

Features

The identity crisis of Jon Cruddas

Sunder Katwala

Jon Cruddas may have been asked to lead the Labour opposition's policy review but the Dagenham MP is not, truth be told, especially interested in policy. 'What interests me is not policy as such; rather the search for political sentiment, voice and language; of general definition within a national story. Less *The Spirit Level*, more what is England', he said, speaking on 'the good society' at the University of East Anglia (Cruddas, 2012).

The public lecture series was entitled 'Philosopher kings? How philosophy informs real politics today', making contributions from Cruddas and Conservative David Willetts perhaps inevitable. But the utility of philosophy in political battle is not universally acknowledged. 'Perhaps when they find out what is England they will let us all have the answer', said Chancellor George Osborne, deploying this Cruddas passage for a little partisan political knockabout. The mockery will have chimed with Labour MPs who worry about whether their new policy chief leading Ed Miliband on an elusive quest for the essence of national identity will prove a particularly direct route to a winning agenda on the deficit, growth, jobs and housing.

Ed Miliband has placed a significant political bet on Cruddas as Labour's philosopher king. It was not just a bet on the man himself, and his ability to somehow cajole the disparate actors within the byzantine, opaque, and dysfunctional Labour policy review and manifesto-making process into some sort of coherence. It was also a significant endorsement of the Cruddasite disposition about what matters most in politics, a view with which his leader has increasingly come to empathise.

That Cruddas world-view is well captured by his contrasting the state of England, an allusion to his political hero, the 1930s Labour leader George Lansbury, with *The Spirit Level* (2009), Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's influential best-seller which was hailed by many on the left as the most important book for a generation. It tells a story through comparative data, painting its picture by amassing graphs demonstrating correlations of various social harms associated with increased inequality. This enabled *Guardian* and *New Statesman* columnists and leftish wonks to declare that they had found the Holy Grail: knock-down proof so that, surely, anybody could now see why the left was right and the right was wrong about inequality all along (Hattersley, 2009) (1). Mysteriously, these factual proofs seemed altogether less convincing for *Telegraph* or *Spectator* writers, and wonks on the right proved curiously stubborn in refusing to concede the argument (Saunders and Evans, 2010). This fierce partisan battle over the book's merits demonstrated what the emerging application of brain science to political psychology would predict: that very few political arguments can ever be settled by appeals to 'the facts'. Rather, evidence tends to be used as ammunition to reinforce existing views, while even contrary counter-evidence will very often reinforce long-held views too, once the motivation behind its production is brought into play. Every quarter's economic statistics on growth, jobs, and unemployment

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shows us much the same phenomenon. Any expert analyses of the evident need for austerity measures, or their evident futility, will usually repolarise and rehash the existing debate, rarely bringing rivals together in the disinterested pursuit of evidence-based policy-making. If the facts don't fit the frame, it is the facts that get rejected, not the frame.

Drew Westen, author of *The Political Brain* (2007), has characterised much liberal progressive advocacy as demonstrating an 'irrational commitment to rationality' in seeking political support through policy arguments, based on a belief that appeals to the evidence are a political trump card. Jon Cruddas would see these research conclusions from political psychology as providing further ammunition to reinforce what had long been his own gut instinct, that for Labour to connect, it needs less of the spirit of the LSE and rather more of that of Lansbury. As Cruddas put it in the UEA lecture:

Politics for me is not a variant of rational choice theory. It is about base, visceral connections, sentiment, themes and language that grip people; stories and allegories that render intelligible the world around them.

(Cruddas, 2012)

This demands that his party understands politics as being driven by questions of identity as much as interests; to see persuasion as depending more often on stories than facts, and to put policy in its proper place, by understanding that the policy manifesto pledges which provide a necessary route-map of priorities for government will not resonate unless they fulfill a vital symbolic purpose too, speak to 'political sentiment, voice and language', so as to explain what motivates a political party and how that is reflected in what it wants to say about the nature of the country which it seeks to govern, and what its ambitions to change it are.

This is the Cruddas starting point: identity matters. And it matters for party and country alike. He sees the 2008 economic crash and 2010 election drubbing as creating Labour's third 'great identity crisis' in not much more than a century of existence, comparable to its lost decades in the 1930s and 1980s. There is a crisis of belonging in society, with a particular concern for the sense of social and political dislocation arising from the loss of traditional class identities among those who were once solidly Labour. In response to the dizzying changes of the global era, there is a foundational question about national identity, and how the form that it takes may shape the possibilities and contours of partisan political competition.

If Dr Cruddas has diagnosed the identity crisis facing Labour, he feels it much more viscerally and directly than that. His own personal political journey can be seen to represent a living out and working through of the strands, tensions, and contradictions of the Labour tradition in an attempt to discover, or to forge, its contemporary meaning and mission.

Who is Jon Cruddas?

So there is another identity question: who is Jon Cruddas? No other leading politician is so ill-captured by the convenient shorthand labels which newspaper reports apply to Cruddas, as a 'left-winger' or an independent 'maverick' voice, or as offering a 'lurch' to the trade union left. (The official Conservative HQ response to Cruddas's appointment attacked him as a 'former union man', though that was quickly challenged by centre-right commentators (Forsyth, 2012), and MPs like Robert Halfon, elected for Harlow in 2010, who has argued that the right damages itself through a kneejerk allergy to trade unionism (Halfon, 2012)).

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For Cruddas is, at once, the ‘maverick’ ‘left-wing’ outsider who cut his teeth as a party staffer and as a Downing Street aide to Tony Blair; the critic of academic abstraction who holds a PhD in political sociology; a foundational defender of the party’s links with the unions who believes that Labour’s insular internal party culture risks suffocating its ability to be a living and breathing political movement, so making him at once the most plural of Labour’s tribalists and the most tribal of its pluralists; the egalitarian who believes that Labour must rediscover the conservative traditions of the British left; and the somewhat eurosceptical advocate of an authentic voice of English Labour, who draws on his deep sense of his own Irish Catholic roots.

It says rather more about the sociological narrowing of the Westminster parliament, on both sides of the aisle, that Cruddas tends to be presented as the working-class tribune of his Labour tribe, in some sort of working-class apostolic succession as ‘keeper of the cloth cap’ in a party history from Keir Hardie to John Prescott. Cruddas is not an heir to Prescott. There are few politicians who Cruddas resembles less than the former Deputy Prime Minister. Prescott was the deputy as loyalist, projecting a fierce ‘my party right or wrong’ partisan certainty where unity and loyalty are the principal political virtues, staying around the table to secure whatever is the best deal on offer. It is a view sceptical about internal debate and pluralism, advocating less pointless think tank pamphleteering and more knocking on doors, so that Labour can unite around the bedrock need to keep the other lot out.

Jon Cruddas’s journey often illustrates quite the opposite political instincts, as can be seen from three defining characteristics of his trajectory to date.

First, Cruddas has demonstrated a wariness about power, its demands and compromises, and a scepticism about the value of holding political office in and of itself. He chose to stay out of the Brown government for three years and away from the Shadow Cabinet after defeat too. This aversion to office is presented in interviews as a somewhat monastic lack of concern for conventional political advancement of a Jim Hacker kind. It might more accurately be seen as signalling a greater sense of personal ego and political ambition: a belief that it is possible to play the political game while disregarding the usual rules, and a disinterest in playing it when the stakes are too low.

Second, in place of partisan certainty, there has been an itchy restlessness in Cruddas’s excavation of different ideas within the party’s tradition. This has been a very personal journey. There is no definable Cruddasite band of brothers or sisters in the parliamentary party or wider movement. It is unlikely that anybody else could hope to emulate each of his particular twists and turns, changes of mind and of emphasis too. This, however, does present something of a paradox for a politician who sees his primary purpose as engendering a collective sense of political purpose to pursue a common good.

So, third, that belief in politics as a collective pursuit has demanded a forging of wide-ranging though often semi-detached political alliances, with those with whom he has had something in common, though significant differences too, across just about the full range of Labour Party strands and factions. One can find a critically engaged Cruddas both within and outside each of New Labour; the trade union and Labour left; and the socially conservative Blue Labour faction. It is his navigation through these strands of Labour opinion, and what he seeks to take and reject from each of them, which offers clues as to his own instincts about how the policy review which he now leads might seek to reconcile them into a new project.

Cruddas as early New Labour

Jon Cruddas was New Labour at its outset, though he was never a high-profile member of the Blair Downing Street team during its first term in power. When Derek Draper sparked

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the New Labour era's first political scandal with his hubristic boast of extreme intimacy with the 17 people who mattered, he was not thinking of Jon Cruddas. Our man seldom featured in any of those Sunday newspaper organograms of the informal networks of New Labour power. Cruddas's role as Deputy Political Secretary to the Prime Minister was focused on party liaison with the trade union movement. During that first New Labour term, the unions would never have admitted to being completely grunted with the rhetoric and imagery of New Labour, but could point to several tangible gains, from the minimum wage and GCHQ union membership to the New Deal for jobs, funded by the New Labour populism of a windfall tax by casting unpopular 'fat cats' in the privatised utilities as the undeserving rich.

Cruddas has always defended the early Blairism of which he was a part, seeing 'a more collegiate, coalitionary project' in the 'early knockings' of New Labour from 1994 to 2001 (Cowley, 2010), motivated by a communitarian project of national renewal, which he believes that Ed Miliband must emulate, before seeing New Labour as losing its ability to connect by narrowing into a more arid, technocratic, market-dominated politics of public service reform after he had left the corridors of power in order to represent Dagenham in the House of Commons from 2001.

This is a view of the narrowing of New Labour largely shared by Ed Miliband, though the former Prime Minister himself offers the unconventional counter-argument that he was at his best in his third term, albeit that his public and political capital had largely slipped away. The Blair dismissal of the Cruddas critique in *The Journey* is something of a caricature, rather suggesting that any deviation from actually existing New Labour immediately ends on the 'no compromise with the electorate' road to Labour's 1983 debacle:

Jon made quite a name for himself. It was clever political positioning. To his overall political analysis – New Labour had deserted the working class and thus our base – he added a programme for the party. It was clothed in some modernist language, but was ultimately an attempt to build a left coalition out of *Guardian* intellectuals and trade union activists. However beguiling – and he was smart enough to make it beguiling – it was, in effect, reheated and updated Bennism from the 1980s. (Blair, 2010, 640)

That early New Labour remains a model for Cruddas and Miliband allows them to challenge the claim that they are breaking with it. Their claim is rather that the work needs to be done again, and that a 'one more heave' politics of trying to reconstruct New Labour in its mid-1990s form eighteen years after it first won a general election, in different economic and social conditions, would be to miss out on the lessons of the revisionist model of New Labour entirely.

If, for Cruddas, the fatal flaw of New Labour was that its communitarianism was sacrificed to its political economy, then finding a new post-crash political economy is the most daunting challenge that the Labour Party faces.

Leader of the pro-union left

Having left Downing Street to represent Dagenham in Parliament in 2001, Cruddas first arrived as a prominent national political figure as the surprise package of the Labour deputy leadership contest of 2007, where he was the only back-bench contender against four Cabinet ministers. I remember a cry 'Go on, Jon boy, my son', a south London voice ringing out to break the nervous silence in the Manchester conference centre as party members watched the complicated electoral college arithmetic unfold on the big screen. The delegate was celebrating the revelation that it was Jon Cruddas who led the five

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candidates on first preference votes. He was to finish a narrow and creditable third, behind Harriet Harman and Alan Johnson after vote transfers. Candidate Cruddas was, not inaccurately, portrayed as the unions' man, mounting an insurgent challenge from the left. That first preference lead had been achieved with 27 per cent of trade union and affiliate ballots, alongside 17 per cent from party members and 14 per cent of his parliamentary colleagues. Pragmatically, union support had been the only feasible way a back-bench candidate could mount a credible bid from a standing start (and it allowed him to be the second biggest spender in the race too). It also reflected the core Cruddas campaign themes, of a Labour reconnection with working-class support, and the need to give higher priority to social housing in particular. Cruddas won the backing of Ken Livingstone, as well as Roy Hattersley, and the editorial endorsement of *Tribune* (*Tribune*, 2007).

Prior to the leadership contest, Cruddas had worked most closely with the left-wing pressure group Compass. Compass had launched as a centre-left, somewhat Cookite project. Its launch document had made a conventional social democratic case for a Scandinavian-style push on inequality, green issues, gender equality, and constitutional reform which was familiar from the advocacy of existing centre-left think tanks, a point underlined by the Compass paper being co-authored by a group which included IPPR director Matthew Taylor, about to head the Blair policy unit, and his Fabian and Demos counterparts Michael Jacobs and Tom Bentley (Compass, 2003, reported in Wintour, 2003). But Compass soon found that there was more distinctive space for a noisier, more vocal and more antagonistic new left faction, focusing from the 2005 election on the need for Blair to go, and for the presumptive Brown succession to ditch New Labour for something more radical too. Cruddas wrote on party renewal with the *Guardian* columnist John Harris, and campaigned against Trident and ID cards. By taking up the role of 'parliamentary spokesman' for the pressure group, Cruddas seemed to stake a claim to be the emerging Labour left leader of his generation.

Yet his links with Compass and the broader left became gradually more distant after 2007. The group's ambition to link parliamentary and public advocacy proved very difficult, with mutual frustrations between a left-leaning membership and the much more selective appetite for rebellion of associated MPs, notably Cruddas and John Trickett, with Trickett publicly warning, on his resignation from representing Compass in the PLP in 2008, against lapsing 'into an intolerant and strident opposition which is the hallmark of sectarians through the history of our movement' (Woodward, 2008). Cruddas also had different instincts about how to conduct the argument between party factions. Compass gained media profile by presenting itself as engaging in mortal combat for the party's soul with the Blairite group Progress over whether New Labour should live or die. But Cruddas's contrary instinct was to depolarise this factional debate, teaming up with his former Downing Street colleague James Purnell, now a fellow refusenik outside of the government by choice, in a series of warm public engagements which demonstrated a mutual respect, and a surprising amount of common ground, if dialogue replaced mutual caricature (Stratton, 2009). It proved a good way to symbolically and pre-emptively call any civil war off, though Cruddas's respectful engagement with the party's right disappointed those for whom 'Blairite' was essentially a treacherous epithet.

The main reason that Cruddas ceased to see carrying the Labour left's banner as his primary party role and affiliation was that he had come to reject the Compass critique as partial, incomplete, and above all too comfortable an analysis of where New Labour had gone wrong. It emphasised the failures of the political leadership to articulate a compelling Labour vision to enthuse the voters, but lacked any corresponding auto-critique of the broader movement, in particular why the left itself seemed unable to bring new energy into the party, whether from new movements or in losing connection with Labour's traditional support.

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Writing with his regular collaborator, the academic Jonathan Rutherford, he was later to summarise these frustrations about the limits of the left's critique thus:

Labour is out of touch with the majority of people in this country. The left wants the New Labourites to admit they were wrong about Iraq, welfare reform, flexible labour markets. They did not understand the destructive capacity of neo-liberal capitalism. But what did we on the left get wrong? Did we listen to people on crime, did we hear the widespread anger about a culture of entitlement and about immigration? Labour's way back into power will mean navigating our way through these issues. We might not want to take this route but the people do and we must engage with them, or be rendered obsolete. (Cruddas and Rutherford, 2011)

Lessons from the ground were a powerful driver of this sentiment. A BNP Barking council breakthrough in 2005 had catapulted Cruddas into the frontline of the campaign against the far right. Working closely with an energetic Hope Not Hate campaign, Labour locally returned to traditional models of community organising, allied to mobilisation of boots on the ground. Cruddas would often talk about mattresses in front gardens, why they were left there, and what that said about bonds of community and reciprocity, offering a Barking echo on 'broken windows' theories of social health and breakdown.

For Cruddas, the fatal flaw of the Labour left was that it struggled to understand or to involve the people in whose name it wanted to act. That Labour had lost more so-called 'core' (DE) than 'swing' (AB) votes to the Conservatives in 2010 did not necessarily support the left's instincts as to why those voters had gone.

His journey out of the conventional Labour left was part of the reason why Cruddas felt so detached during the long summer of the 2010 leadership contest – telling a Fabian fringe meeting that he had been more interested in what was going on with the English Defence League than the battle to lead Labour. 'At times, the Labour leadership contest this summer – equality and fairness – sounded like one long John Rawls lecture', he said, while a visceral contest over identity and belonging went on elsewhere (Cruddas at 'Can Labour speak to England?', Fabian Society 2010 fringe event, quoted in *Next Left*, 2010). Cruddas appeared like a bear with a sore head after the result, telling anybody who would listen that he had been unable to get his head around what had happened between the Miliband brothers at a family level, after his late and rather cautious endorsement of David Miliband (made after almost all of the ballots were already on their way back, seeming to guarantee any lack of king-maker impact in the knife-edge race) proved not to be on the winning side, though it had served to confirm his distance from his allies on the left.

This relational lens was to be the breaking and remaking of his relationship with Ed Miliband too. There had been a catastrophically bad meeting during the leadership contest, not least because Cruddas had given Ed Miliband a copy of the gritty drama 'Fish Tank' and the leadership candidate had found it too depressing to watch it all the way through. For Cruddas, that was not an understandable reaction to the pressures of a leadership contest, but a symbol of not getting it. Neal Lawson of Compass, the third person in the room, later said that he had wanted to throw himself out of the window, as the mood went from bad to worse. Yet, as Mehdi Hasan and James MacIntyre report in their biography of Ed Miliband, the two men were reconciled on a visit to Billingsgate fish market, which had become a lodestar of Blue Labour values for both Maurice Glasman and Cruddas, where Cruddas was impressed with Miliband's relational ability to engage (Hasan and MacIntyre, 2011, 284). That was at least as important in bringing Cruddas back into the frontbench fold as Miliband's conference speech on a new capitalism, which had also impressed Cruddas, when he heard it on his car radio, some distance away from his party's annual conference.

The Labour conservative

Those lessons of the Barking mattress in the garden had given Cruddas a new identity, as a voice of Labour conservatism, so leading him into his next uncomfortable alliance, as an advocate of 'Blue Labour', an agenda developed by academic Maurice Glasman, later ennobled by Ed Miliband, during a long night of despair after the Brown government bailed out the banks. Jon Cruddas never wanted to be 'Blue Labour', stating that he had 'always hated the term', probably because it smacks of triangulation. By contrast, Cruddas was quite happy to use the shorthand of 'faith, flag and family' to explain which issues Labour could sometimes seem to have an allergic reaction to, while Glasman came to so dislike the claim that this was the Blue Labour slogan that he denied ever having uttered the phrase.

That illustrates that there never was any agreed definition of Blue Labour. Cruddas told a Policy Exchange seminar that the value of Blue Labour was in its ability to provoke debate – in his words, 'to throw a few hand grenades around', in a party that risked being excessively becalmed in the face of a historic defeat. But differences of opinion about which political grenades to lob about caused this most relational of political projects to suffer a significant rupturing of relationships. The difficulty over whether and how to balance individual voice and collective deliberation was dramatised by the particular example of Glasman making some over the top (and quickly retracted) comments about the need to cease almost all immigration. Cruddas feared that a 'race to the bottom' over immigration would turn Blue Labour into a reactionary caricature of itself (reported in Davis, 2011, 195).

The episode did not end the influence of Blue Labour, and especially not the individual contributions of the voices associated with it, but it exacerbated existing tensions, and so did appear to close off any serious prospect of it attempting to become a collective, programmatic project. So Blue Labour now resembles a cult band given quasi-legendary status precisely because it broke-up before recording anything. It is telling that the one book-length account of it is not a philosophical tract or political manifesto, but an exercise in long-form journalism, in Rowenna Davis's incisive study (2011) tracing the individuals involved, their relationships and their ideas, though she had little more than a seminar series, a small e-book of essays, and a mass of conflicting commentary to base it on.

What Blue Labour has yet to show is whether it can move from critique and provocation to advocacy. It would probably be expecting too much to see if it can turn into a programmatic manifesto – but it needs to be more than an eloquent Maurice Glasman lament for what has been lost since Tudor England. And the Blue Labour analysis, while emphasising the value of tradition and belonging, risks cutting Labour off from its own story.

If you know your history... recovering the Labour tradition from Blue Labour

Because Blue Labour is heard to be calling for a return to Labour tradition, few people have realised what a heretical account of Labour's tradition it offers. The party cherishes 1945 as its finest hour, when war-time solidarity was parlayed into a people's peace and the creation of the NHS. Maurice Glasman has argued that it was the moment when it all went wrong: 'It could be said that in the name of abstract justice, the movement was sacrificed' (Glasman, 2011, 29; see also Runciman, 2011).

Jon Cruddas rejected the Blue Labour account of Labour history in an intriguing lecture on Clement Attlee at University College, Oxford in October 2011. What was most



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striking about the lecture was that it depended on Cruddas recanting his own previous understanding of Labour's history.

In May 2011, Cruddas had paid tribute to his political hero, George Lansbury, seeing his political assassination by Ernie Bevin as a tragic and defining moment, when the Labour Party lost its soul:

1 October 1935 is arguably the critical moment in Labour's historical move away from a romantic tradition. The victory of the pragmatists and political operators over the prophets of Labour. It is the rationalists, the organisers, the planners and the pragmatists who have consistently won out over the prophets, the utopians and the romantics. Yet it is precisely the latter that have inspired the hope around Labour. (Cruddas, 2011a)

This is a version of the Blue Labour argument about the crushing of the lost traditions of the left. Yet this is to cut Labour off from almost the whole of its own tradition (especially as the dominant figure for its first three decades was Ramsay MacDonald, his reputation tainted by the betrayal of 1931). There is little left but the mythical celebration of lost leaders and paths not taken. This history signals a preference for never being sullied by the holding of power, and it especially cuts Labour off from the moment when it was at its most patriotic and egalitarian.

So Cruddas, characteristically, returned and critiqued his own argument, joking about his own 'political re-education' as he praised Clement Attlee as a voice of Labour patriotism:

Labour became embedded into the national story; a long journey from the Zinoviev Letter. It conditioned the victory of 1945 and was maintained decades later; arguably until epochal shifts around Thatcherism. (Cruddas, 2011b; see also Derbyshire, 2011)

That is incompatible with seeing the 1935 departure of Lansbury as a political tragedy, though it may have been a personal one (Katwala, 2011). It was simply not a moment when an absolutist pacifist could lead Labour, as Lansbury knew. Lansbury, after all, had been the man who had set out his desire to 'close every recruiting station, disband the Army and disarm the Air Force ... abolish the whole dreadful equipment of war and say to the world, "do your worst?"' in his message to the voters of East Fulham, in the autumn of 1933, the year that Hitler had become Chancellor in Berlin. In sharp contrast with Labour's later embarrassments over defence, pacifism was, at that moment, a popular by-election winning argument. That makes Hugh Dalton's achievement (for the pragmatists and political operators) in moving Labour to be a party of armed deterrence, collective security, and anti-appeasement in short order all the more impressive. The result of the 1935 change of leadership was that it enabled Labour to play a decisive role in the 1940 War Cabinet, as Attlee and Greenwood joined Churchill to provide a 3-2 majority against the desire of the old appeasement duo of Halifax and Chamberlain to accept Mussolini's offer to negotiate peace with Hitler. (Lansbury continued to promote peace and neutrality through the Peace Pledge Union to his deathbed in 1940, writing a *Tribune* feature 'Why I saw Herr Hitler' in 1937, in which he argued that 'it is sheer nonsensical folly to think that any Government wants war') (Lansbury quotes from Katwala, 2011).

If there is to be a Labour politics of patriotism, 1940 and 1945 will form a core part of its inheritance – as Cruddas recognised. The story of 1940 should be as much part of the party's collective memory as that of the Beveridge Report and Bevan's NHS.

Cruddas has made national identity a starting point for his policy review deliberations. That was the theme on which Cruddas, prior to taking his current role, led a seminar with



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Ed Miliband and his advisers, and a wide range of academic and civic voices, last February; and it was the theme on which he invited Australian author and writer Tim Soutphommasane to lead the first seminar of his policy review process in the House of Commons.

Labour and the left remain wary of this discussion, and tend to jump quickly to the need to defuse the toxic dangers of national identity and allegiance, with much talk of 'reclaiming' flags from a far right which remains pretty marginal in British politics and seeking to invent a distinctively 'progressive patriotism', which can often leave the reason in while taking any of the felt belonging out. But the success of the London Olympics may prove to have changed the dynamic of this discussion, making national pride both more salient and perhaps more normal too. The Olympics suggested a Britain more confident in itself than many had anticipated. Some on the left will worry about this, seeing the potential for a force that might reinforce the status quo. That, though, would be to ignore the fact that the British left has prospered only in moments of shared hope – in 1945, 1966, and 1997 – while it performed disastrously in the 1930s and 1980s. Cruddas has long argued that, though he has also placed a great deal of emphasis on feelings of disempowerment and loss.

Danny Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony reached many across the liberal-left usually immune or allergic to any sentiments of national pride. The left now appears more comfortable with ethnic minority patriotism and immigrant patriotism, at least. If it can find an important positive sense of an inclusive pride and patriotism by wrapping Mo Farah in the union jack, that at least offers an opportunity to suggest that it might be even more inclusive to be able to fly the flag for everybody else as well.

It is striking how often the case for national identity being a central theme has tended to be argued more strongly by non-white thinkers. Soutphommasane is a second-generation Australian, whose parents were refugees from Laos, going to Australia via France (where they took the view that they would never fully be accepted) (Soutphommasane, 2009). This partly reflects a psychological and sociological truth – that those considered 'other' are more likely to think there is something to work through, often coming to see that as not only a personal challenge, but a collective one of shared citizenship too. Whatever differences there may be about the content, non-white voices have been considerably less likely to echo an often dominant response from liberal commentators, namely that the identity discussion is a navel-gazing distraction from the issues that really matter. Cruddas and Rutherford also argue that any project which depends on redistribution must surely pay some attention to the strength of the collective 'us', proposing reciprocity as their central theme:

We are an immigrant nation. There is no going back and we must find ways of living together and creating a new vision of England. We demand that migrants must be like us. But who actually are we? They must share our British values. But what are they? Newcomers must answer correctly the citizens test. But could we? When we begin a debate about immigration we start talking about ourselves. It's not about them, it's about us. The great majority of us want the recognition and respect of others and a country that treats us equally and in which our children can flourish. Native cannot demand of newcomer more or less than we demand of ourselves – do not do to others what you would not want done to yourself. (Cruddas and Rutherford, 2011)

Conclusion

Cruddas's reclaiming of the Attlee tradition is perhaps of symbolic importance too. It sets out the ambition to link the question of party identity to a project of national renewal. It also signals the central importance of having a governing project.

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The policy review may indeed require him to channel the spirit of Attlee, as much as that of Lansbury. Cruddas's policy review is now perhaps the primary testing-ground as to what influence the Blue Labour moment may have on Labour's long-term agenda. Glasman will remain a challenging public voice, while policy ideas are being pursued by a range of fellow travellers: Jonathan Rutherford, as we have seen a significant interlocutor for Cruddas on both political economy and particularly the nature of identity, belonging and masculinity; the IPPR's Marc Stears, a closely trusted ally of Ed Miliband, working on integration; and Tottenham MP David Lammy, whose book on the aftermath of the Tottenham riots was as well received on the right as the left, through its combination of social democratic opportunity with a traditionalist focus on personal responsibility.

Jon Cruddas's own journey into and out of the various Labour factions has created a diagnosis of the identity crisis – and a map of the challenges for the party to resolve. How would the early ethical communitarianism of Blair play out if combined with a different political economy? What would the egalitarianism of the left look and sound like if it was built up relationally, from below, rather than from the commanding heights of the policy elite? How does the exercise in excavating the party's traditions contribute to a theory of change, and a governing project for the Britain of 2015?

Cruddas has spoken a good deal about the need for a Labour 'reckoning'. He has often argued that the best analysis of today's post-crash Labour identity crisis remains that written by R. H. Tawney, back in 1932, in 'The Choice Facing Labour?' Tawney wrote: 'The gravest weakness of British Labour is ... its lack of creed. The Labour Party is hesitant in action, because divided in mind. It does not achieve what it could, because it does not know what it wants', and criticised the void in the mind of the Labour Party which leads us into 'intellectual timidity, conservatism, conventionality, which keeps policy trailing tardily in the rear of realities' (quoted in Cruddas, 2009).

If Labour is to find a new creed, then the moment of reckoning for Dr Cruddas is upon us.

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Note

1. See also the collated Guardian features at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/the-spirit-level>.