using in some cases up to 20% of their annual budgets on interest payments alone, suggesting that the health service was not made financially safe by New Labour.

Its record has other debit sides, including its policies for school education, which I experienced as divisive in many parts and frequently unnecessary in others. True, it doubled cash spending on schools between 1997 and 2009, but far too much of this new money was used to fund initiatives that restructured the system – academies and faith schools, notably - with no obvious overall benefit in helping to close significantly the achievement gap between children from well-off and economically disadvantaged socio-economic groups.[[22]](#footnote-22) Rather than improve directly the quality of teaching and learning that went on in all schools, 40% of which continued to fail to provide a good education, successive Education Secretaries seemed more anxious to make schooling a commodity or private good, over-stressing the importance of parental choice, rather than constructing it as a high quality public resource. To achieve the latter would have meant building up the capacity of local comprehensives, particularly those located in areas of cumulative social deprivation, as was the case in the so-called ‘London Challenge’, first introduced in 2003, and extended subsequently to other cities, such as Manchester, from 2007.[[23]](#footnote-23) But these worthy initiatives were too local in their effects to have much national impact.

To be sure, in the years from 1997 to 2008, government spending on each pupil in schools rose by nearly a third. But this was accompanied by a host of centrally-mandated micro-management initiatives, often linked to attainment targets, which led some of them publicly to be ‘named and shamed’ when they didn’t shape up. New buildings, equipment, books and desks were in plentiful supply - no doubt about that - but high teacher morale wasn’t, caused entirely by Labour’s insufficient trust in the willingness of schools to make good on failings which they recognised needed redressing.

Labour’s military interventions in each of Afghanistan and Iraq were far nastier. Both were prosecuted against the background of a catalogue of wholesale misstatements and sometimes outright dishonesty. The war in Afghanistan, first begun in October 2001, was justified by the PM on the grounds that its borders harboured scores of Al Qaeda training camps, whose existence posed a threat to Western security, and so had to be eliminated. Our ignominious retreat from the region thirteen years later however was completed in the knowledge that this military objective, plus a host of others, had not been met: there is no improved government in Kabul; there has not been any hoped-for economic reconstruction; and Helmand Provence, which was our main theatre of operations, is even more a recruiting sergeant for terrorism and jihadism.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The UK’s support of the US’s invasion of Iraq, which began eighteen months later, in March 2003, was warranted by the PM’s reference to something else altogether, that which we now know did not exist, namely weapons of mass destruction.[[25]](#footnote-25) He claimed these were not just stock-piled in Iraq, but aimed in our direction as well. But Blair did not know any of this; he only believed it; and on the basis of very limited evidence, which was made to look better than it was. The nation and parliament were taken in, including this particular Party member, and a shockingly high number of Iraqi civilians – it’s estimated over 100,000[[26]](#footnote-26) – have been killed in the cross-fire of the general chaos and murderous sectarian violence which has followed. [[27]](#footnote-27)

New Labour in power was always desperate never to get caught out of position by public opinion. Yet, as millions of people turned out to demonstrate against its intention to wage war in Iraq - which dishonourably did not include me - it ignored their protests and went ahead. At other times, and about other policies, it was ostentatiously populist, cravenly courting Tory press proprietors, editors and columnists, seeking at every turn to please voters rather than challenge them, which maybe explains its failure ever to advocate the practical and moral case for wealth and income redistribution. By 2010, New Labour in fact made no pretence to have a single plan to tackle either, emphasising instead a ‘choice’ agenda, which it mistakenly assumed to be a necessary, almost sufficient, condition for improving public services.

A depressing lack of political courage was particularly shown in New Labour’s craven approach to investment bankers. Fear of this powerful vested interest paralysed its ministers. Indeed, even after the crash of 2008, given a chance to start anew, New Labour could not break its habit of bowing to the demands of financial capital, steering steadfastly away from advocating new taxes on wealth, property and inherited income. And, as for reeling in and differently regulating the investment banking sector, so as to restrain its dangerous financial risk-taking, which persists to this day, New Labour had nothing to offer.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The most telling criticism of New Labour economic thinking is then that it encouraged the City of London to become the Wild West capital of global finance, while allowing the UK’s public finances to deteriorate in the years before the crash, naively mistaking an old-fashioned real estate and credit boom for sustainable growth. To that extent, as even the New Labour sympathizer, Dan Dorry, has said, “a serious analysis of financial capital was missing from [Labour’s] thinking.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

Blair once said that if he did not leave behind an economically fairer Britain he would have failed. Well, he failed; and he failed badly. In 1997, the year he first became PM, the wealthiest 5% of the UK population owned 49% of its marketable wealth. In 2010, when New Labour left office, this group owned over 60% of it, while the richest 1% had seen their share of the overall pot rise from 26% to 34%. It’s simply not good enough then for New Labour apologists to tell me insistently that during the Blair years growth and employment were well above average, because these ‘good times’ were never enjoyed equitably. Redistribution in fact was always of secondary importance to New Labour. What mattered more was getting people into work, even useless, dead-end, work, growing the economy, and increasing productivity, which meant New Labour did not worry overly that both childhood and pensioner poverty actually increased on its watch in 2006-7.[[30]](#footnote-30) Indeed, by setting almost all of its sights on tackling low incomes, New Labour took its eye off the ball of reducing inequality overall, allowing the gap between the less well off and the very rich to increase to absurd levels ignoring its highly negative consequences for our public finances and ultimately social cohesion and democratic practice.

New Labour did so because it believed in the falsehood that is ‘trickle down’, which is why it proved a benign party of government under which to be very wealthy. It did next to nothing to redress fundamentally the gross unfairness that is inscribed in the UK’s rates of personal income tax, the revenue burdens of which fall least heavily on the wealthiest. In 1979, the top fifth of earners paid 38% of their income in tax and the poorest fifth about 31%. By 2010, this pattern had reversed, with the richest tenth paying 35%, and the poorest tenth contributing 43%.[[31]](#footnote-31) On tax, during the New Labour years, there was then no ‘great moving Left show’, but rather a ‘great moving nowhere pantomime’. Indeed, during its time in government, New Labour failed to tax as much as conservative-led Germany, France and all of the Scandinavian countries. It also largely ignored the need better to house the less well-off. New builds fizzled out radically during the New Labour years. Between 1979 and 1996 the total building for houses by local authorities and by registered social landlords was nearly a million; from 1997 to 2008 the figure was less than 300,000.

Which is why ultimately I lost faith in New Labour as a party of government, concluding that its broad acceptance of capitalist rationality is merely a kinder version of conservative retrenchment. Ralph Miliband, writing in 1983 about the Wilson-Callaghan years, anticipates then what I feel today about the Blair-Brown ones: “It was the Wilson and Callaghan governments that made war on industrial activists; and that persistently sought to curb wages under the guise of income policies, wage norms, social contracts and national agreements. Nor could Labour’s policies claim any measure of success: after a combined period of eleven years of Labour Governments from 1964 until 1979, with a Conservative interruption of only four years, there was no major improvement in the British condition to which Labour could point. Meanwhile, the rich prospered; and so did a Labour state bourgeoisie loud in its denunciation of militants and wreckers who were spoiling their enjoyment of the pleasures of office.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Ideologically, New Labour did much the same, reproducing a political discourse inherited from the Thatcher-Major years dominated by the axioms and categories of neo-liberalism. In its post-New Labour period, the party has not irrevocably distanced itself from that inheritance. In particular, to quote David Coates again, “it has yet to break from a public discourse in which taxation is presented, not as a welcome source of a valuable social wage, but as an unwelcome extraction from an entirely private one. It has yet to break free from a discourse in which public ownership, public funding and the public direction of economic and social activity have to justify themselves in ways that private ownership, private funding and private direction do not. It has yet to break free from a discourse that treats the private ownership of the means of production as a guarantee of enterprise, growth and efficiency, rather than of inequality, instability and overproduction. [ . . .] Lacking any economic theory which is critical of capitalism, Labour is wide open to simple business definitions of the public interest because it has no other reference point. [. . . ] The key question before the Labour Party now concerns the recalibration of its whole project. It is about the direction in which the party (and its electorate) will and should be led.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

Towards utopia

My political direction of choice is one that leads to a utopian social and economic political order – specifically, a socialist-communist society grounded in the politics of the common good. While I know that utopian thinking does not currently enjoy a fashionable reputation, there is surely a strong case for undertaking it, not least because it has the capacity successfully to challenge views that are presented as immutable.[[34]](#footnote-34) The Marxist sociologist, Ruth Levitas, who has championed a distinctive conception of utopia as ‘desire’ and ‘method’, with which I broadly agree, says this about it: “it facilitates genuine holistic thinking about possible futures, combined with reflexivity, provisionality and democratic engagement with the principles and practices of those futures”.[[35]](#footnote-35) Thus conceived, and despite commonplace pejorative interpretations of the word, ‘utopianism’ does not have to denote something that is absurdly fanciful and therefore unattainable, pointing up rather a *process* for arriving at innovative practical solutions to complex enduring problems.[[36]](#footnote-36) To that extent, there is maybe a case for seeing utopianism and realism as two sides of the same political coin, which is E P Thompson’s argument when he says that they should not “form into rival contingents, but rather quarrel with each other in a constructive way in the heart of the same movement”.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In any event, to be a political realist one must first surely be a political idealist, a utopian, even – that is, someone who knows what in the grand scheme of things it is important to be realistic about? As my hero Michael Foot once wrote, “the idealism of today is often the realism of the future”.[[38]](#footnote-38) Without a clear alternative, in this case the outline of what an equal and sustainable society should look like, there is the danger that the Right’s parameters, which ultimately seek to maintain things fundamentally as they are, become the only ones. But this is daft. As I wrote before, it makes no sense to seek to solve our deep social and economic problems, which centre crucially on massive inequalities of income and wealth, using ideas which helped to create them in the first place. And mocking my socialist ideas because they can’t be proved to be right is not helpful either. The future can’t be fully fact checked; you can’t perform a five-point credibility test on a radical vision. As Zoe Williams says, “if you won’t speak your dreams until they’re fully costed, you’ll end up living in someone else’s nightmare”.[[39]](#footnote-39) Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams’ recently issued defence of utopian thinking in politics argues similarly: “Utopias give us something to aim for – something beyond the stale repetition of the same offered by the eternal present of capitalism.”[[40]](#footnote-40) To remake our broken society, we thus need to break free from the ideas which have got us to where we are now, and envisage something much better, by which I mean a society in which poverty is eradicated and in which cooperation and reciprocity are its guiding norms. But I am not overly confident that this will happen without a lot of pressure being put on elected representatives in parliament. For thinking in new ways about old political problems remains a rare and even undervalued commodity. This is less, I sometimes think, a question of arguing the case for a whole new economic system, than taking an existing set of facts and exploring innovative ways of addressing them.

Socialist taxes

In my case, such thinking turns on making effective a set of measures designed radically to halt and redress the negative consequences – personal and social - of growing income and wealth disparity. These measures, each of which envisages a new form of direct taxation, were merely listed earlier. Now I will say more about them.[[41]](#footnote-41)

(1) *The introduction of a graduated personal income tax levied on each of the 300,000 UK citizens whose annual earnings presently exceed, many by huge sums, £160,000 a year*. Although I envisage this tax being targeted at all those who earn annually over £160,000, its effects would be chiefly felt by those very big earners employed in the financial sector and in large-scale corporations who benefit from huge year-on-year bonuses. What is needed is a severe tax on such bonus pots, accompanied by a graduated tax on very high earnings, starting with a 50% rate for those on £160,000 per annum, with an extra 5% for every £100,000 above that, rising to a maximum of 90%. This would give a banker with a gross annual income of £1 million a net salary of about £330,000.

(2) *The introduction of an* *80% tax on the accumulated wealth of those three million ‘super rich’ people in the UK who between them own assets valued at over £4 trillion.* This idea is strongly advocated by Thomas Piketty in his book *Capital,* though on a more ambitious global-regional scale than I am proposing here.[[42]](#footnote-42) But it does not originate with him, having been proposed in Ireland in 2013, and implemented earlier in several other European nations. I am told by critics that such a wealth tax, if legislated for in the UK, would simply result in many of its richest individuals transferring their great wealth to lower tax jurisdictions. This objection is not as strong as they think, for by far the greatest proportion of such accumulated wealth takes the form of land and property, which are fixed rather than fluid assets. Indeed, there is surely good sense in the further suggestion that land and property values, in the absence of a fully nationalised land scheme, should be considered as a special form of unearned wealth accumulation and so made subject to separate and greater tax liability. In this connection, it has been calculated that a tax of just 1% on the £5 trillion value of land in Britain would raise immediately a minimum of £50 billion.

(3) *The introduction of a system of state-controlled fair rents affecting both land and property*. The effects of this measure, conjoined with the one just outlined, would be to cut back the sources of unearned income which the rich presently enjoy from extracting excessive rent from the rest of society. Wanting to change land and property rights in this way is not an attack on private ownership *per se*, but a means instead of curbing the amount of ripping off that accompanies the currently restrictive tenure of land and other real estate. Clearly, such a proposal would need to be regionally sensitive.

(4) *The introduction of a universal unconditional basic income.* One of the attractions of the idea that every citizen should be granted as of right a basic income (UBI), set at a level that would allow them each to meet their socially recognized subsistence needs, is that it would not just foster greater equality, but also help to emancipate workers from the dictates of capital. Indeed, such a basic income would radically alter the bargaining power between labour and capital, since potential workers would be in a position, if they chose, to pursue alternatives or supplements to paid employment, enabling them to live how they want to, while simultaneously developing their capacities. The creation of such a basic income would not be as difficult as many of its critics assume, since it would largely entail consolidating many existing welfare transfer schemes, while replacing others that are riddled with complexity and arbitrary and discretionary conditionality, though it would not be cheap to implement.[[43]](#footnote-43) And there is no reason to think it would encourage and reward sloth. For the basic income does not preclude those in receipt of it from seeking employment to top up their earnings.[[44]](#footnote-44) And, anyhow, as Levitas provocatively asks, what’s wrong in doing a form of nothing if it enables better social relations and denaturalizes the link between employment and the means to life.[[45]](#footnote-45)

(5) *The institution of* *radical changes to the regulations that currently govern the ways in which financial organizations operate, so that their high-risk speculative activities are more closely monitored by the state, and their tax evasion and avoidance practices are brought to an end.* A crucial element of any new regulatory framework must be a fresh assault on the use made by investors to hide their money away in so-called tax havens. It’s estimated that the global super-rich off-load at least £13 trillions in this way, which is a sum equal to the size of the US and Japanese economies combined. Nearly half of this cash, moreover, is held in British Crown Dependencies and Offshore Territories.[[46]](#footnote-46) In 2008, the US Government Accountability Office reported that 83 of the USA’s biggest 100 corporations used subsidiaries in tax havens to avoid tax. Meanwhile, the Tax Justice Network reports that 99 of the 100 biggest companies in Europe do the same. Nothing has been done to regulate these offshore havens, which deprive the UK exchequer of massive tax revenues. We could eliminate or significantly weaken them simply by declaring that all transactions with countries registered in countries or territories that do not meet the minimum regulatory standards are illegal. Britain therefore could easily isolate and, if necessary, close down the tax havens which are presently controlled by the City of London, which amount to nearly a quarter of all offshore financial services. Additionally, it could curb the efforts made by multi-national corporations to transfer profit earnings made in the UK to other jurisdictions whose tax regimes are less demanding by compelling them to adhere to a unitary tax methodology.[[47]](#footnote-47)

**Participatory economics**

While a politics of economic redistribution centered on greater regulatory management of financial organizations is a necessary condition for creating a more equal society, it is not, I believe, sufficient. Also needed, *as a foundational condition*, are institutional innovations that foster new forms of democratic representation, chiefly in the workplace, but also beyond it – or what elsewhere has been defined as ‘civic capitalism’.[[48]](#footnote-48) As the Marxist political theorist Alex Callinicos says, “any sustainable alternative to capitalism [as we now know it] has to be based, not on the market, but on democratic planning, otherwise known as participatory economics”, in which a coordinated network of workers’ and consumers’ councils submit proposals for their share of society’s resources.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Actually existing examples of such schemes include the Quebec Labour-controlled Solidarity Fund and the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, the workings of each of which have achieved a decisive broadening of local economic activity.[[50]](#footnote-50) Other precedents worth looking are the New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey, and the Kentucky Highlands Corporation and the various Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) which proliferate elsewhere in the US.[[51]](#footnote-51) And, closer to home, there are the nearly five-hundred employee-owner and cooperative businesses in the UK whose existence highlight how relatively easy it is to extend democracy into the economic sphere, where we know it not only encourages greater work satisfaction, but also higher productivity.

Such moves are central to the overall aim of reducing and eliminating wealth inequality because they anticipate a form of share ownership that removes it from the hands of financial institutions. These organizations spread investments across thousands of companies, making huge sums of money for their clients through short-term share trading. On average, these speculators hold their shares for about three months in banks and six months elsewhere, which undermines entirely the claim they have a long-term commitment to companies, local communities or even the nation. Indeed, these companies are seen simply as instruments for their self-enrichment, without any hint of social obligation.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Responding to my critics

Four objections to my political prospectus have been made regularly over the years. Interestingly, two of them are not so much denials of its moral component, as queries about the chances of it ever being effectively implemented. The exception is the objection that runs like this: *“the kind of socialist-communist society you envisage is surely a dead-hand on encouraging citizens to be creatively innovative, and also likely to fail because people need to be materially incentivized to cooperate and contribute?”* At first-blush, this is a strong objection, because only a fool would gainsay the fact that material self-interest is a powerful motivator. Earlier and failed communist systems clearly turned out to be unviable because they ignored, or wanted to deny, this key human driver. But, this does not prove that material self-interest is our only motive or even the most important one. Indeed, if people are as much motivated by the sort of materialism my opponents regard as very important, then society as we know it would surely collapse under the strain of continuous selfishness. In fact, there are already existing signs that behaviour of this sort can lead to disaster, as we witnessed in 2007/8 when bankers and fund managers pursued high-risk and reckless transactions solely in the pursuit of individual enrichment, with shocking consequences. Their conduct leads me therefore to anticipate the creation of a political and economic order where such enrichment is allowed, but only within a framework of rules that protect the public interest and as part of an ideological project that promotes the view that material betterment is not the chief goal in life.

Nothing in my scheme then disallows wealth accumulation or high incomes, providing each is not permitted to get out of hand and threaten social cohesion, from which no one benefits. And, related to that idea, maybe there is a case for incentives that reward people in work for being trust-worthy and cooperative, rather than go-getting and profit-seeking; and to recompense organizations that exemplify behaviour that has public benefits (like reducing energy consumption and major investments in staff training)? In any event, as Michael Sandel cautions, shouldn’t we be concerned about the creation of a market society in which most things have a price tag and where doing something for a moral or ethical reason is replaced by doing it only for monetary benefit?[[53]](#footnote-53) It occurs to me as well that, despite what some of my critical friends argue, creativity and ingenuity are not so easily negatively associated with economies that have been run on socialistic lines. The old repressive Soviet Union after all was the first nation in the world to launch a person into space, and Hitler’s ghastly Third Reich enabled designers to create the first people’s car – the ‘VW beetle’ – and build the first motorway network for its owners to drive it on. But, the bigger point here is that no one political or economic system has a monopoly of encouraging talent and inspiring inventiveness. Neo-liberalism certainly backgrounds the invention of the I-phone and I-pad; but it is communist China which mostly assembles them, using clever technologies of its creation for this purpose. The articulations here are complex, in other words, which means it’s important not to assume easy linkages where they just don’t exist.

While the material self-interest objection to my ideas does not cause me to reject them, other criticisms are more telling, particularly this one: *“don’t you assume too easily that predatory capitalism can be domesticated along socialistic lines? Indeed, don’t you ignore entirely the key question of how your economic thinking can be made politically operational, when the politicians in charge at the moment are so strongly under the influence of those vested interests that seek to maintain the system in its current form?”* It is not true I ignore entirely the issue of how best to implement my socialist utopia, though it is fair to say I underestimate the challenges involved. In particular, because I focus so much on technical fixes to inequality – notably a radical combination of tax and transfer policies and decreases in the profitability of high finance – I am guilty of addressing insufficiently the sorts of political transformations necessary to make real my utopian vision, which include of course how to persuade the bulk of people that it is one worth believing in and struggling for, which would entail a radical reconstruction of political institutions, notably political parties.[[54]](#footnote-54)

On the other hand, it occurs to me that the ‘realism’ some of my critics believe in so much, and which they accuse me of lacking, is basically an excuse on their part to leave things essentially as they are. Indeed, labeling me a ‘dreamer’ enables them conveniently to live with their conservatism, when they ought possibly to confront directly and critically its limitations, especially its links with maintaining social and economic inequality. It also allows them to overlook, but more often to mock, the significance of political movements in other countries that, in recent days, have successfully convinced electors there are different ways to manage capitalism. Both Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, for example, have emerged as ‘anti-austerity’ parties that re-envision capitalism, neither being enamored by the idea that the free-market is the only, least of all best, way of making it work, sharing with me instead the sort of Marxist-Keynesian outlook I championed in Chapter 2.

It remains of course to be seen if each, and Syriza in particular, can deliver on its promises, and there are already signs they can’t fully. After standing on an anti-austerity platform, winning an election, putting its negotiating position to the test in a referendum, and winning, Syriza has been forced to buckle when confronted by the might of the European Union leadership, demonstrating both the potential of electoral engagement and the limits of democratic control of capital. Some Labour Party members I know unbelievably enjoy sneering about all of this in that familiar “I told you so” kind of way. But, at least it’s a beginning, don’t they know? Market mechanisms and market outcomes, especially when these create massive inequalities of wealth and income, are not ‘natural’ phenomena. There is nothing inevitable about inequality. It is something we have done to ourselves, which means its negative effects can be addressed and its causes removed, notwithstanding the huge obstacles to making this happen. What matters then is often less what voters will tolerate and more what opinion-makers and shapers will consider and advocate on their behalf, an attitude on my part that anticipates the final most often repeated objection made to my version of socialist idealism, which goes a bit like this: *the majority of people are very wary of fixing their gaze on dazzling communitarian ideals that are beyond the here and now. Isn’t it better to go along with ‘where they are’ in their lives, rather than mesmerize them with a vision like yours that is far beyond their moral compass and reach?*

Apart from being highly patronising, this objection fails to take into account what people actually think and how they act. After moving to the Right since the late 1970s, public attitudes on inequality in fact have begun decisively to shift in a more progressive direction during the last few years. Opinion polls in this country for instance show a very large majority of the population – sometimes as high as 80 per cent – think that income differences are too large. There is also related evidence to indicate that many people are more than willing to change and adapt their lifestyles in order to accommodate the needs of others. And there is additionally considerable anti-capitalist agency to be found everywhere and amongst a wide cross-section of people. As David Harvey says, “there is not a region in the world where manifestations of anger and discontent with the capitalist system cannot be found”.[[55]](#footnote-55) There is, in particular, a growing counter politics of taxation, which even some tabloid newspapers report favorably on. Of course this does not mean that such occurrences, which include community-based groups like UK Uncut, Citizens UK and the Living Wage Campaign, are sufficient to cause or support a socialist revolution. Indeed, it is a highly noticeable feature of the Occupy Movement that very few of its adherents possessed an anti-capitalist ideology that could remotely be defined as Marxist. They knew what they are against, but haven’t a clue about what should replace it. But, as I wrote in the preceding paragraph – it’s a beginning, reminding me of Ralph Miliband’s observation that “while there is no popular majority for a socialist programme at present, it does not follow that there is no support for such a programme at all, and that more support for it could not be generated”.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Finally, there is the very familiar objection to my communist-socialist vision for a better society, which has nothing to do with its practical viability, being centered rather on its consequences for civil society, which history teaches us have been largely ghastly: *you say you are aware of the failings of actually existing communist societies, but you flagrantly ignore them, arguing stubbornly in favour of a political and economic system that has a very poor record of delivering on its objectives and a very bad one on protecting human rights and exercising power generally. Worse, you say you have read the sorts of critiques of communism produced by people such as Leszek Kolakowski[[57]](#footnote-57), agreeing even with them, but still persist in defending the idea of a socialist political order.* This is a very strong objection, but not one that forces me to give up on my ideological stance, which is not undermined by inadequate representations of it in practice, which would be like saying the Inquisition is the essence of Christianity. As Alain Badiou, one of my favourite Marxist philosophers, says, “you wouldn’t accept such a thing. So, don’t accept it for communism either. Stalin’s not the essence of communism. It’s not because Stalin aligned himself with communism that he’s the essence of communism. Stalin represents one particular historical period.”[[58]](#footnote-58) As do the likes of Mao, Fidel Castro and Erich Honecker.

Old and extreme

Michael Foot, about whom I have written so enthusiastically in this and the previous chapter, was cynically parodied by the tabloid press in the early 1980s as “being too old and too extreme” ever to be a successful prime-minister. Sometimes, I feel this charge could easily be used to criticise my much more minor role as local party activist and socialist campaigner. Certainly, personal longevity and its political frustrations have influenced my renewed engagement with Far Left ideas and policies in my retirement years, which seem to me to be the only ones capable of addressing adequately the huge social and economic problems that currently confront us.

At those frequently recurring moments when I feel hollowed out politically, I imagine myself to be George Orwell, who once wrote: “This age makes me so sick that sometimes I am compelled to stop at a corner and start calling down curses from heaven”.[[59]](#footnote-59) Just why do we persist with forms of capitalist organization that are demonstrably dysfunctional? Why doesn’t the Labour Party have the guts fully to take on the vested interests of financial capital? Are any of our politicians capable of tackling the nexus of money, corruption and influence that is carefully wrecking our environment and debasing our civilization?

Like all those on the Left, I am therefore compelled mostly to travel in hope, idealistically believing that collective human endeavor and a socialized economy are more likely to improve our condition than the anti-state, free-market, Little Englander, and ‘better yesterday’ instincts of the Right. To that extent, I do not subscribe to the view that politics is exclusively ‘the art of the possible’, preferring a conception of their nature that emphasizes equally the idea that they must also be about the art of seeking the impossible.[[60]](#footnote-60) So, while I continue to be a pessimist of the intellect, I am simultaneously an unapologetic optimist of the will, concurring with the late Raymond Williams that “it is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter . . . . If there are no easy answers, there are still available and discoverable hard answers, and it is these that we can now learn to make and share. This has been, from the beginning, the sense and impulse of the long revolution”.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Selina Todd helps to maintain my political morale as well when she writes:

“When anyone criticizes capitalism they can immediately expect to be asked for a blueprint for an alternative society. But history teaches us that revolutions do not begin with one person offering a coherent programme for building the new world to come. Instead, revolution tends to be provoked when those who believe they have the right to hold power refuse to recognize the shared grievances of the majority. That is the state in which we [now] find ourselves, with a ruling class who refuse to accept that we are living through hard times, let alone recognize the need for reform. But, if history teaches us anything, it is that everything changes. Claiming there is no alternative to the world in which we live demonstrates the brittle and ultimately self-destructive nature of our elite. What we have to do now is to start working out the first steps towards revealing an alternative way to live better than neo-liberalism.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

That ‘alternative’ surely must entail embracing that old discipline called ‘political economy’, with its understanding that people are not simply self-seeking individuals, but also citizens who have a collective social role that contributes to the common good. Marx’s question, long-dormant, of capitalism’s finitude has thus re-emerged. As Jamie Martin writes, “it is high time, in the light of decades of declining growth, rising inequality and increasing indebtedness, to think again about capitalism as a historical phenomenon, one that has not just a beginning, but also an end.”[[63]](#footnote-63)

Of course, such thinking is not easily translated into power, which is an obvious and necessary condition for bringing about the sort of fundamental changes I have in mind.

But power, including notably the kind achieved through electoral success which leads to government, is not the only factor instrumental in creating change, and is never ever a sufficient condition for its realization. In fact, my appreciation of the historical record suggests that it’s what one does in opposition that regularly paves the way for real change, suggesting that progress results both from the struggles of those outside of parliaments who fight for and demand change against entrenched power and the efforts of particular elected politicians – and not just those who are in government - who bravely and consistently speak the truth to it. The impact and value of principled political protest, persuasively conducted and persistently undertaken, must therefore not be underestimated, least of all defamed. Sometimes, it’s all that progressives possess when confronted by the narrow and very powerful vested interests of those who are determined to preserve the status quo.

1. Michael Sandel, ‘A New Citizenship’, Lecture 1 of the 2009 BBC Reith Lectures. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tony Judt, *Thinking of the Twentieth Century*, London, Heinemann, 2012, p.388. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*, Basingstoke, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013, p.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Colin Haye & Anthony Payne, *Civic Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2015, p124. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Quoted by Steven Lukes in his obituary of A H Halsey published in the *Guardian* on 17 October, 2014, p.47.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Terry Eagleton, *Hope Without Optimism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015, p.133. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. George Monbiot, *How Did We Get into This Mess? Politics, Equality, Nature*, London, Verso, 2016, p.289. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The 1987 General Election was a dismal performance by Labour. Its share of the vote – just under 31% - was only 3.2% above its hopeless figure for 1983. For the details see: David Butler & Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1987*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988. In 1992, Labour’s share of the popular vote (=34.4%) was lower than it had recorded in twelve consecutive general elections between 1935 and 1979. For the details see: David Butler & Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1992*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. An account of the origins of New Labour is provided by Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle, *The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?* London, Faber & Faber, 1996. Also relevant is Philip Gould’s *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernizers Saved the Labour Party*, London, Abacus, 1998. The most detailed account of the changes New Labour made to how the party should be led, organized and managed is provided by Lewis Minkin, *The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour’s Party Management*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014, especially Part 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Two books of Anthony Giddens particularly influenced me: *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, Cambridge, Polity, 1994; and *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See David Halpin, ‘Sociologising the Third Way: the contribution of Anthony Giddens and the significance of his analysis for education’, *Forum*, 41, 2, 1999, pp.53-57; and David Halpin, ‘Utopian realism and a new politics of education: developing a critical theory without guarantees’, *Journal of Education Policy*, 14, 4, 1999, pp.345-361. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. There is a host of studies that spell this out in great detail. The ones I found most interesting at the time include Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990; Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London, Sage, 1992; and Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996. Later on, for additional analysis, I turned to Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, Cambridge, Polity, 1999 and Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 2000.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Will Hutton, Editorial, *Sunday Observer*, 20 September, 1998, p.30; Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The death of neo-liberalism’, *Marxism Today*, November/December, 1998, pp.4-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Stuart Hall, ‘The great moving nowhere show’, *Marxism Today*, November/December, 1998, p.10. The most damning critique of the Third Way must be Alex Callinicos’ *Against the Third Way*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For the details of this election see David Butler & Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The details of this result are: Jim Fitzpatrick (L) 24,807 (63.2%); Bene’t Steinberg (C) 5,893 (15.0%); Janet Ludlow (LD) 4,072 (10.4%). Labour majority: 18,915. Turnout: 59%. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. David Coates, *Prolonged Labour: The Slow Birth of New Labour Britain*, London, Palgrave, 2005, p.45. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Labour’s 2001 general election manifesto included five pledges: 1. low inflation and sound public finances; 2.ten-thousand extra teachers and higher standards in secondary schools; 3.twenty-thousand extra nurses and ten-thousand extra doctors in a reformed NHS; 4. six-thousand extra recruits to raise police numbers to their highest ever level; and 5. pensioners' winter fuel payment retained, minimum wage rising to £4.20 an hour. Its manifesto for 2005 also promised to ‘personalise public services’, to ‘help hard-working families’, and to ‘maintain economic stability’. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In 2001, with 40% of the popular vote, Labour’s overall majority in the House of Commons was reduced from 188 to 160. In 2005, it achieved an overall majority of 66, but with the support of a mere 35% of the popular vote, the lowest of any majority government in British history. For the full details of each of these elections see: David Butler & Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2001*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002 and Dennis Kavanagh & David Butler, *The British General Election of 2005*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In the 2010 general election there was a 4% swing away from Labour to the Tories, causing it to lose 91 of the seats it won in 2005, and therefore its overall majority in the House of Commons. Labour’s share of the vote in 2010 was a disastrous 29%.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. There are a number of accounts available which mine here draws on, including notably Tony Wood, ‘Good riddance to New Labour’, *New Left Review* 62, March/April 2010; Patrick Diamond & Michael Kenny (eds.) *Reassessing New Labour: Market, State & Society Under Blair & Brown*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011; David Coates, *Prolonged Labour: The Slow Birth of New Labour Britain;* Polly Toynbee & David Walker, *The Verdict: Did Labour Change Britain?*, London, Granta, 2010; and Terrence Casey (ed.) *The Blair Legacy: Politics, Policy, Governance & Foreign Affairs*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Geoff Whitty, *Research and Policy in Education*, London, UCL-IOE Press, 2016, pp.56-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Tim Brighouse, ‘The London Challenge – a personal view’. In T. Brighouse & L. Fullick (eds.) *Education in a Global City: Essays from London*, London, Institute of Education, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See James Meek, ‘Worse than a Defeat’, *London Review of Books*, 18 December, 2014, pp.3-10; and Jack Fairweather, The *Good War: Why We Couldn't Win the War or the Peace in Afghanistan*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Jack Fairweather, *A War of Choice: Honour, Hubris and Sacrifice: The British in Iraq*, London, Vintage, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This figure is based on data reviewed in Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy & Les Roberts, ‘Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey’, *The Lancet*, 368, 9545, October 2006, pp.1421-1428. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Jonathan Steele, *Defeat: Why They Lost Iraq*, London, I B Taurus, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For discussion of how the City has ignored the lessons of the 2008 crash and conducts ‘business as usual’, see Joris Luyendijk, ‘Riding the bull’, *Guardian*, 30 September, 2015, pp.27-30 and Joris Luyendijk, *Swimming with Sharks: My Journey into the Alarming World of the Bankers*, London, Faber, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Dan Dorry, ‘Labour and the Economy, 1997-2010’, in Patrick Diamond & Michael Kenny (eds.) *Reassessing New Labour*, p.133. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Department for Work & Pensions, *Households Below Average Incomes*, London, DWP, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Office for National Statistics, *Effect of Taxes and Benefits on Household Incomes*, London, ONS, 2013, p.7. For a polemical assault on such unfairness, see Zoe Williams, *Get it Together: Why We Deserve Better Politics*, London, Hutchinson, 2015, pp.125-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ralph Miliband, ‘Socialist Advance in Britain’, in his *Class War Conservatism and Other Essays*, London, Verso, 2015 edition, pp.294-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. David Coates, *Prolonged Labour: The Slow Birth of New Labour Britain*, pp.204 & 213. See also his ‘Labour Governments: Old Constraints & New Parameters’, in *New Left Review*, September/October, 1996, pp.62-77. To have a sense of how the Labour Party, since its General Election defeat in 2010, has tried to reposition itself away from New Labour, see Tim Bale, *Five Year Mission: The Labour Party Under Ed Miliband*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I have argued as much in detail in David Halpin, *Hope and Education: The Role of the Utopian Imagination*, London, Routledge/Falmer, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, p.xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See, for example, Erik Olin Wright’s *Envisioning Real Utopias*, London, Verso, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. E P Thompson, ‘Commitment in politics’, in Cal Winslow (ed.) *E P Thompson and the Making of the New Left: Essays and Polemics*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2014, p.115. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Michael Foot, *Dr Strangelove, I Presume*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1999, p.218. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Zoe Williams, ‘Trump has thrown caution to the wind. So must the left’, *Guardian*, 7 March, 2016, p.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Post-capitalism and a World Without Work*, London, Verso, 2015, p.140. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Most of the measures I recommend in what follows are evaluated in Anthony B Atkinson, *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2015, chapters 6 and 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Piketty, *Capital,* pp. 516-534. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For some costings, see Paul Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future*, London, Allen Lane. 2015, p.285. For other issues about implementing UBI, see Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Post-capitalism and a World Without Work,* pp.118-123. For a succinct defence of the idea of UBI, see Malcolm Torry, *101 Reasons for a Citizens Income*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See *The Basic Income Earth Network* at <http://www.basicincome.org/bien/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, pp.202-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. All of this is graphically described in John Urry, *Offshoring*, Cambridge, Polity, 2014, pp.44-73. See also Nicholas Shaxson, *Treaure Islands: Tax Havens and the Men Who Stole the World*, London, Vintage, 2012; and John Christensen, ‘On Her Majesty’s Secrecy Service’, in David Whyte (ed.) *How Corrupt is Britain?*, London, Pluto Press, 2015, pp.147-56. The so-called ‘Panama Papers’, recently leaked to the world’s media from Mossack Fonesca, the world’s fourth biggest offshore law firm, reveal the shocking extent of offshoring, and associated tax avoidance, implicating a dozen national political leaders. See *Guardian,* 4 April, 2016, pp.1-7 and 5 April, 2016, p.28. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See John Urry, *Offshoring*, p.180. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Colin Haye & Anthony Payne, *Civic Capitalism*, pp.3-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Alex Callinicos, *Bonfire of Illusions: The Twin Crises of the Liberal World*, Cambridge, Polity, 2010, pp.139-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. For details of these schemes, see Eric Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, pp.225-29 and 240-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Gar Alperovitz, *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty & Our Democracy*, Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 2005, Chapters 7 & 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. On the nature of such enrichment, see Prem Sikka, “BHS is a victim of shareholder greed’, *Guardian*, 26 April, 2016, p.18; and Prem Sikka, ‘Break the stranglehold of shareholders’, *Guardian*, 11 December, 2014, p.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Michael Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, London, Allen Lane, 2012, Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. On this point, see Mick Moran. ‘It’s the democratic politics, stupid!’ in Colin Haye & Anthony Payne, *Civic Capitalism*, pp.97-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p.430. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ralph Miliband, ‘Socialist Advance in Britain’, p.306. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See, for example Kolakowski’s bitterly ironic essay ‘What is Socialism?’, in Leszek Kolakowski, *Is God Happy? Selected Essays*, NY, Basic Books, 2013, pp.20-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Alain Badiou & Peter Engelmann, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism*, Cambridge, Polity, 2015, p.47. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Quoted in D J Taylor, *Orwell: The Life*, London, Vintage, 2004, p.130. My favourite melancholic writer, Fernando Pessoa, says something similar: “I feel like throwing up my arms and shouting out things of unheard-of savagery”, in his diary *The Book of Disquiet*, London, Serpent’s Tail, 1991, p.103. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Vaclav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1983, pp.268-269. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class*, London, John Murray, 2015, p.395. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Jamie Martin, ‘Just Be Grateful’, *London Review of Books*, 23 April, 2015, p.20. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)