the

Language

of

Progressive

Politics

in

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For Jon,
at the start of a new chapter

This book traces the word 'progressive' through modern British history, from the Enlightenment to Brexit. It explores the shifting meanings of this term and the contradictory political projects to which it has been attached. It also places this political language in its cultural context, asking how it relates to ideas about progressive social development, progressive business, and progressive rock music.

'Progressive' is often associated with a centre-left political tradition, but this book shows that this was only ever one use of the term—and one that was heavily contested even from its inception.

The power of the term 'progressive' is that it appears to anticipate the future. This can be politically and culturally valuable, but it is also dangerous. The suggestion that there is only one way forward has led to fear and doubt, anger and apathy, even amongst those who would like to consider themselves 'progressive people'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contents

List of Abbreviations

AIPWA	All India Progressive Writers' Association
BUF	British Union of Fascists
BW	*British Weekly*
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CPA	Conservative Party Archive
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DM	*Daily Mail*
ELP	*Emerson, Lake and Palmer*
EU	*European Union*
FPSI	Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals
GH	*Glasgow Herald*
ILN	*Illustrated London News*
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LCC	London County Council
LPP	Labour Party Papers
MG	*Manchester Guardian*
MT	*Marxism Today*
NBM	New Britain Movement
NEG	New Europe Group
NLC	National Liberal Club
PP	*Picture Post*
SA	Sheffield Archives
SCGPP	Sheffield Citizens' Group & Progressive Party
SCUA	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SNP	Scottish National Party

UKIP   United Kingdom Independence Party
USSR   Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction: Being Progressive

What does it mean to be progressive? Does it entail a set of recognisable political commitments, or a series of cultural assumptions? Is it a philosophical outlook, an active stance or even a personality trait? What about the *claim* to be progressive? What does that involve? And, more importantly, what does it *do*? What does it make possible? And what does it preclude?

There are three aspects to this discussion, which I want to examine in turn. First, the politics. How has the term 'progressive' functioned in British political discourse? What roles has it played and what effects has it had? Second, the temporal nature of the term. What does it tell us about our cultural assumptions and about the way we position ourselves between past and future? And third, the way these two elements intersect. What impact has their relationship had on British politics and culture?

Before we go any further, it is worth noting that 'progressive' is not an exclusively British term; it is not even primarily a British one. Its main political associations are with the American movement of the early twentieth century, and the Progressive Party that grew out of it.[1] This has, of course, influenced political debates in Britain and affected our understandings of the term, but perhaps not to the extent that is sometimes assumed. This is not, then, a history of US-style progressivism in Britain, nor of the links between 'progressive' political thinkers and actors across the Atlantic.[2] It is, instead, the story of one particular word within one national context (albeit one made up of four separate nations). It is a word that historians of the US progressive movement attribute to the municipal

politics of nineteenth-century London,[3] but one that has a much longer history than that. And that history is far from parochial. It has been, from the beginning, intimately bound up with questions of race and nationhood, of Britain's place in the world, and its relationship with its colonies and competitors.

POLITICS

'Progressive' seems to play a very particular role in British politics. While it has never (yet) been used as the name of a UK-wide party, it is frequently used to describe political divisions. It is one half of an assumed binary: 'the most basic of all dividing lines is that between progressive and conservative thinkers; it's a dividing line built on two different responses to the human condition'.[4] This idea of a progressive/conservative divide has been remarkably stable. It has shaped British politics for well over a century—and perhaps nearly two. While 'progressive' is a forward-looking term, then, it also carries historical baggage. It invokes former generations of self-described progressives, particularly the so-called left-liberal 'progressive movement' of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. In contemporary Britain, the parties most clearly identified with 'progressive' politics have been Labour and the Liberals/Liberal Democrats, with smaller parties like the Greens and the Scottish National Party joining in recent years, as they have adopted left-of-centre economic programmes.

We will see in Chaps. 3 and 4, however, that the seemingly exclusive association of the term with this particular political tradition is something of an illusion, and in Chap. 6 will note the ways in which this connection became established in the late twentieth century, due to the role it played in that political context. The assumption that 'progressive' indicates a broadly left-liberal position also ignores the intense contestation over the term within the left, and the way in which it is claimed all across the political spectrum. Sometimes this is done in a deliberately counterintuitive way, as with the attempts by the Conservative Party in 2009–10 to shed their existing image by presenting themselves as 'progressive Conservatives'. At other times this has been more descriptive, as with the shared Liberal/Conservative commitment to expanding economic freedom earlier in the century. 'Progressive' has also often been used to indicate a 'sensible' politics of the moderate centre ground, encompassing both centre-left and centre-right. We have seen a revival of this discourse

in the wake of the vote to leave the European Union. The implication here is that ideological disagreement acts to inhibit progress along supposedly uncontentious lines. This is a technocratic form of politics, which has inspired both anger and apathy.

Perhaps paradoxically, the historical baggage that 'progressive' carries makes it particularly useful as a political term. It allows the speaker to gesture towards a supposedly self-evident (though, in practice, undefined and open) set of political principles, while retaining a rhetorical focus on the future. Yet, as we will see in Chap. 7, while the term means a great deal to those within Westminster, it does not necessarily invoke the required associations among those listening outside. This ambiguity may be because, although it is frequently used in political discourse, 'progressive' has not often found its way into party labels. The best-known historical example is probably the London Progressive Party, often seen as the start of the 'progressive movement' in British politics. We will examine that history in Chap. 3, along with some of the less familiar anti-socialist Progressive Parties that appeared in municipal politics in the inter-war years, and in some cases much later. For instance, the South Tyneside Progressives formed the opposition to Labour on South Shields Council from the late 1950s until the 1980s,[5] and there were Progressive Parties established in Glasgow and Edinburgh in the 1930s, which remained strong into the 1970s.

The only party to function at national level is the Progressive Unionist Party, founded in 1979 in Northern Ireland. It distinguished itself from the existing Unionist parties by prioritising fighting deprivation over military fighting, and rejecting Enoch Powell's programme for full integration with Westminster.[6] The leader, Jim Kilfedder, expressed his desire to 'break the fossilised pattern of unionist politics' and explained the use of the label 'progressive' on the grounds of his support for proportional representation, a bill of rights, integrated education and improved worker–management relationships—all issues typically associated with left-liberal progressive politics.[7] There are also two small parties currently recorded by the Electoral Commission: the Progressive Party (registered 2014) and the UK Progressive Democracy Party (registered 2015).

Perhaps because it has not been associated with a single major party, 'progressive' has frequently been proposed as an alternative name for breakaway groups or reconfigurations of existing parties, and has been used as an umbrella term for a range of informal alliances. It has been

particularly useful for these ends because of its connection with forward movement. Being progressive offers the possibility to transcend the past and to avoid the messiness of the present by looking ever forward. The very act of describing something as 'progressive' (whether a party, a policy, a product) does something to it. It places it in a distinct position in time: at the very edge of the boundary between present and future. To be progressive is to anticipate the future and, in doing so, it is to bring that future into being. It is a predictive term. Yet it does not come out of nowhere; to be progressive is to be part of an ongoing, unfolding story. It has a linear, consequential relationship to the past. This is where it differs from either politically empty words like 'new' or more weighted terms like 'modern', which is tied to a particular (if deeply contested) historical epoch. To be progressive is both to transcend the past, but also to fulfil it.

To scholars of rhetoric, the century-long contestation over the term 'progressive' might be described as an ongoing attempt at paradiastole; that is, the deliberate redefinition of a term. This is often linked to the redefinition of vice as virtue, but can also apply to a shift from one set of moral virtues to another.[8] In the case of 'progressive', we see recurrent attempts to align a morally positive term with different sets of political principles. This continual struggle to appropriate the concept could be seen as emblematic of political discourse itself.[9] At its starkest, it is a debate about who is able to define the future, by determining what is considered 'progress' from the present. Tracing the shifting contexts in which this has happened, and the various projects to which it has been attached (and those to which it has not), affords us a very particular perspective on British political culture, its preoccupations and its limits.

TEMPORALITY

The identification of 'progressive' as a morally positive term, however, begs the question of why that should be. The idea that moving forward is a universal good (notwithstanding arguments about what 'forward' might mean) seems so obvious as to be a truism. Yet there is no reason for this to be the case. As we will see in Chap. 2, alternative temporalities associated with ecological, feminist, spiritual or nostalgic time abound. Yet, they have been subsumed by the constant imperative to 'be progressive'—to the extent that their adherents often frame their positions using this language, even as they challenge its logic. Even conservatism has a very ambiguous relationship to progressive temporality. While tra-

ditional conservatives reject both the idea that history has a pattern and the attempts of 'progressives' to force the pace of change or to shape its direction, many of the assumptions of conservative thought are structured around the need to respond to the inevitable and usually benevolent workings of 'progress itself'.

The idea that society and individuals should demonstrate progress is historically and culturally specific, and carries a number of expectations about what that progress should look like.[10] These are contested, but not unlimited. They are tied to Enlightenment theories about the links between political liberty and economic development, as well as to ideas about productivity, self-development and fulfilment, which developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and tied together commercial activity, self-expression and citizenship in complex and often troubling ways.[11]

The very forms of modern politics are weighted towards progress. In Chap. 4 we will examine the ways in which parliamentary practice is shaped by notions of progressive time. This involves both the immediate need to be seen to be 'getting things done' and a particular understanding of the long sweep of historical time, in which radical parliamentarians are seen to have been the agents of progress, carrying Britain from tyranny to liberty. Yet this is not simply a feature of the continuing power of the Whig interpretation of history in British political culture. US scholar Lee Edelman has noted the operation of 'every political vision *as a vision of futurity*.' He describes the way in which 'all political sides' are committed 'on every side to futurism's unquestioned good'. This is a matter of narrative structure, in which all politics can be understood as a way of translating desire into a promise which can be fulfilled in the future. In particular, Edelman is concerned with the way in which this is structured around heterosexual norms—what he calls 'reproductive futurism'—by which all politics is undertaken in the name of children, or, rather, the symbolic Child: 'we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child'. Edelman's injunction is for queer politics to resist this narrative logic and to embrace the idea of politics with no future.[12]

Despite the dominance of such future-oriented thinking, it is also often suggested that the age of progress is over, that faith in the perfectibility of either humanity or social systems exists only as a memory. This has been expressed in terms of the collapse of ideology, of grand narrative history, of collective identity, and of established financial and industrial

models. In each case, the breakdown is dated to sometime in the 1970s and 1980s.[13] Daniel T. Rodgers has traced the ways in which this widespread breakdown of linear, progressive time occurred across the ideological spectrum and in fields as heterogeneous as feminist theory and the New Right, the banking system, and historical memory. He attributes this to the reconception of market economics from the 1970s, and shows how it operated through language: the new market metaphors of fluidity and impermanence bled into debates about gender and identity, and the 'phrases of the counterculture leaked into the rhetoric of conservatism' in late twentieth-century America.[14] Yet, as Rita Felski argues, the very idea of postmodern fragmentation remains firmly rooted within the modernist framework of progress. The idea that we have overcome grand narratives and fixed identities is itself a narrative on an extraordinarily grand scale.[15]

In everyday life, the ideas both of progress and of *being progressive* remain powerful. Whether 'progressive' is tied to a particular ideological project or a general sense of moving beyond the present, its claim to futurity functions as a political argument in itself. To be on the 'right side of history' is to be necessarily in the right. Again, this cuts across political boundaries. We see it manifested in the relentless drive to 'keep up' with the demands of globalisation, in the promises of consumerism, and in the belief that history tends towards ever more liberal and ever more equal social attitudes. While these narratives have been subject to sustained academic critique, and undermined by economic crisis and deepening inequality, they remain remarkably entrenched. Even the news that millennials are facing declining living standards in comparison with their parents has been framed as a perversion of the natural course of progress, rather than a challenge to it.[16]

CONSEQUENCES

We need to ask what are the consequences of this kind of thinking. What does it sanction and what does it exclude from political consideration? One of the most significant effects of 'progressive' positioning is that change is presented as a matter of inevitability, of keeping up with the times. Social and political reform is therefore imagined as simply *appropriate* to a particular time and place, rather than as part of a contested discussion about the common good. This leads to a depoliticisation of certain positions and an appeal to technocratic reasoning, in which good

politics is simply a matter of managing the impersonal forces of change. That does not, however, mean that the 'progressive' case will always win. For instance, the vote for Britain to leave the European Union has been (as we will see in Chap. 7) widely interpreted as a backlash against the complacency of this logic, despite attempts by Leave campaigners to frame their own position as progressive on a number of fronts. Similarly, the need to 'modernise' operates as a self-justifying argument, within a non-negotiable framework of what 'modernisation' entails. A good example of this would be the debates around the formation of New Labour and the rewriting of Clause IV of the party's constitution.[17] As we will see in Chaps. 2 and 7, these arguments carry a form of temporal blackmail. They cast one side of the argument as uniquely rational and the other as purely emotional, denying the interplay of these traits on both sides, and precluding the possibility of contestation. This can only lead to frustration and anger.

These kinds of arguments are particularly explicit with regard to the kinds of social liberal issues that underpinned the 'permissive' reforms of the 1960s and the consequent backlash against the 'trendy liberal' elite, which we will examine in Chap. 5. The use of 'progressive' arguments can be beneficial for campaigners. For instance, an image circulated on social media around the time of the 2013 parliamentary debates on equal marriage featured a photograph of anti–same-sex marriage campaigners alongside one of anti–civil rights protestors in the 1960s, with the slogan 'Imagine how stupid you're going to look in 40 years' time'. This idea of inevitability, of being on the 'right side of history' (encapsulated in the word 'progressive'), is powerful. It also featured heavily in elite political rhetoric, which was replete with metaphors of 'roads' and 'milestones'. The idea that civil partnerships would be 'appropriate in Britain in 2010–11' was widespread.[18] As Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg put it, 'in this day and age I think most people think "come on, let's move with the times"'.[19]

Yet while campaigns for women's rights and gay liberation have been seen (at least from the outside) as self-evidently progressive causes, it is also often noted that progressive time is gendered as masculine and weighted as heteronormative.[20] In her well-known essay on 'Women's Time', Julia Kristeva distinguished between three phases of feminism. The first was the egalitarian phase, in which the aim was to insert women into (progressive) historical time; followed by the Freudian radical phase, in which feminists emphasised instead the specificity of female time. While the second phase was an improvement on the first, it was in the third, 'avant-garde' phase

that Kristeva imagined that the problems of both would be transcended.[21] Victoria Browne has, however, noted that this is itself an inescapably progressive, linear temporality. Indeed, she observes that this is common to most histories of feminism, citing particularly Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. While Kristeva's and Jaggar's accounts differ in the specificities of the waves and phases they identify, they rely upon a 'similar general storyline, portraying feminist thought as a singular journey that begins with a universalistic egalitarianism', before 'explor[ing] a specially female worldview; and finally, register[ing] the differences *between* women'. Moreover, Browne continues, 'both authors construct a linear narrative of progress that culminates in the author's own theoretical position in the present', which is presented as having surpassed all the previous phases 'to arrive at this moment of theoretical sophistication and promise for the future'.[22]

Similar critiques have been made of the supposedly progressive lineage of gay rights.[23] For instance, Robert Mills has highlighted the way in which queer public histories tend to reproduce the narrative forms of grand narrative history. In particular, he examines the 2006 'Queer is Here' exhibition at the Museum of London, which presented a linear timeline beginning with the decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1967 and ending in the present day. As Mills suggests, this relied upon a harsh distinction between being 'in' and 'out' of the closet, in ways that enabled a linear narrative of progress, but failed to take account of the fragmented, contradictory experiences of LGBT[24] (especially B and T) individuals and their desires. In response, he suggests that museum-goers should 'be invited to consume their histories queerly—interacting with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions'.[25] We have already mentioned the challenge that Lee Edelman poses to the 'reproductive futurism' of modern politics. He similarly notes the way in which queer politics is liable to be folded into liberal narratives of universal rights, by becoming 'nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification'. Edelman wants to destabilise and reject the symbolic and social politics of futurity; not to find a place within it.[26]

There are also racial implications here. Nations and races that are seen to be less 'advanced' in these terms are cast as 'backward' and therefore legitimate subjects of external influence. The treatment of women has been, at least nominally, one of the markers of a progressive nation throughout the period that examined in this book. Similarly, it was widely reported that David Cameron wanted 'to export gay marriage around the

world'.[27] In the full version of his speech, he actually talked about export-ing the team who had pushed the Bill through Parliament: 'we've got to export more and sell more so I'm going to export the bill team. I think they can be part of this global race and take it around the world.' He also emphasised the 'work to be done as Britain in the Commonwealth, talking to our Commonwealth partners about decriminalising homosexuality in various countries'.[28] These statements are replete with assumptions about the civilising role both of Britain and of international trade—as well as the association between progressive reform and *getting things done*—even as they disregard the role of British imperialism in producing the legal codes that regulated sexual practices in the countries that are the focus of Cameron's complaint.[29] They therefore work to entrench the notion of Western superiority.

The idea of progressive nationhood has always been concerned with race. From the earliest discussions of progressive, stationary and declin-ing states, through nineteenth-century ideas about national character-istics, through to twentieth- and twenty-first-century discussions about 'development', race and progress have been intimately entwined. While anti-imperialism and campaigns for racial equality have been seen as self-evidently 'progressive' causes, more pernicious ideas of racial hierarchies, linear development and civilising missions have also been expressed in this language. We will return to these themes in Chaps. 2 and 5.

Methods and Approach

In 2004, Michael Freeden noted that the 'central question' that the his-tory of ideas must address is: 'what has to hold for this sentence, that paragraph, this narrative, to make sense to its author, and what has to hold for it to make sense to its consumers'?[30] This book takes up his ques-tion and asks: what has to hold for the word 'progressive' to make sense both to those who use it and to those who hear them? In doing so, it draws upon an established body of literature located between intellectual, cultural and political history, as well the growing scholarship on politi-cal rhetoric. The historical study of political languages developed from the 1980s as an attempt to move understandings of class and radicalism away from a simple reflection of material conditions, and became a way of bridging the gap between the study of high politics and that of popular culture. In both cases, attention was given to the way in which language produces as well as reflects identities.[31] An interest in language and its

effects has also shaped the recent interest in rhetoric within political studies. The hallmark of this approach has been that it asks not only how political speech is structured, but also what it *does*, how political actors can use ideas as 'projectiles […], purposefully displacing the context around them', reshaping the terrain on which politics is conducted and 'reorienting [their audiences] towards their situations'.[32] Both of these approaches have drawn on the work of Quentin Skinner and his insistence on placing political language in its historical context, asking how it was *used* rather than what it objectively *means*.[33]

Alongside these studies of rhetoric and political languages, histories of individual words are becomingly increasingly common.[34] While these seem to be close to conceptual history, practised by historians like Reinhart Koselleck, the benefit of this particular approach is that, as Thomas Dixon explains, it does not work backwards to establish the roots of a familiar concept, but instead begins with a particular word and 'traces its development forwards and outwards', exploring the various concepts and ideas to which it became attached.[35] This is particularly valuable with a word like 'progressive', which appears in many different contexts and in association with contradictory clusters of concepts. It is not enough to know that it has been used to signify an active and collectivist state if we do not also know that to other ears it indicated profitable private enterprise.

There are practical difficulties with this approach, however, which become particularly apparent when studying a word like 'progressive'. Unlike 'altruism' (the subject of Dixon's study), 'progressive' was not a neologism and has a wide range of everyday applications, in addition to its more substantive ones. So for every 'progressive attitude' we find in the sources, there are numerous 'progressive' increases and decreases. The connections between these types of use are complicated. For instance, one of the bedrocks of left-liberal progressivism, progressive income tax, is so called because it is graduated and sequential, not because it is redistributive. It belongs to the family of progressive salaries, share dividends and hire purchase schemes regularly advertised in the late Victorian and Edwardian press. These meanings are difficult to pin down and tease out. Their sheer quantity also makes analysis difficult. Archival research has been possible only in limited cases—and even then only at the risk of missing a reference while skimming the pages. On the other hand, digital word searches (despite the still limited range of sources available) throw up such a surfeit of material that it can quickly become overwhelming.

A possible solution would be to turn to big data and the innovative work currently being done in corpus linguistics.[36] I have not done this, for a number of reasons. First, I do not have a clearly defined corpus. Rather than examining the occurrence of particular clusters of words in a large sample of homogeneous source material, I am interested in tracing the use of one word across as heterogeneous a range of sources as possible. Second, the sheer slipperiness of 'progressive' renders quantitative analysis virtually meaningless: even if it appears in close proximity to, say, the word 'Liberal', it would still be necessary to distinguish between 'the progressive increase in Liberal support' and 'a thoroughly progressive Liberal policy'. Finally, and relatedly, on the few occasions when I have ventured into such searches, I have found that, on picking out specific examples, I did not trust the data they had generated.

Instead, I have chosen to approach digital research more in the spirit of an archaeologist digging exploratory trenches—across a single year here, a particular kind of record there. This is unavoidably arbitrary and I make no apology for that. I have also often concentrated on the kinds of material that I found the most surprising, the most at odds with received understandings of 'progressive'. My study is not intended to replace the works of Peter Clarke, David Blaazer and Michael Freeden on progressive thought and politics. It is, however, intended to supplement them, to show that just as progressive meant left-liberal reform, it has *also* signified efficient business practice, cultural experimentation and elite complacency. This approach is particularly important for a term whose meaning is often taken to be self-evident by both political actors and their analysts.

This is an attempt to tell the cultural history of a political term. While many (even most) of my examples are drawn from the world of politics, I have tried to situate them within broader cultural discussions and histories. I will, therefore, trace links between commercial advertisements and changing ideas of governance, and set ideas about self-development alongside those of nationhood, as well as examining the curious parallels between the careers of progressive politics and prog rock. Throughout, my intention has been to give voice to the sheer variety of ways in which the term progressive has been employed. This is not a linear story with a set of neat conclusions. It is complex and layered, messy and contingent. Ideas crop up and fade away; there are contradictions and cul-de-sacs, lost threads and unexpected echoes.

STRUCTURE

Despite this messiness, the book takes a broadly chronological approach, beginning with an overview of 'progressive' ideas since the eighteenth century, then following the word through a series of political and cultural moments and discussions, from the late 1880s to 2016. As might be expected, there are overlaps and gaps between each of these stories, and I have tried to indicate where ideas are discussed in more detail elsewhere in the text.

Chapter 2 destabilises the relationship between 'conservative' and 'progressive' mindsets. These are often assumed to be in a binary relationship, not only in politics but as eternal and essential philosophical opposites. Recent work in the United States has even suggested that they might be hard-wired neurological responses.[37] This chapter unpicks that opposition, showing that it is historically and culturally contingent. It depends on eighteenth-century models of historical development, Victorian theories of national and racial development, and Edwardian party positioning. The chapter also demonstrates that the relationship between conservative and progressive positions is far less clear-cut than it appears. First, the two terms are not antonyms: on a spectrum, 'conservative' would come between 'progressive' and 'regressive'. Second, conservatism is usually structured around an acceptance of progressive logic—whether in the form of organic change or the need to slow down the inevitable (and ultimately desirable) march of progress. And third, neither political position uniformly adopts the temporal position implied by its name. Indeed, some of the strongest critiques of 'progressive' temporality have come from the left. The terms are not only co-constituting, they are also irretrievably blurred.

Chapter 3 delves into some of the reasons for that blurring. It examines the emergence of 'progressive' as a party label in Britain, as it was adopted by the first administration of the London County Council in 1889. This Liberal group, which incorporated several Labour members, is usually taken to mark the start of a Lib–Lab 'progressive movement' in British politics, which developed throughout the Edwardian period before dissipating in the inter-war years.[38] While not disputing this history, I suggest that the use of the label 'progressive' to describe this movement was contingent and contested, and was initially chosen to indicate continuity with older Liberal and Radical ideas, rather than the novelty of an alliance with the fledgling labour movement. Although this soon developed into

an attempt to redefine the limits of 'progressive politics', it was only partially successful—as the emergence of a number of anti-socialist Liberal-Conservative Progressive Parties in the inter-war years shows. Even insofar as a progressive/conservative divide made sense in nineteenth-century politics, once liberalism had splintered and dispersed across the political spectrum, it was no longer possible to make such distinctions.

Chapter 4 looks at the teleology of progressive positioning at a time when it was under particular strain. The inter-war years gave rise to an eclectic variety of groups and organisations, espousing self-declared 'progressive' opinions and displaying a wide variety of temporal attitudes. Some of these suggested that progress lay in orderly development, others in the attempt to transcend the linearity of history. This could be seen as a dispute between two different forms of modernism: technicist efficiency and esoteric fragmentation. It also involved competing ideas about the nature of the state and about the narrative forms through which national identity could be expressed and understood. This was a contest with winners and losers, but it is not easy to discern which was which. While rationality and linearity became the hallmarks of the 'modern' state, this was also underpinned by a move towards interiority, femininity and emotional self-development in ways that complicate this story.

These ideas are traced forward in Chap. 5, partly through the influence of the psy-sciences on the development of post-war planning, but most importantly through the self-fashioning of consumers and citizens as 'progressive people'. This was an ambiguous process. While Britons were continually urged to 'be progressive', this was an injunction that conveyed both prudence and risk, both continuity and rupture. It was greeted with ambivalence by people who feared that humankind was 'progressing backwards', and with scepticism by those who worried that Britain had fallen into relative economic decline since the war. Moreover, from the early 1960s 'progressive' began to be used in a derogatory fashion to describe liberal ideas on decolonisation. This developed into a wider backlash against the 'progressive' establishment who were seen to be pushing the idea of a 'permissive society' on an unwilling populace. Perhaps for the first time, the question of what it meant to be a progressive person or a progressive nation invited not only doubt, but anxiety and anger.

In Chap. 6 we return to party politics and the attempts of the mainstream parties to respond to the affluence of the post-war years and the changing politics it brought with it. In particular, we will try to understand why and how 'progressive' became solidified in this period as a term

that was 'almost exclusively associated with the Left', at exactly the time that the left was seen to have lost its grip on the future.[39] This involves tracing the contours of the debate around the need to realign the party system on a 'progressive' basis, from the 1940s into the early 1980s. This took several forms, but we will see that the alliance between social liberals and social democrats that eventually emerged was by no means inevitable, nor was it the only understanding of 'progressive' liberalism in this period. Indeed, to most Liberals in the 1960s and 1970s, the statism of social democracy was exactly what they wanted to avoid. Instead, they stressed the politics of active citizenship, participatory democracy, and even anarchism. It was in the hands of social democrats that the history of the Edwardian Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance' took on a new significance and became the dominant political understanding of the term—even if this was rather more of a historical than a future-oriented claim.

Chapter 7 looks at the ways in which this history has been invoked by those wanting to claim the 'progressive mantle' for a range of political projects—from New Labour to Cameron's Conservatives, and from the Green Party to the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP). These attempts at 'political cross-dressing' rely upon a stable and well-recognised understanding of what that mantle conveys, even as they attempt to subvert and reorient it. Yet, this is not just a matter of playing cynical rhetorical games. The attempt to straddle political boundaries has in many ways become a marker of 'modernisation' in an era in which ideology is characterised as a nostalgic remnant of the past. This disguises the way in which the theory of modernisation is itself intensely ideological.

… By Any Other Name?

As is clear from the topics outlined here, 'progressive' has a close relationship to a number of other terms, particularly modernity, modernisation and liberalism. Yet could it be replaced by any of these? What is its distinctive value?

Most obviously, 'progressive' is a term of movement. In its earliest uses it denoted forward movement through space, but it has since become primarily associated with movement through time. While 'modernity' is used to define the present (admittedly in a way that often involves a sense of temporal acceleration) and 'modernisation' to set out how we can accommodate ourselves to that present, 'progressive' indicates the cusp of present and future. To be progressive is to move towards, to anticipate,

the future. To describe something as progressive is thus to make it appear inevitable. In practice, this often makes it more or less synonymous with modernisation, as we will see particularly in Chap. 7. Yet, this is arguably a reflection of the inability to think beyond the present, rather than a feature of 'progressive' thinking itself. Modernisation is also strongly connected, particularly in the United States, with stratified models of state development, from 'traditional' to 'modern' (i.e. consumer capitalist).[40] While 'progressive' has been used in this context, as we will see with its application to decolonising nations in Chap. 5, it is not tied to it. Its association with an (at least formally) undefined future leaves it more open, more fluid than that.

The relationship with 'liberalism' is more complex. David Craig has traced the origins of this term in Britain, showing how the use by Shelley and Byron of *The Liberal* as a title for their satirical periodical (1822–23) worked to develop its meaning from 'generosity' and 'gentlemanliness' to a more derisive association with Jacobinism, 'an assault on religion and the social order it upheld'. *The Liberal* appeared at exactly the time when uses of 'liberal' and 'liberality' were shifting and when 'liberalism' was beginning to emerge. While the periodical was not decisive in fixing the meaning of the latter term, it did 'provide the opportunity for reformers and reactionaries to orient themselves around this language, and in doing so to redefine it'.[41] A similar process can be traced in the case of 'progressive' and the way in which it became overwhelmingly associated with liberalism. By describing themselves as the 'Party of Progress', Liberals constituted politics as a battle between 'progressive' and 'conservative' or 'reactionary' forces. As we will see throughout the book, this division has always been contested—claims to 'progressive conservatism' are apparent from the late 1850s. Yet once the Liberal Party split in 1886 (and again in the early twentieth century), with some Liberals joining forces with Conservative and Unionist politicians, this division became difficult to sustain.

Another element that we will explore is the idea that as a naturally evolving, open-ended ideology, liberalism was intrinsically progressive.[42] Again, though, this became less clear towards the end of the nineteenth century, once conservatism laid claim to Burkean organicism.[43] Despite this, as we will see throughout the book, the association between liberalism and 'progressive politics' remains strong. Indeed, its application to different traditions *within* liberalism makes sense of some of the most contradictory uses of 'progressive'. That is not to say, though, that these links

are indissoluble. If this history demonstrates anything, it is that the term remains open to evolution, appropriation and redefinition.

The persistent attempts throughout modern British history to appropriate 'progressive' indicate the extent to which it signifies a powerful cultural value. This tells us something important about the ways in which Britons have situated themselves in time: turning towards the future, even as they have resisted various attempts to control the shape that will take. In claiming this word, political actors try to associate their political vision with futurity in general, yet the history of previous appropriations means that they are continually pulled back into particularity, forced to contend with pre-existing associations, traditions and counter-claims.[44] Not only does this provide a good example of the way in which political language works in general, it also illuminates the strands that run through modern British political history but are often obscured by the over-riding focus on party as the principal marker of difference, and as the main conduit of tradition.

NOTES

1. For more on this history, see Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, The Class Problem and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Will Morrisey, *The Dilemma of Progressivism: How Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson Reshaped the American Regime of Self-Government* (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); J. Michael Hogan (ed.), *Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era*. A Rhetorical History of the United States, Volume VI (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002).

2. Readers looking for such a work should turn to Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: social politics in a progressive age* (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998) and Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists and the Problems of the State: ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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4. Nick Clegg, *The Liberal Moment,* (London: Demos, 2009), p. 13.

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6. Bob Rodwell, 'Unionist to start new party', *Guardian*, 17 December 1979, p. 2.

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8. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1 Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2002), pp. 183–185; Alan Finlayson and James Martin, '"It Ain't What you Say …": British Political Studies and the Analysis of Speech and Rhetoric', *British Politics* 3 (2008), pp. 445–464 (452).

9. I am grateful to James Martin for suggesting this argument.

10. Reinhart Koselleck, '"Progress" and "Decline": An appendix to the history of two concepts', in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: timing history, spacing concepts,* tr. Todd Samuel Presner *et al* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 218–235; Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On The Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

11. See for instance, Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity Press, 2012 [2000]); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press 1995); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: self and society in the late modern age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

12. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 13; 7; 11. Original emphasis.

13. See for instance, Peter Wagner, *Progress: a reconstruction* (London: Polity, 2015); Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994).

14. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 31.

15. Rita Felski, *Doing Time: feminist theory and postmodern culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

16. See Emily Robinson, '"Different and better times"? History, Progress and Inequality', in Pedro Ramos Pinto and Betrand Taithe (eds) *The Impact of History* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 110–122.

17. See Emily Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition in Contemporary British Politics: past politics and present histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), Chap. 5.

18. Simon Hughes, quoted in Adam Wager, 'Has the time come for gay marriage in the UK?', *Guardian*, 21 July 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/law/2010/jul/21/gay-marriage. Accessed 31.12.2014.

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23. See, for instance, Matt Houlbrook, 'Daring to Speak Whose Name? Queer Cultural Politics: 1920–1967', in Marcus Collins (ed.) *The Permissive Society and its Enemies* (London: Rivers Oram, 2008); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

24. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

25. Robert Mills, 'Queer is Here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture', *History Workshop Journal* 62:1 (2006), pp. 253–263 (262).

26. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 28.

27. For example, Christopher Hope, 'David Cameron: 'I want to export gay marriage around the world', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 2013. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10200636/I-want-to-export-gay-marriage-around-the-world-says-David-Cameron.html; Tim Shipman, 'I want to export gay marriage around the world, says Cameron as he speaks of personal pride at party to celebrate new legislation', *Daily Mail*, 24 July 2016; http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2377175/I-want-export-gay-marriage-world-says-Cameron-speaks-personal-pride-party-celebrate-new-legislation.html. Both accessed 11.07.2016.

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29. For the complex interaction between politics and history on these questions, see Richard Phillips, 'Histories of Sexuality and Imperialism: What's the Use?' *History Workshop Journal* 63 (2007), pp. 136–153.

30. Michael Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 9.

31. For a recent overview of these developments, see David Craig and James Thompson, 'Introduction', in David Craig and James Thompson (eds) *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 1–20.

32. James Martin, 'Situating Speech: A Rhetorical Approach to Political Strategy', *Political Studies* 63:1 (2015), pp. 25–42 (26). See also, James Martin, *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013); James Martin, Judi Atkins, Alan Finlayson, Nick Turnbull (eds), *Rhetoric in British Politics and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

33. Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, pp. 1–7.

34. Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2008); D. M. Craig, 'The origins of "liberalism" in Britain: the case of *The Liberal*', *Historical Research* 85:229 (2012), pp. 469–487.

35. Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism*, pp. 36–38.

36. See for instance, Hansard Corpus: British Parliament, 1803–2005, University of Glasgow: http://www.hansard-corpus.org. Accessed 12.07.2016; Luke Blaxhill, 'Quantifying the language of British politics, 1880–1910;, *Historical Research*, 86: 232 (2013), pp. 313–341; Tim Hitchcock, Adam Crymble and Louise Falcini, *Vagrant lives: 14,789 vagrants processed by the county of Middlesex, 1777–1786.* Journal of Open Humanities Data, 1 (2015) DOI: http://doi.org/10.5334/johd.1.

37. For example, see Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

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40. See Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

41. Craig, 'The origins of "liberalism"', pp. 482–483.

42. Freeden, *Liberal Languages,* Chap. 2.

43. Emily Jones, 'Conservatism, Edmund Burke, and the Invention of a Political Tradition, c.1885–1914', *Historical Journal* 58 (2015), pp. 1115–1139.

44. I am grateful to James Martin for conversations on this topic.

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Two Natural and Inevitable Parties?

In 1946 George Orwell included 'progressive' in a list of words—along with freedom, patriotic, justice—that could be used to deceive. This was, he said, because they had 'variable meanings', which allowed them to be used in a 'consciously dishonest way'.[1] At first glance, 'progressive' seems rather different from these other examples. Rather than a universally desirable description, it is part of a binary, progressive/conservative, both halves of which are respectable political positions. Yet this is not as clear-cut as it seems. Progressive and conservative are neither equally weighted nor mutually exclusive. The extent to which the former has been privileged over the past two centuries is the subject of this book. It has serious implications for our understanding of party positioning and political practice, and the complex ways in which these have interacted with wider cultural and intellectual currents.

The first thing to note is that progressive and conservative are not true antonyms: conservative is a mid-point between progressive and regressive. And, as we will see, fear of being associated with the latter has frequently led conservatives to proclaim allegiance to the former. Moreover, the very construction of these as political positions implies a linear view of history, along which we must either progress or retreat. Such assumptions have become almost incontestable in Western thought and can be seen within even the most traditional of conservative positions. This takes different forms, ranging from the promotion of organic theories of progress to the idea that it is the conservative duty to be on the 'wrong side' of history (despite the belief that history has no 'sides', no pattern). The reach of

'progressive' beliefs deep into the realm of conservative thought is striking. Even explicitly reactionary views (like those we will see from the Liberty and Property Defence League later in this chapter) often operate within this linear understanding of time, and also tend to present themselves as an escape from the stagnation of the present in order to regain the progressive impetus of the past. Conversely, it is among anti-industrial thinkers, like William Morris, or ecological movements that we find some of the strongest critiques of progress and the most sustained challenges to linear progressive time. Yet, because many of these ideas are associated with both left politics and interventionist programmes for social and political change, they are often co-opted into the 'progressive' project by default.

Here it would be useful to introduce another oppositional relationship: between linear, progressive time and cyclical, repetitive time. This opposition has been posed as a way of distinguishing between modern and premodern history, industrialised and 'traditional' societies, even between male and female. In each case, the first is driven by the formalities of 'clock time' and by the need to tell a developmental story. It places individual achievements within the narrative time of History with a capital H. The second is associated with the cycles of human reproduction, of the agricultural seasons, and of the religious calendar. It is a social time of myth and memory. As Rita Felski has shown, such oppositions fail to recognise the extent to which these categories bleed into one another. Not only is home and family life subject to clock time, even in many societies considered 'traditional', but 'modern' life is also inescapably cyclical. We might think of the daily rhythms of the commuter, the annual cycles of holidays and performance appraisals, the seasonality of construction work, real estate sales, and sporting events.[2] Likewise, David Edgerton has argued that despite the valorisation of the new and the lionisation of the inventor, new technologies sit alongside the continued use of inherited, traditional and unglamorous objects, which are at least as influential in structuring daily life.[3] Nevertheless, despite these complexities, progressive time is accorded a privileged status that cyclical time is not. It is seen to be the marker of modernity.

Interestingly, the conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott made a similar argument to Edgerton in his 1956 essay 'On Being Conservative'. While recognising that the 'progressive' mindset was dominant in contemporary society, he noted that it always ran alongside a less visible, though essential, conservative disposition, by which we reach for familiar tools, even to undertake the most innovative of projects. Indeed, 'no business

would ever get done' if we had to design our tools from scratch each time. And, he argued, the same should be true of politics, where the tools should be the rules of general conduct, not 'the search for truth or perfection'.[4] Yet Oakeshott was also aware that this was not the case. A different type of politics had 'come to colour the ideas, not merely of one, but of all political persuasions, and to flow over every party line'. This was the politics of rationalism, which preferred 'the invention of a new device to making use of a current and well-tried expedient'. Since the Renaissance, rationalism 'has ceased to be merely one style in politics and has become the stylistic criterion of all respectable politics'.[5] Rationalism is not a direct synonym for progressivism, but it is a close relative. Both are based on reason over faith, innovation over experience, and abstraction over particularity. Both are also features of post-Renaissance Europe.

Eighty years before Oakeshott was writing, another Conservative bemoaned the 'modern theory and crotchet', which had destroyed the 'spirit of the old constitution which held the nation together as a whole'. Lord Salisbury's attack on what he saw as Britain's 'Disintegration' 'into a bundle of unfriendly and distrustful elements' was also an attack on progress. He both lamented the inevitable 'process of political evolution', which was bringing democracy and—with it—social 'decay', and also blamed Radicals for preaching a deliberate policy of 'unresting advance', which he described as 'progress in which the traveller looks forward to no resting-place but moves for moving sake'. Tellingly, Salisbury acknowledged the futility of opposing a process brought about both 'by the defective working of our political machinery, and by the public temper of the time'.[6]

Progress Itself

The extraordinary power of the idea of 'progress' is usually traced to the eighteenth century, and in particular to the conjectural, or stadial, histories of the Scottish Enlightenment.[7] These were attempts to understand the development of human society by means of a series of historical stages. In particular, they tried to explain the shift from agricultural feudalism to the commercial society, by linking commercial freedom to political liberty and describing both as the drivers of human progress.[8] From the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, such orderly views of progress came under pressure. John Burrow, for instance, has pointed to the dramatic, cataclysmic ways in which time was depicted in the immediate aftermath

of the French Revolution, and in response to the Industrial Revolution. This was a time of events, eruptions, crises. Yet, by the middle part of the nineteenth century it had given way to more gradual, sedimentary models of time, which corresponded to new biological, geological, archaeological and anthropological discoveries.[9] These latter developments were used to situate nineteenth-century Europeans in a long arc of 'progressive' human development, showing that they too had progressed from barbarism.[10] As Jennifer Pitts has outlined, nineteenth-century utilitarians appropriated the models of stadial history to erect 'a crude dichotomy between civilization and rudeness', by which non-European societies were imagined to be in social 'infancy' and thus in need of Imperial intervention.[11]

The extent to which the political economy of the late eighteenth century represented an overthrowing of previous understandings of human nature and its relation to time and change is contentious. Robert Nisbet's *History of the Idea of Progress* gave an 'emphatic yes' to the proposition that faith in the continuous progress of civilisation existed in the classical world, and that this was carried into medieval Christianity through the belief in earthly paradises, before being transformed into a secular theory.[12] These suggestions have been vigorously disputed by Christopher Lasch, who argues that the '"secularization thesis" has too long obscured differences between the idea of providence and the modern idea of progress'. For him, the distinction lies in the question of material wants: while progress urges 'a multiplication of wants and desires', both Christian and classical authors 'believed that moral wisdom lay in limits'.[13] He also points out that in prophetic thought, history was moving towards the moment of judgement, not necessarily towards the promised land. For Lasch, the conflation of providence and progress has disguised 'what was so original about the latter: not the promise of a secular utopia that would bring history to a happy ending but the promise of steady improvement with no foreseeable ending at all'.[14]

In addition to Christian ideas, the other 'other' here is the classical republican tradition with its emphasis on virtue, activity and sacrifice for the civic good. Again, the connection that Lasch makes between progressive views of history and the search for material comfort is useful here. While for republicans, luxury represented corruption and would lead (in a cyclical conception of time) to political decline, the theorists of commercial society saw this as a beneficial process, which would 'drive the economic machine'. Such ideas seemed to have given 'rise to a form of society capable of indefinite expansion' and ultimately 'the exemption of

the modern world from the judgement of time'.[15] More recently, however, the stark contrast between these two positions has been questioned. For instance, Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson point to the way in which 'liberal pioneers', like Adam Smith, developed their theories of commercial society *through* republican concepts.[16] Likewise, István Hont has sought to show the overlap between republicanism and commercial theories within the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and to demonstrate his similarity to Smith.[17]

As we will see throughout this book, the idea that progressive society is associated with the multiplication of material wants runs up against the way in which political 'progressives' (usually on the left) have often been identified with an ascetic, puritanical form of politics, out of touch with the lived experience of 'ordinary' men, women and families, who are seen to be driven by the pursuit of pleasure. This was a common criticism of the London Progressives at the turn of the twentieth century. In Chap. 6, we will see that post-war socialists struggled with the idea of the 'affluent society' and feared that it would militate against the habits of mind needed to nurture good citizens. Moreover, the interest of both the New Left and radical Liberals in the politics of active civic participation at this time has been described as an attempt to revive the republican tradition.[18] These projects were not successful, but they highlight both the enduring appeal of aspects of civic republicanism and the complex interactions between what we might think of as the 'doctrine of progress' and the politics of the 'progressive movement'.

Progress and Politics

One of the most influential readings of the history of the concept of progress has come from Reinhart Koselleck, the founder of the German school of conceptual history. Koselleck's main concern is with the emergence of new conceptions of time in eighteenth-century Europe and the way in which these structured understandings of modernity, first as a 'neue Zeit' (new time) and eventually as the compound 'Neuzeit' (modern times).[19] The idea of progress as a new and intrinsically secular idea is central to this thesis. In one particular essay, Koselleck traces its development, from being an adjunct to other concepts—such as knowledge or art—to being itself a historical agent. At first this manifested itself in expressions like 'the progress of time' or 'the progress of history', but by the late nineteenth century it had become simply 'progress itself'. Koselleck ended his

enquiry into the history of the term 'progress' there, in the late nineteenth century, on the grounds that at this point 'progress' became ubiquitous; merely 'a political catchword' used right across the political spectrum. As he added, 'since the nineteenth century, it has become difficult to gain political legitimacy without being progressive at the same time'. In Koselleck's terms, this was a consequence of progress becoming a collective singular: 'progress itself'.[20]

So far I have been focusing on the doctrine of 'progress', rather than the idea of being 'progressive'—or being 'a progressive'. As we will explore more thoroughly in the next chapter, the idea of 'progressive' politics bears a particular history, tied to new liberalism and its alliance with the labour movement. This form of politics emerged in the late nineteenth century, at exactly the moment that Koselleck ended his survey of the term 'progress'. The historiography of this new political movement has been so dominant that it has obscured more long-standing notions of what 'progressive' politics meant. Even Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, which notes that 'progressist' had been in use since the 1840s, sees 'progressive' as having emerged 'as a term of political description' only in the municipal politics of the 1880s.[21] As we will see, however, the use of the term at that time and in that context was a quite conscious attempt to reclaim and redefine a much older political label, which had been tied to exactly the forms of political economy that the new progressives wanted to contest.

As Williams also emphasises, the meaning of 'progressive' is necessarily complicated because the history of 'progress' is complicated. Its general sense of 'forward movement' and 'discoverable sequence' gained ideological associations in the eighteenth century, when the word became tied to Enlightenment notions of civilisation and improvement. With the political and industrial revolutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the development of evolutionary theories, it became a 'law of history ("you can't stop progress")'. Like Koselleck, Williams notes that in the twentieth century 'nearly all political tendencies now wish to be described as progressive' and, because of this, 'it is more frequently now a persuasive than a descriptive term'—as in 'progressive conservatism'.[22]

TIME AND SPACE

When dictionaries began to be compiled in the mid-eighteenth century, most of the listings for 'progress' were spatial: 'course. Passage. Motion forward. A circuit or journey'; 'a removal from one place to another; a

journey of state'.[23] We also see, however, references to 'improvement'; 'advancement' and 'intellectual improvement'.[24] 'Progressive' was recorded as meaning 'going forward, advancing or increasing gradually' or that 'which proceeds or goes on'.[25] These definitions seem to be largely derived from Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755. Yet, although Johnson himself listed 'progressive' only as 'Going forward; advancing', the illustrative examples he provided suggest that this was already about more than spatial movement. Johnson quoted this verse from Matthew Prior's *Solomon* (1718):

> Ere the progressive course of restless age
> Performs three thousand times its annual stage,
> May not our pow'r and learning be supprest,
> And arts and empire learn to travel west?[26]

While neither Prior nor Johnson was an advocate of 'progress' in the late eighteenth-century sense and both adhered to more cyclical notions of time, we can see that the term was already being used in relation to questions of national standing, intellectual and cultural advancement and imperial ambition.[27] Even in the late seventeenth century it held an association with prosperity and success. For instance, Edward Phillips' *The New World of Words*, published in 1696, defined 'progressive' as 'going prosperously forward in any undertaking'.[28]

Johnson's examples also placed 'progressive' in a binary (spatial) relationship, not with conservatism but with retrogression, as in his quotation of Francis Bacon's advice that 'Princes, if they use ambitious men, should handle it so, as they be still progressive, and not retrograde'.[29] This referred to the need to make sure that there are opportunities for such men to rise through the ranks, otherwise they will become discontented and malevolent. This understanding of progressive was further developed by Johnson's reference to John Milton's description of the planets in *Paradise Lost* as 'Progressive, retrograde, or standing still'.[30]

This choice between being 'Progressive, retrograde, or standing still' underpinned later eighteenth-century understandings of the fate of nation states. Thinkers like Adam Smith were concerned to explain how and why some societies continued to progress while others fell into stationariness or decline.[31] In Smith's words, the progressive state manifested itself 'while the society is advancing to the further acquisition […] of riches'. It was 'the cheerful and the hearty state', contrasted with the 'dull' and 'melancholy'

character of the stationary and declining states, respectively.[32] It was while states were still 'under-stocked' and 'under-peopled' (like North America) that they retained the potential for progressive growth; once they had reached maturity (like China or Holland), they would become stationary and, potentially, decline.[33] In the early nineteenth century, this debate developed from the physical conditions necessary for growth to its internal workings. David Ricardo contended that growth would inevitably slow down over time, leading to a stationary situation in which it was no longer possible to make profits from capitalist expansion, and 'the wealth and resources of a community will not admit of an increase'.[34] While this was 'yet far distant' and could be delayed by seeking external markets, importing cheaper commodities, and introducing new technology, it was the logical endpoint of capitalist growth.[35]

In the hands of John Stuart Mill, this argument was inverted and recast as a utopia.[36] For Mill, the stationary state 'would be, on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition'. He went on:

> I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress. It may be a necessary stage in the progress of civilization, and those European nations which have hitherto been so fortunate as to be preserved from it, may have it yet to undergo. […] But the best state for human nature is that in which, while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back by the efforts of others to push themselves forward.[37]

The Developmental Self

Mill's refusal to valorise the process of progressive capital accumulation did not, however, mean abandoning the possibility of progressive improvement. In the stationary state, 'There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the Art of Living, and much more likelihood of its being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the art of getting on.'[38] Indeed, Mill's philosophy was structured around the question of how best to serve 'the permanent interests of man as a progressive being'.[39] This

involved a redefinition of utility—away from the pursuit of happiness and towards social progress, which for Mill meant freedom from custom. His answer to the question of when a people may cease to be progressive was when it ceased to value individuality. Again, it was China that provided the 'warning example'.[40] The role of individuality was essential to Mill's conception of both human nature and social progress: 'the unlikeness of one person to another is generally the first thing which draws the attention of either to the imperfection of his own type, and the superiority of another, or the possibility, by combining the advantages of both, of producing something better than either'. Britons may 'flatter ourselves that we are the most progressive people who ever lived', but if social and political practice succeeded in producing uniformity in outlook, Britain would 'tend to become another China'.[41]

The marker of progressiveness here was continual development. It was about *becoming*, not about being. According to many theorists, this is the essence of modernity—properly understood as a condition (or an attitude), not a historical period. As Michel Foucault explained in his reading of Immanuel Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung?* (*What is Enlightenment?*), 'Enlightenment must be considered both as a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally.' This is not just a social project, it is an individual one. And it is structured around the idea of forward movement, characterised as 'humanity's passage to its adult status', in which 'each individual is responsible in a certain way for that overall process'.[42] This is the basis on which the ideal of progress—and the idea of *being progressive*, both individually and collectively—underpins the ethos of modernity. It does not operate as a description so much as an injunction. This is where we see the real power (or, as Foucault suggests, the 'blackmail') of the idea of 'progress itself'.

As I have already suggested, there are profoundly gendered and racialised implications here. Progressiveness was often framed in terms of virility and vigour. This was seen to make it intrinsically male, as in John Ruskin's claim that 'The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender', whereas the woman's power is passive, it lies in 'sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision […] she enters into no contest, but infallibly judges the crown of contest'.[43] Nor were such views limited to cultural conservatives. Janet Lyon's study of avant-garde manifestos demonstrates that (although feminists were able to wrest this form to their own ends) the dominant view among the political and aesthetic avant-garde aligned radicalism with

masculinity, reaction with femininity.[44] Similar distinctions were made with regard to race and nationality. '[T]he progressive spirit of the West' was contrasted with 'Eastern passiveness and immobility'.[45] This was intimately linked to race, as in the claim that the 'admixture' of Semitic, Iberian and Uranian stock 'infused into European Aryans the progressive spirit which is lacking among our Asiatic kindred'.[46]

Both climate and governance were also seen to be significant contributors to the progressiveness or otherwise of a particular nation—according to which it might move either up or down the 'ladder of civilisation'.[47] For instance, an article on Ceylon recommended government intervention 'to develop the activity of the people, to raise the standard of enjoyment, and to give then a fair chance of becoming a free, industrious, and progressive people'.[48] Similarly, the Bishop of Jamaica was reported to have remarked that the local population was 'developing in general knowledge and in all those qualities, attainments, and beliefs which go to make up an intelligent, industrious, progressive Christian community'.[49] This process was, however, reversible. For instance, while 'Dutchmen in their land by the German Ocean are energetic and full of forethought', the climate and conditions of the Transvaal, in which 'there is no urgent demand for promptitude and laboriousness', had resulted in a complete change of character, so that 'No race of European extraction is less progressive than the Boers.'[50] Again, there are long trails here leading back to Enlightenment thought, particularly as expressed by Montesquieu in his 1748 *The Spirit of the Laws*.[51]

This was not simply a matter for each individual nation, but for the human race as a whole. In 1870, Liberal MP, polymath and anthropologist John Lubbock (whose politics we will explore further in Chap. 3) felt able to proclaim that the story of humanity had 'on the whole been one of progress', on account of the way in which 'improving nations increase in numbers, so that they always encroach on less progressive races'.[52] Lubbock was a social evolutionist, who used archaeology, biology and anthropology to arrange elaborate plans showing how individual societies—including Britain—had developed from primitive to civilised. As Peter Mandler explains, this became the dominant way of explaining the differences between nations in the mid-Victorian period.[53] It was nicely summed up by a feature detailing 'The Progress of the British Boy' in the illustrated periodical *Boys of the Empire*:

> The transmutation of English boys from uncouth savages, with long, flowing locks, tattooed limbs, and wolf-skin covering, into polished young gentlemen with clear skins, broad-cloth suits, and mouths filled with the wisdom and excellence of past ages, has not been effected in a single day.[54]

Yet, despite this association between 'progress' and the white, Western male experience, it is also the case that progressive logic has been employed by marginalised communities to frame their demands for recognition.[55] The idea that socially liberal attitudes on race, gender, and sexuality are 'progressive' is now a commonplace use of the term—to the extent that 'progressive' can be used in a derisory way by moral conservatives. We will explore the emergence of these meanings further in Chaps. 5 and 7. Even in the late nineteenth century, however, suffrage campaigners were able to argue that reform was needed to bring the law into 'accordance with a civilised and progressive age'.[56] In 1889, Grace Greenwood commented sardonically on the fact that the Duke of Argyll, 'though himself a fair specimen of progressive manhood, is sternly conservative womanward'.[57] And an anonymous letter to the *Englishwomen's Review* quoted from a 1776 text advocating a female Magna Charta [sic], before commenting: 'It is passing strange that the above poetic claim for women's rights is 100 years old, and yet even now thought too advanced for this progressive age.'[58] It is striking that such arguments seek to use the linear logic of progressiveness, even as they dispute its effects in their own time.

Two Parties

Progressive and conservative positions have usually been seen not only as competing political approaches, but as opposing cultural and philosophical mindsets. Thus we see mid-nineteenth-century claims that 'The conservative and progressive elements were imbedded in the first principles of human society' and descriptions of 'the two natural and inevitable parties, which under different forms and names, ever have divided and ever must divide mankind into conservatives and progressists'.[59] The first of these statements was made during a debate on the government of Australia and was used to show the need for both an upper and a lower chamber, to represent both tendencies; the second related to the division between the aristocratic and populist parties in Renaissance Florence. In each case, age, timidity and moderation were allied with supporting aristocratic interests, whereas youthful enthusiasm supposedly corresponded with representing

the people. So the temporal and the ideological elements were seen to be necessarily entwined.

Such nineteenth-century beliefs continue to structure ideas of politics in the twenty-first century. In the run-up to the 2010 General Election, we heard that 'the most basic of all dividing lines is that between progressive and conservative thinkers; it's a dividing line built on two different responses to the human condition'; 'Fundamentally Conservatives and Progressives have a conflicting conception of human nature'; and 'Left and Right, Labour and Tory, progressive and conservative—these labels represent real and important differences in the way we understand the world'.[60]

Yet, at root, these are not usually seen to be competing political approaches, but complementary ones. Even (or perhaps especially) the most die-hard conservatives have tended to frame their position as a necessary counterpart to progressivism, rather than a self-sufficient form of politics. A common metaphor in the nineteenth century was of a coach and horses: progressive force was necessary to bear the vehicle forwards, while conservatism provided a judicious brake when required. Although conservatives disavow what John Gray has called the 'sentimental religion of humanity, with its ruling superstition of progress', in reality they have found it rather more difficult to reject this grand narrative than we might imagine.[61] Running underneath their arguments we find the recurrent suggestion that the role of conservatism is to trail behind a historical process, which is both inevitable and desirable. The very logic of conservatism implies an acceptance of progressive time.

One particularly clear expression of this attitude can be seen in an article entitled 'A Plea against Progression', published in the Conservative *National Review* in 1892 under the pseudonym 'An Old-School Tory'. The author argued that 'To promote progress is not the proper function of the Tory Party'[62]; instead, 'the natural function of the Tory Party, the party of negative force, is to prevent the Radical Party, the party of initiative force, from using power wrongly'. That led to this surprising claim:

> We are not meant to be constantly, or even usually, in Power ourselves. An endeavour to do so by means of any Progressive Policy would be only in appearance an endeavour to vanquish Radicalism. It would be really an endeavour to vanquish Nature.[63]

The idea that the 'party of initiative force' had more claim to be in power reveals the extent to which parliamentary politics (and indeed the history of the modern nation state) is structured around a progressive view of history that conservatives frequently accept, even as they disavow their own role within it. A century after this piece was published, another British Conservative, John O'Sullivan, also depicted conservatism as an essentially negative creed. Drawing on Samuel Huntington's 1957 article 'Conservatism as an Ideology', O'Sullivan explained that conservatism exists in order to

> defend established institutions when they came under fundamental attack […]. And once a social system has been decisively overthrown, conservatism counsels acceptance of the new *status quo* and may even defend it against future attack.[64]

The implication of this is, as O'Sullivan went on, that 'when a country is at ease with itself, conservatism is largely unnecessary'.[65]

What is striking about this argument is the acceptance not only that radical change is both inevitable and (largely) benevolent, but that conservatives are *necessarily* on the wrong side of it. The examples that O'Sullivan took from Huntington were the Reformation, the French Revolution, franchise reforms and the abolition of slavery. In a 1969 article in the *Swinton Journal,* Alasdair Morrison made a similar argument. This time seventeenth-century royalists and medieval barons joined the Church and opponents of the 1832 Reform Bill as illustrations of the way in which 'History is littered with dead issues, and also with the wreckage of conservative stands on those issues.'[66] This is a clear example of Herbert Butterfield's characterisation of the Whig interpretation of history, which 'organiz[es] the historical story upon what is really an unfolding principle of progress' and thus classifies 'historical personages' as 'the men who furthered progress and the men who tried to hinder it'.[67] We will examine Whig accounts of history further in Chap. 4, but the way in which they structure conservative as well as liberal accounts of the journey from past to present is significant and emphasises the ubiquity of such ideas—even amongst those who place themselves on the side of 'the men who tried to hinder' progress.

Morrison's argument is also the direct inverse of Walter Benjamin's well-known description of the 'Angel of History', whose 'face is turned toward the past […], he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling

wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it as his feet'. The angel is propelled 'irresistibly' into the future by a storm, which goes by the name of 'progress'.[68] In Morrison's account, progress is similarly irresistible, but it is also benign. The 'wreckage' of conservative positions is its welcome side effect: 'Many things that we value would have been stifled unborn if earlier conservatives had won.'[69] The idea not only that conservative ideas will inevitably be overthrown, but also that they *should* be, goes against the driving logic of modern parliamentary politics. Its implication is that conservatives are necessarily out of step with the public mood. This is not their misfortune; it is their *purpose*. As we will see below, however, such statements also involve the paradoxical claim to be uniquely in touch with the national soul.

Liberty and Property

Conservatives like the 'Old-School Tory' took a self-consciously reactionary position. They opposed all proposals for social reform and state intervention, and derided any suggestions of 'progressive conservatism'. Yet they expressed a strong conception of the idea of progress as a measure of civilisation. Their fear was that any attempts to meddle with the 'natural' processes that had brought them to this point—not least the creativity of entrepreneurial men of industry—would result in a falling-off from this high point, a dilution of genius in the mediocrity of the masses. The article argued that 'progressive' measures of state intervention would in fact lead to 'retrogression': 'It will be a blind irrational destruction of the very forces to which our country owes all the progress which she has already achieved.'[70] This was in many ways a Radical Liberal position—the fact that it was being made by a self-declared 'Old-School Tory' illustrates the extent to which the party system was in flux by the end of the nineteenth century. The concern with state intervention, and its designation as 'progressive', reflects the term's changing meanings at that time.

In late Victorian Britain, such views were expressed particularly vehemently by the Liberty and Property Defence League (LPDL). Although officially a cross-party organisation, the LPDL supported the Conservative Party at national level and exercised a great influence over the (Conservative-aligned) Moderate Party on the London County Council in the early part of the 1890s.[71] Its members strongly believed in progress as a natural phenomenon, glorifying the time 'when England was the banking house of the world', but regretting the 'present and long-continued depression',

which they believed to be caused by 'vexatious restrictions' on industry, enacted by 'men in high places'.[72] This emphasis on 'men in high places' was critical. The declared enemies of the League were 'State-Socialists', which meant 'all those men calling themselves Radicals, Liberals or Conservatives, who seek to trammel private enterprise by State fetters and to confer illimitable benefits on mankind by the agency of Government'. There was also a sense that this tendency was particularly associated with parliamentary politics. M.J. Lyons claimed that 'we need not look beyond St. Stephen's [i.e. the House of Commons] for the real, the primal cause', which lay in the promises of Cabinet Ministers to remedy all ills by means of legislation.[73] The LPDL's language was often alarmist, with State-Socialism imagined as 'a monster, young, lusty, growing with every hour stronger and more hungry by what it feeds on'.[74]

This critique of state intervention was based in the strongly individualist views of the social evolutionist Herbert Spencer. Like many philosophical radicals, Spencer was clear that 'as civilization advances, does government decay'.[75] He was best known, however, for his description of Darwinian evolution as the 'survival of the fittest', and for his application of this formula to the analysis of contemporary society.[76] By the 1880s, Spencer had become profoundly critical of what he described as the 'New Toryism', which he believed to be infecting liberalism. As Thomas Dixon explains, 'Spencer was trying to retain the associations of the terms "Tory" and "Liberal" with which he had grown up several decades earlier. According to Spencer's definitions, Toryism stood for "coercion by the State *versus* freedom of the individual".'[77] The result, as he saw it, was that municipal and national governments were 'doing all they can to further survival of the unfittest!'[78] This point was expressed particularly clearly by an anonymous contributor to *Saturday Review*:

> If Nature's method of the suppression of the unadaptable, the unfit, the weak, is the method which makes for progressive evolution—shall we say for 'righteousness'?—then what about the outcome of the most advanced stages of evolution? What about our hospitals, our insane asylums, our doctoring and coddling of the weak progeny […]?[79]

Such ideas reflect a more heroic conception of progress, which, as we will see in Chap. 4, were later taken up by Nietzschean individualists. Yet, much as the LPDL saw progress as the result 'not of the labour of many, but of the intellect, the ingenuity, and the perseverance of the few',[80]

they were also at pains to illustrate that its measures would benefit rather than harm the working classes. This argument was a direct counter to the increasingly influential work of Henry George, who pointed to the connection between industrial progress and personal misery in his argument for land reform.[81] As Lord Bramwell put it in 1885, 'The great bulk of the people of this country are better off than ever they were. They have more wages, more food, better homes (though far from good enough in towns), and better clothing than they ever had.'[82] Similarly, M.J. Lyons confirmed that 'all classes of population were better fed, better clad, and better housed than they were forty years ago'.[83] Indeed, he went on, 'in all respects the working man is steadily but surely improving. And who shall venture to put a limit to this progress; for while none but visionaries believe in the ultimate perfection of human nature, he must be blind indeed who denied its progressive perfectibility.'[84] W.H. Mallock even disputed the suggestion that the nation's wealth was concentrated in the hands of the landowners, arguing that—in comparison with 1851—'the entire wealth at that time belonging to the rich has since that time been virtually divided amongst the poor'.[85]

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATISM

It is important to (re)emphasise that, for all its defence of 'progress' and even the 'progressive perfectibility' of humankind, this strand of conservatism pitted itself against 'progressive' ideas, and particularly self-declared 'progressive conservatism'. And its defensive rhetoric highlights the extent to which it was ranged against the established opinion of the day.[86] The 'Plea against Progression' of the 'Old-School Tory' was a response to another author's 'Plea for Progression', which argued that the Conservative Party must be 'frank and straightforward—not creeping tentatively forward on a democratic path, trembling at every sound, but fearlessly accepting the wants of the time, and adapting our institutions and laws to their fulfilment'. This was, it claimed, in the best traditions of 'the truest Conservatism' and in sympathy with 'the policy of free evolution'.[87]

In the twentieth century, certain Conservatives have tried to challenge the idea that progress was intrinsically bound up (in the words of Margaret Thatcher) with 'the Socialist, corporatist, collectivist way of doing things'[88] and to put forward their own, often radical, schemes for social and moral progress. It is telling, for instance, that the grouping set up by the right wing of the Conservative Party to oppose the progressivism of the Tory

Reform Group in 1943 was called the Progress Trust.[89] By this reasoning, it was time for Conservatives to stop being 'political "corks on the water"' and to stand up for what they really believed.[90] Yet it was their opponents—those Conservatives who accepted the social democratic *status quo* and who worked within rather than against its basic assumptions—who have most easily established their credentials as 'progressive conservatives', or 'right progressives' in Andrew Gamble's terminology.[91]

As we have seen, Raymond Williams dates the appearance of the phrase 'progressive conservatism' to the twentieth century. Yet it had actually been in use since the mid-nineteenth century. It was initially employed to describe Conservative supporters of free trade,[92] but was soon adopted by those who argued more generally that Conservatives 'must be in harmony with the spirit and feeling of the people, and must not be obstructive'.[93] In 1858, the *Manchester Guardian* remarked sarcastically that 'the edifying discussion of the respective beauties of progressive Conservatism and Conservative progress' was occupying so much parliamentary time that it was distracting attention from urgent questions of national defence.[94]

The counter-intuitive nature of the phrase has often underpinned its attraction. In 1859, for instance, the newly elected Conservative MP for Berkshire Captain L. Vernon made great play of this seeming contradiction, to the delight of the crowd:

> I, as is well known, am a Progressive Reformer. (Great laughter and cheers.) I mean to say Conservative. (Renewed laughter. A Voice.—'You've put your foot in it.' Laughter.) I am so far a reformer that I at once reform the phrase. (Laughter.) […] I therefore am going with the hour, in seeking out that which is for the best advantage of the British public, and legislating according, without partiality, favour, or affection, and this I call being a Progressive Conservative. (Cheers).[95]

Nevertheless, there is perhaps not so great a contradiction here as we might imagine. As Michael Freeden has made clear, conservatism is an ideology 'predominantly *concerned* with the problem of change: not necessarily proposing to eliminate it, but to render it safe'.[96] As Benjamin Disraeli famously put after the 1867 Reform Act,

> In a progressive country, change is constant; and the great question is not whether you should resist change, which is inevitable, but whether that change should be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the

laws and traditions of a people, or whether it should be carried out in deference to abstract principles, and arbitrary and general doctrines.[97]

This emphasis on the social context of change is key. Michael Oakeshott similarly depicted the conservative as far more attuned to the particularity of historical change than the rationalist, whose quest for universal rules led to 'a deep distrust of time' and 'of everything topical and transitory'. Moreover, 'the rationalist does not recognise change unless it is a self-consciously induced change and consequently he falls easily into the error of identifying the customary and the traditional with the changeless'.[98]

However, change does not necessarily mean improvement, and conservatives tend to be cautious about its effects, as with Quintin Hogg's warning that although a 'virtuous circle of progress has been working in our favour over six hundred years', this should not be seen 'as something certain and inevitable, guaranteed by any law, natural or divine'.[99] More pessimistically, Lord Salisbury noted that 'It is patent on the face of history that the aggregates of men who form communities, like the aggregates of atoms that form living bodies, are subject to laws of progressive change—be it towards growth or towards decay.' And, as we have seen, he felt that decay was the most likely direction of modern society.[100]

Some Conservatives suggest that conservatism is the *most* progressive political philosophy, due to its preference for gradual evolution rather than either sudden revolution or conscious design. In the turbulent year of 1848, an article in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* argued that 'Progressive Reform [was] the only Conservative Policy'. After making the familiar argument that judicious reform at the right time had forestalled a revolution in Britain, the article went further, suggesting:

> Never was the country so conservative, in the true sense of the word, as at this critical juncture. […] But the conservative spirit which the neighbouring Revolution has called forth is not to be confounded with the stationary principle; it is the conservation of progress made and machinery by which further progress is to be made.[101]

The rejection of the association between conservation and stationariness is critical. It shows that this is about more than appropriating the language of progress for conservative ends, and reveals the extent to which conservatism is structured around an idea of gradual, benevolent change. In

1885, Randolph Churchill described 'the principles of true Conservatism' as 'those of gradual, unceasing progress, adhering strictly to the lines of a well-founded Constitution, and avoiding all violent and unnecessary changes',[102] and asserted that the Conservative Party was the only one that could be trusted to 'proceed safely, steadily, and surely along the broad path of social progress and reform'.[103] Another writer dismissed socialism on the grounds that no 'society so artificially formed would be either durable, or progressive, or happy'.[104]

The emphasis on organic growth and resistance to 'artificial' schemes for reform is important here. Taking a similar line, in the early twentieth century Walter Elliot MP argued that modern science was on conservatism's side. He explained that 'in the realm of thought a veritable revolution is taking place, against the conceptions of three hundred years'. Rather than heading towards ever greater rationality, as the positivists had imagined, he pointed out that Darwinian theories of evolution suggested that nature had no telos. And, as he put it, 'Biology is the logos of Toryism.'[105] It is worth noting that more recently arguments have been made for the radical emancipatory potential of Darwin's theories for postmodern and feminist thought, in ways that would be deeply disturbing to such progressive conservatives. It is not only the organic and non-teleological nature of development that matters here—it is its dependence on disruptive, unpredictable and radical change.[106] This is rather different from the way in which conservatives attempt to *manage* change. As Edmund Burke noted, change is 'the great law [...] the most powerful law of nature' and, if implemented 'by insensible degrees', it can be a beneficial force and a means of conservation, 'without any of the inconveniencies of mutation'.[107]

In her examination of the way in which Burke came to be seen as a founding father of conservatism, Emily Jones has shown how organicism was originally associated with Whig and Liberal arguments about gradual constitutional development, in contrast to the Conservative defence of the *status quo*. It was only in the mid-1880s that the Liberal/Conservative divide became reconceptualised around responses to the French Revolution. This was when the contrast between (progressive) abstract reason and (conservative) organic custom came to define the parties' respective positions.[108] This connection has proved enduring. As David Willetts put it in 1997:

> What our opponents once most feared about us, and perhaps still do to this day, is that somehow Conservatives understood the drumbeat of national identity. We had an ability to reach the hearts of electors and evoke instincts and emotions which were a closed book to the rationalist progressives.[109]

Conservatives portray themselves as being attuned to the sensibility of ordinary men and women because of their refusal to subject the people to grand historical narratives. As John Gray put it in a 1991 lecture, conservatives 'are rightly suspicious […] not only of politics as the pursuit of perfection, but of the idea of history as a narrative of progress, with ourselves as its telos'.[110] Similarly, Shirley Robin Letwin has explained that conservatives 'are not allowed to pride ourselves on being doomed to great crises and struggles, or to hope that we are progressing ever closer to perfection. […] We must reconcile ourselves to the banality of being neither God nor bits of clockwork, and we have to get through life without a cosmic obligation to be either rebels or saints.'[111] In contrast, in Peter Oborne's characterisation, 'Progressives consider that it is the job of government to make us better and the state is therefore entitled to intrude into almost every part of human existence.'[112]

Tory Democracy

In the late nineteenth century, the idea of progressive conservatism was perhaps most closely associated with another seeming contradiction: Tory Democracy. As Peter Clarke points out, there were two types of Tory Democracy. The first was based on 'the essentially democratic nature of Toryism', the second on 'the essential Toryism of the democracy'.[113] The first type accepted the Liberal-Radical view of the world; it was essentially an attempt to compete on 'progressive' territory—often very successfully. Proponents of this view emphasised the role of Conservatives like Shaftesbury and Disraeli in championing some of the totems of progressive legislation: the 1847 and 1853 Factory Acts, 1842 Mines and Collieries Act and 1867 Reform Act. The second type of Tory Democracy set itself explicitly against the Liberal conception of progress, particularly the methods of industrial capitalism. As one author explained, 'The interests of the Conservatives lie in the land, and the land has nothing to do with capitalism. The interests of the Liberals lie with the manufacturers and traders; and the interests of manufacturers and traders are necessarily bound up with capitalism, sweating, and the exploitation of the workman.'[114]

Some of the advocates of this second type of Tory Democracy opposed the very idea of progressivism as an attempt to foist an unnatural and unwelcome form of programmatic politics on the populace, as with this from a self-declared Edwardian 'Tory Democrat':

> Most 'Progressives' are tee-totallers, many vegetarians and anti-tobacconists; some believe in the abolition of marriage and the State taking complete charge of all children; and Mr. Bernard Shaw professes belief in breeding humanity by the methods of the Stud Farm. All these opinions are very 'Progressive' no doubt, though we may question whither the progress along these lines will lead humanity, but they are not democratic; that is to say, these opinions are not held or approved by the vast mass of our fellow citizens.
>
> Democracy is Government legislation and administration in accordance with the wishes of the people at large, and it is because this country is not democratic but is controlled by financial bureaucratic and pedantic-progressive forces: it is because of these things that the working classes are losing all faith in politics.[115]

This distrust of the programmatic nature of 'progressivism' resonates with many of the views we will encounter later in this book—from the attacks on 'Progressive puritanism' by the Edwardian avant-garde[116] to the late twentieth-century denunciations of the 'trendy liberalism' of the '"progressive" establishment'.[117] Such views were seen to be out of step with the natural inclinations of the British (or, more often, English) people. And, crucially, they often tied together critiques of social and of economic liberalism—as in the passage quoted above. It is because of the alliance between 'financial bureaucratic and pedantic-progressive forces […] that the working classes are losing all faith in politics'. The breaking of this link could be seen as the transformative feature of Thatcherite politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

This should not, however, be seen as a straightforward left–right divide. A shared hostility to liberalism has often united Conservatives and Socialists. For instance, Tory Democrat Standish O'Grady claimed that 'With our Tory Democratic principle professed Socialists will sympathise' and appropriated both William Morris and John Ruskin to his cause, stating in the case of the latter: 'I do not merely guess that Mr. Ruskin is a Tory Democrat, as I understand the word, I know it.'[118] Recent academic work has suggested that these kinds of attitudes were also a formative influence on labour politics, particularly in opposition to the puritanical teetotalism

of progressive liberalism.[119] Such arguments have been part of a longer-term attempt to uncover the populism, patriotism and even jingoism of late Victorian popular culture, in order to complicate the simplistic narrative of a working class aligned straightforwardly with the labour movement.[120] Yet they also betray a particular perspective on the possibility and desirability of progress—and its ambivalent position on the left.

Conservative Socialism

While socialism is intrinsically progressive in that it is oriented towards a better future, part of the socialist project has also always been about resisting (or transcending) the particular forms of modernity bound up with the idea of 'progress itself'. Perhaps the best-known, and best-loved, proponent of such views was William Morris. His 1890 utopian novel *News from Nowhere* imagined a future in which the bases of both industrial capitalism and political institutions had been destroyed and an egalitarian pastoral community established in their place. Though Morris' vision used medieval tropes, particularly in the aesthetics of dress and architecture, it was very far from a restoration of feudalism. His imagined society was peopled by self-sufficient artisans, entirely in charge of their own work and leisure, and able to follow their interests and instincts as they saw fit. While this was in many ways a nostalgic vision, it did not reject the idea of purposeful self-development.[121]

Alastair Bonnett has examined the way in which the late nineteenth-century emphasis on progress and modernity led to a distrust of nostalgia on the left. Even when works like Thomas Spence's *Property in Land Everyone's Right* (1775) were rediscovered as proto-socialist, this was always in line with the 'developing anti-nostalgic political orthodoxy', which ignored or minimised the extent to which they looked back to a preindustrial past. Writers like Morris were treated as exceptions, and excuses and justifications were made for their nostalgia, while both Robert Blatchford and H.M. Hyndman were dismissed as covert Conservatives—or at best 'Tory-socialists'—despite the radical implications of their brand of popular socialism. Bonnett emphasises that this was shift from the radical thought of previous generations, for whom a sincere lament for lost ways of life was a standard mode of critiquing the present.[122]

Despite this suspicion of nostalgia on the left, there were repeated attempts to reinvigorate a more romantic conception of politics throughout the twentieth century, in opposition to the technicist modernism of

state socialism. In the first decades of the century this was epitomised by the guild socialist movement, associated with G.D.H. Cole, and in the 1960s and 1970s by the New Left (at least in its first incarnation).[123] Both of these movements emphasised the ethical components of social and economic life, both prioritised active citizenship and workers' control of industry as a guard against alienation, and both drew inspiration from William Morris. More recently, Blue Labour picked up some of these themes in its attack on the abstract universalism of the Fabian-Liberal tradition, and argued for a politics that cares more about preserving the bonds of family, community and the 'Common Good' than about pursuing social and economic progress.[124]

While such political projects can tend towards a rather static view of class and social relations, they also promote a more active vision of political change than the gradual evolution of Tory Democracy. It is significant, for instance, that Morris imagined the transition to the utopian pastoral society in *News from Nowhere* as the result of a tough and historically detailed struggle on the part of socialists. The first step was to raise workers' conditions and consciousness through the 'piecemeal' ameliorative measures of 'State socialism'; mass protests then escalated through a general strike to civil war. This was in stark contrast to another socialist utopia, *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* by Edward Bellamy, the second bestselling American novel of the nineteenth century.[125] It imagined an entirely nationalised, moneyless, industrial world system, which had been brought into being by common consent, purely because it was realised that it would solve the social and labour problems of the late nineteenth century and be more efficient than the present system of capitalism.[126]

Morris reviewed *Looking Backward* for *Commonweal*, describing it as mechanistic in its view of human nature and not ambitious enough about its potential for creativity: 'a machine-life is the best which Mr. Bellamy can imagine for us'. He also objected to Bellamy's depiction of progress as natural evolution, rather than political struggle: it 'follows naturally from the author's satisfaction with the best part of modern life that he conceives of the change to Socialism as taking place without any breakdown of that life, or indeed disturbance of it'. Morris felt that this was a 'dangerous' and fatalistic view for socialists to take: 'A far better hope to trust to is that men having once got it into their heads that true life implies free and equal life, and that is now possible of attainment, they will consciously strive for its attainment at any cost.'[127] Morris' fears seem to have been borne out in practice. A speaker at the 1892 Fabian Society Conference remarked that,

in his experience, although the book was a useful one to lend to prospective socialists, 'many people who read it wanted to go to bed one night and wake up in the morning and find the whole thing accomplished, and some objected to joining the Fabian Society because they thought if they did they would be expected to work'.[128]

These unlikely alliances between socialist and conservative thought are sometimes classified (and in fact often describe themselves) as anti-liberal. This is, however, based on a rather narrow conception of liberalism as dogmatic and utilitarian, cold and elitist. It ignores much of the history of the various liberal traditions.[129] Indeed, as we will see throughout this book, it is to the pluralism, eclecticism and *humanity* of liberalism that socialists and social democrats have often turned in their efforts to escape the rigidity and bureaucracy of their own traditions. As Peter Ackers and Alastair Reid have recently argued, the rich heritage of liberal pluralism echoed throughout the twentieth century, running alongside the history of Labour in power.[130] Nor is it possible to juxtapose programmatic 'progressive' politics with a warmer, more human 'anti-progressive' politics. As Freeden underlines, it was the progressive, organic nature of liberalism that made it so open-ended. It is the notion of movement that matters here: 'progress is not a matter of mechanical contrivance, but of the liberation of living spiritual energy'.[131]

CONCLUSION

In a 2009 programme for BBC Radio 4, Conservative commentator Peter Oborne set out the fundamental differences between Progressives and Conservatives, which (as we have already seen) he felt were built on 'a conflicting conception of human nature'. In his elaboration of this thesis, Oborne turned to Michael Oakeshott's well-known distinction between civil associations and enterprise associations. In Oborne's words:

> The civil association was a conception of the state whose only purpose is to lay down conditions so that men and women can pursue whatever ends and purposes they choose. An enterprise association, by contrast, is a body of men and women brought together to pursue some overriding goal, which sanctions the state to take precedence over the individual.[132]

Unsurprisingly, he aligned the former with conservatism and the latter with progressivism. It is certainly the case that progressive politics have

often been associated with programmes, plans, and 'getting things done' (as we will see in Chap. 4). Yet, there has also been a persistent use of the term to describe the conditions needed for individuals to thrive, and to voice complaints that state intervention was obstructing this process.

This difference comes down to the question of whether progress is conceived as an independent force or as a political project. In the case of the former, the progressive position is to enable this process to take its course. It involves adapting to the conditions of 'modernity' and adopting a position in line with the direction of 'progress itself'. This may be about political change, but it could equally be a matter of demography, technology, or social practices. Although the truly conservative position may be to resist such trends in the first instance, it is also to absorb them once they have become established. In the case of the latter, the progressive position is far closer to Oborne's depiction—though it does not necessarily have to be aligned with state control. The programme enacted by these progressives may be in line with the direction of existing social and political developments or it may involve a radical diversion, though this is likely to be represented either under the guise of continuity or as a response to the demands of 'progress itself'. A complete rupture—whether premised on the logic of moving 'forward' or moving 'back' in time—would have little claim to be progressive. As we will see in the next chapter, the idea of ordered, sequential development is intrinsic to understandings of progressive time.

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Municipal Enterprise: Contesting the Liberal Tradition

'Progressive' is usually seen to have emerged as a political label in Britain in the late 1880s and 1890s. It is primarily associated with the alliance between the Liberal and fledgling Labour parties that began at this time and ran through the reforming 1906 Liberal Government and (arguably) into the inter-war years.[1] This was a new form of politics associated with state intervention, redistribution, and social justice, which was to go on to shape twentieth-century British politics, most notably through the foundation of the welfare state.[2]

Historical interest in the 'progressive movement' in Britain can be dated to the 1970s. Previous studies have focused on the relationship between the Liberal and Labour parties, asking how far it signalled genuine co-operation and why it ultimately failed.[3] As we will see in Chap. 6, there were particular political consequences at stake at that time, but this was also an academic debate. In 1971 the historian Peter Clarke published his seminal work *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, which challenged existing assumptions about the decline of the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century.[4] Clarke argued that the decline was not inevitable; up

until the First World War, 'it seemed that social democracy in England was bound up with the prospects of the Liberal party', on account of the vibrancy of the 'progressivism' that united Labour and Liberal politics.[5] Clarke framed his work partly as an attempt to recover the British origins of both the word 'progressive' and the movement it described, which he felt had been 'forgotten' after the First World War and thereafter 'neglected' by historians. He defended his interest in the term on the grounds that it was 'hardly strange in the 1890s, and by 1910 it starts out from every newspaper page'.[6] We will return to this idea of recovering a lost history of progressive politics in Chap. 6.

While Clarke acknowledged a pre-existing 'generalized' usage of the term, he dated its emergence as a political label to the Progressive Party, which formed the first administration of the London County Council in January 1889.[7] As we saw in Chap. 2, this was also the origin of the term noted in Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, published five years after Clarke's study.[8] Similarly, James T. Kloppenberg felt that this new word 'captured the novelty and amorphousness' of late Victorian collectivism because it was 'free from the idea of a self-guiding market economy and the negative conception of liberty associated with variations on the theme of liberalism'—such as 'new liberalism' or 'social liberalism'.[9]

We have already seen in Chap. 2, however, that 'progressive' was well established by 1889. And despite its later 'connotations of social justice, state intervention and alliance with Labour',[10] at this point it was most strongly associated with ideas about social evolution, civilisation, and active governance, and also with the very 'idea of a self-guiding market economy' that the New Liberals went on to reject. By asking why it was used in this way at this time, we can see its emergence as a party political label not as the declaration of a new alliance between Liberal and Labour politics but, instead, as an expression of existing Liberal concerns. The subsequent labelling of the 'progressive movement' therefore begins to look more like an example of what Quentin Skinner calls 'innovating ideologists […] wresting an available moral language to their own ends' than the emergence of a new label to describe a new political concept.[11] Moreover, this did not succeed in completely reorienting understandings of the term. In the inter-war years, for instance, a number of Progressive Parties emerged in municipalities throughout England and Scotland. They were coalitions of anti-socialist forces, including local business elites and Unionist politicians who vigorously opposed the 'municipal socialism' of the London Progressives.

Taking a lead from Michael Freeden, this chapter asks what had to hold for the champions and opponents of municipal socialism both to call themselves 'progressive' and to be understood as such by their electors.[12] This enquiry takes us beyond party labels. It allows us to ask questions about what it meant to *be progressive* in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. It is perhaps no surprise that at the very point when (as we saw in Chap. 2) progress became a universal political value, a debate erupted about the kinds of policies that would further this end and so could legitimately be called 'progressive'.

Municipal Beginnings

The progressive movement is now associated primarily with the United States, to the extent that some have suggested an American influence behind early progressive municipal politics in Britain.[13] Yet, as Daniel T. Rodgers, the historian of the American progressive movement, acknowledges, this story began in London. Not only the ideas of British Progressives but also the label itself 'was English before it was American, born in the heated municipal politics of 1890s London'.[14] It is therefore worth examining this moment of emergence in some depth. When the first administration of the London County Council (LCC) called itself Progressive, what—at this particular historical moment—was that description intended and understood to convey?

First, it must be noted that although the politics of the London Progressives may have been novel, their use of the word 'progressive' was not. The term was already well established in British political discourse and strongly associated with Liberal politics in all its guises. While Whigs were widely seen to be 'progressive reformers',[15] the *Manchester Times* based its calls for a more radical liberalism on a program of 'Free Trade, Cheap Government, Progressive Reform',[16] and the *Manchester Guardian* described the Cobdenite 'actively-minded gentlemen' of the Manchester Reform Association as a 'progressive phalanx'.[17] By 1845, Lord John Russell was able to use the term as a stand-alone label, declaring himself 'a progressive in the cause of free trade'.[18] To borrow J.W. Burrow's terms, this was a vocabulary that Liberals, Radicals, and Whigs were able to inhabit, rather than a doctrine to which they subscribed.[19]

Given this background, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the use of the label 'Progressive' on the LCC was not heralded as a new departure in politics; rather, controversy focused on the extent to which it signified

the (unwelcome) application of existing Liberal politics to the metropolis. Municipal governance at this time was seen as a matter of administration rather than politics. Many candidates stressed that they were 'purely non-political'; they would be 'the slave of no party, the mouthpiece of no clique' and stood at the request of 'Citizens of all shades of Politics'.[20] The Progressive Party was blamed for having introduced party politics to the contest on account of the London Liberal and Radical Union having resolved to support a slate of candidates 'pledged to "a Progressive Policy in all matters"'.[21] Perhaps for this reason, the term was not much used during the election itself. Just two election addresses referred to candidates as 'Progressive' with a capital P[22] and only a further three candidates seem to have used the term at all—and one of these was from the other side of the political spectrum: a Moderate, who praised the Liberal Unionists for aiding the Conservative government in enacting its 'progressive policy'.[23] It was only *after* the election that the successful candidates divided into two distinct parties, Moderates and Progressives—although this too was rather tentative.[24] Even the label Progressive was the subject of some confusion, being used interchangeably with Progressist until 1892, which led to complaints about inconsistency.[25]

A great deal of mythology has been attached to the London Progressive Party, particularly by Fabians like Edward Pease, who described the way in which 'the tramways of London were held as a trench in the world-wide conflict between Socialism and its enemies', attributing this to 'Fabian advocacy'.[26] This has inevitably coloured later readings of the term 'progressive' and its application to Lib–Lab politics. As previous scholars have noted, however, there is a certain amount of self-congratulatory teleology to these accounts.[27] John Davis in particular cautions that 'Too much can be made of the Progressives' ideological range [… and] coalition appearance'. He notes that Labour members did not gain prominence within the Progressive Party, despite their effective work on the Council. Instead, the Progressive Party's 'centre of gravity lay with the new Liberal and Radical Associations'.[28] This interpretation is reinforced by an examination of the press coverage at the time. Even when the specific idea of 'progressivism' appeared in 1892, it was initially a synonym for 'radicalism'. One of the earliest examples took Lord Rosebery's 'faith in Progressivism' as justification for his desire that '"men of business capacity"' should be elected to the County Council.[29] Another identified them as 'fanatical faddists', located in an established tradition of radicalism.[30]

It is also important to note that the Progressives strongly resisted the charge of party political influence. As late as 1901 they reassured electors that 'a person may be a sound Conservative or Liberal Unionist and also a sound Progressive'.[31] Indeed, the label seems to have been used precisely because it did *not* have an overtly ideological meaning. In an attempt to refute charges of politicising the Council, Rosebery emphasised that 'they turned their back on the word "Liberal," because they would not be identified in any way with the imperial [i.e. parliamentary] politics which that word represented'. By this account, 'progressive' was 'a non-political name', indicating only a broad preference for reform over stasis.[32] The *Times* greeted the new Council with the hope that 'all members of the London Council will turn out to be moderate in temper and progressive in policy, using the terms in their natural sense and not as party distinctions'.[33] This was a central part of the Progressives' appeal. They emphasised the non-partisan nature of their brand of municipal modernity, arguing that most other cities (including those with Conservative administrations, like Liverpool and Sheffield) were progressive and that London was being left behind.[34]

Active Municipalism

The distinguishing feature of progressive politics was its association with active citizenship. As Lord Hobhouse urged Londoners: 'Shake off the sloth with which you are reproached in public matters, and which makes your friends despair of you, and your enemies despise you' by voting for 'progress in town life' rather than 'reaction'.[35] As we will see below, right-leaning progressives in inter-war Glasgow employed a similar rhetoric to galvanise their citizens *against* municipal socialism. Both were drawing on the language of civic republicanism, which we examined in Chap. 2. Far from their dying out with the emergence of political liberalism, James Thompson has shown that these ideas continued to infuse mid and late Victorian conceptions of 'good government', with their basis in active and responsible local self-governance.[36] Sidney Webb made the connection explicit, with his call to awaken 'That "Municipal Patriotism" which once marked the free cities of Italy, and which is already to be found in our own provincial towns.' He went on to explain that 'We should "municipalize" our metropolis, not only in order to improve its administration, but as the best means of developing the character of its citizens.'[37]

Such ideals not only influenced the programme of the Progressive Party, they also underpinned the creation of the LCC itself. The long struggle for metropolitan self-governance had been a cross-party concern until 1881 when the formation of the London Municipal Reform League politicised the issue, making it seem a predominantly Radical cause.[38] Not only was this electorally disastrous for the Moderates, who only won in 1907 under the new name of the Municipal Reform Party, it also helped to define active municipalism in London as exclusively left-wing, in a way that had not been true in other cities.[39] This association was cemented by the evangelical enthusiasm of the Progressive administration.[40] The Moderates' most frequent and consistent attack was that the Progressives were too active. They were perceived to have confused an administrative with a legislative role and to be directing their energies at extending their powers, rather than getting on with the effective (non-political) administration of the city's affairs.[41]

Despite their resistance to active municipal policies, the Moderates were unwilling to cede the term 'progressive' to their opponents. As we have seen, one of the four election addresses to use this term at the 1889 election belonged to a Moderate. At the 1892 election there was a more deliberate attempt to undermine the Progressives' claim to the label. Of the thirty-three Moderate or Conservative election addresses that referred to the Progressive or Progressist party, policy or programme, twenty-one—nearly two-thirds—qualified this with the words 'so-called' or 'self-styled', or by putting the words Progressive or Progressist in inverted commas. A few openly challenged the Progressives' use of these terms. John Bulmer, for instance, appealed for 'the support of both Conservatives and moderate Liberals against the extreme party which has usurped the name of "Progressive"'.[42] Similarly, Horace Farquhar emphasised the way in which the Moderates had carried out their municipal duties without 'arrogating to ourselves the title of "Progressists"'.[43] Several Moderates followed this line, presenting themselves as the party of true, sensible, steady progress, rather than the false or extreme progress represented by the Progressives. This was more than political point scoring; it shows the extent to which the Progressives had succeeded in laying claim not only to an attractive political label, but also to an important cultural and social value.

Many of the opponents of Progressive politics in this period were strongly committed to the idea of social, moral and civilisational progress. They just did not believe that it could be brought about by legislation—especially not at the municipal level. One particularly interesting case is

that of Sir John Lubbock, the evolutionary biologist, archaeologist, and polymath. Although initially elected from the Progressive bench to be Vice Chairman of the LCC, Lubbock found himself increasingly at odds with the Progressive Party and shortly stepped aside. As Mark Patton has explained, this was something of a surprise: 'Instinctively, he too was a progressive—he shared many of the aspirations of the new radicals—it was only their means that he doubted, convinced that these would, in all too many cases, have the opposite effect to that intended.'[44] As Lubbock explained in a 1906 pamphlet, 'Municipal trading is now urged in the name of progress, but it is entirely contrary to the old traditions of the Liberal party—to the teaching of Cobden and Bright, of Mill and of Fawcett.' The result of such schemes would, he believed, 'check the progress of scientific discovery, and stifle, if not destroy, that spirit of private enterprise to which in the past our commercial supremacy is mainly due'.[45]

That Lubbock thought of himself as a progressive should not be surprising. The progressivism of the New Liberals was an adaptation of classical liberalism, not a departure from it.[46] At the other end of the Liberal spectrum, the same was true of Individualism, developed particularly by Herbert Spencer.[47] Both were based on evolutionary and developmental conceptions of society; both saw man as a progressive being, continually developing and improving. Yet where Individualists imagined society *naturally* evolving towards a state of co-operation with no need for intervention, New Liberals saw this as 'fatalism', and stressed instead the evolution of the mind and its role in 'the attempt to remodel society by a reasoned conception of social justice'.[48] Progress here was imagined as a political project, but to Spencerians this was 'a retrogressive rather than a progressive enterprise', which risked 'undermining the very conditions of progress and re-creating the repressive type of society from which mankind had only recently emerged'.[49] In the colourful language of the Earl of Wemyss, founder of the Liberty and Property Defence League, the policies of the London Progressives represented 'progress backwards', which would 'lead men in legislation back to the dark days of the Plantagenets, when prices were fixed by public authority; when the State was everything and the individual a slave'.[50] This argument was explicitly rooted in eighteenth-century models of conjectural history. Men like Wemyss saw commercial society and freedom of contract as the means by which humankind had risen above feudalism; their opposition to municipal socialism was therefore pitched as an attempt to prevent Britain slipping back down the ladder of civilisation.

It should also be noted that this was no longer just a debate within liberalism: Michael Freeden suggests that by the 1890s extreme Individualist views were primarily held by Conservatives.[51] This is just one symptom of the way in which the distinction between Conservative and Liberal worldviews was starting to dissolve. In 1886 the Liberal Party had split over the issue of Home Rule for Ireland, and Liberal defenders of the Union entered into an alliance with the Conservatives. The seemingly natural and eternal division between the 'progressive and conservative elements' of human society was no longer reflected in the political system. Both factions vigorously contested their right to inherit the mantle of the 'Party of Progress'.[52] It is worth noting that Unionism was often described as progressive in itself, on the grounds that it would foster a prosperous and progressive Ireland.[53] Again, we hear echoes of far older ideas about the progressive state being defined by its commercial activity.

LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

Given this ambiguity over the use of 'progressive' as a political label, it is worth asking how it would have been heard by citizens. What meanings were attached to this term in late nineteenth-century Britain? A sample of 767 uses of the word in newspapers and periodicals during 1888, the year leading up to the first LCC election, yielded just nine references—some of them tenuous—to the 'progressive politics' identified at the start of this article, with its connotations of redistribution, collectivism and state intervention. Indeed, only just over one in seven referred to British politics at all—despite the likelihood that political subjects are over-represented by the use of newspaper data.[54] Two-fifths of the articles used 'progressive' in a technical sense, either to mean sequential (as in music and language exercises 'arranged in progressive order'[55]) or ongoing and increasing (for instance, many job adverts specified that the salary would be 'progressive').[56] The progressive nature of knowledge, especially in relation to the sciences and arts, appeared as often as British politics. The principal characteristic here was of the constant accumulation of knowledge and development of expertise.[57] For the most part, these sources referred to a steady, cumulative growth in knowledge, rather than radical or experimental innovation. As a piece in the *Musical Times* explained, 'All true art is progressive, and the forms commonly used and accepted by musicians, which were the result of long and earnest endeavours to bring them to perfection, are yet in a transitive state.'[58] Roughly one in nine of the articles

referred to progressive nations and races—for example, the formation of a Political Economy Society in Tokyo was taken to be a 'remarkable illustration of the progressive and inquiring spirit of the Japanese'.[59] Finally, around one in eleven used 'progressive' as a synonym for prosperous or profitable, particularly in terms of business opportunities[60] and share values and dividends.[61]

While these figures cannot be anything more than indicative, they do allow us to build up a far more nuanced sense of the meanings that the electorate of January 1889 would have been likely to apply to the term 'progressive' than is possible from looking at its political uses in isolation. They give a picture of dynamic forward movement, of civilisation realised through scientific discovery and commercial enterprise, and of an open-ended, yet ordered and sequential, sense of human development. This is apparent across a range of discourses. For instance, progressive spiritualism, which originated in 1860s America, was 'an attempt to actualize on earth' a complicated series of realms through which the spirit was believed to progress in the afterlife—or Summer-Land. Crucially, however, the spirit was believed to be inherently progressive and so could never reach perfection.[62] Likewise, progressive theology was an attempt to reconcile religious belief with the constant stream of scientific discovery by treating the latter as the piece-by-piece revelation of God's purpose, progressive because it was ongoing and cumulative.[63] The same applied to science itself. To quote an address delivered to the British Medical Association, 'To men of eager restless temperament, to men of progressive minds, it is not pleasant to be told that progress can never more take place, that the goal of surgery is reached.'[64]

Science, spiritualism and progressive theology are all aspects of the 'crisis of faith' that Mark Bevir sees as one of the two central dilemmas that beset Liberals in mid to late Victorian Britain, and thus underpinned the development of socialism in the 1880s and 1890s.[65] As such, they could be grouped together as adjuncts to a generally progressive movement in intellectual and moral thought, as seen for instance in the July 1888 edition of the *Westminster Review*, which included three articles on the nature of marriage, presenting the possibility of progressive moral evolution leading to unions based purely on love.[66] Bevir's other dilemma, however, was the collapse of classical political economy. And this is almost entirely absent from the 'progressive' articles. One exception came from the MP for West Belfast, who noted that 'There were two systems of political economy, and in the national schools only the side of individualism was presented.'

He felt that this was unacceptable 'in a progressive age, where the wishes of the mass of the people should be in some sort typified and embodied in our public boards'.[67] Even here, it is the representation of public opinion that is seen to be progressive, not alternative political economy itself. Defendants of prevailing assumptions were just as likely to present their politics as part of a progressive view of human society. So we see John Rae writing in the *Contemporary Review* of the way in which 'classical economists' (he objects to the label 'Manchester School') put 'the labouring poor […] securely on the lines of progressive elevation' and 'asked the State to secure to the body of the citizens the essential conditions of a normal and progressive manhood'. He contrasted this with the 'pernicious and dangerous forms of intervention' known as 'State-Socialism'.[68] We also see the founders of Manchester Liberalism being lauded in this period as the champions of 'all that was progressive and Liberal' in that city.[69]

There is a great deal here that would be familiar to early nineteenth-century Radicals, but little to suggest that, at the time of the emergence of the London Progressive Party, the term was suggestive of new liberalism, social democracy, or an alliance between the two. The example of Keir Hardie's candidature in the Mid-Lanark by-election in April 1888 is particularly instructive. Hardie attempted to stand as the Liberal candidate, but was rejected and instead contested the seat as an independent miners' candidate. Given that Liberal support for working-class parliamentary candidates was the basis of the later Lib–Lab progressive alliance, this is one episode where we would certainly expect to see the word 'progressive' used. Yet this is not the case. One article in the *Scottish Leader* commented that 'A Labour candidate must have something more than horny hands to justify him in harassing the party of progress'—that is, the Liberal Party.[70] The word 'progressive' itself appears just twice.[71] The first was a proposal for 'progressive death-duties' from the Liberal candidate.[72] The second came at a public meeting, when William Robert Bousfield, the Conservative candidate, called 'for order and progressive reform'. He was asked by a member of the audience whether 'he was a Liberal or a progressive Tory', which was greeted with laughter from the crowd. To quote the *Glasgow Herald*:

> Mr Bousfield said he was not a Tory in any sense of the word. If he was asked if he was a progressive Conservative or a Liberal he should have difficulty in answering. […] They were called Unionists now. But he did not care by what name he was called. He asked them to judge him by his principles.[73]

As this example indicates, the primary contestation over the term 'progressive' in the year before the founding of the LCC Progressive Party occurred between Gladstonian Liberals and Liberal Unionists, not between classical and 'new' Liberals. Even if we turn to the editorials of the *Manchester Guardian*—the newspaper most closely aligned with the emergence of the progressive movement[74]—we do not see a sudden appearance of the term in the 1880s/1890s to describe this new type of politics. Instead we see a gradual evolution from progressive reform and improvement in the 1830s, through progressive policies and legislation in the 1840s and 1850s (including Manchester's 'progressive phalanx'[75]), progressive opinions, governments and candidates in the 1860s, to finally its application to labour politics in the 1890s.[76] Even then, the impression is of Labour candidates being welcomed into an existing fold of progressive Liberal politics, rather than the term specifically referring to this new alliance. In November 1891, for instance, readers were reassured that 'of course, we include the Labour party' when calculating the votes of 'what may be called the Progressive party' on the Manchester School Board.[77] In June 1894, an editorial noted that the 'progressive movement in the country' was 'becoming more and more a distinctively Labour movement'.[78]

Liberals and Socialists

One of the groups most closely associated with creating the new Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance' was the Rainbow Circle, a discussion group whose founding members included Ramsay MacDonald, J.A. Hobson, William Clarke and Herbert Burrows.[79] In October 1896 (well into the London Progressive Party's third term of office), its members launched a publication called the *Progressive Review*. Their use of this title was both hesitant and explicitly framed as an attempt to claim and redefine it in service of their emerging political programme. Hobson, the assistant editor, explained it to an interviewer in these terms:

> Progressive is a hard word to define. If I say that our review is to be an effective presentation of what we assume to be the forward movement in modern thought you will gain only an imperfect idea of our object.
>
> We feel that this great movement, which aims at social and political reform is wasting its energy in a confused inarticulate cry, to which the *Progressive Review*, we hope, will give a clear and rational expression.[80]

This was a self-reinforcing argument; it was in being defined as 'progressive' that the ideas of the Rainbow Circle acquired the impression of forward movement, which in turn made them appear inherently progressive. Moreover, as Peter Clarke has pointed out, this was a 'striking appropriation' of the term 'progressive'.[81] And it was explicitly framed as such.

The purpose of the *Review* was to map out a new future for 'the political party whose watchword has been Progress' in light of its current 'disintegration and enfeeblement'.[82] As the Liberal journal the *Speaker* put it, the new publication 'aims to do for advanced Liberal thought what the *Edinburgh*, *Westminster*, and *Fortnightly* reviews respectively did for that thought at the times of their first appearance'.[83] The major departure of the *Progressive Review* from these previous incarnations of liberalism lay in its 'enlarged and enlightened conception of the functions of the State'.[84] This was presented as a bold but necessary transformation, with the editors noting that 'If such a departure from the historical lines of party action seem impossible, we can recognize no force in the claim of the Liberals to be regarded as the progressive party of the future.'[85] This argument gained persuasive power from the notion that liberalism was intrinsically adaptive and evolutionary, governed by the processes of history. Indeed, this openness to change was precisely what made it progressive. As G.J. Shaw-Lefevre had put it a decade earlier, liberalism 'is necessarily progressive, for its aims advance as it succeeds in approaching them'.[86] New liberalism could therefore be absorbed into an ongoing history of transformation. We should see the language of the Rainbow Circle as an example of what Quentin Skinner calls 'innovating ideologists […] wresting an available moral language to their own ends'.[87] By defining their political project as progressive, the New Liberals were attempting to harness these characteristics and use them to drive the party in a particular direction. That direction was not itself intrinsically progressive.

This was in many ways a successful move. 'Progressive' has acquired an association with the politics of the centre-left that dominates its use in Westminster politics and in historiography. Its overriding connotations are seen to be 'social justice, state intervention and alliance with Labour'.[88] Moreover, this form of politics dominated twentieth-century Britain, not only giving rise to the thinking behind the welfare state and Keynesian economics, and to the great reforming governments of 1906 and 1945, but also informing debates around the need for a renewed relationship between Liberal and Labour politics from the 1960s to the 2010s. This narrative is not, however, as straightforward as it seems. As we will see in

later chapters, it developed only slowly and owes at least as much to the reassertion of this history in the 1960s and 1970s as to the work of the New Liberals themselves.

Even at the height of the Lib–Lab progressive alliance, its dynamics—particularly at local level—were often difficult and contested.[89] As Duncan Tanner put it, 'The Liberal and Labour parties were being drawn together, but the Progressive Alliance was under pressure from its inception.'[90] Language played an important role in this. Martin Petter has noted that 'only Liberals appeared to display any genuine fondness for the term ["Progressive alliance"] or others like it, such as the "forces of Progress" or the "Progressive party"'. In his assessment, this was because 'such forms of words, rather than being politically neutral descriptions, were used in a way which reflected a whole set of Liberal attitudes about the emergence of a separate Labour party and the means of dealing with it'.[91] Jon Lawrence has suggested that 'the very notion of a "Progressive Alliance" often intensified inter-party conflict within a constituency as both sides sought to establish their credentials as the dominant local "progressive party"'.[92] He found that in Edwardian Wolverhampton, 'the modish language of "progressivism" disguised the fact that what bound Liberal and Labour politicians together was a shared understanding of the past—of the heroic popular struggles of the nineteenth century and hence of the radical tradition'.[93] He points out that despite their claims to progressivism, some of the former were really nothing more than 'classic "old" Liberals' in disguise. They 'displayed little interest in social or Labour issues' and instead campaigned on the established Liberal causes of non-sectarian education and retrenchment in expenditure.[94]

It is worth considering that perhaps to contemporaries this did not look like a disguise at all. Liberals of all descriptions had long been associated with 'progressive' politics, and even supporters of the Lib–Lab alliance often saw themselves to be generously welcoming Labour candidates into an established progressive tradition, based on exactly the issues that Lawrence mentions. Many also resisted the attempts of New Liberals to circumscribe the boundaries of this term. While we can agree with Peter Clarke that members of the progressive movement were keen both to extend the description to non-Liberals, like the Webbs, and to 'emphasize that not all Liberals were progressive in this sense',[95] we must also note that this was explicitly refuted by their contemporaries. For instance Lord Rosebery, himself Progressive Chair of the London County Council (LCC), insisted that there were 'Progressives who are not Liberals, but

that I think there are no Liberals who are not Progressives', going on to elaborate that 'if a man calls himself a Liberal, it involves every form of Liberalism, municipal and Imperial'. Rosebery even included Liberal Unionists with his observation: 'There are many Progressives, for instance, who do not share the views I hold about Ireland.'[96]

The socialist press was disparaging of both the London Progressives and the entire project of Lib–Lab progressivism. *Justice*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), welcomed the Progressives' electoral victories in 1889 and 1892 as evidence of the fact that 'London has declared emphatically in favour of a policy of advance, of improvement, of the extension of municipal life', and also claimed credit for significant aspects of the Progressive programme, noting that 'if not our men, our measures have been overwhelmingly victorious at this election'.[97] This did not last. By 1898 *Justice* was complaining that 'They have taken—and spoilt—sufficient of the Socialist programme to get themselves dubbed Socialists by stupid or dishonest opponents.'[98] Throughout the period, the SDF ran its own candidates against the Progressives in an attempt (in Paul Thompson's words) 'to point out the genuine distinction between Social Democracy and Progressivism' and to highlight the paucity of the latter's achievements, particularly on housing and unemployment.[99] Such criticism was not limited to the SDF. An editorial in Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* echoed the non-partisan language of the Progressives themselves. While welcoming the vast extension in public ownership, it noted that 'these developments have been made by no one party. Our Conservative towns have them to as full an extent as our Liberal towns.' Moreover, 'many of them have been made from the narrowest ratepayer point of view […]. They are, in fact, merely a form of extended joint-stock capitalism, with the ratepayers as capitalists.'[100] This criticism was not unfounded. As John Davis explains, the London Progressives did not see the municipality as a 'redistributor of wealth'. The profits of their municipal enterprise were used to subsidise the rates, even though this 'implied taxing the working-class consumer to support the householder'.[101]

This approach has been seen as a weakness of the Progressive Party, the chink through which we can spot the middle-class Radicals beneath the municipal socialists. Yet it is also possible that this is precisely what made them progressive according to established uses of the term. As we have noted, the progressive state was one of expansion, of industry, of innovation. This is the sense in which Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill all used the term. For Marxists, it was a necessary stage through

which society must pass; but it was the stage of bourgeois accumulation, not of socialist transformation. Even Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* (available in Britain from 1880) was a foundational text for the transatlantic progressive movement, did not present his proposals as progressive in themselves; rather, they were intended, as we saw in Chap. 2, to mitigate the worst effects of 'the progressive state of society'.[102]

Wise Government

In November 1888, just two months before the formation of the London Progressive Party, a satirical book entitled *A Natural History of Local Boards* was published. This was based on a series of columns previously published in *The Engineer* and purported to be a scientific treatise detailing the varieties of local government boards that the anonymous author claimed to have studied in West Yorkshire: Progressive, Forcible, Fighting, Experimental, *Laissez-Faire*, Compulsory and Contentious. Of these, the Progressive Board, in the fictional West Yorkshire town of Flatthorpe, represented the pinnacle of civilised development. Its administration was described as 'enlightened, vigorous and comprehensive'.[103] Flatthorpe began as the unregulated overspill of a neighbouring industrial town. Though benefitting from 'unexampled prosperity', its residents lived in a moral and administrative state of nature, 'in which every man was a sanitary law to himself'. The board undertook extensive public improvements, but without imposing 'unduly heavy' rates, and Flatthorpe became a paragon of civic virtue and prosperity.

Despite the achievements of the Progressive Board, however, the book concluded with a warning against overweaning municipal government, imploring readers,

> before trying to reform the world, practice reform in your individual self
> […]. Put no implicit trust in County Councils and the countless wanton
> inventions that people go a-lusting (not to use the racy scriptural word)
> after. These will be of exactly the same flesh and blood as yourselves—no
> better and no worse; therefore again I say, ourselves seek wisdom and ensue
> it. Then will wise government begin.[104]

No clearer statement of the values of self-governance and active citizenship could be needed. And it was received gratefully by reviewers, who lamented that 'local government in this country is extremely deficient in

the vigour, the enterprise, and the dash observable in many American villages, where the population unite to further the common good'.[105] The supposedly non-political nature of its recommendations made it 'an excellent corrective for those sanguine spirits who put measures before men',[106] especially as it 'comes very opportunely on the eve of the great new departure in local government'.[107] Both electors and the soon to be elected were advised to take note of its findings in the 'new science' of local government,[108] in the hope that 'the constitution of the new County Councils will prove the beginning of better things in this all-important matter of electing local government representatives'.[109]

This is the context within which the London Progressive Party gained its name. The Progressive Board applied modern technology and reason to the improvement of civic life and succeeded in creating a well-managed and prosperous commercial society. It was of a piece with the advanced municipalism exercised most famously by Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham, but also widely practised elsewhere.[110] The Progressive Board also epitomised Whig ideals of 'good government', described by James Thompson as 'virtuous leadership, directed towards the common good and committed to upholding justice. Its enemies were corruption, faction and the pursuit of private over public interests.'[111] Significantly, in Thompson's account this vision of good government endured throughout the nineteenth century, before losing its resonance in the face of new liberalism's emphasis on 'wealth, welfare and social policy'.[112] The Progressive Board was firmly in the former rather than the latter mode; it made no attempt to institute a socialist municipal utopia. That the London Progressives were later seen to have done so created a new set of meanings within which the term 'progressive' could be understood. Yet it did not entirely displace the old.

COMMERCE AND ENTERPRISE

The idea that a progressive society would be necessarily prosperous and commercial did not die away with the emergence of progressive new liberalism. In 1906, the year in which the 'progressive' Liberal government was elected, a book was published with the title *The Business Blue Book: A Book for the Progressive Business Men and all interested in commercial knowledge, which includes every member of the community*. Although it was primarily a handbook, 'designed to assist the busy progressive business man' with his day-to-day affairs, the preface set out a wider vision of

the role of commerce in Britain's historical development and in its future prospects. Following a 'long sleep' when Britain had declined relative to its competitors, the author was now confident that the 'dawn of a new era of commercial prosperity and greatness is breaking over this Empire'. This would allow for not only a restoration of financial health, but also the recovery and perpetuation of national characteristics: 'The character of John Bull for energy and acumen, will, no doubt, be sustained, and history will repeat itself.'[113]

The Business Blue Book was published at the height of the popular fervour for Free Trade that Frank Trentmann has identified. In the aftermath of the First World War, however, such confidence dissolved, and Trentmann tracks the way in which the former allies of Free Trade 'migrate[d] to different ends of the political spectrum'. Co-operatists, New Liberals and internationalists—David Blaazer's 'progressive milieu'[114]—joined the Labour Party, while middle-class business owners and ratepayers attempted to safeguard their positions by grouping around the Conservative Party.[115] With this in mind, we might expect to see a decline in 'progressive' language by this latter group. Yet that was not the case. In the 1920s and 1930s, defining and supplying the needs of the 'progressive business man' and (very occasionally) woman became an industry in itself. In addition to handbooks of the kind already mentioned,[116] business exhibitions were advertised on the basis that 'No progressive man of affairs would willingly miss it.'[117] As one of these put it, '"More" and "Better"—sums up the objective of every progressive business man and woman for 1929.'[118] Advertisers targeted the 'progressive business man' with everything from stationery to Dictaphones and from new business journals to office space, always playing on his fear of missing out or being left behind.[119] This fits into a wider discourse, which presented business and retail as not only necessarily but perhaps also uniquely progressive.

As we will see in more detail in Chap. 5, one of the principal concerns of a truly progressive business man was advertising. This was the means by which he could 'make his business known, rather than […] sitting down and waiting for popularity to come to him'.[120] Advertising was not limited to private enterprises, however; municipalities were also keen to publicise their attractions. And it should come as no surprise that some chose to portray themselves as 'progressive'. This was particularly common among seaside resorts: Hastings and St Leonards advertised itself as 'The Progressive Resort', Bournemouth as a 'fashionable and progressive seaside resort', and Clacton-on-Sea as a 'Well-equipped and progressive seaside resort'.[121]

Municipal authorities were also described as 'progressive' on account of their efforts to attract and entertain visitors. A promotional piece entitled 'Winter Sunshine' in the *Manchester Guardian* praised the way in which Scarborough's 'municipal authorities and other organisations strive to satisfy visitors and spare no expense in their efforts', noting that 'The word progressive aptly describes their policy.'[122] Similarly, a 1923 advert for Torquay, funded by Thomas Cook, listed the 'progressive policy of the Corporation' along with its 'climatic attractions' and 'manifold entertainments' as the features that made the town 'THE Premier winter resort'.[123] Lancashire resorts were praised for being 'among the foremost in enterprise'—of these Blackpool was a particularly 'conspicuous example', on account of the 'progressive people' who ran its amusements, entertainments and hotels.[124] And Leamington's spa facilities were attributed to 'long years of patient research and progressive enterprise' on the part of the local authorities.[125]

This should be located in a broader discourse about the nature of progressive municipal administration in inter-war Britain, which was often very far from the ideals of the London Progressives. The target audience of *The Bulletin: Dartford's Progressive Monthly News-Magazine*, for instance, can be identified by its promotion of the Rate-payers' Association, the Rotary Club and the Association of Dartford Industries. An early issue expressed the hope that house-building would be taken over by 'progressive builders' in private enterprise, 'so that it will not be necessary for Local Authorities to burden themselves with Building Schemes'.[126] Similarly, in 1936 the *Doncaster Gazette* produced a glossy advertising brochure revealing *Facts and Figures about this Progressive Town and the Intensively Industrial District*. The 'progressive' nature of Doncaster was evidenced by its increasing population and its 'modern' industry, housing and shopping facilities. The brochure concluded that 'Doncaster is a rapidly growing district—an area devoted to many business interests, with men of foresight and Progressive minds at their head.' Gratifyingly for the *Gazette*, Doncaster was also felt to be 'undoubtedly one of the most "Advertising-minded" towns in the country'.[127]

Such 'progressive' attitudes towards municipal advertising had, however, caused controversy a decade before. In 1914, a small argument blew up around comments made by John Burns MP, in his capacity as President of the Local Government Board, about the utility and desirability of advertising. Burns was objecting to a proposal to allow a penny levy on businesses in seaside towns to fund advertising. He thought that

this would disadvantage smaller resorts, by forcing them to compete on the basis of their advertising budgets rather than their 'intrinsic merits', which should speak for themselves. Furthermore, 'He did not want to see the countryside spoilt with placards, "Go to the Isle of Wight," "Go to Llandrindod Wells."' The root of the controversy was Burns' description of advertising as a 'mania'.[128] This description was vehemently resisted by both *Higham's Magazine* and *Advertiser's Weekly*, who insisted, 'ADVERTISING is about the sanest form of madness we know […]. Advertising is living, and getting on with the task.' Not only was it sane, it was also inevitable: 'nothing can be done without publicity, and to talk of advertising being a mania is to use an almost foolish word for the sounder and saner word "necessity"'.[129] That sense of inevitability is the key to this argument. In a perfect example of 'progressive' logic, what was now daringly innovative would soon come to seem natural, uncontroversial, even conservative:

> Whatever Mr. Burns may call the new force in modern life, advertising has come to stay, and those who rush in to practice it as a mania will live to apply the science of telling folk all about it, conservatively, as an indispensable part of the day's equipment.[130]

The episode is especially interesting for our purposes because Burns had been a member of the LCC 'labour bench' and a significant player in the politics of the Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance', working his way from trade union organiser to Liberal Minister and President of the Board of Trade. *Advertiser's Weekly* was more than happy to remind him of that: 'We doubt very much whether Mr. Burns would have got very much further than the ranks of the workaday labour leaders without much advertisement.' Given 'the difficulty labour has of rising', it seemed that 'an extra use of publicity must have taken place to enable an orator of the people in Trafalgar Square to march directly to the security and comfort of a seat in the Liberal Cabinet'.[131] It is striking that the writers of *Advertiser's Weekly* did not seem to see Burns' politics as being intrinsically opposed to their trade. His attack was not presented as ideological, but simply as old-fashioned, 'ranking almost with the archaic points of view one finds in old-fashioned directorates'.[132]

The parallels that *Advertiser's Weekly* drew between its work and Burns' political campaigning were perhaps not entirely tongue in cheek. In 1908, Burns' former colleague on the LCC, the political psychologist and

erstwhile Fabian Graham Wallas, had written a serious book on this topic entitled *Human Nature in Politics*. This represented the first attempt to grapple with political psychology in Britain and has been described as having 'inaugurated a new approach to political science'.[133] Wallas was troubled by the gap between the way politics was perceived as an intellectual, rational process and the way it was practised, which was primarily irrational and emotional. He argued that politicians needed to recognise the extent to which human decision-making (about which tea to buy, which candidate to elect) was based on the power of suggestion, rather than logical analysis. Crucially, he recognised the signal importance of names and symbols. Just as a tea trader will choose a name and an image designed to 'practice on our automatic and subconscious associations', so 'the makers of parties […] choose names whose primary meanings possess emotional associations'.[134] These meanings were not fixed: almost immediately 'new associations are, however, being created which tend to take the place, in association, of the original meaning of the term'.[135] One of the examples of party labels that Wallas used to demonstrate his theory was the Progressive Party in South Africa. He noted that in its immediate locality 'the original associations of the word were apparently soon superseded', but that elsewhere it continued to suggest that the party shared 'the same sort of democratic sympathies' as its namesake on the LCC.[136]

New Alliances

Wallas was writing in 1908. By the time his third edition was published in 1920, the shape of politics in Britain (and indeed worldwide) had changed. The First World War threw party politics into flux. The Liberal Party split, with the Lloyd George faction remaining in power at the head of a largely Conservative coalition, which was maintained until 1922, and the Labour Party broke its tacit alliance with the Liberals and established itself as an independent party. These shifts were paralleled in municipal politics. After 1918, the LCC Progressive Party maintained its wartime partnership with the Moderates (now renamed the Municipal Reform Party), in opposition to the Labour Party, which had become independent in 1915, taking the Progressives' 'labour bench' with it. By 1925 the London Labour Party was publishing pamphlets reminding electors that 'the Anti-Labour Coalition sails under all sorts of names; for example, Municipal Alliance, Ratepayers, Progressives, Progressive-Reformers'.[137] The fundamental dividing line on the Council had shifted, with progres-

sivism no longer directly opposed to conservatism, and socialism beginning to seem a common enemy to both. Although James Gillespie has shown that many of the remaining London Progressives continued to support Labour on matters of municipal ownership,[138] this did not preclude the development of an anti-socialist discourse. The wider context was the Russian Revolution and subsequent establishment of the British Communist Party in 1920, and the 1924 Labour minority government. While many prewar Liberals moved further to the left in this period, others sought to challenge these perceived threats. We will examine the tangled party politics of inter-war Britain in Chap. 4, but here I want to focus on a new development at municipal level.

In the 1930s, a number of Progressive Parties emerged in cities throughout England and Scotland in vigorous opposition to the kind of 'municipal socialism' that had been associated with the London Progressive Party. These were coalitions of anti-socialist forces, including local business elites and Unionist politicians, which had grown out of the attempts by Conservative supporters of the Lloyd George coalition to create a socialist/non-socialist two-party system in the years after the First World War.[139] In Sheffield, for instance, the business-dominated Citizens' Association prided itself on its 'sane and progressive' attitude,[140] and its candidates proclaimed their support for 'a Sound, Progressive Municipal Policy with Fair Play For All'.[141] In 1930 the Citizens' Association transformed itself into the Municipal Progressive Party, in an attempt to overcome partisan divisions between Unionists and Liberals.[142] This was announced locally as 'A New Party […] formed of Anti-Socialists, absorbing the Citizen Party, called the Progressive Party.'[143] A similar pattern can be seen in Glasgow, where the governing Moderate Party lost office to Labour in 1933. Following this shock, which was attributed 'to the unfortunate division in the ranks of the Anti-Socialists', many arrangements were tried, culminating in the Progressive Party, formed in 1936.[144] Similarly in Edinburgh, Liberals and Unionists formed a Good Government League, followed by a Moderate Party in early 1929, which gradually became known as the Progressive Party. Again, the electoral advantages were clear, with the *Edinburgh Citizen and Portobello Advertiser* noting that 'The League has used its influence to prevent divisions in the anti-Socialist ranks at municipal elections, and it is significant that there has not been a triangular contest in Edinburgh since its formation.'[145] In the 1930s such parties were bolstered by the addition of National Liberals.

In a historiography dominated by the politics of the Lib–Lab progressive movement, such uses of the term appear at best counter-intuitive and at worst disingenuous. As Wallas observes (of the use of the label 'socialist'), 'Any one who applies the name to himself or others in a sense so markedly different from common use as to make it certain or probable that he is creating a false impression is rightly charged with want of ordinary veracity.'[146] Yet these new Progressive Parties made no secret of their opposition to the signature policies of the London Progressives: municipal trading, direct employment of labour, and increasing the powers of municipal government. This was clearly not an attempt to wear their opponents' clothes. What seems more likely is that they were 'keeping wide the use of a word which [was] tending to be narrowed'.[147] The new Progressive Parties were using the term in a way that resonated with a different set of 'emotional associations' than those that Wallas attributed to the LCC Progressive Party. Importantly, this was in line with the established meanings of 'progressive'—where it diverged was with the new associations, which had become attached to the word through the experience of the LCC and the Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance'.

The specifically anti-socialist use of the word 'progressive' had been evident for some time. Both the Sheffield Citizens' Association and the Glasgow Unionists had been speaking in terms of the need for 'moderate and sanely progressive opinion' since the early 1920s.[148] In 1921, Glasgow was one of a number of Unionist Associations behind a motion to the Scottish Conservative and Unionist's annual conference on the need to work with other non-socialist organisations 'to secure the return to Town and County Councils, Parish Councils, and Education Authorities of men and women of sound, progressive, and anti-Socialist opinions'.[149] The connection between being 'sound' or 'sane' and 'progressive' suggests an attempt to circumscribe the limits of acceptable political opinions, with socialism firmly on the outside.[150] 'Progressive' here became a marker of 'ordered progress', in contrast to what they presented as the 'extreme revolutionary opinions' of their opponents.[151] The echoes of the London Moderate Party are clear.

More strikingly, we can also discern certain parallels with the rhetoric of the London Progressives. Like their predecessors, the inter-war Progressives were deeply concerned about apathy, which they saw not only as an electoral disadvantage to themselves, but also as a threat to a healthy civic sphere.[152] One election leaflet in Glasgow found it 'deplorable' that 43% of citizens 'should have shirked their responsibility and failed in

their duty as citizens' by not voting. It asked its supporters to pledge to 'not fail to go to the Poll and cast our votes for sound, economical and business-like administration of our Municipal affairs'.[153] Interestingly, this also formed the basis of the joint Municipal Reform and Progressive campaign in London. In 1937 the two parties issued a joint 'anti-socialist' manifesto, which attributed Labour's success at the previous election to apathy on the grounds that two-thirds of electors had not voted.[154]

Another similarity between the new Progressive Parties and their London counterpart was their use of Progressive as an avowedly 'non-political' name, indicating an unspecified notion of 'Good Government', analogous to that explored by James Thompson.[155] As with the LCC Progressives, this was contested.[156] The *Crewe Chronicle* complained, 'We have lost faith in an organisation that professes to be non-political, but which has its headquarters at the Conservative Club and uses its political machinery.'[157] As we saw with Lord Rosebery in 1892, this 'non-political' appeal was coupled with an emphasis on 'business-like' administration. One correspondent to the *Glasgow Herald* concluded his complaint that the Labour Party had introduced party politics into the Council with the words, 'We do not want Labour, Liberals, Conservatives, I.L.P.s, or Communists in the Town Council. We want men who have business acumen, who would run the city successfully, as they would run a prosperous business.'[158] This desire for 'businesslike, and economical, conduct of the city's affairs' united all the anti-socialist Progressive Parties.[159] Their appeals often resonated with the language of nineteenth-century liberalism:

> The choice is between a continuance of Socialist rule marked by prodigal spending and a Progressive administration pledged to retrenchment and prudent, businesslike management and development of the city's resources.[160]

While such sentiments may seem very far from the politics of the 'progressive movement', which was (as we will see in Chap. 4) by this point largely clustered on the Labour left, they were similarly rooted in Radical Liberal values, which—as we have seen—had long been viewed as emblematic of progressive politics. The ideological divergence between New Liberals and Liberal Unionists did not preclude either side's continued use of this inherited language, even if it now carried very different implications for each.

Conclusion

'Progressive' was not a new term, brought in to define a new political position in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Yet neither was the position itself radically new. As scholars like Michael Freeden have long noted, new liberalism should be seen as a development of the existing Liberal tradition, rather than a break from it: 'New wine was constantly flowing into the old bottles because by nature liberalism was dynamic, flexible, and progressive.'[161] The centrality of *progressiveness* to liberalism, both 'old' and new, is essential. By looking at the ways in which new liberalism developed *through* its use and appropriation of the term 'progressive', we can start to understand some of its seeming paradoxes. This approach also helps to make sense of the way in which self-described progressives often found themselves at odds with common conceptions of progress—particularly in terms of commerce, capitalism, and resistance to state intervention.

One way of reconciling these alternative languages of progressive governance might be to see them as revolving around a contestation not over the meaning of the word 'progressive', but about the sphere of activities to which it could legitimately be applied. Where Whigs and Radicals had discussed progressive nations, individuals and bodies of knowledge, the London Progressives applied progressive attributes to government itself—making it active, expansive, energetic. It is significant that this shift took place first at local level, which enabled it to be presented as self-government in opposition to a large central state. Yet it was resisted by those who saw any attempt to interfere in the free conduct of commercial relations as a threat to the historical processes that had made Britain into the epitome of a progressive society. Even when New Liberals succeeded in reshaping political debate in the early twentieth century, this resistance continued.

Although the 'progressive movement' had attempted to reorient the meanings of the word 'progressive' so that it necessarily implied 'an enlarged and enlightened conception of the functions of the State',[162] this was in many respects an intellectual exercise. It supplemented, but did not replace, existing understandings of what it meant to be progressive. In the case of national and municipal characteristics, the term remained associated with energy, vigour, and commercial success. This left it open to appropriation by anti-socialist municipal parties, who echoed the 'non-political', business-like and civic republican language of the LCC

Progressives, but applied this to political positions more closely aligned with their Moderate opponents.

This contestation over the term 'progressive' could perhaps be dismissed as nothing more than the use of 'progress' as an empty catchword, noted in Chap. 2.[163] We have, however, seen that this was itself an ideological development, contingent on the splits within liberalism and their effects on the new alliances forged by Liberals with both social democrats and Conservatives. Liberalism had always been seen as the naturally progressive creed. It was rooted in models of historical development, first articulated by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment and later adapted by evolutionary biologists and sociologists, often within the framework of philosophical radicalism. When liberalism splintered in the late nineteenth century (and again in the early twentieth), its influence spread across the political spectrum. It was no longer clear which faction was the truly progressive force. This was more than a dispute over positive and negative conceptions of liberty; it involved differing interpretations of history and the historical process. Whether commercial freedom was to remain the apotheosis of progressive civilisation or be modified by the potential of government to improve citizens' lives—to become itself a progressive force in society—was now in question. As J.W. Burrow has noted, however, this debate was not so sharply delineated at the time as it has often appeared in the works of historians.[164] It is therefore no surprise to find that those whom we crudely term individualists and collectivists, advocates of intervention and of *laissez-faire*, all thought of themselves as progressive people and all laid claim to that political label. Moreover, as we will see in Chap. 4, the certainties of linear, Whiggish progression were themselves called into question in the inter-war years.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1971); P. F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, vol. 24 (1974), pp. 159–181; Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

2. Michael Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 3–4.

3. For example, Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*; Clarke, 'Progressive Movement'; Martin Petter, 'The Progressive Alliance', *History* 58:192 (1973), pp. 45–59; Jon Lawrence, 'The Complexities of English Progressivism: Wolverhampton Politics in the Early Twentieth Century', *Midland History* 24 (1999), pp. 147–166.

4. Clarke was not quite the first to make this argument, though his work was arguably the most influential. See also Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966). For an overview of the historiographical debate, see J. A. Thompson, 'The Historians and the Decline of the Liberal Party', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 22:1 (Spring, 1990), pp. 65–83.

5. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, pp. 406–407.

6. ibid., pp. 397–398.

7. Clarke, 'Progressive Movement', p. 160.

8. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana/Croon Helm, 1976), p. 205.

9. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 299–300.

10. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, p. 398.

11. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 178.

12. As we saw in the Introduction to this book, Michael Freeden has noted that the 'central question' that the history of ideas must address is 'what has to hold for this sentence, that paragraph, this narrative, to make sense to its author, and what has to hold for it to make sense to its consumers'? Freeden, *Liberal Languages*, p. 9.

13. See, for instance, Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868–1906* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2007), p. 141.

14. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age* (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 52.

15. *Manchester Guardian* (hereafter *MG*), 30 March 1839, 2; *MG* 9 January 1836, p. 2.

16. *Manchester Times*, 9 June 1832, p. 2.

17. *MG*, 28 October 1854, p. 6.

18. *Manchester Times*, 5 July 1845, p. 4.

19. J. W. Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 5.

20. Election addresses of Horace Turner, W. Æneas Smith and Lord Rosebery. London County Council 1889 election addresses, National Liberal Club Papers, University of Bristol Special Collections (hereafter NLC Papers): DM688/2.

21. John Davis, *Reforming London: The London Government Problem, 1855–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 118. Quoting London Liberal and Radical Union, *Second Annual Report* (1888–1889), p. 2.

22. NLC Papers: DM688/2. Addresses of B.F.C. Costelloe & James Woolen and George Cooper & Joseph Thornton.

23. ibid. Theodore Lumley. See also Halford L. Mills in NLC Papers: DM688/2, and Margaret Sandhurst, *Women's Penny Paper*, 29 December 1888, p. 2.

24. *Pall Mall Gazette 'Extra'* 17 January 1889, p. 86.

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33. *Times*, 5 February 1889, p. 9.
34. *To Conservatives … and Liberal Unionists*.
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38. Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, p. 132; Davis, *Reforming London*, p. 186.
39. See Freeden, *The New Liberalism: an ideology of social reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 36–37 and Roger Ward, *City-State and Nation: Birmingham's Political History, c. 1830–1940* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), p. 76.
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52. See, for example, *MG*, 3 March 1888, p. 5; *Glasgow Herald* [hereafter *GH*], 31 October 1888, p. 7.
53. *Times*, 5 June 1888; 10 October 1888.
54. Analysis of every use of the word 'progressive' in the *Times*, *MG*, *GH* and the ProQuest British Periodicals Digital Database Collections I and II, for the year 1888. Search undertaken in January and February 2012.
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56. See *Times* classified adverts throughout the year, for example 7 January 1888, 10 January 1888 and 23 January 1888. Similar adverts are available in *MG*, for example 8 February 1888, 22 March 1888 and 19 May 1888.
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74. See Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, p. 153.

75. *MG,* 28 January 1854, p. 6.

76. See, for example, *MG,* 26 July 1837, p. 2; 24 July 1847, p. 6; 19 May 1852, p. 4; 18 June 1864, p. 4; 17 November 1868, p. 4.

77. *MG*, 17 November 1891, p. 5.

78. *MG*, 22 June 1894, p. 5. See also *MG*, 26 September 1894, p. 5.

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British Architect
Bulletin: Dartford's Progressive Monthly News-Magazine
Contemporary Review
Crewe Chronicle
Daily News
Edinburgh Citizen and Portobello Advertiser
Edinburgh Review
Glasgow Herald
Higham's Magazine: A Business Magazine for Progressive Men
Illustrated London News
Isle of Wight Observer
Justice

Labour Leader
Leeds Mercury
London Quarterly and Holborn Review
Manchester Guardian
Manchester Times
Monthly Musical Record
Musical Herald
Musical Journal
Musical Times
Pall Mall Gazette
Portfolio
Practical Teacher
Progressive Advertising
Progressive Review
Quarterly Review
Saturday Review of politics, literature, science and art
Scottish Leader
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The Pageant of Parliament: Politics in the Time of Modernism

In his 1931 destruction of *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Herbert Butterfield explained:

> If we see in each generation the conflict of the future against the past, the fight of what might be called progressive versus reactionary, we shall find ourselves organizing the historical story upon what is really an unfolding principle of progress, and our eyes will be fixed upon certain people who appear as the special agencies of that progress.[1]

The kind of present-centred thinking at the core of Butterfield's account underpins the very notion of what it means to be progressive. It is an anticipatory phrase, with an inescapably retrospective orientation. We can only know that something was progressive (insofar as it anticipated its future) after the fact. In the moment, matters appear much more complex.

The period when Butterfield was writing was one of political flux. The establishment of mass democracy brought with it fears of violence and demagoguery. The economic crisis uprooted the most fundamental assumptions of the political system. Both the Labour and Liberal Parties split in the 1930s; the Communists and Liberals tried in their different ways to forge relationships with Labour; and Conservatives and Liberals found common ground in the National Government—at first under a former Labour Prime Minister. In retrospect, however, the inter-war years appear to be the time when the British political system crystallised around the Labour/Conservative duality that would be cemented in 1945. This is

a story familiar to every undergraduate student of modern British political history: the breakdown of the Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance', the decline of the Liberal Party, and the subsequent rise of Labour. Not only did party alignments begin to assume their present shape, but so did the political system itself, most notably through the establishment of universal adult suffrage in 1928. Yet much as this looks like the route to our political present, one of the most striking features of inter-war Britain is the extent to which political identities remained fluid, contingent and open.

The use of the term 'progressive' in this period is most obviously associated with the intellectual left—from liberal to communist—who attempted to form a 'Popular Front' of 'progressive forces' against fascism and in opposition to the National Government. Within this context, the label indicated continuity with the ideals of the late Victorian and Edwardian 'progressive movement', but it also echoed more Whiggish ideas about an ongoing tradition of English political liberty, in ways that proved controversial within communist circles. For its part, Labour resisted any attempts at combination, insisting that it remained the true inheritor of the 'progressive' mantle. Yet this claim was contested not only by the Popular Front, but also by members of the National Government, on the grounds that cross-party collaboration was inherently progressive: it moved beyond outdated and rigid structures and allowed new political solutions to emerge. There are a number of different (though complementary) strands of thoughts at work here, associating the word 'progressive' with non-partisan 'common sense', with political centrism, with moderate social reform, with continuity and stability, and with 'getting things done'. This was also the context in which it was applied to the 'constructive' policies of those like the future Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and the centrist Next Five Years Group.[2]

This association with planning also reminds us that the inter-war years were the time of technicist modernism, particularly on the left. Ethical socialism, with its esoteric and spiritualist leanings, had been replaced by Fabian efficiency and expertise.[3] This is not, however, quite as clear-cut as it seems. Not only did these share common roots, but Keith Gildart has demonstrated that 'séance-sitters, ghost hunters, spiritualists and theosophists' could all be found within the Parliamentary Labour Party well into the 1950s.[4] As both Gildart and Joy Dixon make clear, there was an intrinsic connection between faith in the 'beyond' and the desire to shape the present world, whether through socialism, feminism, pacifism, economic schemes like social credit—or often a combination of all of these. This is

absolutely the stuff of the 'progressive movement', but it falls out of our accounts of political progress (particularly by the inter-war years) because it does not fit with the story of the development of modern political forms; it does not 'follow down to the present', in Butterfield's words.[5] As Joy Dixon puts it:

> Post-Enlightenment discourses of modernity have tended to map the opposition between the sacred and the secular as an opposition between the traditional and the modern; the result has been to make it difficult to perceive those moments when a 'progressive' politics, such as feminism, has been founded on and grounded in claims that are as much spiritual as political or economic.[6]

Despite this, we cannot write off the more esoteric aspects of the 'progressive movement' as a lost historical path. First, because, as we will see in Chap. 5, some of these themes—particularly the emphasis on the psyche—did feed through into the policies of post-war social policy, albeit in the hands of Fabian experts.[7] And second, because these currents align with the fluid and ambiguous temporalities that we know from cultural accounts of the inter-war years. While technicist modernism was linear, efficient, rational, its aesthetic counterpart was decidedly queer.[8] There are political implications here. For instance, Douglas Mao has suggested that literary modernism's 'extraordinary privileging of the individualized critical intelligence', and its inherent suspicion of normativity or 'what we might call the non-queer angle', could be seen as a form of liberalism—in that both saw individuation and critical dissent as the route to social and cultural evolution.[9] It was when liberalism was seen to fall short of this ideal that its critics reached for extremely illiberal solutions.

   In this chapter I will trace a series of competing understandings of progressive temporality across the political spectrum and into some of the fringe parties and societies that proliferated at this time. I will also examine what might be seen as the last gasp of a truly anti-progressive mindset, and its complex interactions with both liberalism and socialism. Finally, I will look at the attraction of temporal rupture to those who wanted to enact a radical break with the continuities and linearity of progressive time. This can be seen in extremist politics, particularly those that drew upon Nietzschean ideas. Yet it was also a feature of attempts to challenge the patriarchal and imperialist nature of linear narratives of nationhood—

though again, more complex commitments to continuity and inheritance also came into play.

The Popular Front

Most studies of the 1930s remark upon the particularity of this decade. It was a time of crisis and uncertainty, when previous understandings of party politics, economics and social relations came under challenge, and in which the prospect of another great war seemed ever more inevitable. Some writers have emphasised the extent to which this made for a 'morbid age'; others that the restless desire to find solutions made it a time of optimism.[10] All of this meant that the question of progress was particularly pressing. What would this look like? Should it take the form of continuity or rupture? Was it possible within existing forms of politics? Was it possible at all? As we will see, the search for answers to these questions created unlikely alliances and threw up unexpected proposals. The shape of 'progressive' politics in inter-war Britain is extremely hard to discern, and especially difficult to limit.

One of the most obvious places to start is with the Popular Front, that self-declared alliance of 'progressive forces'. The Popular Front was formed in 1936, having been inspired by similar campaigns in France and Spain. Its primary purpose was to bring together the various factions of the left (and centre) to resist the threat of fascism, including that represented by the National Government. Although the Popular Front has been primarily remembered as a feature of the Communist left, recent work by Martin Pugh reminds us that it was also supported by the Liberal leadership and backed up by action at constituency level.[11] Yet, the relationship between the various potential 'progressive forces' was complicated. Labour notoriously refused to participate, and expelled those members—most notably Stafford Cripps and Aneurin Bevan—who pressed for joint action.[12] It also resisted the claim that an alliance with the Liberals was necessary to avoid splitting 'the progressive vote', pointing out that 'in a very large number of Constituencies […] the presence of a Liberal Candidate is a definite advantage to Labour', and observing that 'Experience in Municipal Elections, when Conservatives and Liberals frequently form a "United Front" against Labour, strongly confirms this view.'[13] Yet, despite this official position, Labour activists worked with both Communists and Liberals at a local level (often under the banner 'Independent Progressives') and also maintained 'broad left' relationships outside of their work as party

members.[14] Pugh even speculates that a more formal agreement might have been reached had there been a peacetime general election in 1939/40.[15]

It is difficult to place the complex interactions between Labour, Liberals and Communists in a straightforward left–right framework. On the one hand, some Liberals did seem to reinforce the idea of a spectrum running from their position in the 'progressive' centre through Labour to the Communist far left. For instance, one explained that while 'Liberals wish to co-operate with progressive forces whatever their origins […] it should be made clear that what we mean by "progressive" does not cover the real Socialists, but only the '"Labour" men […] who have in some measure inherited the cloak of pre-war Radicals'.[16] On the other, as both Martin Pugh and David Blaazer remind us, the trajectory of the Edwardian progressive movement meant that at this point many Liberals and Communists found themselves occupying much the same intellectual territory, with more in common with each other than with Labour.[17] One of the best-known examples here is Stephen Spender's *Forward from Liberalism*, in which he famously declared himself to be 'a communist because I am a liberal' and announced that 'in the modern world communism—the classless, internationalist society—is the final goal of liberalism'.[18] For Spender, liberalism was the truly modern mindset, the 'product of a scientific and progressive age', because 'The idea of a progressive society—whether one despairs of or regrets it—is deeply rooted in the mind of modern man.'[19] This emphasis on scientific progress echoes the language of nineteenth-century liberal development that I explored in Chap. 3.

Spender drew a crucial distinction between liberal *democracy*, with its political freedoms, and the *laissez-faire* doctrine of liberal *capitalism*—a distinction that he raised to the level of a 'great struggle between good and evil'—and he dismissed Labour's fears that a Popular Front would be dominated by the latter as an 'absurd' detail, which rather missed the point of the 'union of forces prepared to commit themselves disinterestedly to a programme of internationalism and economic freedom against imperialism, fascism and war'.[20] Yet even Spender's attempt to draw an equivalence between democratic liberalism and communism was controversial. In his review of *Forward from Liberalism* for *Labour Monthly*, Communist General Secretary Harry Pollitt took issue with Spender's presentation of liberalism as a creed of 'lofty ideals' nurtured by 'a philanthropic and well-intentioned Liberal ruling class'. It was, as Pollitt put it, 'necessary to drop this nonsense about Liberalism being something completely distinct from Toryism' and acknowledge the complicity of Liberals in imperialism

abroad and the repression of the working class at home. He did, however, note that the book would 'undoubtedly help people in the position of the author himself''—that is, 'middle-class and professional people' of the generation who came of age during the 1906 Liberal Government and 'will travel with him [Spender] along the road that leads away from Liberalism and in the direction of Communism'.[21] By the time the review was published, Spender had joined the Communist Party.

The relationship between communism and liberalism was further complicated by the attempts of Communists to make use of 'the Liberal tradition', with its Whiggish faith in the gradual achievement of liberty. As one article in the Party's monthly journal, *Discussion*, put it:

> What is known as the English Liberal tradition presents itself to the Communist Movement in this country as by far the most important obstacle to the achievement of progressive unity among opposition forces at the present moment. Indeed, it seems that unless the Communist Party can devise a scheme or develop some attitude that will enable the horizon of Communism to embrace this peculiarly English fact, the Liberal tradition, a vital opportunity will be lost.[22]

The Popular Front was in many ways an attempt to do just that, in response to the suggestion from the Comintern that the party should counter the fascist practice of 'rummaging through the entire *history* of every nation so as to be able to pose as heirs and continuers of all that was exalted and heroic in its past', by 'enlighten[ing] the masses on the past of their own people, in a historically correct fashion'.[23] One of the ways in which this was done was through a series of pageants described as Marches of English History (and as Pageants of Scottish History in Glasgow and Dundee[24]). The marches invoked the legacy of historical radicals from Thomas More to Byron.[25] The intention was to place the Communist Party firmly within a patriotic narrative of 'the long history of Britain's fight for ancient freedoms'.[26] As one speaker said at the London rally: 'we Communists not only cherish the glorious traditions, but we seek to carry them on to the end [...] history has placed before our generation the task of completing the final stage of the great struggle initiated by our forefathers'.[27]

These claims were not uncontested. The *Daily Telegraph* pointed out that the barons behind Magna Carta and the Catholic Thomas More would have had little sympathy for communism. Even the socialist *Daily Herald* mocked the attempt 'to prove that they were the true heirs to

British democracy' and hinted at the bathos of 'a two-mile-long pageant of British history, from the signing of Magna Charta [sic] down to the election of Willie Gallacher as M.P. for West Fife'.[28] Most significantly, though, they also encountered opposition within the Communist Party itself, with some describing them as nothing more than a 'deliberate flattery of bourgeois susceptibilities', and insisting that there was nothing to celebrate in 'the fight against kings by feudal barons no less autocratic than their masters or the struggle by business interests for the right to enslave the working class under Liberal slogans'.[29] The response to these complaints suggests that they represented a minority opinion within the Party.[30] Nevertheless, the argument that in appealing to this democratic Liberal tradition communists were implicitly condoning the existing political system raises interesting points with regard to the tension between continuity and rupture, and the challenges to the Whig interpretation of history, which we have already identified as central to inter-war politics.

Another Communist pageant staged in 1939 appeared to address these complaints. *The Pageant of Chartism: Heirs to the Charter* claimed a seemingly straight line of transition from Chartism in 1839 to Communism in 1939. In some ways, the Party's claim to be 'inheriting the fruits of that struggle' would seem to be a perfect example of Popular Front positioning.[31] Rather than celebrating liberal reforms, however, the script used this to frame a story of the seemingly unstoppable rise of communism ('the Chartists have become Communists'[32]). The second half of the pageant focused solely on the solidarity between the British working class and their brothers in the Soviet Union, before concluding with a speech by Harry Pollitt (appearing as himself participating in the Jolly George strike in which workers refused to load arms onto a ship bound for Poland). Historical pageant became political rally as he announced: 'We are proud to know that these ideals which began to be realised 100 years ago will be fully realised here tomorrow.' This was about more than situating communism in an established—and safe—lineage of English radicalism. Although Pollitt invoked the anger of the past, his speech was focused squarely on the struggles of the present—against the National Government and against international fascism. He concluded with the words 'we have been too long kneeling; it is time to rise'.[33]

The Pageant of Parliament

These pageants were part of a widespread cultural trend, beginning in the Edwardian period with a series of town pageants and expanding in the inter-war years to include explicitly political productions, including a large number of left-wing pageants.[34] They provide an interesting perspective on temporality, because of their reliance on chronological narrative. One of the key features of the early Edwardian pageants seems to have been a focus on continuity; on the idea that that underneath the changing costumes and colourful episodes, life went on much as before. Some pageants finished in the reign of Elizabeth I, which was presented as the culmination of national development, thus avoiding the controversies of the seventeenth century and beyond.[35] In contrast, political pageants dealt with much more recent history. While some opened with the medieval period—and particularly Magna Carta—they all ran up to at least the aftermath of the First World War.

In 1934, the Conservative Party staged its own *Pageant of Parliament* at the Royal Albert Hall. By focusing on the development of Parliament, it was able to tell a story that was at once democratic and inclusive and also designed to reinforce the *status quo*. It is significant that it was told as the Pageant of *Parliament*—rather than of the Conservative Party.[36] Although the pageant was organised under the auspices of a committee established by Conservative Central Office, it was consistently presented as non-partisan, in keeping with the rhetoric of the National Government. As Miss Maxse, the Chief Organisation Officer at Conservative Central Office, noted, 'it would be a pity to give prominence to the fact that this appeal is being run for party funds'.[37] Moreover, the very narrative of the pageant seemed not only to be non-partisan, but to be actively anti-political. The party disputes of the eighteenth century were played for laughs. The overall impression was almost of progressing *beyond* party politics and reverting to 'the common sense and good nature of the English people'.[38] This revolved around the idea of balance: whether between sovereign and Parliament in the earlier episodes, or between competing political views in the later. Yet politics were only ever a backdrop to—as the narration put it—'the history of the soul of Britain'.[39] While struggles for democratic rights (and their peaceful resolution) were depicted, this was not a tale of the achievement of political liberty. Instead, it made the rather astonishing claim that 'every Parliament since the first great Parliament of Edward I has been a more or less faithful mirror of the British people'.[40]

As Philip Williamson has pointed out, the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin was ambivalent towards the idea of democracy, seeing it as precarious, something that could easily tip into extremism.[41] This was the implicit message of the Pageant. Press reports made clear that it had two objectives: to 'increase the prestige of the National Government and at the same time [to] remind the apathetic public what it owes to British Parliamentary Institutions'.[42] The *Northern Whig* described this latter objective as 'a great anti-Communist move'.[43] The concluding speech lauded 'the common sense and good nature of the English people, who have shown that they prefer committees to dictators, elections to street fighting, and talking shops to revolutionary tribunals'.[44]

It is worth comparing this depiction with a 1951 study of the *Mother of Parliaments* by Sir Herbert Dunnico, the former Labour MP of a mining constituency, Deputy Speaker of the Commons (1929–31) and later National Labour candidate. On one level, Dunnico's was another story of continuity. He celebrated the 'living vital' nature of 'one of the greatest institutions in the world'. Since its foundation, 'empires have vanished, dynasties have disappeared, crowns have crumpled, thrones have tottered and the face of the whole world has been completely changed'. Only 'Parliament still remains, its eye undimmed, its force unabated'. Yet underneath the continuity, Dunnico emphasised that 'the Parliament of today is far different in its form and its powers from the Parliament of 1295. It has taken seven hundred years of revolution, conflict and struggle to broaden downwards, from one layer of society to another, political power.' While the *Pageant of Parliament* sought to remove the need for political struggle, Dunnico's book highlighted its essential role in bringing about Whiggish progress. Parliament was able to take this role because it had, since its foundation, been composed of 'the most vigorous and progressive elements in the nation'.[45]

The Pageant of Parliament shared its name with a two-volume book published in 1921 by the *Times* parliamentary reporter Michael MacDonagh. MacDonagh was convinced that Parliament was 'the country's chief political instrument of progressive civilization' and that 'its foundations were never deeper or better laid than they are to-day, broad-based as they are on electoral comprehensiveness and the people's will'. His *The Pageant of Parliament* depicted a similarly active body to Dunnico's and was intended to defend it against the accusation of being 'clumsy, inefficient, slow', and to counter the view that the 'remedy' to any perceived decline in Parliament's strength or authority was to 'destroy it and put in its place

some untried mode of government and administration'.[46] This was no idle worry. As Tom Villis has suggested, there was a deep strain of anti-parliamentary thinking in Britain, running from the Edwardian period into the 1930s.[47]

Villis identifies two distinct strands of anti-parliamentarianism associated with very different journals: the avowedly modernist *New Age* and the defiantly traditionalist *Eye-Witness* (later *New Witness*). He shows that, despite their very different approaches, their diagnoses and proposed solutions to the cultural, economic and political problems of early twentieth-century Britain were remarkably similar. Both were edited by former Fabians (Alfred Orage and Cecil Chesterton, respectively) and both can be understood as rejections of Fabian-style technicist modernism, with its fetishisation of efficiency and expertise, in favour of a more spiritual emphasis. In Orage's case, this took an eclectic and esoteric form. He was interested in psychoanalysis and occultism, theosophy and Nietzsche. As Luisa Passerini has emphasised, these were complementary threads of thought, all 'part of the effort to rediscover aspects of the European tradition which had been forgotten and to give them a new meaning'.[48] In the case of Chesterton and both his predecessor and successor editors—Hilaire Belloc and Cecil's brother G.K. Chesterton, respectively—their critique came from a profoundly traditional point of view, rooted in Roman Catholicism and a desire to retain and recover England's true national character.[49]

Villis suggests that the convergence of these critiques should be understood as 'an anti-liberal intellectual counter culture', which 'reveals a hitherto underestimated cultural depth to anti-parliamentary thinking in Britain'.[50] This anti-parliamentary thinking focused on nationalism and the assertion of the power of the mass, was buttressed by anti-semitism, and led in directions that we might consider proto-fascist. As Villis stresses, the common background lay in their 'rejection of liberal paradigms', particularly the association between capitalism, representative democracy and the idea of the rational, developmental individual.[51] They can perhaps be summed up in their shared aversion to that over-riding liberal principle, the doctrine of progressive development. For instance, in an introduction to Georges Sorel's *Reflections of Violence* in *New Age*, T.E. Hulme noted that it was difficult for 'the pacifist *progressives*' to understand this anti-democratic, ethically absolutist, mystical form of politics, and the way it 'speaks contemptuously of modernism and "progress"'. He attributed this to the extent to which the progressive 'thinks of democracy as the natural and inevitable equipment of the emancipated and instructed man', when

'in reality' it was 'of course nothing of the kind'. Instead of Romantic myths about progress, Hulme reached back to the classical 'pessimistic conception of man', suggesting that rather than seeing social transformation 'as a result of intellectual arrangement on the part of literary men and politicians', it should be recognised as 'an heroic task requiring heroic qualities'.[52]

G.K. Chesterton's attack on the logic of progressive thought focused on what (as we have seen) Butterfield labelled the 'Whig interpretation of history'. As Julia Stapleton has detailed, his objection took place 'at the level of both method and myth'.[53] While Butterfield criticised the historical narrative by which the present system was seen to have been achieved without condemning that system itself, Chesterton argued that the idea of progressive development was not only a falsehood, but it had obscured the virtues of monarchy and denied the true place of Roman Catholicism in England's story.[54] As he put it in a 1935 radio broadcast:

> It is the prejudice that the winning side always must have won, and ought to have won. Every soldier knows that every battle was much more nearly lost. And as for the notion that lost causes were lunatic causes, mad; moonstruck and deluded causes—in God's name get rid of it altogether. If the winning side had always been the wisest side, the world by this time would be a much nicer place than it is.[55]

Chesterton's resistance to the parliamentary narrative of Whig history and preference for the lost path of early modern monarchy found resonance with some of the more extreme political groupings at this time. The rhetoric of both Oswald Mosley's New Party and his British Union of Fascists (BUF)—both of which I will examine later—claimed that the nation could only be saved by a radical reversion to the values of 'Merrie England' and the 'Tudor Dictatorship'.[56] Likewise, an obscure fascist group, English Mistery (later English Array), suggested that 'An advanced stage of decadence had been reached by the end of the seventeenth century. Nothing has checked the tendency in the past two and a half centuries.'[57]

There are, however, important differences in temporal attitude here. Chesterton derided the 'cult of the future' and melancholically suggested that it was not only possible to '"put the clock back"', it was necessary: 'the lost causes are exactly those which might have saved the world'.[58] In contrast, Mosley was self-consciously creating 'the modern movement'; 'a creed of dynamic change and progress'.[59] A radical rupture with the

present trajectory of politics was necessary to begin this process, but it was far from a nostalgic enterprise. Similarly, despite its explicitly revivalist programme, the English Mistery's publications reassured supporters that

> it is not you, or your friends, or your teachers, who are now engaged in 'putting the clock back,' as the Liberal progress-maniac terms it, but that it is the Liberal and Progressivist clock itself which is putting itself back and which, if we can imagine it having a tail like a scorpion, has actually stung itself mortally and is dying a suicide's death.[60]

Its attack on socialism was based on the claim that it 'would render impossible any step towards regeneration and must, therefore, be anathema to any truly progressive mind'.[61] The group also developed its own theory of progress, which emphasised its illimitable potential:

> At any point on the parabola of progress it is possible for an entirely new impetus to be given an effective political lead. If the new impetus comes at any time before the breed has been exterminated, the life of the breed can be indefinitely prolonged. If the impetus comes sufficiently near the apex of progress, culture can go on rising to indefinite and unprecedented heights.[62]

Getting Things Done

The decline of the Liberal Party cast the story of triumphant whiggism in a different light. As we have seen, different aspects of the Liberal legacy found their way across the political spectrum, leading to claims that both socialism and capitalism were the 'progressive' forces in society. Chesterton continued to identify as a Liberal, albeit one who had 'wandered away from the other Liberals',[63] yet he remained fundamentally opposed not only to the actions of the old 'Party of Progress', but also to the way in which they were absorbed and naturalised by their opponents:

> The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent those mistakes from being corrected. […] Each new blunder of the progressive or prig becomes instantly a legend of immemorial antiquity for the snob. This is called the balance, or mutual check, in our Constitution. […] It was the Radicals who made the Industrial Revolution, with its sweating and its slums, its millionaires and millions of wage-slaves. But as soon as the Progressive has done this happy

thing, it instantly becomes the duty of the Conservative to prevent it from being undone.[64]

As this passage suggests, there was more to this than the particular actions of progressives: the logic of the parliamentary system was structured around the expectation of constant progress. And Chesterton seems to have been a lone voice against this idea. As we saw in Chap. 2, a more common response, even from diehard Tories, was to cast this co-dependent relationship between 'the party of negative force' and 'the party of initiative force' as both natural and benevolent.[65]

Recent work by Ryan A. Vieira suggests that towards the end of the nineteenth century, parliamentary procedures underwent a process of acceleration, entwined with and reflective of wider cultural changes in the experience of temporality. This was tied to the decline of Burkean concepts of tradition residing in the unwritten constitution, the association between industriousness and manly virtue, the transmission of news across the Empire, and growing fears about national decline. All of these combined to produce a strong critique of the 'sluggishness' of parliamentary procedure and the desire for greater speed:

> By the beginning of the First World War, a self-consciously modern understanding of time had thoroughly intruded upon parliamentary culture and efficiency had become the dominant rubric through which the legislature's effectiveness was judged.[66]

In the inter-war years, the experience of time became, if anything, still more accelerated. This is the high point of what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'heavy modernity' in which spatial expansion and temporal acceleration were yoked together to produce ever bigger and ever faster machines, which in turn drove the desire for yet more speed.[67] We will examine this culture of production and consumption in Chap. 5, but it is also worth noting a parallel turn inwards, towards interior life, domestic space, and national rather than imperial culture.[68] Moreover, the political and economic crises of the 1930s have led to the decade being routinely characterised as a period of paralysis and stagnation. Yet, as Juliet Gardiner has argued, one of the effects of this uncertainty was an outpouring of schemes for improvement, such that she suggests that an appropriate label for the decade might be 'the restless years'.[69] Not only did an enormous number of groups, parties and movements emerge at this time (of which

we can examine only a small fragment), but they were distinctive in their commitment to active *plans* as an end in themselves.

A broad swathe of what Arthur Marwick has called 'Middle Opinion' clustered around a number of 'constructive' cross-party groups, including the Next Five Years Group and Lloyd George's Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction.[70] The idea of a moderate cross-party consensus was seen as intrinsically progressive. As Herbert Samuel (a central figure of the Edwardian Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance', who led the Liberal Party out of the National Government) put it:

> at bottom, the British people does not want those five years to be spent under the rule of the present Government, 'going on as it has been doing.' Nor yet does it want a brief spasm of Socialist government and financial crisis. But it does want a period of sane, effective, progress, of 'getting things done'; without financial or commercial upheavals.[71]

Moreover, it was because Labour had shown itself unable to 'get things done' that, in his view, it 'fails to command the general confidence of the progressive elements in the nation'. A further example of that tendency was the party's refusal to join with 'common action by the rest of the progressive forces', even though 'It was never more necessary that there should be in this country a powerful, efficiently organised body of representatives and of electors, devoted to practical progressive ideas.'[72]

G.R. Searle has suggested that, had Labour been prepared to co-operate with these groups, they might have formed the basis of a 'National Opposition'—'at once patriotic and progressive'.[73] This would have been on rather different terms than the Popular Front, but it is possible that the two may have been able to join together. Similar views were expressed at the time, for instance a *Manchester Guardian* article of 1935 suggested:

> There is a common body of progressive thought on peace and on social and economic reconstruction on which Labour, Liberals and some Tories are ready to combine. It is not specifically Liberal; it falls far short of ultimate Socialism, but it is a programme for 'practical people.' There is, in the present state of English politics, no chance of a progressive alliance in office, but there is a chance of an alliance in Opposition.[74]

Harold Macmillan's *Middle Way* was a clear example of such 'progressive thought' for 'practical people'. It was framed around 'the problem

of economic progress', which it linked inextricably with the 'defence of Democracy'.[75] This made it an unlikely source of common cause with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and Communist members of the Popular Front. Communists themselves despaired of 'the deadly inertia of the Labour Party leadership' and debated 'the urgent question of how the independent volume of Liberal opinion (independent Liberals, Council of Action, Next Five Years Group, readers of Liberal press, etc.) can be swung into action against the National Government'.[76]

Macmillan called for 'the progressive elements in society' to 'respond to the need for an imaginative policy of reconstruction *now*', so as to 'safeguard Democracy by lifting the conditions of our people to a higher level of material well-being and cultural opportunity'.[77] The 'progressive elements' here were those who felt 'discontent with things as they are' and—crucially—were prepared to act. Again, this was a policy of (as Samuel put it) 'getting things done', but always in line with 'the British tradition of peaceful change'. It was about the need 'to strengthen, enlarge, and reconstruct the very groundwork of [the existing] way of life as to enable it to endure unshaken the inner strains and external perils of the anxious days that seem to lie ahead'.[78] These were exactly the grounds on which G.D.H. Cole objected to these schemes: 'I do not believe that the right course in the immediate future is to work for a Ministry of All the Progressives, that will get on with the things on which all the progressives agree, and leave unsolved the major questions about which they differ.'[79] Moreover, he observed, they could not induce the Labour Party (without whom 'Nothing "progressive" can be done'[80]) 'to join up with Mr. Lloyd George and a pack of progressive "capitalists" and Liberal intellectuals in a crusade to put the progressive system back on its feet'.[81]

National Government

The Labour MPs who had remained in office as part of the National Government (under the name National Labour) played on exactly these notions of 'getting things done' to demonstrate that, despite being in government with the Conservatives and National Liberals, they retained the progressive mantle. Sometimes they presented themselves as merely 'the more progressive elements in the Government', with the power to keep it 'on a progressive as well as a stable keel'.[82] At others, they suggested that the whole of the National Government was more progressive than Labour, on the grounds that 'Programmes for immediate transformation

of the competitive system into a full-blown Socialist state make no con-
verts, but repel men and women of progressive sympathies.'[83] On the con-
trary, 'Thanks to the National Government, and to the hereditary powers
of our people, we have made more substantial progress during the last two
years than any other country in the world, be it democracy, dictatorship
or hybrid.'[84]

The National Labour peer Lord Elton declared that voters must choose
between 'on the one hand, a progressive modernization of industrial and
economic methods' and, on the other, 'the sterile and antiquated doc-
trine of class war [that] is now the chief obstacle to progress'.[85] Similarly,
National Liberals depicted 'progressive' politics as antithetical to social-
ism. In October 1937, their leader John Simon warned that 'The future
[…] was going to present itself as a contest and struggle between the new
faith which broadly was called Socialism and the progressive advanced view
which was really common now to the great mass of those who opposed
the Socialist doctrine.'[86]

Labour was depicted as unable to progress, due to its dependence on
outdated modes of organisation and political analysis. For instance, Earl de
la Warr explained that Marxism was designed to address the problems of
shortage, but politics now needed to grapple with the dilemmas of plenty:
'We can produce boots by the million, but we cannot get them onto
the children's feet. We can flood the market with milk, but we have not
acquired the technique of getting it down the throats of those who need
it without ruining those who produce it.'[87] Whereas in the first decades of
the twentieth century Labour had 'seemed to be the only party that was
looking ahead', in 1931 it had proved itself to be 'just as tied to the past as
those who openly called themselves Diehards'. Its status as the inheritor of
the 'progressive tradition' had become a bar to further progress:

> I cannot help feeling that, with a Parliamentary party composed of a mixture
> of Bloomsbury theorists and elderly trade union secretaries, they are quite
> unequal to grappling with those new problems of the new world with which
> the scientist is confronting this generation. The world of twenty or thirty
> years ago, for which their then very progressive policy was designed, no
> longer exists.[88]

Perhaps uniquely among political parties, the Conservative Party does not
seem to have claimed to be 'progressive' in the inter-war years (that would
come later, as we will see in Chap. 6), but it did continually emphasise

its status as the party of 'ordered progress'.[89] This was particularly associated with the personal appeal of Stanley Baldwin, who was depicted on Conservative Party posters as 'THE MAN for PEACE[,] SECURITY and PROGRESS'.[90] Such language was part of Baldwin's attempt to paint a portrait of British democracy that depended upon—in Philip Williamson's words—'a history of progress achieved through continuity and the slow evolution of traditional institutions, not by disruption and revolution'.[91] As one 1934 Conservative pamphlet explained,

> We live in stirring times. Conditions are changing and with them Industry, the Social Order, even our Constitution itself, must evolve.
>
> Evolution means steady progress to a better state—Nature's way. Revolution means turning *back*; scrapping not only outworn institutions, but also those which are sound just because they have taken time to grow.[92]

The link with both linear time and modernity was made clear in two striking animated broadcasts, produced in 1930 and 1931. Each depicted government as a motor car: with Baldwin at the wheel progress was smooth and steady, but socialism and liberalism led to obstacles and collapse.[93] A 1929 Conservative poster had made similar use of modern technology with its depiction of 'The Escalator to Prosperity',[94] and Baldwin's address to the electors had asked them 'once again to place their confidence in our Party as the only one which can secure stable conditions and ordered progress along sound and practical lines'.[95] Labour's 1929 manifesto directly countered '"The old bogey" of socialism presented by the Tories'. Instead it used very similar language to the Conservatives, insisting that Labour was 'opposed to force, revolution and confiscation as means of establishing the New Social Order. It believes in ordered progress and in democratic methods.'[96]

THE CRITIQUE OF PARTY

Despite this emphasis on continuity and stability, much of the rhetoric justifying the National Government also included a strong critique of party government, and suggested that the National coalition offered a productive rupture with the existing forms of politics. As Harold Nicolson put it:

> from the union of parties which has now been established under Ramsay MacDonald's initiative and with Baldwin's present leadership some new

formula, some more central and progressive creed, will before long emerge and rally many millions to its support. Once we have cut the dead wood of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism we shall find the sap rising again in the younger branches and can confidently look forward to a further National growth—young, vigorous and enduring.[97]

Standing above party affiliation was seen to be both pragmatic and in line with public opinion:

A progressive National policy, if it is to be in accord with the character of our people, must be sensible, unprovocative, constructive, avowed, illogical, experimental, gradual, but with all that clear and courageous. The British public […] like to feel that the Government is 'getting on with the job'.[98]

In 1934, a hundred Conservative MPs signed a letter to the *Times*, in which they regretted that it had not yet been possible to 'drop […] the sub-labels of Conservative, Liberal, and Labour' and looked forward to the eventual growth of 'a National Party, without prefix or suffix', as 'the old party traditions' had 'small bearing on the problems of the present day'.[99] The National Labour supporter (and soon to be peer) Godfrey Elton similarly suggested that 'It may be that out of the present flux will emerge new Parties and even—what is much more uncommon—new Party labels.' He maintained, however, that whatever change of name they underwent, 'there will always be a Conservative Party, for Conservatism […] is eternal. And similarly, […] until society has finally adapted itself to the ever-changing conditions of this age […] there must needs be a Party of Advance.'[100] That said, he was equally clear that if 'there does emerge in the near future one powerful progressive Party capable of competing with Conservatism upon equal terms', it was unlikely to be the present Labour Party: 'Only a new Labour Party can become the channel of the impulse of progress and so organize future victory out of present disaster.'[101]

These were all calls to revise and remake the party system in light of the new alignments that had emerged in the wake of the crisis. None was opposed to electoral competition in itself. Indeed, as G.R. Searle points out, the idea of National Government came to be seen as a way of '*preserving the old political system from extremism.*'[102] There was, however, a symbiotic relationship between these critiques of party politics and the extremism that they were designed to counter. The most obvious example here is Oswald Mosley, who had left the Labour government in 1930

and founded first the New Party and then, in 1932, the British Union of Fascists (BUF). Both Searle and Matthew Worley place Mosley's politics within the context of the widespread crisis of party discussed in establishment political circles in this period. In late 1930 and early 1931, these discussions had begun to focus around the possibility of forming something like a National Government (with some suggestions that Mosley should be at its head).[103] This was the background to the New Party, which initially gathered support from a wide section of respectable people from across the political spectrum.[104] It was in the wake of the defeat of the New Party at the 1931 election that Mosley adopted positions that were not only anti-parliamentary, but explicitly anti-political.[105] In 1932, the New Party was folded into the British Union of Fascists.

Even in its early publications, however, the New Party was deeply critical of the '"dud" game of Parliamentary politics', which it characterised as the '"do nothing" policy' of the 'old men'.[106] This rejection of the previous generation chimes with modernist antipathy to the Victorians. Instead, Mosley and his supporters appealed to the 'hard-headed, hard-fighting, hard-working business men, and the progressive, well-educated and highly-skilled workers […] the shock-troops of the army of those who do the nation's work'.[107] Later on, Mosley expressed the desire to cut 'clean through all classes, clean through all the old political parties':

> out of the fires will emerge a welded whole, a corporate mass, stern of purpose and resolute; ready to govern Britain in the interests of all Britain and not on behalf of some faction—the Trades Union Council, the landowners, the workers, the employers or the bankers.
>
> We believe in a supreme Government who will consult whom it chooses, dictated to by no man, making its own decisions and putting them into immediate action in the interests of the country as a whole.[108]

In *The Greater Britain*, the founding document of the BUF, Mosley explained that the corporate state was a fusion of the two traditions in British politics: '*It combines the dynamic urge to change and progress with the authority, the discipline and the order without which nothing great can be achieved.*'[109] Again, we see the emphasis on getting things done:

> Stability confused with reaction and a resistance to change, together with progress confused with obstructive debate and committee irresponsibility, end alike in chaos. Both are instruments for preventing things being done, and *the first requisite of the modern age is that things should be done.*[110]

Interestingly, Mosley made repeated attempts to connect with H.G. Wells, who had begun to suggest the need for a 'Liberal Fascism', '"flatly opposed" to the norms of "parliamentary democracy"', in order to create 'one prosperous and progressive world community of just, kindly, free-spirited, freely-thinking, and freely-speaking human beings'.[111] Ironically enough, though, it seems that Wells was less than impressed with Mosley's preoccupation with the details of parliamentary representation.[112]

THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY LEFT

The way in which Mosley reached out to Wells is indicative of the role that the latter played as a kind of unofficial contact point for self-identified 'progressives' searching for 'a counter-culture in opposition to mainstream society', despite his lack of interest in taking up that role. Lesley Hall has detailed the network of groups that sprang up around Wells' ideas, including the H.G. Wells Society, later renamed Open Conspiracy and then Cosmopolis, and also the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI).[113] The latter was established in 1932 in response to the sense that there was 'a new agreement among progressively-minded persons upon certain fundamental issues […] a certain *crystallization* of progressive thought'.[114] This statement echoes many of the ideas that we have seen throughout this chapter. The FPSI's definition of 'progressive' was rooted in the ideals upon which 'all liberal-minded and socially constructive men throughout the world can agree'.[115] These issues included the replacement of production for profit with production for use; a world currency and banking system; disarmament leading to world government; universal education; reform of the sex laws (covering divorce, abortion, birth control and 'abnormality', and the provision of voluntary sterilisation) and of the criminal law, including the abolition of capital punishment; preservation of the countryside; town planning; and disestablishment of the church, abolition of censorship, Sunday observance and blasphemy laws, as well as of all restrictions on freedom of dress, drink and speech.[116] Marcus Collins has described this as a forerunner of the 'permissive' attitudes that spread more widely through society in the 1960s.[117]

The FPSI was primarily an organisation of the eclectic extra-parliamentary left—in addition to Wells, it drew in Rebecca West, C.E.M. Joad (as President), Leonard Woolf and Harold Nicolson. Joad and Nicolson had both been members of the New Party and Nicolson would be elected as a National Labour MP in 1935. Yet it remained aware

of the dangers of being an organisation of the intellectual middle class and insisted on the need for unity with 'the progressive class of society'—the workers.[118] Despite their admiration for the Soviet Union and initial preference for 'progressive construction' over the 'old-fashioned stuff' of class war, by 1937—following their participation in the Popular Front—the editors of *Plan*, the Federation's journal, concluded that 'the class war is the motive force in society'.[119] While the FPSI continued to support Labour as the best means to a socialist government, R.A. Wilford has emphasised the extent to which it continually jeopardised this relationship through its close association with the Socialist League and championing of Stafford Cripps.[120]

The FPSI was one of a series of groups that sprang up on the intellectual left at this time. Another was the New Britain Movement (NBM), established in 1933 as an offshoot of the New Europe Group (NEG). Some of the same names seem to have been involved—Joad and Woolf both gave lectures, which were chaired by Nicolson.[121] Like the FPSI, the NBM and NEG were keen to establish a world government—European unity was to be a first step. And they shared a similar mix of despair and optimism. The FPSI was formed as a direct response to the catastrophic defeat of the Labour Party in 1931 and the ensuing factionalism on the left.[122] Its manifesto described how 'The chaos of international relations, the failure to balance production and consumption, the nationalist policies pursued by governments […] must, unless arrested inevitably lead […] to the breakdown of civilization.'[123] The NBM and NEG took inspiration from the idea that the present system had reached such a low that change was now inevitable. The symptoms here included 'the competitiveness and underlying hostility of our relationships, the futilities of our daily activities', the 'disrepute' of Parliament, 'steady economic decline and the impotence of statesmen', and 'the hostility and distress that are inherent in our present order'.[124] Yet both of these groups retained faith in their ability to remake the system and maintained that 'an age of plenty, in which there shall be neither poverty nor need for conflict over the right to live, is now possible'.[125] Their philosophy was based on the belief that humanity was fundamentally both developmental ('the essential feature of his nature is potentiality') and social.[126] Without the distortions of the current order these capacities would blossom.

All of these groups set themselves to some degree against the norms of the parliamentary process. Stephen Spender described the Popular Front as

an appeal above the heads of the professional politicians to the people who are sick of professional politics […]. The people who support such a Front will be those who are sick of Labour, Liberal and Tory or 'National' and pin such faith as they still have to the League of Nations, or the much smaller societies which are springing up.[127]

In 1934 (the year of his death), Alfred Orage became joint editor of *New Europe*, the journal of the NEG.[128] Even the centrist Harold Macmillan supported the NBM and toyed with joining the New Party.[129]

As this tangled history indicates, in early twentieth-century Britain the boundaries between left and right, between mainstream and extreme, and between radical and reactionary were not merely porous, they were warped and buckled, with odd kinks and unexpected cracks. Where they came together was in their sense that parliamentary democracy, and the party system in particular, was damaged, outdated, profoundly misguided— or various combinations of the three. They differed in the technicalities of their responses, but more fundamentally in the extent to which they accepted, first, a progressive doctrine of history and, second, the idea that parliamentary democracy was a central part of this history.

Entering the Narrative

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, one of the key ways in which parliamentary democracy in the inter-war years has been celebrated as 'progressive' is through the franchise reforms that granted the vote to all men and to women over thirty in 1918, and to all women in 1928. The campaign for women's suffrage is one of the founding stories of the modern political system and has become a ubiquitous touchstone for politicians of all parties.[130]

In her 1978 essay 'Women's Time', Julia Kristeva argued that the suffrage campaign had been an attempt to insert women into narrative time, the time of events and political processes.[131] Likewise, Rita Felski suggests:

The feminists of the period explicitly espoused what can be described as a quintessentially modern time awareness; in creating their vision of the present and the future, they affirmed a sense of history as chronological development and as embodying a linear, irreversible flow of time. For many women, such an experience of historicity was a drastically new and exhilarating phenomenon that announced a dawning public intimation of the signifi-

cance of women as political agents, as subjects of, rather than simply subject to, history.[132]

The emphasis on chronology and linearity here is significant. As Rhodri Hayward has argued, this was one of the features of modernity, crafted simultaneously by the doctrines of psychoanalysis, scientific rationalism and the historical discipline, all of which depended upon a traceable and consequential relationship between past and present.[133] Yet this is about more than the individual psyche. It is about an entry into public time, the time of history. This is the kind of time that Bonnie G. Smith suggests underpinned the development of scientific history, and the nation state that was its subject. This time was secular—'neutral, mathematical, unmarked'—and constructed in opposition to 'the thick sluggishness of feminine space'.[134] Interestingly, Smith also notes that this gendered understanding of political time weighted it as 'progressive', in that it 'textured time with the liberal ideal of the developmental man' and focused on the means by which men had defeated and thus succeeded one another, thereby feminising the superseded individual or regime as 'weaker'.[135]

The idea that women had been excluded from the processes of history on account of their sex underpinned Olive Schreiner's denunciation of the 'sex parasitism' of modern femininity in her 1911 *Woman and Labour*. As Felski explains, for Schreiner, 'The category of labour, as the supreme marker of humanizing activity and individual agency, provided the key to situating women in history.'[136] Or, as Lydia Becker put it in a speech to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, once we cast aside the notion that the interests of men and women were fundamentally opposed, that 'the one was progressive and the other non-progressive', then it would be possible to see that 'the feminine portion of the race—being practically debarred from such means of cultivating the higher mental faculties […]—must suffer serious deprivation and loss'.[137] Moreover, as an 1859 article had suggested, to allow women to be 'progressive' would 'be to the unspeakable advantage of both sexes': 'as human beings they [women] are not stationary'; on the contrary, 'progressive change in them' was 'as right as it is inevitable'. Stunting this progressive change serves only to 'prevent men from being truly great, and will continue to do so'.[138] This assertion that women could be as progressive as men (if only they were allowed to realise their natural tendencies) was a direct counter to the tendency that I examined in Chap. 2, whereby man has been consistently represented as

the more progressive sex, located in individualised historical time, in contrast to the cyclical, biological repetitions of women's time.

Perhaps the ultimate rebuke to such views was the individualist feminism expressed by Dora Marsden in the pages of her journals the *Freewoman*, *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*. Although Marsden had been a militant suffragist, her advocacy of Nietzschean ideas led her into similar territory to the anti-parliamentary tradition examined above. Both the *New Age* and the *New Witness* expressed violently misogynistic views. Yet they also wrapped much of their criticism of the suffrage campaigners in their wider critique of the parliamentary system (which, in a further twist, they represented as decadent and feminised) and its entanglement with industrial capitalism and wage slavery.[139] Marsden similarly questioned the value of the vote, on the grounds that delegating responsibility was a dangerous abstraction of the self and represented a form of servility.[140] While remaining a feminist, she made clear that there were bigger issues at stake than gaining the vote:

> We work for its [government's] destruction. […] As for Votes for Women, we think the women will be very quick to see the nature of government. Unless they get it soon (and then forget it) the more thoughtful among them will cease to ask for it. They should battle with Government itself.[141]

As Lucy Delap reminds us, this should be seen in the context of the abuse Marsden had suffered at the hands of the state when imprisoned for her suffragist activities.[142] Other former suffragettes, disillusioned with the party system, transferred their militancy from feminism to fascism in the 1930s.[143]

Feminist thinkers also developed arguments based on affirming rather than denying the distinctiveness of their sex. In place of asserting their right to enter the historical narrative of men, this was a way of remaking history and reshaping its narrative forms. Such arguments were aligned with the idea that the progressive life force is rooted in sex difference, as in an 1889 article in the *Women's Penny Paper*, which linked sexhood to 'the whole line of progressive continuity that led upwards to humanity out of primal chaos'.[144] This did not necessarily frame women as the progressive sex, but it created the possibility for doing so. Elizabeth Grosz has outlined the importance of this idea to Darwinian theories of evolution, and traced forward the resonances of this line of argument in feminist thought. She stresses the importance of disruptive, unpredictable and

radical change to Darwin's theory and highlights the radical emancipatory potential that this contains.[145]

One of the more explicit forms of gendered temporality in early twentieth-century Britain was the idea that society was becoming feminised. This was strongly linked to the debates over degeneration, racial weakness and eugenics that emerged in the late nineteenth century and took on particular significance with the Boer War.[146] Felski shows how feminist writers grasped this discourse and turned it to their own ends, using it to suggest that the future was feminine. The example she uses here is Frances Swiney's *The Awakening of Women* (1899), which argued that women were the most evolved sex, both on the basis of their physical superiority and their greater contribution to cultural, linguistic, technological and ethical development: 'All the social and industrial development upon which modern civilisation rests is owing, to a great extent, to the inventive genius and crude expedients of primitive woman.'[147] In answer to the complaint that mechanisation was feminising men, Swiney proclaimed that this was evolution towards the re-establishment of matriarchal rule, which would sweep away the anachronistic values of masculinity.[148]

This turn to 'feminine' virtues became more pronounced in the aftermath of the First World War. Alison Light has suggested that 'the 1920s and '30s saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny […] to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private—and, in terms of pre-war standards, more "feminine"'.[149] This was symbolised, as Peter Mandler has pointed out, by the shift from the iconography of John Bull to that of the gentle, domestic, timid 'Little Man', as drawn by Sidney Strube.[150] Light emphasises the extent to which this shift was underpinned by a form of 'conservative modernity', in line with organic conceptions of nationhood. Although not progressive in the sense of 'getting things done', this was nevertheless a story of progression, particularly in terms of the technological developments that meant that the inter-war years 'mark[ed] for many women their entry into modernity, a modernity which was felt and lived in the most interior and private of places'. This was also, as Light emphasises, a period in which those private places were raised to a place 'at the centre of national life'.[151]

Light's study focuses on popular middlebrow writers—Ivy Compton Burnett, Agatha Christie, Rebecca West, Jan Struthers. Similar ideas can be found in the experimental writing of female modernists. Light herself suggests that we might read Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay 'A Room of

One's Own' as asking 'on what terms […] should modern women seek to enter the historical narrative? Now that there was a chance of writing it for themselves, might they not want a different plot altogether?'[152] Jane Garrity takes up this theme, arguing that the fragmented and circular narratives of female modernist writers, like Dorothy Richardson, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Mary Butts and Virginia Woolf, should be read as attempts to construct new modes of understanding themselves as national subjects, in a political framework in which even their nationality was derived from that of their husband. Moreover, this involved contesting received notions of temporality: 'In demonstrating their attachment to territory, British women's rhetorical strategies challenged the dynamic of female passivity and male action'.[153] They also

> invert[ed] the hierarchy of the primitive and the civilized by representing the 'primitive' nature of femininity as a kind of moral compass through which the masculinized nation—overly mechanized, rational, detached, individualistic, and violent—can be repositioned and healed.[154]

The Race of Progress

As Garrity notes, these encounters with the gendered nature of citizenship and nationhood were also deeply racialised. The female body was already inscribed with ideas of race and heredity,[155] and these writers used this to position it 'as central to the maintenance of the nation, and crucially, to the empire as well', even as they explicitly challenged the masculine logic of imperialism.[156] They also aligned women's experience with that of oppressed 'foreigners', but in ways that 'elide[d] the very real distinctions (racial, economic, linguistic, and so forth) between the native and the immigrant'.[157] There had also been a strongly imperial edge to the more overtly political work of earlier writers like Schreiner and Swiney. Felski notes that in the attempt to rework misogynist theories of social and biological evolution, they constructed a different narrative of progress, in which they took up their place 'as an intellectual and political vanguard at the forefront of history', partly through constructing a contrast with women of other races and classes—who were presented as backward or primitive.[158]

This fits with recent work by Sumita Mukherjee on the way in which British suffragists used the trope of the oppressed Indian woman to bolster their own cause, rather than supporting the Indian women's struggle

for enfranchisement. This changed in the inter-war years, when former suffragists took up the cause of Indian women campaigning for the vote within the new Indian Parliament. As Mukherjee emphasises, however, this was still framed within the idea of imperial duty, with little regard for the proposals of women like Herabai and Mithan (Mithibai) Tata, who were leading the campaign on the Indian side.[159] We can see this attitude at work in the Duchess of Atholl's 1931 book *Women and Politics*, which concluded with a discussion of how women could 'discharge their responsibility towards women of the backward races of the Empire'.[160] By turning their attention to spreading democracy in the Empire, British women were thus able to position themselves as the agents of Whiggish progress, rather than its subjects.

Just as British women used their writing to forge new national narratives and identities, so did writers located within the Empire itself. One particularly interesting example is the All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA), formed in the mid-1930s. It had close links with left-wing groups in London, but also a strong identity as an *Indian* movement. AIPWA grew out of the defence of a collection of short stories, entitled *Angāre* and published in 1932 in Lucknow. The controversy over this publication was so intense that all but five copies were destroyed by the police; the book was banned and fatwas issued against its authors.[161] In defending their work, the four authors, Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmed Ali, Mahmuduzzafar and Rashid Jahan, stated their intention to form 'a League of Progressive Authors'.[162] This became AIPWA; its manifesto was written in London in 1935 and launched at a conference in Lucknow in 1936.

The four writers of *Angāre* were affluent and had been educated in England. This led to accusations of 'Westernisation', particularly with regard to their use of modernist literary styles.[163] The implication here was that they were trying to impose a Western model of aesthetic progress on India. Yet the group emphasised a more complicated lineage. A 1939 text on the 'Role of Progressive Writers' in adult education set out a developmental history of literature, beginning with Sanskrit Puranas (epics), dramas, Prahasanas and lyrical ballads, then moving through Plato, Macaulay and the Romantic poets before reaching the 'world-wide impetus for the development of […] modern and novel modes of literary expression' created by the advent of adult suffrage in Western Europe, coupled with the rupture of the First World War.[164] This contributed, along with the influence of Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore at the end of the nineteenth century, to the emergence, during the 'new nationalist age of

Gandhism', of 'an entirely new and rich crop of literature, mostly in prose surcharged with nationalism, breathing of Indian soil, heritage and culture and seeking to raise the self-respect and arouse the spirit of self-sacrifice of our masses as a whole'.[165]

As this passage suggests, the movement was political as well as literary. The first and second resolutions of the Second All India Writers' Conference declared that 'it is the sacred duty of all those who love culture to align themselves with those forces in our country which are fighting for the political emancipation of India', and announced that its members 'stand in the ranks of those who are striving to build a new social order based on equality, freedom and peace', against the 'anti-cultural forces of Fascism and militarism', particularly in Germany, Spain and China.[166] One of the Indian students in London at the time of the AIPWA Manifesto, Jyoti Basu, placed it within the political context of the gathering of 'progressive forces' against fascism around the time of the Spanish Civil War. He was particularly inspired by Harold Laski and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) leaders who worked with the India League and the Indian Students' cell of the CPGB.[167] Similarly, Zaheer had been drawn into the world of Communist and left Labour politics during his time at Oxford.[168] That is not to say that the movement as a whole was communist. Its founders consciously sought the participation of nationalists and liberals, and of both Hindu and Muslim revivalists, as well as of those with no political affiliation.[169] Neither was it 'foreign' to India, but grew out of its history, its civilisation and its political situation—as Zaheer has been at great pains to point out.[170]

The self-identification of this group of Indian writers as 'progressive' is not incidental. Indeed, Rakhshanda Jalil argues that the word itself was intrinsic to their identity:

> What set them apart from the others—and what made their voice distinct in that babel of voices that cried for revolution and change—was their use of the word 'progressive', or to be more precise, *taraqqui pasand*, literally meaning those who 'like' progress.[171]

What this meant was contested within the group. As we have seen, there was a strongly developmental aspect to their work, both in terms of the narrative of literary progress over the centuries and the idea of literature as a means of developing new and self-aware Indian citizens. They also aligned themselves with certain aspects of Enlightenment thought, particularly in

terms of 'the banishment of mysticism and all that which stands in the way of attaining freedom'.[172] This was what had caused such controversy with regard to *Angāre*. Theirs was not, however, a Whiggish tale of the achievement of liberty; it was framed in terms of struggle rather than expectation. Ismar Chugtai has expressed this particularly graphically, explaining that 'The Progressive Movement's foundation stone was laid when the first man in the history of mankind groaned under the oppression experienced through injustice, the usurpation of his rights, exploitation, inequality and tyranny.' Progressivism was possible '[a]s long as there is the possibility of progression on this planet [...]. Till such time as the big fish swallows the smaller one, progressivism will indeed remain alive.'[173]

The example of the AIPWA underlines the breadth of the international context in which the events that we have looked at throughout this chapter should be understood. Sibte Hasan has described it as 'the natural result of the circumstances prevailing in the world at the end of the First World War', compounded by the effects of economic crisis.[174] As we have seen, this was a period in which schemes for world government and European unity were mooted. A critique of liberal norms took hold across Europe and—in response—anti-fascist groups rallied to the defence of Spain. British political activists were located in strong international networks of feminists, pacifists, anti-imperialists and socialists.[175] Guild socialism developed in conversation with American progressives, as much as in contestation with the British tradition.[176] Hasan also characterises literary modernism as an international movement with deeply political implications. He suggests that 'Progressive writers' were asked 'Whose side are you on?' and that only Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot 'supported the forces of oppression'.[177]

Conclusion

The grand narratives of British, English and *parliamentary* history are above all (as Butterfield identified) narratives of progress. History is seen as an accumulation of progressive acts, piled one upon the other, spreading liberty and democracy ever further down the social spectrum. While these kinds of celebratory narrative have long been discredited in academic history, they continue to inform the stories that we tell ourselves about our political past and present.[178] We can see this dynamic in play in the way in which the inter-war years themselves are remembered, whether as the starting point of the modern political system or as the foil against which

later social progress is understood (the 'never again' that inspired the welfare state and still provides the ultimate warning against its destruction[179]).

In this chapter, we have seen how such linear narratives of progress were resisted by those who preferred to find inspiration in the lost causes of history, and by those who proposed a different narrative altogether—whether of proletarian revolution, fascist rupture, or feminist innovation. We have also seen how these narratives were mobilised on both right and left; how they were used to tell stories about the ongoing fight for political liberties and social reforms, as well as to buttress a centrist tale of moderation and stability. Yet all of these narratives involved a certain degree of fragmentation. The 'progressive' option for many people seemed to be to move beyond the inherited party system—whether as a temporary response to crisis, a means to preserve the existing power structures, or a way to destroy the parliamentary system altogether.

As we will see in Chap. 6, discussions about party realignments continued through the post-war years. It is, however, striking that the seemingly 'outdated' alignment continued, along with the implicit assumption that the parties divided naturally into 'progressive' and 'conservative' sides. As we have seen in this chapter and in Chap. 3, this was an increasingly difficult line to maintain, particularly in light of the divisions *within* political traditions. The complicated overlap between collectivism and even the most extreme individualism was highlighted by a 1912 article in Dora Marsden's *The Freewoman*. The anonymous author cast this as a disagreement amongst 'the forces which call themselves "progressive"'— 'Contradictory theories are rubbing shoulders together, and with one voice asking for a like solution. Like theories are at each other's throats, and demanding solutions poles apart.' Both grew out of the impulse to improve humanity, but the mistake had been to imagine that the contradictory ideals of 'a Perfectly-conditioned State' and 'a Perfectly-conditioned Individual' were one and the same.[180] Such tensions only increased in the inter-war years.

This political fragmentation was mirrored in the realm of aesthetic modernism. Here it was not only social structures, party identities, and triumphal historical narratives that were seen to have cracked, warped, doubled back on themselves, but the deeper realms of personality, materiality, and the experience of time itself. As Alison Light reminds us, however, for many people the turn to interior life also involved a retreat to the comfort and stability of the domestic. In the next chapter we will follow these observations into the private realm, looking at the ways in which

self-consciously modern forms of selfhood were constructed and experienced. This will take us into the 'other 1930s'—a period of consumption, glamour and expectation. This is the 'third England' that JB Priestley observed on his *English Journey*—a place of 'giant cinemas and dancehalls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages, of cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses […] and everything given away with cigarette coupons'.[181] Yet, as we will see, it was also a place of complicated and contradictory temporalities, in which 'progress' meant both continuity and rupture, and 'progressive people' were both the agents and the subjects of modernity.

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Puzzled People: Making Sense of Modernity

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, British citizens were encouraged to 'be progressive', both by commercial advertisers and by public agencies. A multitude of meanings were attached to this injunction, but the simple message was clear: both keeping up and getting ahead were crucial; standing still was not an option. What that meant in practice was more complicated and—as always—the binary opposition between progressive and conservative mindsets was blurred, to say the least. Progress was presented both as a rupture with the past and as part of a continuous tradition of improvement. To be progressive was both daring and prudent, innovative and conventional. It therefore perfectly captured the ambiguous temporality involved in the project of the modern, which was never straightforwardly synonymous with the new.[1]

In this chapter we will examine the idea of progressiveness as a state of mind, perhaps the defining state of mind of what we call 'modernity'. Various characterisations of modernity have been put forward, but most revolve around the question of time and our changing relationship to it.[2] That may be due to a perception that time is accelerating or that it is less predictable, less continuous, than before.[3] Modernity has been associated with the desire to colonise space through the conquest of time, and with the sense that both time and space are dissolving into nothingness.[4] It carries connotations of rationality, planning and secular reason, but also conjures images of frenetic movement, social disorder and emotional incontinence.[5]

As many authors have pointed out, modernity is a project of the self; it is a state of constant reflexion, remaking and reimagining.[6] This might involve conscious attempts at self-examination and discovery, perhaps through an engagement with occult practices or with the new psychological sciences.[7] It might be an imaginative undertaking, lived out through movies and novels, or in the search for romantic love.[8] Or it might be something glimpsed in adverts, with their invitations for self-fashioning.[9] Rita Felski suggests that 'the consumer is a key symbol of modernity', but also underlines that this is not a passive business 'march[ing] in step with the interests of production or serv[ing] as shorthand for human alienation and spiritual impoverishment'. Instead, consumption 'involves agency, imagination, and even work'; it is 'the site where the intricate connections between large-scale social systems and the experiences, desires, and struggles of ordinary individuals are forged'.[10] This is what we see in the two-way construction of the 'progressive' consumer.

As this passage suggests, progressiveness is not *only* an individual project: it is also a collective undertaking, the means by which communities and nations define themselves. As we have seen throughout this book, the idea of Britain as a peculiarly progressive nation had a great deal of purchase. Yet this was always shadowed by fears that this status was slipping. The post-war years marked a high point of cultural and economic declinism. Commentators from across the political spectrum and members of the public frequently expressed fears that Britain was not as progressive as had once been the case, and also that its attachment to the past was holding back progress—creating a cultural drag on innovation. Assessments of Britain's position relative to its competitors in Western Europe and the United States, as well as the standing of the self-declared 'progressive' states of both Soviet and Chinese communism and the enterprising 'progressive' nations of the new Commonwealth, also show a range of conflicting and contested ideas about what it meant to be a progressive nation.

Underneath the valorisation of the progressive mindset, and panic that Britain and its people were less progressive than they could or should have been, we can also detect deep currents of unease with the whole idea of progress. Far from being a universally desirable trait, the progressive imperative often invited uncertainty, resistance and even fear. These feelings were only heightened by the sense of its inevitability. Whether imagined as an orderly procession or an unstoppable whirlwind, a competition or a test, being progressive did not seem to be a choice.

In the 1960s, 'progressive' began to be used in a derogatory fashion to describe the liberal elite. This began at the start of the decade, in the context of decolonisation, but later developed to cover the 'permissive' reforms of the Wilson government and the use of 'progressive' educational methods in first primary and then comprehensive schools. The then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins famously noted that 'the permissive society has been allowed to become a dirty phrase'.[11] The term 'progressive' took a similar path. As we have seen throughout this book, it had generally been seen as a morally positive word, claimed across the political spectrum. Aspects of permissive legislation were described as befitting 'a free, intelligent, and progressive people'.[12] Yet by 1973, *Daily Mail* sketch writer Andrew Alexander was able to invoke the 'Progressive forces' whom he assumed his readers would 'be terrified to hear—had a good day at Westminster yesterday'. He went on:

> Another stride was taken in the process of making it illegal to discriminate against people on grounds of race, colour, creed, sex, religion, shape, size, length, breadth, attractiveness, repulsiveness, strength, weakness, aptitude, ineptitude, longitude, latitude, etc etc.[13]

These criticisms were based on the idea that Britain was entering a period of moral and cultural decline, brought about by the meddling of 'progressives', intent on forcing society in a particular direction. Yet for economic declinists the argument had long been that Britain was not progressive enough, that it was not keeping up with the modern world. The distinction between 'progress' and 'progressive' is crucial. In the course of the 1960s and 1970s the two terms became dissociated from one another in a way that had not been true before. This had implications both for party politics, as we will see in Chap. 6, and also for the way in which Britons did (and did not) imagine themselves to be progressive people.

The Whirr of Progress

Advertising has long been recognised as a central part of the self-fashioning of modern identities. Matthew Hilton has described manufacturers as modernists, and their advertisements as expressions of a capitalist utopian vision. This involved both creating 'the mass' and cultivating a seemingly intimate relationship with the individuals who comprised it.[14] In selling a product, the new advertising agencies did not simply reflect the desires of

their potential customers; they attempted to create and shape them, offering a ready-to-wear sense of self.[15] We can therefore ask what it meant to be progressive in this context: what were the defining characteristics attributed to 'progressive' consumers, products and retailers?

The first thing to note is that (as we started to see in Chap. 3) advertising was itself seen to be a particularly progressive activity. As early as 1901 a publication called *Progressive Advertising* appeared. The name, its editor explained, was chosen to indicate that the new periodical 'will not only be go-ahead, but will go ahead and be thoroughly up-to-date'. He went on to describe 'the best kinds of Push' as examples of 'Progressive Advertising'.[16] 'Push' was 'essentially a motto for the retailer […] to make his business known, rather than a matter of sitting down and waiting for popularity to come to him'.[17] Similarly, *Higham's Magazine: A Business Magazine for Progressive Men* described itself in its first issue as 'a paper devoted to Advertising and Selling […] that hopes to secure the attention of live progressive men of commerce'.[18] The Newspaper Society was also keen to impress the message that 'Progressive firms advertise'.[19] Another advert, following the General Strike, advised that now the restrictions on trade had been lifted, 'Sales will go up for those tradesmen who pursue a progressive policy and—Advertise in Newspapers'.[20] As with the politics we examined in Chap. 4, again we see a connection between being progressive and an active approach to *getting things done*.

This was about more than the interest of individual companies; it was also linked to ideas about national prosperity. In one advert, placed in the midst of the 1931 economic crisis, Debenham and Freebody declared that 'a new aggressive and progressive policy must be set in motion to provide for the greater manufacture, *and sale*, of British productions' because 'The future prosperity of the country is largely in our hands'.[21] This echoed Stanley Baldwin's 1927 suggestion that 'We must all work together with a view to the restoration of trade and national prosperity. […] On the production side I have no fears […] On the selling side we must modernise our methods and make use of the great developments which have taken place recently in the art of advertising.'[22] In 1938 a property company quoted a speech in which Neville Chamberlain had said that inspiring confidence was 'the mainspring of prosperity and progress everywhere', in order to assure readers that 'For nearly fifty years Key-Flats have been building a progressive organisation on that foundation stone'.[23] As these statements suggest, business success was itself a marker of progressiveness. Debenham and Freebody boasted that 'No section of our business is more progressive

than the blouse department'[24]; Charterhouse Investment Trust offered 'Facilities for the Provision of Capital for Established Progressive Industrial Undertakings in all parts of the World'[25]; and Eagle Star described itself as 'The most Progressive Insurance Company of the Age'.[26]

Perhaps the ultimate example of the 'progressive business man' in early twentieth-century Britain was Harry Gordon Selfridge, the American owner of the eponymous department store, credited with transforming the nature of modern retail.[27] His nationality is significant here. As Scott Anthony has shown, American public relations experts were rather more prone to 'personal boosting' than their British counterparts.[28] One of Selfridge's innovations was a column on the methods and philosophy of modern business, published in the *Morning Post* and other papers under the pseudonym Callisthenes. Only the legend 'Selfridge & Co. Ltd' at the foot of each column gave away that it was an advertisement. The idea of progress and the ideal of being progressive ran through these columns, whether in relation to Selfridges itself, to retail more widely, or to business and national development in general. 'Progressive business men' were seen to be uniquely receptive to the 'new ideas' that were 'the basis of all progress, all enterprise, all adventure, all success'.[29] Retail, in particular, was depicted as 'a whirr of progress' on account of its ever-changing fashions; indeed, Selfridge declared, 'few departments of the nation's life are so progressive just now as retail distribution'.[30] Rather than fearing change, he pledged to 'ally ourselves with all that is youthful and progressive and courageous'.[31]

The idea that the department store represented a great innovation was an essential part of its appeal. For historians of this period, 'the defining features of consumer modernity derive from the department store's adoption of a cadre of innovative retail practices: fixed prices, the sale of ready-made and branded merchandise, free entry into shops without the obligation to purchase goods, constant product innovation, and spectacular advertising displays'.[32] As Margot Finn has forcefully argued, however, such ideas do not look so new to historians of eighteenth-century commerce and consumer culture. Not only were all of these individual practices already in use in late eighteenth-century Britain, but they had been combined to create a rich culture of spectacular consumption, aided by 'dramatic lighting and seductive window displays'.[33] Moreover, this facilitated the movement of bourgeois women 'into the public sphere of the modern market' much earlier than historians of late Victorian consumer culture have recognised.[34]

With this in mind, it is worth considering Selfridge's pronouncements in light of the eighteenth-century languages of progressive commercial activity that we explored in Chap. 2. One of the Callisthenes columns, with the wonderful title 'World Progress—And Ours', is particularly revealing here. It drew an explicit link between the progress of humankind and the success of stores like Selfridges. Highlighting recent 'expressions of pessimism about the ability of the race to make any advance', it countered that these critics were using the wrong comparisons and overlooking the fact that 'one of the tests of world progress is retail distribution', which 'in the welfare of mankind […] has a place with sculpture, law or oratory':

> It is an important, perhaps the most important, proof of progress that the market-stall and the packman have been changed into the great Store. It is a great advance that all the products of the world are put more cheaply, more conveniently, more honestly, with more dignity before the people than ever before.
>
> That is world progress. It is a kind which matters, and it is a kind to the realization of which this House has given and will give its intensest effort.[35]

This depiction of commerce as a civilising force in the story of human development directly echoed the conjectural histories of the Scottish Enlightenment. Freedom of exchange was seen as both driver and marker of social progress.

Hilton has pointed out that Selfridge's pronouncements were an anomaly in British advertising culture and should not be taken as symptomatic of 'an explicit and vocalized commercial environment'.[36] That said, similar assumptions underpinned other, less overt advertisements. In particular, travel and emigration were often promoted in ways that suggested a link between trade, progressiveness and masculinity, echoing the themes that we explored in Chap. 2. For instance, Britons were encouraged to discover 'Thriving—Progressive South America' or Uruguay, 'A Healthy and Progressive Country—Safe for Enterprise'.[37] Many of these adverts focused on the British colonies and dominions. In Canada, Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg were sold as 'progressive modern cities'[38]; Maisonneuve was the 'most progressive industrial city', managed by 'progressive business men for business purposes'[39]; and Nova Scotia a 'virile and progressive province', 'Where Life is *Good*—and Taxation Low'.[40] Similar descriptions were applied to Australian cities, which had 'all the amenities of an advanced and progressive people'. An advert for Southern

Rhodesia, headed 'Travel Imperially' and invoking the spirits of Cecil Rhodes and Lord Curzon, praised the 'young towns and progressive commerce' of the area, in which the visitor would find 'the British spirit born anew'.[41] Similarly, 'men of enterprise and grit' were encouraged to give up 'plod[ding] along in town' and take up fruit-growing in 'a progressive country like South Africa', where life was appealing and 'the profits are large'.[42] There are echoes here of Adam Smith's characterisation of the progressive state as a colony that remained 'under-stocked' and 'under-peopled' and thus retained the potential for great economic growth, as we saw in Chap. 2.[43] However, this language was also used to describe non-settler colonies: Northern India was 'not only India's wealthiest territory, but […] also the most progressive', which supposedly made it ideal for British retailers.[44]

The idea that the British themselves had *made* the colonies progressive was strongly promoted. For instance, the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley invited 'tourists, businessmen, and would-be emigrants to identify with imperial ideas, to celebrate Britain's self-proclaimed role in bringing "progress" to "backwards peoples"'. One visitor, amazed by the material wealth of India—the grain, rice, raw silk, coal, fruits—commented that 'it stands for the achievements of all those millions of British people who have gone overseas […] the exhibition stands as a monument to the colonizing and commercial genius of the British people'.[45] This was a far cry from the anti-imperialism of the 'progressive movement'.[46] Yet, as we will see later in this chapter, the lens of 'progressive enterprise' and its connection with the civilising role of the white man were also called into play during and after decolonisation.

Progressive People

Thomas Richards has suggested that 'new' was the prototypical adjective of advertising, 'the one word which has traditionally taken precedence above all others'.[47] 'Progressive' often functioned in much the same way, showing the speed of change in a motorised age. Unsurprisingly, cars were particularly likely to be advertised as 'progressive'. Flying Standard were proclaimed 'Britain's most progressive motor cars!'; Wolseley 'the most progressive car in its class'; Daimler 'definitely progressive'; Minerva 'now more progressive than ever'; and Lagonda 'always progressive' with their 'ultra-modern design'.[48] In terms of tyres, 'Dunlop is progressive' because 'Each year shows substantial progress in Dunlop quality and design'.[49]

And a petrol advertisement urged its customers to 'Keep abreast of the times—Be Progressive—by always insisting on "BP".'[50]

As this latter example shows, retailers also appealed to consumers keen to think of themselves as progressive people. This involved a certain amount of flattery, but also the pressure not to be left behind. Progressive people were prudent and ahead of the game. For instance, one Manchester car company placed an advertisement thanking 'those progressive concerns and individuals' who had already placed orders for 118 Fords during February 1931, while urging others to follow suit, with the reassurance that 'The present urge is to spend money wisely, and the Ford is undoubtedly in a class of its own when economy has to be studied'.[51] Frigidaire suggested that 'Like most progressive people, you'll decide this Summer to cut out all the dangers and worries and waste inseparable from food in hot weather'.[52] In both cases, progressive thinking was associated with taking sensible precautions. Other adverts, however, appealed to would-be progressive customers purely on the basis of the risk of the new. One particularly clear example was an advert for Mennen's Shaving Foam, bearing the slogan 'For Progressive Men Only' and a short address to the consumer, signed by Jim Henry, Mennen Salesman, which read:

> If you must shave as your grandfather did I have nothing to offer, but if you will take a sporting chance and post me 6d. I'll send you one of my twenty-five shaves demonstrator tubes, with full instructions on the Mennen method.[53]

Mennen's advertising strategy is a perfect example of the 'cultivation of the male consumer' in this period.[54] As Brent Shannon has shown, such appeals were based on the need to create a masculine realm of fashion and grooming, dissociated from feminine traits. Advertisements aimed at men were 'clear, brisk and direct', using a 'business style' rather than 'florid descriptions and hyperbolic promises'.[55] This 'strenuous and masculine' style was seen by advertisers to be particularly 'modern'.[56]

Appeals to the progressive woman could be rather more emotional in tone. Helena Rubinstein repeatedly urged potential customers to 'LOOK in the mirror', where they would find an ageing complexion, fading beauty, 'some fault, some blemish, some definite ill'; she then offered hope with the idea that there was 'one woman who can and will devote her trained judgment, her profound scientific knowledge, to your beauty problems'. This rather alarming address closed with the reminder that 'to

care intelligently for your complexion and contour, you want a specialist of comprehensive learning, of progressive large-minded ideas'.[57] A more positive campaign was run by Potter & Moore's Powder-Cream, which assured potential readers that 'Progressive beauty [is] the most wonderful cosmetic discovery of our times'. Although 'Surface Beauty is not enough', by caring for their '*underskin*—the precious, lovely new complexion already growing underneath', women could be 'Lovely today yes, but lovelier tomorrow'.[58]

While the address to readers in the Helena Rubinstein campaign may have been somewhat depressing, its depiction of Rubinstein herself as a progressive, forward-thinking professional woman was fairly typical. In 1926, *Good Housekeeping* ran a special issue dedicated to 'Women in their many progressive activities'. These included 'brilliant' women novelists, women in politics, women in business ('pushing Adam's Applecart'), women as wives, and 'the spinster in education', as well as 'the provocative question "Have Women a Sense of Humour?"'[59] *Housewife* magazine mocked a man's attempts to replace a button, before noting the complexity of the job of being 'A modern housewife', which incorporated all the skills of a cook, manager, nurse, chauffeur 'and so on'. It was to the 'intelligent, practical, progressive woman who is determined to make a go of it' that *Housewife* offered 'her very own *professional* magazine'.[60]

In 1925, Lyons' Teashop rebranded its waitresses as 'Nippies' (their previous nickname had been the rather condescending 'Gladys'). With clear connotations of speed and efficiency, the Nippy was promoted as 'the embodiment of all that is smart and progressive'.[61] These traits frequently went together. Progressive people were often seen to be those who were able to keep up with the demands of the new age, who 'find that they cannot do without SECCOTINE [adhesive] to repair the breakages that are always occurring in the hurry and rush of the twentieth century',[62] or who 'will have nothing else' but Ferrocrete—'the rapid-hardening Portland Cement'.[63] There is of course a nice twist, in that these latter two products were intended to fix things exactly where they were, to provide a degree of stability in a fast-changing (and careless!) world. More explicitly stable was the Parker Knoll Tension Suspension chair, whose 'sane progressive design' was described as 'modern […] but not "modernistic"'. 'Sit in it', readers were told, 'and you will feel that for the moment progress is uncalled for.'[64]

Other adverts sought to reassure customers by presenting progressive innovation as part of an ongoing tradition of improvement. This

combination of temporal attitudes was put most explicitly in an advertisement for the Humber Six headed 'Progressive Conservatism', which explained that the car was 'backed by the most wonderful reputation in motoring history, yet up-to-date in the last detail of refinement'.[65] Another car advertisement stressed 'the traditional Ford policy of progressive improvement'.[66] Aquascutum boasted that it had been 'progressive in quality since 1851'.[67] And Heal's suggested that its new shop marked 'the progressive spirit that has made the century-old Heal and Son the home of the modernist school of art'.[68]

The ambiguity of the temporal claims made in these adverts reflects many of the trends we saw in Chap. 4. To be progressive was both to shed the assumptions of the past in the quest for radically new modes of living, and also to continue in a long tradition of continual development. The extent to which the latter was really a form of conservatism, which created a cultural drag on creativity, has been much debated.[69] In the post-war years this would develop into a 'declinist' critique of British culture and industry, but these currents of thought were already visible before the Second World War. One 1923 advert for central heating noted that 'For a progressive people we Britishers cling surprisingly to old-world ideas', noting how railway carriages were still called 'coaches', the first motor cars 'had a "bucket" for the whip', and British householders had tended to replace fireplaces with radiators, while retaining the idea of localised heating. Yet, it optimistically predicted, 'Eventually we shall warm the whole house instead of single rooms. Such a system is the only rational one, and fortunately is already available by means of the International Onepipe Heater.'[70] This gradual adoption of the new, under the guise of the familiar, could be seen as an example of what Alison Light has called the 'conservative modernity' of the inter-war years. As she observes, 'think of the inventiveness of the spirit which could take that that futurist symbol of speed and erotic dynamism—the motor car—and turn it into a Morris Minor!'[71]

Self-Development

One of the products most consistently advertised using the word 'progressive' was the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The *Britannica* was pitched at 'intelligent, progressive people who want the best for themselves and their families'[72] and the 'keen, progressive and prudent people who have always wanted the Britannica'.[73] It also emphasised its appeal to the 'renowned

men and women who are steeped in the cultural heritage of the world but who play a large part in the active, progressive life of to-day'.[74] One advert brought these two strands of aspiration and elitism together, boasting that 'the foremost men and women of the world […] own and use the Britannica', but also making clear that 'It is not only in successful offices the Britannica is used but in successful homes where people are progressive and get the best things out of life'.[75] Progressive here denoted ambition and success, but also intelligence and education. It offered ordinary families the opportunity to improve themselves and to gain the cultural advantages previously open only to an elite. Yet potential customers were warned that 'Education itself, however, is progressive. You can be educated to-day, and far from educated next year.'[76]

The idea that 'progressive people' were engaged in a process of reflexive and continual self-development was far broader than their use of the *Encyclopaedia*. Mathew Thomson points to the growth of the 'practical psychology' movement at this time. While it grew out of the more elite and bohemian interest in spiritualism and theosophy associated with the 'progressive movement' that we saw in Chap. 4, it also developed a more popular, middle-class and lower-middle-class form. Thomson links this explicitly to the new cultures of consumerism and the desire for self-development, both inside and out. As we noted in Chap. 3, spiritualism had long been described as 'progressive', not merely on the grounds of the cultural and political groups to whom it appealed, but also because it revolved around the idea of progression through a series of otherworldly realms. Alex Owen has outlined the differences between spiritualism and theosophy on the one hand and other newer forms of occultism on the other: while the former insisted on a coherent self, which received spiritual communications from external sources, the latter was an exploration of the inner realms of consciousness.[77] Both relied upon a progressively open-ended conception of the self, whether undertaking an incompletable journey towards perfection in the afterlife, or an ongoing process of self-discovery in the present. Yet it was the latter that converged with modern conceptions of the self.[78]

The idea that the hidden power of the mind could be harnessed and used to progress to a higher stage of consciousness was explicitly seen as 'modern' and validated by reference to new scientific insights, psychological theories, and the sociological language of the crowd and mass society. Most importantly, it was conceived as a reflexive project, requiring constant work and commodified through 'the development of a

mass therapeutic industry of cures, advice manuals and courses'.[79] This was not only a project for the individual. The ability to improve human nature began to seem a realistic political goal, to be set alongside political reform and to be achieved through a series of psychological interventions, in the home, workplace and the public sphere.[80] A good example is the work of psychologist John Bowlby and Labour MP Evan Durbin, which exercised considerable influence on the post-war Labour government.[81] Bowlby advocated applying the insights of psychoanalysis to social and political problems, arguing that democratic governments needed to understand and to employ 'the psychological forces making for group co-operation'. This was to be a 'truly scientific' undertaking, in the hands of public administrators whose vocational training in social sciences—including applied social psychology—would put them on an equivalent standing to engineers and doctors.[82]

However, citizens also displayed considerable unease with the interventions of experts. Fewer than half the people who responded to a 1947 Mass Observation survey felt that humankind was progressing and one in twelve feared that it was 'progressing backwards'; the authors of the report noted that this probably underestimated the proportion that had reservations about the nature or direction of progress. Individual comments included 'Mankind's progressing to destroying itself, I should say', 'we're progressing too fast, and in the end it will kill us' and 'We're progressing to degradation everyday'.[83] Such attitudes are perhaps not surprising in the aftermath of the Second World War and with the ever-present threat of the atomic bomb,[84] but this migrated into a general fear of science and expertise. As one 55-year-old woman described as 'educated' put it, 'James Watt and his kettle started all this trouble. I'd like to drown all scientists. We'd be better off without them. We're not educated up to it. We haven't the right principles.'[85] In 1941, another Mass Observer had recorded an acquaintance's view that 'all scientists should be hung by the neck until dead and then left as a grisly warning to others. […] He would also like to see the aeroplane inventors and technicians enjoying a similar fate to the science-mongers.'[86] Progress was far from universally desirable.

Can Britain Make It?

While in the inter-war years the problem—as Baldwin had identified it—was with finding ways to sell the products that Britain was manufacturing, in the late 1940s this dynamic was reversed. Although retailers continued

to impress upon their customers the need to 'Be Progressive' by using their products (such as Alasil—a 'new and improved way of taking aspirin'[87]), 'progressive' business methods now became primarily associated with maximising productivity—through regulating working hours and increasing man-hour output, avoiding wastage, 'close accounting and detailed costing', and planned resource management.[88] As ICI explained, this was not about working harder but more efficiently: 'the more progressive firms' knew that 'We've got to learn to cut out all forms of waste in the way we use our machines and materials. Most important of all, we've got to stop wasting human effort.'[89] According to the *Daily Mail,* 'progressive enterprises' recognised that 'Modernisation implies not more manpower per machine but more horsepower per man.'[90]

This emphasis on productivity spoke to a widespread (and well-documented) fear that Britain was falling behind its competitors.[91] While this was not a new concern, it became particularly marked in the post-war years.[92] One *Observer* article, headed 'Dinosaurs', explained the problem: 'In the field of scientific research we are still a progressive nation: the war proved it. But in the application of science to industry and industrial organisation we lag behind.'[93] Nearly twenty years later, a *Daily Mail* editorial bemoaned the fact that Britain was not 'half the progressive workshop she once was, and could be again', if only its methods were modernised.[94] Comparisons were drawn with other nations, with Britain's past achievements, and between different types of business—as in a letter from the owner of a small supermarket to the *Daily Mail* complaining about the 'slowness of British big business to get on with it', in terms of modernising the techniques of packaging, noting that 'The progressive retailer is working in the 1965 era, but the wholesaler is still in the horse-and-carriage days.'[95]

Jim Tomlinson has suggested that part of the reason for the panic over productivity in the post-war years was that the availability of international statistics meant that it was now possible to measure—and, crucially, to compare—national income, industrial production, productivity, and each nation's relative share of world trade. While Britain's economy and living standards were growing quickly by historical standards, they looked slow in comparison with other Western European countries and with the United States.[96] Among the answers put forward by manufacturers and analysts to rectify this situation, and make Britain once again 'a balanced and progressive country' and 'firmly recognised as the most progressive country in the world in quality and reliability', were modern methods

of, respectively, quantity and quality surveying.[97] The politics of declinism were subtly different on right and left. While Labour stressed the need for industrial efficiency (and blamed parasitic shareholders) and the Conservatives placed their faith in expanding popular consumption (and blamed restrictive trade unions), Marxists and the New Right found common cause in critiquing the supposedly anti-industrial spirit of the elite.[98] This was not just a debate within the political class. In the early 1960s, a number of popular books were published with alarmist titles including *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (1961) and *Suicide of a Nation?* (1963).

The seeds of this disquiet were, however, sown much earlier. While wartime developments in science, public administration and planning seemed quintessentially modern and had underpinned Labour's drive to build an efficient 'New Jerusalem' in 1945, the fear that the war had impeded Britain's industrial progress was also apparent. The 1946 Britain Can Make It exhibition was intended to showcase the country's achievements in industrial design, in a postcolonial echo of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, examined above. There was, however, a sense of urgency among the organisers:

> Only far-reaching plans, energetically carried out, can make up the leeway of lost years of development. Some sections of industry may be forced to begin again after the war where they left off in 1939 and 1940 or even further back. In design the target for industry as a whole must be ten years' progress in five years' time.[99]

These concerns were shared by visitors. Mass Observation found that about a third of visitors 'speak of interest in the future, in production, and progress'.[100] Yet many also expressed scepticism about the rate of this progress, and about the extent to which it would benefit Britain.[101] A particular source of criticism was the extent to which the goods were believed to be destined for export. This may have been increased by the press coverage of the Exhibition, renamed as 'Britain Can't Have It'.[102] The idea that the future was happening elsewhere was reinforced by the impression that Britain's achievements were lagging behind other countries, particularly the United States, and that they had in fact declined rather than progressed since the 1930s. In the words of one visitor to the exhibition, 'A lot of the new design is emulating of American stuff—the war set us back in design—right back to pre-war and we're just trundling on after 1939— We've been set back six years.'[103]

The role of Britain Can Make It was not only to advertise Britain's wares to the world, but also to inculcate 'modern' tastes in the general population. It was a clear example of the 'progressive public relations' examined by Anthony. Similarly, the 1951 Festival of Britain 'sought to educate popular taste and encourage technical enthusiasms'. It navigated the 'hinterland between officialdom and the hurly-burly of the commercial world', in service of the belief that 'national prosperity depended on Britain's ability to reimagine itself as a pioneer of new industry'.[104]

Michael Frayn memorably described the 1951 Festival of Britain as representing 'the Britain of the radical middle-classes, the do-gooders; the readers of the News Chronicle, the Guardian, and the Observer; the signers of petitions; the backbone of the B.B.C.' For Frayn, these people were 'the Herbivores' and the Festival was their last great gesture, in a country that was soon to be taken over by 'the Carnivores':

> the readers of the Daily Express; the Evelyn Waughs; the cast of the Directory of Directors—the members of the upper and middle-classes who believe that if God had not wished them to prey on all smaller and weaker creatures without scruple he would not have made them as they are.[105]

Frayn did not describe his Herbivores as 'progressive', but that term has been added to recent elaborations of his thesis.[106] The combination of high-mindedness, public-spiritedness and a soft left-liberal attitude seems emblematic of what we have come to think of as the progressive mindset. The Festival was, as Frayn recognized, the culminating achievement of the post-war Labour government, which had come into office on the back of a 'Call to all Progressives' to help in bringing about the 'establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain—free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited'.[107] This language underlines the extent to which by the end of the war, socialism had not only been legitimated as a respectable political position, but was also able to present itself as intrinsically modern and forward-looking. This was, however, by no means the only understanding of what it meant to be 'progressive' in post-war Britain—and it is perhaps significant that the term did not suggest itself to Frayn, writing twelve years after the Festival, as easily as it has to later commentators.

The only two uses of the term 'progressive' that I have come across in relation to either the Festival of Britain or Britain Can Make It seem to have been aimed at reconciling Carnivores to their activities, rather than

appealing to natural Herbivores. In 1950, Leonard Lyle, the Conservative peer and sugar magnate who had led the opposition to the proposed nationalisation of his industry, wrote to the *Times* to urge 'progressive industrialists up and down the country' to supplement the activities of the Festival by opening their facilities to visitors, including those from overseas, as a way of demonstrating 'our technical and industrial progress during recent decades'.[108] Similarly, in its First Annual Report, the Council for Industrial Design reassured 'the progressive manufacturer' that he would not 'have to pool his ideas with other people', as their proposed new Design Centres were 'intended to provide a co-operative basis for individual achievement'.[109]

LEFT OR RIGHT?

For many people in the 1940s, 'progressive' was self-evidently associated with left politics (whether for good or ill), as indeed it had been in the 1930s. This view can be seen in criticisms of, for instance, 'the whole progressive Socialist outlook' with its 'excessive tendency to bureaucracy', 'which is today's orthodoxy for so many people'.[110] Some writers took it for granted that 'Progressive people are concerned that there should be a more equal distribution of wealth; and that the workers should be protected', even as they went on to contest this view and suggest that 'it is not reactionary to state that the size of the cake is fully as important as the distribution of the said cake'.[111] This is clearly true, for instance, of Mass Observers, who tended to use 'progressive' to indicate left politics and associated it with Stafford Cripps,[112] the Beveridge Report,[113] Common Wealth,[114] pacifism,[115] and public ownership. With regard to the latter, a file report on the political truce quoted these two responses:

> Right wing parties at the moment [… are …] suppressing all ventilation of progressive measures in the direction of public ownership and planned democratic control.

> The progressive forces are largely hamstrung by it as in many constituencies the votes that would normally go to Labour are split among a variety of independent party groups.[116]

There is, however, reason to think that this use of language reflected the interviewees' political persuasions. In 1947, a study of the panel's composition suggested that 60% of Mass Observers were left wing, 7% right wing

and 30% 'Progressive, vague'; further elaboration revealed that this term included 'the more progressive Liberals and the vaguer Socialists'. A final 5% were identified as 'Pacifist'.[117] Neither the political bias of the panel nor its members' use of the term 'progressive' to signify a general left orientation is surprising—after all, Mass Observation grew out of the intellectual milieu associated with the Popular Front and the wider 'progressive left' in the inter-war years.[118]

When we look outside this movement, however, it is clear that for many other Britons it was not the social democratic settlement that was progressive, but the profitable private enterprise that it was perceived to threaten. In a 1946 advert, the British Omnibus Company asked, 'Should such a vital and progressive industry be made the victim of a political experiment? Or should it be permitted to continue to advance efficiently under the spur of free enterprise?'[119] In a similar vein, one *Daily Mail* reader worried that the Egg Board's supply management system would be 'bound to prejudice the efficient and progressive and to subsidise the more pedantic and inefficient'.[120] When Mrs V.A. James wrote to *Picture Post* to complain about the inefficiency of gas and electricity provision since nationalisation, the editor agreed, suggesting that, although 'The chief blessing of nationalisation, according to its prophets, is its progressive nature', this had been disproved by her 'excellent example of this theory in practice'.[121] Lord Melchett was described by the *Daily Mail* as 'exactly the kind of progressive commercial brain' that was needed to run the nationalised steel industry—precisely because he was not a Labour type and was causing 'uproar among Cabinet members'.[122]

The uncertainty over the nature of 'progressive' values was particularly acute when it came to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). As we saw in Chap. 4, there had long been an association between progressive politics and communism, but the question of how far the Soviet system was compatible with 'progressive' values was an ongoing source of contestation. This can be seen from the way in which BBC listeners objected to its depiction of the USSR. One listener corrected an unnamed Agricultural Correspondent for stating that Soviet agriculture was following a normal path of development. He attacked the centralised and tyrannical nature of land management, noting that it was no wonder it was 'unprogressive'.[123] Former Conservative MP Katharine Atholl objected to E.H. Carr's description of democracy 'as a process […] of social and political change' that precluded a return to the conditions of 1939. She pointed to the experience of Poland, where although the redistribution of

land 'may be regarded as a progressive *social* change', its disregard for the parliamentary system in place before the war could hardly be judged as a 'progressive political change'.[124]

Another BBC listener took issue with a 1947 BBC broadcast on 'Great Britain's Interest in Eastern Europe', in which Donald McLachlan had said that, despite the 'tyrannous methods' in Eastern Europe, the governments there were supported by the 'most patriotic, intelligent and progressive elements'. This listener felt that this was a 'dangerous' and 'surprising statement', which would 'if followed logically—induce one to think that the Fascist government in Italy, and the Nazi regime in Germany have also had the backing of a large majority of "patriotic", "intelligent" and—in a special meaning of the word—even "progressive" elements of the peoples concerned.' Yet, he pointed out, 'according to our beliefs, these former governments and their supporters were not progressive, because, notwithstanding some salutary economic and technical reforms, they failed in preserving [the] basic civic liberties of their peoples, and in this way were destroying important values without which a real progress is inconceivable'.[125] In a further letter he reiterated that such regimes 'always demonstrate their anti-progressive character by suppressing all the basic individual and civic liberties in their countries'.[126]

The association between progressiveness and the freedoms of liberal democracy was underlined by the way in which both BBC listeners and Mass Observers held up prewar Czechoslovakia as an exemplary progressive state. As one letter to the *Listener* put it, 'It is not yet ten years since Germany destroyed the most progressive democracy in Europe.'[127] During the war, Czechs were described as 'A progressive democratic people, unlucky in their geographical position' and as having been 'a very advanced state in democratic rights and […] one of the few socially progressive countries in Europe outside the Scandinavian bloc'.[128] An elementary teacher in Newcastle, who had visited Czechoslovakia before the war, admitted to feeling ashamed that 'having created their country, we should connive at its destruction. Here was a people well on its way to becoming a progressive democracy much more advanced in everyway than their neighbours, and in some ways, than ourselves.'[129] Likewise, a soldier noted that he 'felt more anguished' about the destruction of Czechoslovakia than about Poland, Holland or France, on account of its being 'a more progressive nation than many', with great 'achievements in the field of music, theatre (especially the attempts to bridge the schism between popular and highbrow) and architecture'.[130] The status of China was

more complicated. In 1950, one letter to the *Picture Post* suggested that Chinese Communism offered 'not just another version of Stalinism but a genuinely progressive movement backed by large sections of the Chinese people'.[131] By 1966, however, the experience of the Cultural Revolution led the Communist Party of Great Britain to issue a statement saying that it 'was causing great anxiety to "all progressive people," all Communists and all true friends of China'.[132]

As the British media reminded the public, communism was routinely described by its leaders as 'a model which should be followed by progressive people all over the world'.[133] The *Daily Mail*, for instance, sardonically reported that pupils at a Moscow kindergarten were 'cheered by the happy gospel that they are luckier than children of any other land both because they are citizens of the world's most progressive country and also because they are under the personal protection of the all-wise and all-seeing Father Joseph Stalin'.[134] This line of thinking was summed up in the wry comment of Independent MP and satirist A.P. Herbert, 'Even in that enlightened and progressive country, Russia, I doubt whether "one man, one vote" is in very active operation; and, if the claim is made, we all know who the One Man is.'[135]

Yet this self-promotion was not uniformly dismissed as deluded. The West also felt the need to compete. According to an *Observer* account of a television debate between the Danish and Soviet premiers, the former was 'ruffled by Soviet claims to be the most progressive country in the world' and insisted that 'Denmark is now as modern and developed a country as the Soviet Union'.[136] More bizarrely, Britain's Master of the Incorporated Guild of Hairdressers, Wigmakers and Perfumers, Frank A. Grein, also felt the need to impress Khrushchev during his 1956 visit to Britain. Grein urged men to allow their wives more money for hair and beauty treatments with the comment that 'however progressive a nation […] it is still a peasant country if its women look like peasants'.[137]

'Over There'

The treatment (rather than the appearance!) of women was one of the criteria against which the relative progressiveness of other nations was judged—particularly newly independent nations. In an interview with the wife of the Tunisian ambassador, the *Guardian* noted approvingly that 'Tunisia is a progressive country and its women have rapidly come to be accepted on the basis of equality'.[138] Another marker of progressiveness

was the nature of governance. One reader of the *Daily Mail* insisted that 'in spite of admitted feudalism and poverty', Iraq had been 'the most progressive wisely governed country' in the Middle East until 'insensate mob violence [led] to the murder of a conscientious and enlightened young ruler'.[139] In a similar vein, a letter to the *Listener* defended the governance of colonial India by suggesting that the 'modern and progressive governments' of the Indian Maharajas—'those enlightened and gifted princes [who] put even the neighbouring British Indian provinces and districts in the shade'—had been unjustly forgotten.[140] The nature of these 'progressive' and 'enlightened' styles of governance is opaque, but seems to carry connotations of the rule of law, public service, individual liberty, and ordered administration: all features of the supposedly civilising mission of Empire.

It is not surprising that these values were seen to go hand in hand with that other Enlightenment virtue, the commercial mentality. Indeed, when it came to assessing the progressive nature of developing nations, the principal criteria seemed to be stability, prosperity, rapid growth, and self-confidence.[141] In 1959 the *Guardian* reflected that while 'the ambition of every under-developed country used to be to produce its own cotton goods', now 'the mark of a progressive nation is the wish for a steel industry of its own'. This was 'not surprising; steel output is the modern index of a country's economic power'.[142]

Adverts played on this narrative. One from Brooke Bond, showing a smiling African family on the edge of a newly built village, explained that 'In parts of Africa, where only twenty-seven years ago there was primeval forest', 'Primitive huts are giving way to stone and brick bungalows. Shops, schools, crèches and playing fields are being provided', along with 'European doctor[s]' and 'modern hospitals'. This transition from the 'primitive' to the 'modern' and 'European' was due to the 'progressive tea growers', whose 'modern factories' were overseen by 'European Welfare officers [who] guard the workers' rights and see to their well-being'.[143] Although this advert depicted unspecified 'parts of Africa', Brooke Bond was heavily invested in Kenya, so it should be read against the experience of the Mau Mau internment camps that were in operation at that same time. This context is particularly relevant because of the British belief that 'Mau Mau intentionally and deliberately seeks to lead the Africans back to the bush and savagery, not forward into progress'. A parliamentary report insisted that Mau Mau must be considered separately 'from the progressive movements, economic, social, and political, which seek now or in the future to carry

the African people forward into a share of a prosperous future'.[144] Brooke Bond clearly saw itself as part of this trend.

British consumers were assured that they could contribute to the process of progressive development and modernisation in Africa. In the case of the housewife, 'Each meal she makes here […] makes life better there'. The 'healthy demand for margarine in Britain' was seen to have 'provided the means for Commonwealth countries to buy goods that are essential to maintaining a progressive standard of living'. The 'double benefit' was spelled out with a clear territorial and cultural distinction: 'Over here' margarine enhanced 'the national larder' and fuelled the export industry, 'and *over there* [in this case, Nigeria] it has helped to produce a lively market for *their* produce'.[145] This rested on somewhat shaky foundations. The East African Groundnut Scheme had been instituted by the Attlee government in 1947, with a view to increasing both agricultural development in Tanganyika and supplies of margarine in Britain. It was wound up as a failure in early 1951, though this did not prevent similar schemes being instituted elsewhere, including Nigeria.[146]

In 1960 the Commonwealth Office issued a film called *Nigeria—The Making of a Nation*, based on the idea that 'the story of Nigeria is an outstanding example of an ordered progress towards independence'. The 'history and pageantry' of tribal life were set alongside the 'modern thought and modern progress' of its cities. And the viewer was left in no doubt that the latter were due to the work of 'men of the colonial service', who had been 'at work patiently guiding the Nigerians towards eventual independence' since 1914:

> Now the last elements of British administration have been withdrawn and a great new nation emerges—a nation of 35 million people who have put their faith in the democratic life and whose voice will command respect throughout Africa, the Commonwealth and the world.[147]

Post-war colonial development was structured around industrial development, underpinned by education and technology.[148] In Nigeria, a prime example of this seems to have been the Berger Paint Company, established in the early 1960s. Twenty years later it was boasting to *Guardian* readers of its 'tradition' of 'rendering true service to a progressive nation'. This was seen to be a function of its work in pioneering technical developments, developing a highly trained and productive workforce, and 'enabling thousands of Nigerians to share in our growth' through share

ownership. The emphasis was on the 'Nigerianisation' of the company and the way in which it had 'aided the growth of practically every Industry from building and road construction to shoes and cars'. This was all presented as a successful story of how the company had 'boldly met the challenges offered by a progressive economy in the march towards complete Industrialisation'.[149] In 1960, the new Federation of Nigeria invited industrial and commercial enterprises to invest in this 'stable, progressive country, with an enterprising, vigorous people'.[150] Advertisements were also placed for workers in 'Ghana, a steadily progressive country'; Malawi, 'this progressive country'; Zimbabwe, 'a growing progressive nation'; and 'Iran, a progressive country'.[151]

Most strikingly, adverts appealed for engineers, physicists and chemists to work in South Africa, boasting that this 'young, wealthy and progressive country' 'offers a wonderful climate, very high living standards with low income tax and no purchase tax'.[152] Even the strongest critics of the apartheid regime emphasised the progressive potential of South Africa. Albert Luthuli, leader of the African National Congress, for instance, argued that with 'her rich and varied potentials in human and material resources South Africa could be a more prosperous and progressive country but for the Nationalists besmirching her name'.[153] At the other end of the scale, one correspondent to the *Guardian* argued that South Africa was 'a prosperous, wealthy and progressive country, made so by the brains, industry and capital of white men'.[154] The importance that the South African government attached to being a progressive country was revealed in 1973, when it appeared in a secret list of items that the Secretary of Information expected international observers to mention when asked for their first impression of the country. The list ran as follows: 'racial conflicts, diamonds, animals, beautiful country to visit, progressive country, Dr Barnard—heart transplants, Johannesburg, dislike country, gold mines, apartheid policy'.[155]

Similar arguments were made about Rhodesia. For instance, a 1952 letter to the *Listener* suggested that it was 'the progressive methods of the European farmer' that had underpinned the rapid development of Northern Rhodesia—and that without them the nation would not have progressed.[156] As Luise White has argued, Rhodesia defined itself in contrast to its neighbours, both as a place with 'working telephones' and as being 'like Britain at the height of Empire, or like Britain in the 1940s'. While talk of whiteness was deemed 'vulgar', terms like 'responsible' or 'civilized' stood in.[157] 'Progressive' seems to have fulfilled much the same

role. In 1976, for instance, the *Guardian* reported a speech by Ian Smith in which he argued that the new constitution would 'determine whether Rhodesia remains a stable, democratic and progressive country'.[158] As these examples illustrate, even well into the age of decolonisation 'progressive' ideas were closely aligned with imperial notions of the superiority of white Western models of development, and explicitly contrasted with the primitivism of tribal societies. 'Progressive' local elites were identified by their contribution to this process of 'civilisation'.[159]

Despite this, we also know that anti-apartheid was identified as a progressive cause. The Secretary-General of the Zambian United National Independence Party, for instance, urged 'all true progressives in Britain to support the struggle of the Zimbabwe patriots'.[160] Yet it is through attacks on 'progressive' opponents of apartheid that we can most clearly gauge the strength of this association. One correspondent to the *Times* suggested that 'The protests of English progressives would carry more weight' if they were less selective in their choice of causes, and wondered 'how many of those who are organizing a trade boycott of South Africa would support a trade boycott of Russia or Hungary, where the Communist application of *apartheid* is incomparably more severe than in South Africa'.[161] Similarly, a reader complained to the *Daily Mail* that the sanctions on Rhodesia represented 'a further manifestation of the current "progressive" cult that the white man is always wrong and the coloured always right'. This correspondent argued that 'If justice and liberty are to be the criteria, why are sanctions not being imposed on Ghana, where neither exist'.[162]

It is worth noting that these complaints about 'progressive' attitudes to decolonisation were apparent from the early 1960s. This predates the backlash against either the 'permissive' legislation introduced by the 1966 Wilson government or progressive educational methods. Just as Mark Jarvis has suggested that permissivism should be set in a longer timeframe stretching back to the policies of Macmillan's Conservatives in the late 1950s, so should the corresponding reaction against the liberal elite.[163] Early signs included, for instance, the Clean Up TV Campaign launched by Mary Whitehouse in 1964.[164] It was, however, at the end of that decade that the disparaging use of 'progressive' took on a greater resonance.

TRENDY LIBERALISM

As Marcus Collins has shown, public attitudes began to turn against per-
missivism in the 1970s and were largely hostile to many of its features
by the 1980s (before turning back in the 1990s).[165] At this time 'pro-
gressive' became a dirty word to many, used to indicate an assortment of
socially liberal causes that were seen to threaten national unity, morality
and prosperity. In 1973, a Lieutenant-Colonel H.V. Rose, writing to the
Times, blamed 'a materialistic concept of social good' combined with 'a
false sense of post-imperial guilt, which induced an unprecedented out-
break of trendy liberalism' for creating the conditions in which 'the hand-
ful of so called progressives who dominate the mass media and education,
were able, slowly but purposefully, to create our present permissive soci-
ety'. This letter, dripping with vitriol, perfectly sums up the atmosphere
of paranoia of the 1970s, whose appearance in popular fiction has been
described by both Steven Fielding and Antony Taylor.[166] Rose came close
to praising totalitarian regimes for their willingness 'to forgo butter for
nuclear weapons' and seemed regretful that 'such a sacrifice is not consid-
ered to be "practical politics" in this country'. Although his chief targets
were the 'progressives', that 'minority of decedent "intellectuals"' and
'would-be revolutionaries' who had initiated the 'wave of iconoclasm', he
also blamed the 'succession of weak governments' and the fact that 'the
authorities and the public are so spineless'. In response, he declared his
intention to launch 'a Pensioners' Volunteer Service […] a non-political,
patriotic organization', which would allow 'the older generations, with
whom much of the guilt for which our present condition must lie, [to] at
last help by […] helping to create a new spirit among the young'. It was
not clear what their activities would be.[167]

The BBC was seen to be particularly guilty of such 'trendy liberalism'.
One reader of the *Listener* suggested in 1967 that it had now become
the mouthpiece of the '"progressive" establishment', associated 'with one
identifiable cluster of exclusively leftist opinion', which ranged 'all the way
from the Hippy Left […], to the Hard Left'. He objected to 'the predict-
able features on anti-semitism and German crimes' and the coverage of
'"flower power", i.e., drug addiction; "black power"; even student power"
to be fully with it!' Significantly, this reader pointed to the efforts of Mary
Whitehouse and Oswald Mosley 'to publicise the virtual near-monopoly
which self-styled and self-appointed "progressives" have in the BBC'.[168]
The perception that the BBC was controlled by a liberal 'Establishment'

was the motivation behind Mary Whitehouse's Clean Up TV campaign.[169] In 1969, she complained to the *Listener* about the 'virulent and even vicious opposition' that she had met 'from those who call themselves "progressive"', adding that 'This is no doubt because they themselves have become the new "Establishment" within broadcasting—and elsewhere—and are therefore more concerned that power should remain in their hands than that true progress should be made'.[170] This distinction between 'progress' and 'progressives' is critical. The terms became dissociated from one another in this period, in a way that, as we will see in Chap. 6, left the latter inaccessible to the Thatcherite right. These moral conservatives did not see themselves as reactionary. They were opposed to what they saw as the deliberate attempts by 'progressive' reformers to shape society, not to the supposedly natural process of 'progress itself'.

Similar critiques could be seen in other areas of national life. Particular targets included progressive attitudes to criminal justice and to education. In the mid-1950s, readers of the *Picture Post* had suggested that Britain was 'lagging behind more progressive nations' on the matter of capital punishment.[171] By the 1970s, however, the perception that Britain was experiencing an unprecedented level of delinquency and disorder was frequently expressed—as was the idea that 'shouts of protest from the "progressives" of all political parties' were preventing the introduction of the kind of 'drastic penalties' with which 'any reasonable person' would agree.[172] In the early 1980s, one letter to the *Times* attacked 'liberal-progressives' for blaming riots, like those in Handsworth, on unemployment.[173] Another to the *Daily Mail* wondered 'how the well-padded politicians in their privileged and cushioned environs would cope with the results of their "progressive" ideas if they had to suffer the confrontations that ordinary people have to live with day by day'; the writer went on to speculate that 'capital and corporal punishment would be very swiftly reintroduced'.[174]

Until the late 1950s, progressive education was exclusively associated with certain private and residential schools, often co-educational and mostly founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This self-consciously 'progressive education' was based on liberal conceptions of the creative development of the self.[175] These schools were not without their critics,[176] but they were also defended by those who felt that they fostered the moral and democratic instincts of the child.[177] Over the next decade, comprehensive education was introduced and 'progressive' methods of learning were extended through the state school system. Both were highly controversial. The extremes of the debate can be seen in the

Plowden Report on Children and the Primary Schools (1967) and the Black Papers (1969–77). The former rated schools on a scale ranging from 'Informal, free, progressive' to 'Formal, rigid, orthodox', and posited a 'convincing association between progressiveness and school success'.[178] The latter suggested that, with its lack of discipline or focus on exam results, 'Progressive education has become a new form of cruelty to children'.[179] As one mother put it, 'The progressives can keep their open-plan schools and their learn-by-play methods. I care too much about my child and his future to take any more risks.'[180]

In 1976, Jim Callaghan acknowledged 'the unease felt by parents and others about the new informal methods of teaching', while distancing himself from 'the Black Paper prejudices'. He urged that teachers should strike a balance between 'producing socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed because they do not have the skills' and— 'at the other extreme'—'technically efficient robots'.[181] Shortly before the Conservatives came to power in 1979, their spokesman on Education and Science framed his objection to progressive methods in rather more apocalyptic terms:

> We are engaged in nothing less than a conflict of principle on which our future as a nation will depend. On the one side are the 'realists', who believe that the true purpose of education is to develop every child's potential to the full and that any changes—whether in the organisation of schools, methods of teaching or examinations—should be considered solely on their educational merits. On the other are the self-styled 'progressives', who are concerned with using education for ideological ends: to obtain a more egalitarian society. And if that means equal shares of mediocrity, they seem unconcerned.[182]

The linking of traditional educational methods with the development of each child's individual potential is particularly interesting; that this was the original purpose of progressive schooling had been obscured by political controversy.

This debate was not simply about cultural conservatives clashing with modernisers; it was about the fear that a political and cultural elite was imposing policies driven by the logic of change, while being itself insulated from their effects. This is not a surprising narrative, or a particularly new one. It fits with what we already know about the period and the anti-Establishment resentment that was beginning to emerge.[183] However, the

use of the term 'progressive' here underlines the extent to which this was also a question about both the speed and the seeming inevitability of social and cultural change. As one opponent of the new educational style complained, '"progressives" seem to be forcing the pace, and traditionalists appear to have no choice at all'.[184]

Conclusion

Much of the contestation over the term 'progressive' has been concerned with attitudes towards change—whether it was seen as gradual and orderly, or frenetic and unpredictable; a managed process, a conscious project or an unstoppable force. In each case, advertisers and public relations professionals tried to define the progressive business, consumer or citizen by their ability—and propensity—to keep up to date in a world that would otherwise leave them behind. To be progressive in this context was a process of both continual self-development and collective endeavour.

This is not to say that there was any single reading of what such 'progressive' thinking entailed. Against the self-improving progressive readers of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or the 'Progressive Men and Women' to whom *The Humanist* appealed,[185] we have to set 'Britain's youngest, most progressive, and most brilliant business men' whom Pope & Bradley tailors believed would be left 'in a hopeless condition of stagnation' by the Excess Profits Tax,[186] and also the 'Investors, Speculators, Motorists, and all Progressive People' invited to attend an Oil Exhibition at Earl's Court.[187] Similarly, when we turn to events like the Festival of Britain, it is unclear whether the term is best applied to the public-spirited organisers or the commercial interests they hoped to enlist.

Even allowing for the variety of 'progressive' ideas that were promoted, it is clear that consumers did not always take home the intended messages. To return for a moment to the Britain Can Make It exhibition, the Mass Observers following visitors around the rooms noted that while some expressed frustration that the exhibits were not modern enough, others were critical of 'the ultra-modern designs'.[188] The Observers also noticed that some aspects of the Exhibition (a patchwork quilt, a Welsh dresser, a fireplace) attracted attention and approval precisely because they were perceived to be 'nice and old fashioned'. Even more strikingly, a display of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century costumes close to the exit proved to be 'a constant source of attraction to people coming out, especially young women'. For some this was a source of nostalgia;

for others it may have provided a way of measuring how much progress had been made. For at least one young woman, however, the distant past was as vivid a source of inspiration as the exhibits that had been carefully selected in order to cultivate the housewife's taste for the new. 'That's what I want, Ralph,' she said, indicating the showcase, 'a pair of those yellow sandals.'[189]

By the 1960s, we can see the expression of a more deliberate resistance to the idea of being progressive. It was not only the constant valorisation of change that came under attack, but the attempts by self-appointed 'progressives' to promote and create it. 'Progressive' began to be widely used in a negative way, to indicate a left-liberal elite, out of step with the wider population, and imposing artificial and unwelcome 'progressive' change for its own satisfaction. As we will see in Chap. 6, this developed over the course of the 1970s and 1980s to create an 'almost exclusive' association of the term with the political left. The irony was that this occurred just as the left was seen to be losing its claim to represent 'the future', on account of its struggles to reconcile material and cultural change with its own vision of the social ends of progress.

Notes

1. Rita Felski, *Doing Time: feminist theory and postmodern culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 70.

2. A recent exception is James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), which focuses on the spatial experience of living amongst strangers.

3. Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman (eds), *High-Speed Society: social acceleration, power, and modernity* (University Park, PA: Pennysylvania State University Press, 2009).

4. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity Press, 2012 [2000]).

5. See for instance, Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press 1995).

6. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: self and society in the late modern age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: identity, culture, and health in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Matt Houlbrook, '"A Pin to see the

Peepshow”: culture, fiction and selfhood in Edith Thompson’s Letters, 1921–1922’, *Past and Present* 207:1 (2010), pp. 215–249.

7. Alex Owen, ‘Occultism and the ‘modern’ Self in Fin-De-Siècle Britain’, in M. J. Daunton & Bernhard Rieger (eds), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 71–96; Mathew Thomson, ‘Psychology and the “consciousness of Modernity” in Early Twentieth-Century Britain’, in ibid., pp. 97–117; James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the making of the modern self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

8. Houlbrook, ‘“A Pin to see the Peepshow”’; Claire Langhamer, ‘Love, Authenticity and Selfhood in Post-War Britain’, *Cultural and Social History* 9:2 (2012), pp. 277–297.

9. Peter Scott, ‘Marketing Mass Home Ownership and the creation of the modern working-class consumer in inter-war Britain’, *Business History* 50:1 (2008), pp. 4–25; Matthew Hilton, ‘Advertising, the Modernist Aesthetic of the Marketplace? The Cultural Relationship Between the Tobacco Manufacturer and the “Mass” of Consumers in Britain, 1870–1940’, in Daunton & Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity,* pp. 45–69.

10. Felski, *Doing Time*, p. 68.

11. Roy Jenkins, 1969: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2629445.stm. Accessed 14.08.2015.

12. Derek Monsey, ‘The Stage Censor: Despot in the Wings’, *Picture Post* (hereafter *PP*), 20 January 1951, p. 27.

13. Andrew Alexander, ‘Strictly for the birds?’, *Daily Mail* (hereafter *DM*), 30 June 1973, p. 8.

14. Hilton, ‘Advertising, the Modernist Aesthetic of the Marketplace?’.

15. See, for instance, Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Stuart Ewen, *Captains of consciousness: advertising and the social roots of the consumer culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

16. ‘My Programme’, *Progressive Advertising*, 1: 1, 25 October 1901, pp. 3–4.

17. *Progressive Advertising*, 1: 2, 1 November 1901, p. 63.

18. *Higham’s Magazine: A Business Magazine for Progressive Men*, 1: 1, March 1914, p. 3.

19. *Manchester Guardian* (hereafter *MG*), 27 January 1926, p. 4.
20. *MG*, 2 December 1926, p. 4.
21. Debenham and Freebody, *Observer*, 1 November 1931, p. 25. Original emphasis.
22. 'Letter from Stanley Baldwin', *Advertising World*, no. 3, January 1927, p. 347. Quoted in Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the birth of a progressive media profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 37.
23. Key-Flats, *Observer*, 27 February 1938, p. 29.
24. Debenham and Freebody, *Times*, 9 November 1927, p. xxiii.
25. Charterhouse Investment Trust, *Times*, 1 February 1927, p. viii.
26. Eagle Star, *Times*, 9 November 1927, p. xxiii.
27. See, for instance, Lindy Woodhead, *Shopping, Seduction & Mr Selfridge* (London: Profile Books, 2007); Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), Chap. 6.
28. Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain*, p. 5.
29. Callisthenes, 'The Introduction of Ideas', in Selfridge and Co. Ltd, *The Counsels of Callisthenes* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1916), p. 105.
30. Callisthenes, 'The Need for Ideas', *Times*, 28 October 1931, p. 10.
31. 'The More Change, the More Chance', in Selfridge and Co. Ltd, *Callisthenes* (London: Selfridge and Co. Ltd, 1933), pp. 172–174.
32. Margot Finn, 'Sex and the City: Metropolitan Modernities in English History', *Victorian Studies* 44: 1 (2001), pp. 25–32 (27).
33. ibid., p. 28.
34. ibid., p. 29.
35. Callisthenes, 'World Progress—And Ours', in Selfridge, *Callisthenes*, p. 73.
36. Hilton, 'Advertising, the Modernist Aesthetic of the Marketplace?', p. 51.
37. *Times,* 27 October 1913, p. 4; 24 August 1926, p. 17.
38. *Illustrated London News* (hereafter *ILN*), 26 April 1930, p. 761.
39. *Times,* 27 June 1914, p. 20; 13 June 1914, p. 23.
40. *ILN,* 11 August 1928, p. 281; 28 July 1928, p. 193. Original emphasis.

41. *ILN*, 27 December 1930, p. 1182; 10 January 1931, p. 34; 17 January 1931, p. 113.
42. African Irrigated Land Co., *Observer*, 13 December 1925, p. 8.
43. See Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: lineages of the twenty-first century* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 48–49.
44. *ILN*, 11 April 1931, p. 619. See also 12 November 1932, p. 779.
45. Daniel Stephen, *Empire of Progress: West Africans, Indians and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924–1925* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 111; 113.
46. See Peter Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5: 24 (1974), pp. 159–181 (165); David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 71; 72–97.
47. Richards, *Commodity Culture*, p. 257.
48. *ILN*, 31 July 1937, p. 219; 15 October 1932, p. 600; 22 March 1930, p. 493; *Times*, 9 April 1920, p. 27; 21 July 1926, p. 10.
49. *MG*, 21 August 1930, p. 5.
50. *ILN*, 22 March 1924, p. 521.
51. H. & J. Quick Ltd, *MG*, 28 February 1931, p. 13.
52. Frigidaire, *MG*, 19 June 1929, p. 8.
53. *Times*, 9 December 1920, p. 6.
54. I am grateful to Will Wilson for this observation.
55. Brent Shannon, 'ReFashioning Men: Fashion, Masculinity, and the Cultivation of the Male Consumer in Britain, 1860–1914', *Victorian Studies*, 46: 4 (2004), pp. 597–630 (602). See also Paul Jobling, *Man Appeal: advertising, modernism and men's wear* (New York: Berg, 2005).
56. Elaine Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 181; 178. Quoted in ibid.
57. Helena Rubinstein, *ILN*, 2 May 1925, n.p.
58. Potter & Moore's Powder-Cream, *PP*, 8 April 1939, p. 69. Original emphasis.
59. Good Housekeeping, *Times*, 29 September 1926, p. 7.
60. Housewife, *PP*, 28 September 1940, n.p. Original emphasis.
61. J. Lyons & Co., *MG*, 9 January 1925, p. 4.
62. *Times,* 17 June 1911, p. 6.
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Party Games: Realignments and Revisionism

You and I, Robyn, grew up in a period when the state was smart: state schools, state universities, state-subsidised arts, state welfare, state medicine—these were things progressive, energetic people believed in. It isn't like that any more.[1]

These days ['progressive'] is almost exclusively associated with the Left.[2]

This chapter is concerned with the contradiction between these two observations. How did 'progressive' come to be 'almost exclusively associated with the Left' at exactly the point when the left seemed to have lost its grip on the future?

In many ways this is a story about liberalism and the paths it took in the post-war years. As we saw in the first two chapters of this book, the ideology of progress has been particularly strongly associated with liberalism; moreover, we have traced many of the contradictions in the use of the term 'progressive' to the splits within the Liberal Party, and liberalism more broadly, in the early twentieth century. This ambiguity continued in the post-war years, with different factions within the (hugely depleted) Liberal Party suggesting that the best options for progressive politics lay with, respectively, the Labour and Conservative parties. This was essentially a contest between the lingering idea of a Lib–Lab 'progressive tradition' and the belief that Labour's turn towards state socialism was a bar to both individual and national progress. In the 1940s and 1950s the latter view won out, and the Liberal Party hovered uneasily between a

relationship with the Conservatives and the assertion that 'The only really progressive way is the Third Way—the Liberal Way'.[3]

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, under its new leader Jo Grimond, the Liberal Party moved explicitly to the left. The possibility of a Liberal revival led to assertions that it was now time for a realignment of British politics around a 'non-socialist progressive party' of the left. In retrospect, this looks like the beginning of a turn in Liberal thought that would lead straight through the Lib–Lab Pact of the 1970s and the SDP–Liberal Alliance of the 1980s, into the creation of the Liberal Democrats in 1988. Indeed, the merging of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) with the Liberals was celebrated as a reunion of the two halves of progressive politics that had been separated in the early twentieth century. And this narrative later informed the rhetoric of New Labour, cementing the idea of 'progressive' politics as inextricably tied to the Edwardian Lib–Lab alliance. This would seem to give the answer to our question: 'progressive' migrated to the social democratic left because the Liberal Party did so.

Yet things are not quite that simple. Grimond's own turn to the left had been of a rather different kind. He explicitly distanced himself from the legacy of Hobson, Hobhouse, Keynes, and Beveridge, and suggested that it was time to reconsider 'the true spheres of Society and the Nation-state so as to strengthen the former as a bond uniting all citizens and at once prune and improve the latter'.[4] As Geoffrey Foote has shown, this had distinct similarities with the attempts of the New Left at this time to reinvigorate the ideal of active citizenship, based on participation in communities and workplaces.[5] This shared critique of the statism of social democracy explains the otherwise counter-intuitive sympathy between radical Liberals and the far left at this time. For both, progressive politics was leading away from the assumptions of the post-war settlement, towards new forms of participatory politics. As Foote makes clear, this also mirrors the currents at work on the right, most obviously in the work of Diana Spearman and Enoch Powell.[6]

The relationship of these ideas to liberalism is complicated. On the one hand, this was a classical republican politics of virtue and corruption, of activity, duty and community, implacably opposed to liberalism in the shape of both Benthamite utilitarianism and abstract rationality. On the other, the politics of both the New Left and the Liberal Party were underpinned by a commitment to the social liberalism of the 'permissive' cultural reforms that had transformed British society in the 1960s. As commentators both at the time and since have pointed out, there were

(however much the left may have denied this) clear connections here with the classical Liberal tradition—not only in its emphasis on personal liberty and the breaking down of hierarchies, but also in the way in which its economic forms nurtured an ever-expanding fragmentation of personal taste.[7]

In Foote's account, this strand of thought led through to Thatcherism, which was able to launch its own assault on the state, free of the lingering attachment to its post-war achievements by which the Left had been held back. The language of 'progressive' politics did not, however, make this journey to the right. Indeed, it became cut off from economic liberalism in a way that had not previously been true. The reasons for this are complex. One element was the connection between progressivism and permissivism, which we examined in Chap. 5. The moral conservatism of the Thatcherite right, coupled with its attacks on the 'progressive' attitudes of its opponents, made this language inaccessible for their own political project. As we will see in this chapter, however, the recovery of the history of the Edwardian 'progressive alliance' at this time also played its part. It was subject to heated academic reinterpretation and also provided a usable narrative both to Liberals wanting to reassert their historical significance, and to social democrats attempting to reorient the Labour Party towards its intellectually liberal heritage. This worked to cement the understanding of progressive politics as a project of the centre-left.

THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY

In 1959 and 1960, there was a great deal of talk about the need for a 'new progressive party' in Britain. Much of this came from the Liberal Party; Jo Grimond was keen to suggest that it was time for a 'realignment of parties' around a 'new party of the Left' led by Liberals.[8] Yet the Liberals were not the only progressive party on offer. In 1960 the sociologist, and erstwhile Labour Party strategist, Michael Young reported having 'heard of three separate attempts to form new parties in the last month' and having been formally invited to join the 'New Progressive Party', which he described as putting forward a 'ragbag of proposals', including syndicalism, the abolition of capital punishment and space exploration.[9] This was by way of introduction to Young's own proposal for a 'new progressive party', based primarily on representing consumer interests, with an added emphasis on internationalism, world government, and liberal legal reform. Polling showed that such a party might gain the support of 25% of British voters, especially amongst those who had voted Conservative in 1959.[10]

The meaning of 'progressive' in this context is difficult to unpick. On the one hand, it was used to indicate the need for a new party *of the left*, which would replace Labour as the main opposition to the Conservatives. On the other, it seemed more centrist and was pitched to gain support from disaffected Conservatives. Moreover, the position of Labour, in the aftermath of its third election defeat, showed that left-wing politics was not a sufficient qualification for progressiveness.

Labour's struggle to keep up with social and economic change and to present itself as a party of the moment has been well documented.[11] Party reports desperately suggested that Labour needed to develop 'A Forward Looking Policy'.[12] As Lawrence Black has shown, these discussions covered domestic and foreign policy, the party's constitution, its advertising techniques, and even local party premises.[13] Anthony Crosland's consideration of the question *Can Labour Win?* suggested that a 'thorough overhaul' and a '"new look"' at Transport House, the party's headquarters, 'would contribute markedly to creating the image of a progressive, forward-looking Party'.[14] One of the best-known inquiries into the topic was published in 1960 with the rather despairing title *Must Labour Lose?* When asked to identify the qualities of a good party leader, 29% of survey respondents said that they should be 'progressive, forward-looking'. Surprisingly, Labour identifiers placed rather less emphasis on this than did the average voter, and Conservative identifiers slightly more (23% and 31%, respectively). Worryingly for Labour, Macmillan was felt to be the most progressive party leader by 37% of the total sample, compared to 17% who chose Gaitskell. Even among Labour identifiers, 22% chose Macmillan, compared to 34% for Gaitskell.[15]

One of the most important components of progressive politics was the ability to keep up with the times, to be modern and forward-looking. This was something with which both the main parties struggled, but Labour was particularly hampered by what Crosland described as 'its one class image'. In his view, it needed 'to slough this image off, and present itself as a progressive, national, social-democratic Party'.[16] Labour also had to contend with the perception among significant sections of the party that popular consumerism was incompatible with socialism. As Lawrence Black has suggested, 'Most on the left judged affluence socially, culturally, even politically, regressive.'[17] Steven Fielding's study of Labour activists in this 'Golden Age' of party activity identified a prevailing 'Labour Socialist ideology', which saw the primary purpose of the party as being to 'lift up manual workers from their preoccupation with everyday conditions and

endow them with a greater sense of purpose'. Yet 'Labour's promotion of "community" and "service, not greed" was imperilled by a popular affluence that privileged "self-interest" over all else'. This left the party not only ill-equipped but ideologically opposed to responding to the electoral demands of an affluent society.[18] Here we see the gap between the idea of the affluent society as 'progressive', in the sense of being driven by the cycle of material wants, and 'progressive' politics as a project, aimed at creating a *different* future.

In his 1957 study of the (pernicious) effects of affluence on working-class culture, Richard Hoggart dedicated a section to 'Living in the present and "Progressivism"'. Although Hoggart underlined the connections with older forms of hedonistic presentism ('enjoy yerself while y' can') and the nineteenth-century belief in unlimited progress, he also noted a new aspect to popular attitudes, which he linked, with considerable distaste, to the affluent society, the 'glorification of youth', and the 'shiny barbarism' of America. This new progressivism was rooted in material culture, 'a "progressivism" of things', but also leaked out into wider attitudes:[19]

> So the wagon, loaded with its barbarians in wonderland, moves irresistibly forward: not forward to anywhere, but simply forward for forwardness's sake. Somewhere out in front are the scientists ('it's new—it's scientific') handling the controls. […] 'There's a good time coming,' sings the crowd on the wagon.[20]

The link here between progressivism and living in the *present* is important; it precludes any possibility of radical change of the kind sociaists desired. It was not until Harold Wilson's 1964 'Let's Go with Labour' campaign that the party seemed to have reconciled itself to the demands of post-war society. By then, Labour was convincingly able to present itself as the modern, scientific 'Lab Men', in contrast to the old, aristocratic 'Con Men' of the opposing party, as one *Daily Mirror* cartoon put it.[21]

In the 1950s and early 1960s, however, it was the Conservative Party that seemed at ease with the values of the supposedly classless affluent society. It focused on 'drawing attention to the lively and progressive nature of the Conservative Party of to-day', as the publicity for a 1947 Conservative Party exhibition on Regent Street declared.[22] The exhibition was entitled 'Trust the People', and this became a central theme of Conservative rhetoric in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly when it came

to legislative change on social questions, including commercial television, gambling and licensing. Harold Macmillan emphasised the link between economic and attitudinal change in 1959, when he told the Conservative Steering Committee that Conservatives had to 'Show we have brought about a new way of life for the people of this country. Now we must bring the laws up-to-date as well. Show that we have been the progressive ones.'[23] The relationship between reflecting and creating social change here is ambiguous: to what extent were the Conservatives claiming to have brought about social change, and to what extent had affluence simply let loose existing tendencies?

The Young Conservatives were particularly instrumental in reframing the party as 'up-to-date'.[24] A piece by the Chairman in the first issue of the Young Conservatives' glossy and slick magazine *Impact* described the Conservatives as 'the most Progressive Party in Britain today'. He attributed this to the influence of younger MPs who had been through the Young Conservatives or the Bow Group: 'as the proportion of such backbenchers rises so will the attitude of the Parliamentary Party become still more progressive'. To be 'progressive' in this context meant being 'firstly a modern Party, secondly a Party which stands for a tolerant and liberal approach to the organization of society. […] Finally, and perhaps most important, the Tory Party must strive to create a more just society, nationally and internationally.' The inspiration here was Macmillan's *Middle Way*.[25]

The reference to the *Middle Way* is significant, but this should not be understood as a simple move into social democratic territory. While Macmillan was certainly concerned with social justice and with the elimination of poverty, he saw the 'fate of democracy [as] linked up with the problem of economic progress', which was in turn dependent on 'the preservation of the conditions of freedom in which alone the highly individualistic efforts of men in the intellectual and cultural sphere are made possible'.[26] Economic reconstruction, as Macmillan imagined it, was a way of avoiding class antagonism in order to safeguard democracy and individual liberty. In his words, 'There can be no progressive meaning in economic and social efficiency unless it is directed towards the liberation of the individual from all restraints other than those which have to be imposed for the protection of other individuals against an impairment of *their* liberty.'[27] This was much more in line with the Conservatives' attitude to post-war Britain than with Labour's. As Mark Jarvis has shown, the commitment to trusting people formed the basis of the Conservative Party's

early embrace of the 'affluent society' and the cultural modernisation that it seemed to entail, even if they soon became concerned about the effects of 'permissive' legislation on traditional morality and social bonds.[28]

Realignments

The debates around the formation of a new 'progressive party' should be set in a longer history of discussions about realignment and the role of the Liberal Party, dating to the immediate post-war years. As we saw in Chap. 3, there were a number of anti-socialist Lib–Con alliances at municipal level in inter-war Britain; after 1945, such arrangements also functioned at national level. In 1946 the Conservative Party had entered into negotiations about a possible merger with the National Liberals (who had remained separate from the Liberals after their participation in the National Government), with an agreement announced in May 1947.

The two parties soon began campaigning for the Liberals to join them. Lord Woolton issued 'A Message to Liberals' (published jointly with Conservative Central Office), in which he argued that 'the spirit of Liberalism […] finds its practical force and its outlet, to-day, in the Conservative and Unionist Party'. Noting that 'Many of our leaders come from Liberal stock', he 'invite[d] all Liberals to consider whether anything now divides us, except the recollection of old battles, and wounds long since healed by time'.[29] A longer pamphlet 'for the consideration of all Liberals' similarly made clear that 'whatever issues divided Liberals and Conservatives in the past and whatever differences there may be between them today, they are as dust in the balance as compared with the challenge of Socialism to the fundamental principles for which both Liberalism and Conservatism stand'.[30] This was not merely wishful thinking, but rooted in the hope that 'some deal […] will be achieved before the next election'. In several constituencies Liberal and Conservative Associations had been formed.[31] By April 1949, S.H. Pierssené, General Director of Conservative Central Office, felt able to boast that there were already 'about 50 constituencies, extending from Land's End to the highlands of Scotland' in which Conservatives and Liberals had created 'an effective form of united organization to support a joint candidate at the next General Election'.[32]

My point here is not just that Liberal–Conservative joint working challenged the traditional alignment of Liberals and Labour as the 'progressive forces' of parliamentary politics; it is that these Lib–Con alliances were themselves described as 'progressive'. On 3 August 1946, Winston

Churchill included 'Progressive Unionists' in a list of possible names that could be used by National Liberals and Conservatives under a broad 'Union Party' banner.[33] More strikingly, the announcement of the agreement between the two parties in May 1947 described it as 'a development that not only gives great encouragement to all progressively minded persons but will also bring about a unity of effort and thought among those who desire a progressive National policy based on respect for freedom and individual liberty'.[34] This thinking was not limited to National Liberals. Some Liberals who had welcomed the Labour Government in 1945 ('full of new men and fresh ideas') now felt that the best option was 'for Liberals, and other progressive people, to seize, and hold, the citadel, and machinery, of the Tory Party'. There was, after all, little space between liberalism and 'the progressive Conservatism of the new Charters', and there was proving to be 'an inescapable drabness and sadness' to life under socialism. This was not, one author assured his readers, an argument against any future Labour government, but a call for it to develop 'fresh banners, new thoughts (if not a "New Look") and, it might be added, some new banner-bearers'. In the meantime, 'the Conservative Party ought to be allowed another chance'.[35]

In 1953, an article in *Political Quarterly* argued that not only did Liberals and Conservatives share an opposition to socialism, they were also the joint heirs of nineteenth-century liberalism, as foretold by Randolph Churchill: 'The Tory Party will be turned into a Liberal Party, and in that transformation may yet produce a powerful governing force.' The author, Captain Colin Coote (a journalist and former Liberal MP who had benefitted from an electoral alliance with the Conservatives at a 1917 by-election), explained that Liberals and Conservatives agreed on fundamentals, whereas Labour followed a 'completely different political philosophy'. Significantly, for Coote the label 'progressive' was working to confuse this situation: 'Some liberals, outwardly and otherwise apparently sane, are still attracted towards the socialist party because it calls itself "progressive". Communists find a similar claim extremely effective in gulling a certain type of socialist into co-operation with them.' Not only was it 'nonsense to talk of conservatism as being "reactionary"', but 'nothing in the ideologies of politics is more inane than the contrast between "progressives" and "reactionaries"'.[36]

Wooing the Liberals

As this example demonstrates, the idea of a division between 'progressives' and 'reactionaries' remained fundamental to the outlook of certain sections of both the Liberal and Labour Parties. In particular, the historical ties between the two parties remained persuasive in post-war Britain. Following his defection from the Liberals to Labour in November 1947, T.L. Horabin MP tried to facilitate the movement of a group of his former colleagues, led by A.P. Marshall, across the floor. Marshall noted that this ran against the thinking of the party leadership, explaining that 'whereas in recent years much thought and some action and publicity have gone on within the Liberal Party on the question of co-operation with Conservatives (in which we have taken no part), no one has begun to try to find out whether co-operation is possible with Labour'.[37] Despite this, Marshall assured Labour's General Secretary Morgan Phillips that 'The rank and file of the Liberal Party are in the main radical in outlook', and predicted that two-thirds would 'go left in co-operation with Labour', 'if faced with the necessity of making a decision'. He made clear, however, that Liberals would not join Labour as individual members, but only if they could 'remain for the present a coherent body, working on alliance with Labour upon an agreed policy and upon electorally agreed terms'.[38]

Labour remained resistant to such appeals. While the party was happy to welcome individual Liberal converts like Horabin into its ranks, it consistently refused to consider the idea of any formal agreement between the parties, and rejected the assumption that without an alliance with Liberals they risked splitting 'the progressive vote'. In 1951, Morgan Phillips assured E.L. Mallalieu that the claim made in an anonymous letter addressed 'To all intelligent Labour Members of Parliament' that a pact with the Liberals could allow Labour to claim 70 more seats had 'no significance whatsoever'.[39] The negotiations between Liberals and Conservatives further fuelled Labour's resistance to forming any alliance with the Liberal Party itself, on the grounds that the Parliamentary Liberal Party was 'a minority group which for the most part has supported our opponents'.[40] In a January 1957 broadcast of *Any Questions*, Morgan Phillips also questioned whether there was a difference between Liberals and Conservatives[41]—a point that, as we have seen, the Conservatives and National Liberals were keen to emphasise themselves.[42]

In March 1949, the editor of *Everybody's*, a weekly magazine, asked Phillips to provide the Labour response to an article by Liberal journalist

A.J. Cummings on 'the possible renaissance of the Liberal Party, and the very natural attempts of the Socialists and Conservatives to attract the Liberal voter into their fold'.[43] Cummings suggested that the 'Socialist line […] that the Liberal Party had accomplished its reformist mission, that Socialists were the natural successors, and that the honest course for progressive-minded Liberals was to throw in their lot with modern Socialism' had been called into question by the revival of liberalism.[44] Phillips responded thus:

> The Labour Party can hardly be said to have 'wooed' the Liberal vote as such. Rather has the radical tradition become embodied in the Labour Party's philosophy of social justice, and the progressive vote has followed it. It is my belief that it will continue to do so. Our British radical Tradition has always stood for certain principles—equality of opportunity and minimum basic standards of life. The Labour Party is making a reality of those principles and I believe that all progressively-minded people realize that the Labour Party must have their support if we are to win the battle of ideas now raging in the world.[45]

He also took the opportunity to contest Cummings' assertion that the Liberals represented the 'middle way' of British politics, noting that it was the Labour Party that now had the stronger claim to be a '"people's party" or "a party of all classes"', having 'struck the balance between the two extremes of reaction and revolution'. [46] The Conservative respondent, S.H. Pierssené capitalised on Labour's reluctance to 'woo' the Liberals, noting that 'Nobody has ever yet heard of a Socialist and Liberal Association being formed anywhere nor are they likely to hear of it.' On the contrary, 'we Conservatives suggest that there is so much common ground between ourselves and the Liberals […] we invite them not to destroy their identity but to co-operate with us while preserving it'.[47]

Nine months later, the former Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander sent Phillips an article he had written for another exchange between Liberal and Labour viewpoints organised by the *British Weekly*. Here he argued that 'real revival' was not a realistic prospect for Liberals, and sought to persuade them that 'Labour is the standard bearer in these days of Left Wing Progressives'.[48] A short version of Mander's piece was later reworked as an 'Address to Liberals', to be used during Labour's 1951 election campaign. In it, Mander, writing as 'a life-long Liberal who has

joined the Labour Party', assured his readers that 'Labour is now the heir of the radical tradition, and the Government has been doing thoroughly Liberal things for the last 6 years'.[49]

This idea of a single tradition of social reform, passing on from Liberals to Labour, was not, however, dominant within the Liberal Party. In the same *British Weekly* exchange, Ernest Barker complained that 'some Liberal newspapers' seemed to suggest 'that the Conservative Party is the enemy of enemies, and that the Labour party is somehow a friend', before declaring 'That is not the way in which I read the signs of the times. Indeed, I read them in the opposite way.'[50] Similarly, Viscount Simon noted that 'It would be absurd to vote against the progressive Conservative today merely because our fathers or grandfathers resisted reactionary Tories long ago.' He added, 'The Conservative Party has been "liberalised," whether its members recognise this or not.'[51] This 'liberalisation' cannot be equated with a simple acceptance of the welfare state; it entailed an acceptance of personal and economic liberty as the central objectives of Conservative policy. The party leader, Clement Davies, put forward the most characteristically Liberal line by rejecting both of the other two parties, on account of their subservience to the vested interests of, respectively, the Trades Union Congress and big business.[52]

The Liberal Party had consistently insisted that it did not represent '*a compromise between Toryism and Socialism, but a challenge to both*'. Throughout the post-war period, Liberals claimed that conservatism and socialism were 'both essentially reactionary'. In contrast, '*The only really progressive way is the Third Way—the Liberal Way.*'[53] The Liberal Party was a '*constructive and progressive alternative*' to both statist Socialist government and outdated Conservatism.[54] While realignment formed a central plank in Liberal thinking, this was to be around a Liberal rather than a Lib–Lab or Lib–Con axis. This line held when Jo Grimond took control in 1956, despite the beginning of what Peter Sloman has described as 'a slow convergence around social democratic and social liberal ideas'.[55]

Grimond reoriented the Liberal Party as the core of a potential 'new party of the Left', and as the 'non-socialist progressive' alternative to Labour. This was not, however, to be a revival of the old Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance'. Indeed, Grimond explicitly distanced himself from the new liberalism of the early twentieth century, which 'demanded a great deal of action by the State'. Instead, he put forward a rather different view of liberalism as 'thrusting, progressive, enterprising in outlook'.[56] In his *Memoirs*, published in 1979, Grimond seemed bemused that 'the idea of

a permanent arrangement, whether pact or realignment, with elements of the Labour Party has been more popular in recent times', reminding readers that 'From the Liberal Unionists and Joseph Chamberlain, through Lloyd George, to the National Liberals, such coalitions as have actually taken place have been with the Tories.'[57] The seeming ambiguity of Grimond's position has been well explained by Geoffrey Foote, who places him within the classical republican tradition, which was undergoing revival on both left and right in this period.[58]

'RED' LIBERALISM

While Liberals welcomed the idea of 'a radical progressive alliance with an enlarged and expanded Liberal Party as its core and directing intelligence', many questioned the wisdom of entering a partnership with 'the ruins of Labour's social democratic wing'. After all, 'those whose careers have been dedicated to constructing the machinery of state centralism' were unlikely to be 'best qualified to supervise its demolition'.[59] Instead, Liberals positioned themselves to the left of the Labour Party. Desmond Banks, Chair of the Radical Reform Group, argued that while the Liberals needed to 'replac[e] the Labour Party as the major progressive party in this country', this meant overturning the idea that 'our natural sympathisers are necessarily to be found on the Right wing of the Labour party. The Right wing contains the trimmers and those who are far to the Right of the modern Liberal party.' Instead, they needed to 'provide a new and better ideal for the disillusioned idealists of the Left'.[60]

A similar attitude can be seen in the politics of Young Liberals in this period. In 1960, a group called New Orbits, run by the Joint Political Committee of the National League of Young Liberals and the Union of Liberal Students, published a pamphlet entitled *High Time for Radicals*. This examined Labour and the Liberals as 'the two allegedly progressive parties' and concluded that Labour at present was very far from being a radical party, on account of its 'socialist dogma' and the 'vested interests' of the trade unions. Despite this, the authors declared themselves more in sympathy with Labour's socialists than with its social democrats, noting that although 'Potential radicals can be found in most sectors of the Labour Party, they are scarcest in the "right wing"'. They therefore rejected the idea of an arrangement between Liberals and social democrats as 'certainly not the sort of realignment which we have in mind'.[61] Another New Orbits pamphlet explained that 'we have today a Left that is

neither Liberal nor Socialist. What we need is a Left that is both', a 'hard "Red" Liberalism, unafraid of being seen in unfamiliar places and with unfamiliar associates'. In an explicit reference to the trends that Foote describes, Cousins drew on the 'common republican tradition' shared by Labour and the Liberals up until the 1920s, which 'believed "citizenship" to be the greatest political good, and what would today be called "alienation" the greatest political evil', and pointed to both the New Left and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) as positive signs in the present.[62] Likewise, Paul Foot, president of the Oxford University Liberal Club, described the modernising social democracy of Gaitskell and Crosland as an 'arid path' that held little appeal for the young, but explained that 'there is more hope for the Labour party' in its socialist wing.[63]

Radical Liberals argued that their party was about more than splitting the difference between the other two parties—liberalism was a distinct ideology with its roots in anarchism, and as such offered an entirely fresh approach to British politics.[64] At the 1980 Liberal Assembly, for instance, Michael Meadowcroft resisted David Marquand's pleas for unity between liberalism and social democracy, arguing that the social democrats were anything but radical and would tie Liberals to the old forms of statist government that had already been found wanting.[65] It is also worth noting that in the pages of *Marxism Today*, Meadowcroft put forward a strong argument that it was the Liberals, not Labour, who were best placed to represent the New Left 'progressive' politics of feminism, environmentalism, and pacifism.[66] In Chap. 3 we saw how Liberals at the turn of the twentieth century tried to reorient the meaning of progressive politics towards a more interventionist role for the state. Here we are witnessing a further evolution. In the hands of these radical Young Liberals, progressive liberalism became indicative of active citizenship, participatory democracy, and even anarchism. While they located this within left politics (and some way to the left of Labour), it was fundamentally different from the earlier new liberalism and its alliance with social democracy.

Many Young Liberals seemed to find it easier to get on with the Young Communist League than with the Young Socialists—despite the background of the Cold War. This was a matter of attitude more than policy, but the feeling was reciprocated. New Left thinker Perry Anderson, for instance, noted that the Romantic cultural tradition leading through William Morris was not—and could not be—represented in the Labour Party and observed that 'it was no accident that in the late fifties and early

sixties, the Liberal Party should have been markedly more progressive than the Labour Party'.[67] Similarly, a *Marxism Today* article of 1966 attributed the revival of the Liberals to the fact that 'many young Liberal policies and decisions are more progressive than those of the Labour Party Executive'.[68] Despite this seeming enthusiasm, the status of the term 'progressive' in this context may be best understood as a form of relative praise, rather than an unequivocal good. As one piece in *New Left Review* suggested,

> I would rather, of course, have a socialist opposition; but if this is impossible, any sort of 'progressive' opposition which is capable of taking over the government will do. In such an opposition, our right-wing friends in the Labour Party could play a useful if unspectacular role. I myself would prefer to remain with the 'left'.[69]

It is worth noting that neither the New Left nor the post-1968 feminist and gay social movements seem to have used the term 'progressive' very enthusiastically to describe their own activities. Although it was employed to describe the 'progressive' policies of particular community centres and family planning clinics, for instance,[70] it seems to have remained too connected with liberalism to do much other work.[71] This association with moderate respectability may, however, have been exactly its attraction to civil rights campaigners like the Coloured People's Progressive Association, established in the aftermath of the Notting Hill riots in 1958, in order to campaign for 'democracy, interracial unity, social incorporation for Black migrants, equal employment opportunities regardless of race, and unrestricted Commonwealth migration'.[72] Among the New Left, the views of the 'liberal and progressive' Establishment were summed up as

> acceptance of the rights of ordinary people and the importance of fair play for the workers, alongside a deep fear of the 'mob' and of the people taking things into their own hands. The feeling is that there should always be control exercised by the 'responsible' people like union leaders, policemen, 'sensible' management and so on.[73]

These were the 'progressive professionals', whom Chris Moores has described working for organisations like the National Council for Civil Liberties, and who were the source of so much consternation among moral conservatives.[74] Yet these 'progressive professionals' were by no means

always in tune with those they sought to defend—as in the complaint by the Gay Liberation Front that judges and magistrates 'who see themselves as progressive' had taken to equating deviance with sickness, in a way that allowed them to congratulate themselves on their participation in 'the march from medieval moral absolutes' by displaying 'tolerance and understanding of the homosexual as being the victim of an undeserved affliction!'[75]

HISTORICAL REVISIONISM

In retrospect, the 1981 Alliance of Liberals and Social Democrats appears to be a natural consequence of the Liberals' reorientation from centre-right to centre-left. As we have seen, however, this did not necessarily follow. Indeed, those radical Liberals (like Peter Hain) who did migrate to the Labour Party in this period found themselves on its left rather than its right wing, in an echo of the movement of Liberals like Stephen Spender into communism in the inter-war years that we saw in Chap. 4. Far from being the forgotten answer to the problems of the left, then, social democracy was seen to be the core of the problem. In David Marquand's words, it

> depended on communitarian ties, but it could not speak the language of community. That was why it became a technocratic philosophy rather than a political one: why its view of government and of the relationship between government and governed was 'mechanical', rather than 'moral'.[76]

This verdict may have been unfair to Labour's revisionists, whose own project acknowledged the desire for greater personal freedom, particularly in terms of relaxing the strictures of public morality, and also recognised that the bureaucracy and rigidity of state socialism were unsuited to contemporary society. That said, it is difficult to see Tony Crosland, for instance, as a spokesman for the 'new politics'. In a 1971 Fabian pamphlet detailing his vision of *A Social Democratic Britain*, he discussed participation, decentralisation, student revolt, and Women's Lib under the heading of 'false trails', and dismissed the former with the observation that 'we do not necessarily want a busy bustling society in which everyone is politically active, and fussing around in an interfering and responsible manner, and herding us all into participating groups'.[77] Despite this, Steven Fielding has suggested that while Labour was deeply ambivalent about

these trends in the 1960s, by 1970 its manifesto commitment to make Britain an 'active democracy' was sincere, if hesitant.[78]

For Marquand, the answer to Labour's malaise was to reinfuse social democracy with liberal humanism. Yet to many Liberals in the late 1950s, 1960s and well into the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of resurrecting the historical partnership with social democrats seemed more of a threat than an opportunity. That it did not remain so owed much to changes within the Liberal Party (particularly the change of leadership from Grimond to first Jeremy Thorpe and then David Steel, who were far more sympathetic to the social liberal tradition and committed Keynesians[79]), but also to the efforts of social democrats, like Marquand, in rethinking the past in ways that not only emphasised the historical relationship between the two parties, but also tied this to the need to rediscover a less statist tradition in Labour's history.

The extent to which the debate about the future relations between Labour and Liberals was framed in terms of history can be seen in a heated exchange between right-wing Labour backbencher Woodrow Wyatt and Morgan Phillips about whether Arthur Henderson had made a secret electoral pact with David Lloyd George in 1931. The dispute began in 1961 in the letters pages of the *Guardian*, when Wyatt supported his call for an anti-Tory Lib–Lab electoral 'arrangement' with the claim that this would be in line with historical precedent. Phillips took issue with Wyatt's historical claims (though not, explicitly, his political argument) and the debate continued via a column by W.H. Ewer in the *Daily Herald* ('I am going to take time off from Kruschev and Berlin and the Congo and all that […] to recall things which happened 30 years ago') and in private correspondence between Phillips, Ewer and Henderson's son, Will Henderson, before concluding on the letters page of both the *Daily Herald* and the *Guardian*.[80] Three months later, Wyatt was formally warned by Labour's National Executive Committee that if he continued to agitate publicly for an electoral pact, it 'would have to consider [his] position'.[81] Marquand, then a young academic, responded to this dispute with the observation that 'it is true that a pact between the two parties would work if the Labour Party could so transform itself that it no longer repelled Liberal voters. But if it could do that, a pact would be otiose.'[82] The prescience of this remark was underlined thirty-five years later by Tony Blair's abandonment of the Liberal Democrats in the aftermath of his 1997 victory.

For Marquand, as for Wyatt, this was a historical question. In July 1962, he published an article in *Encounter* that examined the Liberal

revival with reference to the relationship between the Labour and Liberal Parties in the early twentieth century. The latter had fallen, he suggested, because Lloyd George failed to form a broad coalition, similar to that of Roosevelt in the United States.[83] This was an early intervention into an academic debate that would really erupt in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Trevor Wilson and Peter Clarke both published books exploring the viability of the Edwardian Liberal Party.[84] Previous accounts of this period had presented the party's eclipse by Labour in the 1920s as a historical inevitability, the result of changing structural forces, particularly associated with the rise of class-conscious politics, to which the tired and outdated Liberal Party was unable to respond.[85] The changing political currents cast the history of the early twentieth century in a new light. What had been a settled story of liberalism's inevitable eclipse by socialism now came to seem rather more contingent—a matter of historical circumstance rather than ideological destiny. The new analyses stressed the intellectual vibrancy of the Liberal Party and argued that liberalism had proved itself more than capable of adapting to the new political climate, and—had it not been for the war and the mistakes of its leaders—could well have continued to represent both Liberal and Labour interests well into the twentieth century.[86]

The political implications of this cut two ways. For Liberals, it seemed that if liberalism did not have to decline, then Labour did not have to remain the primary progressive party. They argued that it was now time for what Nick Clegg fifty years later would call a 'reverse switch'.[87] In the meantime, they would be the centre of a new alliance of radicals. The other interpretation, advanced by Marquand, centred around Labour and its need to shed its socially conservative 'labourist' image, become less dependent on the trade unions, and embrace the radical intellectual currents that had sustained the progressive alliance in its early days.[88] While the decline of the Liberal Party had seemed to confirm that history was being carried 'inexorably and irresistibly, from the small to the big: from the disorganized to the organised: from the unco-ordinated to the planned: from the mushy, wishy-washy, backward-looking compromises of liberalism to the clear, harsh, unfudgeable choice between Right and Left', this was no longer the case.[89] Both history and the left had been 'derailed'. Yet the situation was salvageable. The answer lay in constructing an adequate structure of political citizenship to underpin the social citizenship offered by the welfare state. As Marquand explained at a meeting of the discussion group Arena during the 1980 Liberal Assembly, this had been neglected in the post-war years, but it was now crucial to 'develop a decentralized,

libertarian vision of social democracy', which would form the basis of a 'broad-based, progressive coalition embracing the present Liberal Party, the Radical Right of the Labour Party and the growing army of disaffected radicals outside politics'.[90]

ALLIANCE

The SDP–Liberal Alliance, formed the next year, was arguably such a coalition. Still, it remained caught between different visions of social democracy. As Stuart Hall noted, its 'strongest card will not be the promise to "restore the Centre", but the vaguer threat to "break the political mould". In so doing,' he went on, 'they inherit, not the mantle of Attlee, but the legacy of Mrs Thatcher—for, though they may deflect it in a different direction, that is what she promised too'.[91] That assessment seems to have been borne out by the response to the SDP's formation. Its support came overwhelmingly from people who had not previously been a member of any political party. These members stressed that the great attraction lay in joining a new party and insisted that it should transcend the old class-based politics that they associated with Labour.[92]

Yet the founders of the new party also presented the rupture of established politics as troubling and unsettling. And for all their claims to be breaking with the past, the defectors from Labour were extremely keen to assert that their political position had not changed. Far from Liberal calls for a radical new form of politics, the founders of the SDP presented themselves as the political heirs to Gaitskell and Crosland. This provided emotional stability. It allowed them to present themselves as being true to a tradition, rather than betraying it. They also drew on more distant history. In an article in the issue of *Labour Victory* produced for the 1981 Special Conference, David Owen argued that their position was closer to that of the Labour Party's Pioneers, who though 'themselves trade unionists, deliberately decided not to create a Trade Union Party but to establish a constitution for the Labour Party that made it a national party'.[93] By this rhetorical strategy, breaking away from the Labour Party became in itself an act of loyalty—an attempt to uphold the legacy of the past and bear the standard into the future.

At this stage, the two halves of the SDP–Liberal Alliance were keen to emphasise that they came from different traditions, and to maintain separate identities. It was only gradually that the narrative of reuniting the two halves of progressive politics came to the fore. It had, for instance,

played no role in the rhetoric around the Lib–Lab Pact of 1977–78. Yet, by the time of the merger to become the Liberal Democrats the narrative was fixed—at least in the rhetoric of the parties' leaders (with the exception of David Owen, who led a breakaway Social Democratic Party; Michael Meadowcroft also continued his opposition by leading the rump Liberal Party). The founding document of the new party, the Joint Policy Statement, stated that the new party would 'not start from a blank page' because their shared 'tap-roots go deep'. Both parties could 'take pride in our record of promoting social progress and radical reform in Britain' and should now focus on the need to 'rekindle' their shared traditions.[94]

This realignment of the left around a social democratic/social liberal axis was by no means inevitable. The fact that it now appears so obvious an alliance was due in large part to the work of social democrats in making it so. A significant part of this work involved embracing the politics of participation and citizenship, of devolution, democracy and constitutional reform, which had formed the basis of much of the New Left and Liberal critique of social democracy. In *The Progressive Dilemma* Marquand called for 'a marriage between the communitarian, decentralist, participatory radicalism to which the Liberal Democrats are heirs, and the communitarian, decentralist, participatory strands in the socialist inheritance: a marriage, if you like, between Thomas Paine and William Morris'.[95]

The irony was that rediscovering the Edwardian progressive tradition worked to institutionalise an unnecessarily rigid characterisation of what later became known as 'old Labour' as entirely beholden to state socialism. In fact, as Peter Ackers and Alastair Reid have recently argued, we can trace a tradition of decentralising and experimental 'liberal-pluralism' from the Fellowship of the New Life in the 1890s, through guild socialism and organisations like the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals in the inter-war years, to the participative politics of the 1960s and 1970s. This was not always (or even often) embraced by the Labour Party leadership, but it remained an influential component of labour movement politics and was—they suggest—rather more in tune with the associational life of working-class communities than the centralist bureaucracy that grew up after the war.[96] Part of the problem for social democrats in claiming this decentralising inheritance, however, was that it was rooted in the very trade union traditions and labourist culture that they were trying to escape.[97]

History De-railed

The tradition that Ackers and Reid reference here had long been described as 'progressive', and not always in a complementary way. We saw in Chap. 2 how self-described progressives were dismissed as 'cranks', as in this attack from Tory Democrat Pierse Loftus:

> Most 'Progressives' are tee-totallers, many vegetarians and anti-tobacconists; some believe in the abolition of marriage and the State taking complete charge of all children; and Mr. Bernard Shaw professes belief in breeding humanity by the methods of the Stud Farm. All these opinions are very 'Progressive' no doubt, though we may question whither the progress along these lines will lead humanity.

As this passage suggests, critics often picked up on the distinction between 'progressive' as a political label and as a description of a particular set of ideas; they questioned whether proposed reforms would really lead to progress and put forward competing ideas about what that meant. It was only in the 1970s, however, that the right relinquished its own claim to the term. While in previous periods Conservatives and economic Liberals had insisted that their own policies offered the truly 'progressive' path, they now abandoned that line of argument.

In 1983, Robin Butler, Thatcher's Principal Private Secretary, suggested that 'progressive' had 'the right vibes' to describe monetarism, without carrying the overtly Gladstonian Liberal resonances of a term like 'Reforming'. He was, though, corrected by Ferdinand Mount, who pointed out (in the marginalia quoted at the head of this chapter) that '*These days* it is almost exclusively associated with the Left'.[98] It is perhaps significant that Butler, the high-flying Establishment civil servant, should have thought this a more attractive word than Mount, the Head of the Number 10 Policy Unit, involved in a project both to destabilise the elite consensus and to reassert 'traditional' values.[99] Thatcher's own use of this language included attacks on 'the professional progressives among broadcasters, social workers, and politicians who have created a fog of excuses in which the mugger and the burglar operate', redolent of the anti-Establishment rhetoric that we examined in Chap. 5. Yet she also observed that 'For forty years now, the progressive—the up-to-the-moment—thing in Britain has been to believe in the virtues of collectivism'.[100] This latter point was clearly a source of some discomfort. In 1996 she was still

reflecting on the shift in language, which meant that 'progressive' had lost its association with Gladstonian liberalism and become associated with the liberalism of 'the latter day collectivists':

> the view which became an *orthodoxy* in the early part of this century—and a *dogma* by the middle of it—was that the story of human progress in the modern world was the story of increasing state power.
>
> Progressive legislation and political movements were assumed to be the ones which *extended* the intervention of government.[101]

This was partly a self-inflicted problem. The New Right's attack on the 'progressive' attitudes that we examined in Chap. 5 had in many ways worked to cement this association, particularly by dissociating ideas of moral liberalism from those of economic liberty and dismissing the former as examples of 'progressive thinking'.[102] Still, it seems likely that the left's emphasis on the history of the Lib–Lab progressive alliance also played its part.

There was, however, an irony here, as this 'almost exclusive' association of progressive politics with the left coincided with the collapse of left teleology, from Keynesianism to Marxism; in other words, with its claim to be progressive in any meaningful sense. This was about more than the perennial swing of the political pendulum. Marquand's 1990 pamphlet *History De-railed* captures the way in which a whole series of assumptions about the logic of history had been destabilised: from 'the quintessentially Fabian assumption that the intellectually and organisationally tidy should and would prevail over the variegated, the spontaneous and the unruly', to the faith 'that the omnicompetent "collectivist State", managed by tidy-minded experts was bound to be the wave of the future'.[103] The attempts to recover a more pluralist, ethical socialist tradition offered one way out of this impasse, but looked nostalgic in their own way. The same could be said of the idea of a broad alliance of 'progressive forces' that gained ground within the Communist Party from 1983, in a deliberate invocation of the Popular Front of the inter-war years (which we examined in Chap. 4).[104] Although 'progressive' became solidly attached to a particular form of left politics in this period, this was arguably at the expense of its signification of 'progress' in the sense of either forward movement, or ordered and sequential development.

We will look further at the collapse of socialist teleology in the 1980s and 1990s in Chap. 7, but it is worth reflecting here on how Thatcherism,

which explicitly set itself against the cultural forms of modernity that arose in the 1960s, could have any claim to represent 'progress' in the 1970s and beyond. The first thing to say is that the connections between the counter-culture and left politics were not as strong as they may have appeared. This seems to have been a problem of form as much as content. As Willie Thompson and Marcus Collins have pointed out, the ideological and structural rigidity of the various factions of the left were not attractive to a youth movement that aimed to cast off hierarchy and constraints.[105] Certain aspects of the counter-culture were also highly problematic for feminists; as the Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band explained to *Spare Rib*, 'Too often the sexism of popular and progressive music invades and insults the occasion.'[106]

In 1966, a series of articles in *Marxism Today* had debated whether British Youth was 'Progressive, Reactionary or Indifferent'. The first piece, by Barney Davis, pointed to the involvement of young people in broadly 'progressive' movements like CND, and the idealism and anger demonstrated by the popular folk music and protest songs of the period.[107] Later contributors, however, dismissed this as superficial fashion, orchestrated by capitalist record companies—and also noted that the membership of the Young Conservatives outnumbered that of left-wing youth organisations by four to one.[108] The counter-intuitive affinity between *Capitalism and the Permissive Society* was underlined by the economist Samuel Brittan in his 1973 essay of that name. While the New Left may have resisted such conclusions, he noted that

> The revolt of young people against the pattern of their lives being decided by others or by impersonal forces they cannot influence is fundamentally justified. Precisely the same arguments are to be found in the classical defences of free markets, private property and limited government.[109]

We have already suggested that the New Left's radical anti-statism aligned with the themes picked up (in different ways) by right-wing thinkers like Diana Spearman and Enoch Powell; this was further developed by Thatcherism's 'republican commitment to citizenship in the market'.[110] Richard Cockett has pointed out that, despite its moral and cultural conservatism, in fact Thatcherism 'worked with the grain of the 1960s' cultural revolution, picking up its anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment impulses and its 'rhetoric of self-determinism, classlessness and meritocracy', even as it turned these in a counter-revolutionary direction.[111] As

he observes, 'to anyone who cared to look just beneath the surface, the economic and aspirational politics of the sixties generation dovetailed perfectly with the older economic liberal traditions of what would become Thatcherism'.[112]

PROGRESSIVE ROCK

While progressive music and progressive politics never quite aligned with one another, there is an odd parallel in the way in which the label 'progressive' became fixed to both at this time. In both cases, a term that had been applied to an eclectic variety of projects narrowed in the 1970s. In both cases, that happened at exactly the point when the tradition in question was seen to have become bloated, complacent and tired. In both cases, it involved charges of elitism, intellectualism and distance from the 'true' soul of a wider movement. And in both cases, this meaning was cemented through a nostalgic revival of interest in the 1990s—indeed, this is when the abbreviation 'prog' came to stand for what had previously been known as 'progressive rock music'.

Progressive rock, led by groups like King Crimson, Yes, Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP), and Genesis, developed from the late 1960s and peaked in the 1970s. It was generally seen to involve longer songs with long instrumental interludes, complicated (and changing) time signatures, complex instrumentation, musical virtuosity often drawing on classical and/or jazz training, unusual and electronic instruments, improvisation, and concept albums frequently using imagery from fantasy, folklore or sci-fi.[113] Debate about the exact criteria and canon continues on forums like ProgArchives.com. It is, however, clear that this specific application of the term 'progressive' developed only gradually, displacing much more general connotations of forward movement, experimentation, and modernity.

This was a matter of narrowing a term that in the late 1960s had been applied to everyone from Bob Dylan to the Rolling Stones,[114] so that it described only a very specific genre. The Beach Boys are a particularly interesting case; *Melody Maker*, for instance, asked whether *Pet Sounds* was 'the most progressive pop album ever?'[115] Yet, while the album was highly innovative, virtuosic and experimental, this series of short songs on the theme of teenage love meets few of the other criteria of progressive rock as it has come to be defined. In 1972, even MC5—often seen as being proto-punks, opposed to everything progressive rock stood for[116]—were

described as an 'act of progressive hard rock with a political slant'.[117] Yet by 1975, a distinction was being drawn between '"heavy" and "progressive" popular music, which […] is more serious in approach' and other less distinctive kinds.[118]

This was exactly the time when prog rock was seen to have become decadent and out of touch. Critics complained that 'progressive' bands had betrayed the 'authenticity' of rock and roll, and prioritised technique above emotion.[119] This position has been criticised by Allan F. Moore, who suggests that it is based on racist assumptions about the 'unmediated' and 'natural' nature of black music.[120] Without disputing Moore's point, there is an interesting resonance here with critiques of 'progressive' politics, which similarly gained a reputation for being elitist, intellectual and emotionally cold—in contrast with both the supposed authenticity of labourism and the seemingly natural connection of conservatism with the 'national soul'.[121]

As we saw in Chap. 5, throughout the post-war years the belief in the necessity of 'progress' (whether social, political, scientific or technological) ran alongside a deep ambivalence about its consequences. Prog rock was a product of this ambiguity. Some of its defining features were a preoccupation with fantasy, folklore and sci-fi, and its attempts to invoke both an idealised preindustrial past and a terrifying technological future. In this, it picked up on many of the interests of the early esoteric 'progressive movement'. It is no coincidence that H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* later appealed to Jeff Wayne. In Genesis' 1973 album *Selling England by the Pound*, pastoral nostalgia gives way to consumer madness; and ELP's *Brain Salad Surgery* (1973) moved from Blake's 'Jerusalem' to the dystopian 'Karn Evil 9', with its evocation of tyranny by computer.

Another interesting example is the 1976 *Kibbo Kift: The Rock Musical*, by Judge Smith of Van der Graaf Generator and Maxwell Hutchinson. The Kibbo Kift was an esoteric youth movement of the inter-war years, led by the charismatic John Hargrave, which developed into the Social Credit Movement, known as the Green Shirts.[122] The musical sets this movement within what is described in the lyrics as 'a quite progressive atmosphere', in which one of the lead characters 'thought the modern word for God was Bernard Shaw'. When questioned about this at a recent commemorative event, however, Judge Smith emphasised that there was no connection between the progressivism of the Kibbo Kift and that of his own musical milieu. The latter simply did not draw that connection, not least because they thought of what they were doing as 'rock' rather

than as specifically 'progressive rock'. The latter term, as he describes it, initially 'had quite a wide remit', but 'narrowed more and more over a thirty year period' until it was only applied to bands that sounded like Yes and Marillion, something that, he claimed, 'doesn't interest me at all'.[123] As a further complication, neither the Kibbo Kift nor the Social Credit Movement made much use of the word 'progressive', unlike some of their counterparts, which we examined in Chap. 4.

CONCLUSION

I started this chapter with a question: how did 'progressive' come to be 'almost exclusively associated with the Left' at exactly the point when the left seemed to have lost its grip on the future? As we have seen, there were a number of different factors at work here. The most important of these seems to have been the gradual uncoupling of the different strands of liberalism. In the immediate post-war years, the question of personal liberty was bound up with the promotion of economic freedom, within the context of the affluent society. This was the territory on which Conservatives and Liberals made common cause. In the late 1960s, however, the idea of personal liberty took on more counter-cultural overtones, which the Conservative Party found hard to embrace and which fuelled the turn to moral conservatism under Thatcher's leadership in the 1970s. In attacking the 'progressive' views of the supposedly liberal 'Establishment', Conservatives effectively ceded this language to their opponents.

The Establishment was also under attack from the left. Both radical Liberals and the New Left challenged the statism and bureaucratic elitism of post-war social democracy. This was the part of the left that came to look old-fashioned, the social democratic Herbivores who Michael Frayn believed had their last great success in the 1951 Festival of Britain (as we saw in Chap. 5). Although Harold Wilson's 'New Britain' campaign, and particularly his 'white heat of technology' speech, briefly cast Labour as the modern scientific party, this was tempered by the climate of economic and cultural declinism that had taken hold in the early 1960s and continued to inform political opinion throughout the 1970s. In this context, it is surprising that 'progressive' politics became so closely associated with the social democratic centre-left in this period. Paradoxically, this seems to have been a consequence of the very problem I have identified. It was the need to move beyond the 'mechanical' statism of post-war Labour politics that led social democratic intellectuals, like David Marquand, to revive the

heritage of the Lib–Lab progressive alliance. Yet progressivism here was more of a historical than a future-oriented claim. And, as we will see in Chap. 7, in the hands of New Labour it led back to exactly the centralising elitism that it had been intended to counter.

Part of the attractiveness of 'progressive' as either a political or cultural term is that it is anticipatory, in the same way as the phrase 'ahead of your time'. Yet, that leaves it in an awkward position with regard to both 'common-sense' politics and popular culture. Although labelling certain ideas as 'progressive' gives them the appearance of inevitability, it also suggests that they are the preserve of a forward-thinking elite, out of step with the natural inclinations of the general public. As we have seen in this chapter, both progressive musicians and progressive politicians came to be associated with cold intellectualism, artificial experiments and upper-middle-class expertise at the expense of the 'authentic' expressions of either rock and roll or the politics of 'ordinariness'. If punk was the reaction against the first, Thatcherism was the response to the latter.[124]

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The Rhetoric of Change: Modernisation and Its Discontents

In his speech to the 1999 Labour Party conference, Tony Blair declared that 'the twenty-first century will not be about the battle between capitalism and socialism but between the forces of progress and the forces of conservatism'. Blair's definition of these two tendencies was complicated and involved a recognition that many of the 'forces of conservatism' were (or at least had been) on the left. It was only in 'having modernised itself' that Labour had become 'the new progressive force in British politics which can modernise the nation, sweep away those forces of conservatism to set the people free'. This group of 'new radicals, the Labour Party modernised', had a new 'historic mission': to 'liberate Britain from the old class divisions, old structures, old prejudices, old ways of working and of doing things, that will not do in this world of change'.[1]

Eleven years later, the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, declared that the recently elected Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition were the 'new progressives' of British politics, while Labour had become the 'old progressives'. This argument was based on the idea that there was a new and 'important divide between old progressives, who emphasize the power and spending of the central state, and new progressives, who focus on the power and freedom of citizens'.[2] The rather convoluted use of 'old progressives' in place of 'conservatives' reflected both the impossibility of using the party name of Clegg's coalition partners as an insult, and also the extent to which the history of the Lib–Lab 'progressive tradition' had

become so established that it could not simply be ignored. Both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives had used that history in their election campaigns, arguing that Labour had betrayed its legacy and should now be superseded by a new progressive force. Neither suggested that 'progressive' had historically *also* been used to describe Liberal–Conservative anti-socialist alliances.

In this chapter I will examine not only the way in which 'progressive' has become a ubiquitous term in British politics (as we have seen, it has always been applied to a wide range of political positions), but also how its meaning has been used rhetorically both to delineate 'left' and 'right' positions and to transcend and subvert them. On the one hand, we have seen that political uses of the term coalesce around a cluster of signifiers of 'modern' politics: social *and* economic liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and a 'professional' approach to party management. Here, 'progressive' functions as a marker of both ideological centrism and pragmatism. On the other, it still carries connotations of left-wing politics and a connection to the historical 'progressive movement'. New Labour's rhetoric was particularly adept at employing both of these meanings in tandem, and even the Conservative Party's recent declarations of 'progressive conservatism' made a play for the second meaning as well as the first. Nevertheless, this has not been convincing and other parties—most notably the Greens and the Scottish National Party (SNP)—have invoked the progressive tradition to underpin the idea of a broad anti-Conservative progressive alliance.

Opinion polls suggest that this complex—and often convoluted—rhetorical positioning has not translated very well to voters. Yet despite their uncertainty over its meaning, a majority of the British public feel that to be progressive is a 'good thing' and a plurality describe themselves as progressive. This latter point is worth reiterating in a context in which the idea of a backlash against both modernisation in general and the idea of 'progressive' politics in particular is gaining ground. This is not to say that the general public is calling out for 'unceasing modernisation',[3] but it does suggest that a generally forward-facing temporal orientation is still regarded as desirable. Finally, it is worth considering the emergent critique that, in their concern to uphold the rights of religious minorities, parts of the left have begun espousing 'regressive' ideas, particularly with regard to free speech and sexual equality. This argument is often made in the name of 'Enlightenment values' and thus brings us full circle to the ideas discussed at the beginning of this book.

Beyond Left and Right

Since the late nineteenth century, there has been an intermittent contest between different forms of self-described 'progressive' politics. As we have seen, these have tended to cluster around the two poles of economic and social liberalism. While different emphases have been apparent at different times, each variant has its own teleology. Of all the political projects we have looked at, New Labour came closest to combining these contradictory aims. Indeed, it seems to have picked up on pretty much all of the meanings of 'progressive' in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain that I have outlined. It was redistributive, socially liberal, and explicitly claimed the legacy of the Lib–Lab 'progressive alliance'. Yet it was also economically liberal and predicated on the temporal logic of capitalist growth. It employed a linear narrative of modernisation, especially when applied to 'international development',[4] but also emphasised the necessity of open-ended and continual psycho-social self-development.[5] Finally, it was a strong advocate of active citizenship, in ways that drew upon the legacy of both the municipal progressivism that we examined in Chap. 3, and the civic republicanism of left and right radicals in the 1960s and 1970s that we looked at in Chap. 6.[6] The contradictions between these various 'progressive' ends grew directly out of the political context that we examined in Chap. 6. Just as Thatcher's Conservatives wrested a language of (neo)liberal economic progress away from the idea that 'progressive' politics necessarily involved both a strong social democratic state and a permissive attitude to social reform, so Blair's New Labour tried to make use of these latter two associations, while simultaneously accepting the argument that there was 'no alternative' to the former.

As Jonathan White has outlined, the word 'progressive' was used in New Labour rhetoric as a way of escaping the dichotomy of left and right. In place of a 'monolithic bloc' of 'the left', it invoked a pluralist, moderate majority.[7] I would suggest that the association with forward movement was even more important. One of the defining characteristics of left-wing politics between the late 1970s and the early 1990s was the fear that the right had captured not only the electoral momentum, but also the very spirit of the times. Conservatives seen to have 'become radical' while socialists had 'become conservative', in the words of Anthony Giddens, the sociologist who was to have a profound influence on New Labour.[8] The sheer complexity, instability and reflexivity of the modern world ran against the left's long-standing belief that 'History was there to be seized

hold of, to be moulded to human purposes'.[9] In contrast, under Thatcher conservatism had embraced 'more or less exactly what it set out to repudiate: competitive capitalism and the processes of dramatic and far reaching change that capitalism tends to provoke'.[10]

This reckoning with both the fluidity of postmodernity[11] and the logic of late capitalism also formed the basis of the *Manifesto for New Times*, produced by the eurocommunist wing of the CPGB in 1988, and given further impetus by the fall of the USSR in 1989. The basis of the New Times thesis was that the global economic system was undergoing a transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy; in place of the mass structures and fixed identities of the machine age, the digital era was flexible, diffuse, individualised, mobile. This entailed rethinking the relationship between citizen and state, between individual and collective, and between identity and class. Yet, while the Thatcherite right had managed to capture this language, this spirit, the left were still trying to represent a masculine working-class experience that no longer existed:

> Socialists are yet to develop a radical, popular appeal for the 1990s because we do not yet confidently speak the language of the future. For much of the labour and democratic movement still rests upon a world which is fast disintegrating beneath its feet. It lives in the last house of a terrace which is slowly being demolished and redeveloped.[12]

Even if the left were to develop such a language, the writers of the *Manifesto* warned of the 'danger' that in the face of both 'the collapse of its various previous visions and a failure to generate its own new historic project', the left would 'produce, in government, a brand of New Times which in practice does not amount to much more than a slightly cleaned-up, humanised version of that of the radical Right'.[13] This was rather prescient, and *Marxism Today* reformed for a 1998 special issue in which it denounced New Labour (in a one-word headline) as 'Wrong'.[14]

The idea of the New Times project as 'progressive' was central to its identity. The term was so prominent in the *Manifesto for New Times* that one party member complained that it had become 'Eurocommunist newspeak, as much part of our language as "worker" and "the state" are for Trotskyists'.[15] It is important to note here that the term was not used to suggest that communism itself needed to be progressive (i.e. to move with the times); instead, it was about ensuring that any modernisation took a progressive (i.e. left-wing) form:

> If Britain is to develop in a more democratic and sustainable way in the 1990s, we have to work with the grain of the new times, to enable society to develop in a more progressive way. Progressive forces in Britain need to realign, modernise, and contest the changes underway by offering an alternative vision of progress.[16]

Nevertheless, this kind of language was criticised for the way it gestured towards vaguely defined left-wing principles in the place of rigorous socialist analysis.[17] In particular, the emphasis on 'work[ing] with the grain of the new times' suggested to critics that it really meant progression into (or accommodation with) a future that socialists had given up all hope of shaping. Any such criticism seemed to be confirmed by the appearance of New Labour.

Unceasing Modernisation

It is worth remembering that the initial New Labour project was welcomed by academics and intellectuals, who saw it as a further development of the 'progressive tradition' (egalitarian in economics; liberal in politics; 'for' capitalism if it could be used to support the 'common good').[18] And this was certainly how Blair saw his own project. He directly referenced David Marquand's work (which we examined in Chap. 6) in his speech to the Fabian Society on the fiftieth anniversary of 1945. The aim here was to break the hold of Attlee's legacy of planning and nationalisation on the party's memory, and he used Marquand's narrative in order to present ethical socialism, co-operatism, and the Edwardian Lib–Lab alliance as an alternative (and perhaps even a more authentic) Labour tradition. He also used Marquand's critique of the 1918 constitution as a way of framing his own rewriting of its fourth clause: 'Labour in 1945 overcame but did not resolve fundamental issues of ideology and organisation facing the Labour Party'; 'in the rewriting of Clause IV […] far from escaping our traditions, we recaptured them'.[19]

Yet, these hopes were soon dashed and many—including Marquand— went on to become stern critics of New Labour. Moon shows that their unease revolved around the idea that New Labour was too deterministic; that it adhered too strongly to a single (neoliberal) vision of progress, which allowed no space for divergence or redirection. In contrast, its 'critical friends', including organisations like Compass, journals like *Renewal,* and individuals like Marquand, were more hesitant, 'all too aware of the

dangers of adhering to a single homogenised version of a "progressive" social democracy'.[20] As Marquand explained, their form of politics was pluralist above all, 'it rejected the notion of a single modern condition to which there was a single route'.[21] As a result, he came to question the term itself:

> I have a lot of trouble with the term 'progressive politics'. I once wrote a book called *The Progressive Dilemma* and taught a course called 'The Progressive Tradition'. These experiences convinced me that the term was vacuous, a hangover from the days when the self-defined 'left' saw itself as the vehicle of preordained historical change.[22]

While the New Times project (and indeed Giddens) had stressed the emancipatory potential of the fluidity of social and economic relations, New Labour took a more fatalistic view, seeing instability as an externally imposed reality to which there was only one response: 'modernisation'. As Moon's 2007 pamphlet makes clear, modernisation could be seen as the core principle of New Labour's politics. It was applied to economic policy, to the full range of public services, and to the Labour Party itself. Yet at root it meant nothing other than a commitment to change at all costs. It was based on the belief that (in the words of Philip Gould, one of Blair's close advisers) the twenty-first century 'will be "an age of permanent revolutions" […] in which "unceasing modernisation" will hold the key to political success'.[23] The logic of New Labour was premised on 'The hard choice: stay as we are and decline. Or modernise and win.'[24] In his 1998 analysis of Blair's use of the 'jargon of modernisation', Alan Finlayson underlined the extent to which this was a malleable concept, open to being 'uttered in the language of the labour movement, the language of Marxist history, the language of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy or a new language invented by Tony Blair and advisers', concluding that 'It seems likely that it comes from all of these'.[25] 'Modernisation' could play this role because it had previously been aligned with a series of political projects on the left, from Harold Wilson's scientific revolution to Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn's Marxist depiction of Britain as a country that had missed out on the bourgeois revolution without which it could not become a modern nation. As Finlayson showed, however, in New Labour's hands modernisation began to be conceived not as a political project to be enacted, but as an external process that had to be accommodated.

The same analysis could be applied to Blair's conception of what it meant to be 'progressive'. The relationship between the two terms was illustrated in 2000 when *Modern Labour: The Magazine for Labour Party Modernisers* was renamed *Progress: Labour's Progressive Network*. Like its predecessor, the latter name was used to underline the necessity of challenging Labour's traditions so as not to fall into conservatism. The Third Way, for example, was described as 'not a new way between progressive and conservative politics. It is progressive politics distinguishing itself from conservatism of left or right.'[26] Yet the historical associations of the term (which, as we saw in Chap. 6, had been cemented over the previous two decades) meant that it also worked as reassurance that New Labour was and remained a project *of the left*. So we also see the Third Way justified on the grounds of 'uniting the two great streams of left-of-centre thought—democratic socialism and liberalism—whose divorce did so much to weaken progressive politics […]. In this respect the Third Way also marks a third way *within* the Left.'[27]

The work that 'progressive' did for Blair can be seen in his retrospective and defensive claim that 'It is true that my head can sometimes think conservatively especially on economics and security; but my heart always beats progressive'.[28] Many critiques of the New Labour project have focused on the ways in which Blair betrayed the (supposedly clear-cut) ideals of progressive politics.[29] As we will see later in this chapter, though, other critics have suggested that the relentlessly progressive heartbeat of New Labour was exactly the problem. Paradoxically, it was perhaps in the Conservative Party that Blair's use of the term was most thoroughly accepted.

The Progressive Conservatism Project

In autumn 2011, the Scottish Conservative Party divided over leadership contender Murdo Fraser's intention to disband the party and launch instead a 'new, progressive, winning party for Scotland'.[30] This proposal received support from a number of high-profile Conservatives, including Michael Gove and Francis Maude, and was seen to be a 'refreshing' attempt to create a new centre-right party without the 'toxic' associations of the Conservative Party.[31] There were a number of specific factors at work here. First, the Conservative Party's standing in Scotland had been particularly poor since the Thatcher years, so any attempt to rebrand was not surprising. And second, within Scottish politics the term 'progressive' had a far stronger history of being associated with economic liberalism

than in England. The broad anti-socialist alliances of business interests that I described in Chap. 3 dominated Scottish city politics throughout the inter- and post-war years, declining only in the 1970s. Despite the particularities of the Scottish case, however, it is also clear that the attempt to rebrand the Conservatives as 'progressive' was also part of a wider trend.

In 2007, a pamphlet appeared with the title *Who's Progressive Now?* It was written by Jeremy Hunt and Greg Clark, both of whom had been elected as Conservative MPs two years before and were strongly associated with the 'modernising' wing of the party, which had gathered around its new leader David Cameron. They admitted that 'it might seem paradoxical to claim the label "progressive" for a party of the political right', but argued that it was now 'time for a reassessment'. It was no longer enough for 'progressive' 'simply to be used as an alternative word for left-wing'; instead, 'a dispassionate assessment […] would now associate it with the Conservative Party'. This was based on a return to what they saw as the defining features of progressivism: 'the party of idealism, of social justice, impatience with the *status quo* and optimism for the future is now the Conservatives'.[32] Over the next three years, this was to become the basis of the 'Progressive Conservatism Project', based at the think-tank Demos.

This should be understood as part of Cameron's strategy to 'decontaminate' the party's image through 'a series of counter-intuitive initiatives and […] unapologetic raids on Labour and Lib Dem territory'.[33] As Robert Page has explained, the turn to this form of socially 'warmer' conservatism was part of a long process that can be traced back to the late 1990s and the recognition that (in the words of Matthew d'Ancona) 'to win again, the Conservatives would have to change the way they communicated, the way they did business, the language they used, and the way they were'.[34] As with Blair's reforms to the Labour Party, this was undertaken in the name of 'modernisation'.[35] Katharine Dommett has underlined the specific implications of this language: 'party change alone is not enough to ensure modernisation; a clear link must be made between modern conditions and change'. This involves 'diagnos[ing] a disjuncture between [the party's] practices and/or ideas and contemporary society'.[36] In the case of the Conservatives, one of the essential strands of this diagnosis was social liberalism. As Richard Hayton and Libby McEnhill have noted, this meant *both* liberalising the party's position on moral issues (in a direct counter to the split between economic liberalism and moral conservatism that I noted in Chap. 6) *and* embracing questions of social justice,

which had long been associated with the traditions of new liberalism and social democracy.[37]

The striking feature of this project was that it was based on reorienting the image of the Conservative Party towards the centre-left meaning of 'progressive', not on redefining 'progressive' values towards those espoused, for instance, by the older Scottish Progressives. When George Osborne claimed that 'The torch of progressive politics has been passed to a new generation of politicians—and those politicians are Conservatives', this confirmed the idea of 'progressive politics' as a tradition that had come from the left.[38] Similarly, Cameron made it clear that he considered this a new departure both for the Conservative Party and for the country. It was a 'powerful idea' that involved using 'conservative means' to achieve the 'progressive ends' of creating a fairer, more equal, greener, and safer society.[39] Both speakers emphasised that they were in their opponents' political territory by justifying even their proposed 'conservative means' (decentralisation, strengthening civic society, economic growth, and fiscal responsibility) with reference to centre-left politicians. Cameron quoted Alan Milburn, and Osborne called on the authority of 'politicians on the left from Bill Clinton to […] Jean Chretien' to support his financial proposals.[40] Even the choice of Demos was deliberately counter-intuitive: the think-tank had been set up in 1993 by Martin Jacques, the former editor of *Marxism Today*, and Geoff Mulgan, who went on to become Head of Policy for Tony Blair. It was the quintessential 'new times' project.[41] Moreover, Cameron and Osborne used an emotional tone more usually associated with the centre-left: the idealism, concern for social justice, radicalism, and optimism noted by Clark and Hunt. This approach had been apparent since Cameron's first speech as party leader, with its claim to be 'optimistic about human nature' and his appeal to the party to 'let sunshine win the day'.[42]

Yet it was not enough to place themselves in this territory; the Conservatives also needed to contest Labour's authority over it. This entailed a complicated rhetorical manoeuvre. First, Cameron's Conservatives confirmed the pre-existing association of 'progressive' politics with centre-left, social liberal values, while also arguing that these same 'progressive ends' motivated politicians 'right across the mainstream political spectrum'.[43] They then insisted that *only* conservative means were capable of achieving these ends. Finally, they attempted to exclude from the category of 'progressive' anything that did not conform to these methods, arguing that Labour had 'abandoned the field of progressive politics'

on account of its 'illiberalism, centralisation, fiscal incontinence and opposition to meaningful public service reform'.[44] This argument had the effect of allying 'progressive' politics with economic liberalism *as a consequence* of a claimed commitment to social democratic ends. This strategy owed rather more to Blair than to Macmillan, whose *Middle Way* took the opposite approach, as we saw in Chap. 6, turning to state planning in order to safeguard economic and social liberty. Instead, the Conservatives applied the same arguments to New Labour that Blair had used against his own predecessors. These were also, perhaps surprisingly, in tune with some of the critiques of New Labour that came from several different factions within the Labour Party in the aftermath of its 2010 defeat. By all of these accounts, New Labour's problem was that it had remained too wedded to the 'Croslandite-New Labour model' of statist social democracy, not that it had broken with the party's heritage too firmly.[45]

This is not to say that the Conservatives' programme was indistinguishable from the politics of New Labour. There were many important differences. Most notably, the Big Society represented a retreat from state provision, rather than an attempt (however problematic) to introduce citizen participation to public services. Similarly, while Cameron and particularly Iain Duncan Smith declared a commitment to social justice, this bore little resemblance to New Labour's efforts in this area. As Hayton and McEnhill have pointed out, their language disguised a moralising approach to the behaviour of 'poor people', rather than an analysis of structural inequality or the causes of relative poverty.[46] Echoes of anti-progressive rhetoric were also audible, most clearly in Michael Gove's attack on the 'progressive betrayal' enacted by child-centred learning.[47]

Despite these differences, it is striking that most criticisms of Cameron's declarations in the run-up to the 2010 election revolved around his commitment to achieving progressive ends, rather than his definition of what those ends were. The idea of 'progressive conservatism' seemed dubious; the nature of progressivism itself was not in doubt. For instance, Labour think-tank Progress complained that 'the word "progressive" had been hijacked by David Cameron and his Conservatives without anyone interrogating what it meant to be a progressive'. However, their attempts to do this involved measuring Conservative candidates' views against those of a 'perfect progressive' in ten policy areas: climate change, gay rights, inheritance tax, the hunting ban, public services, abortion, immigration, marriage, human rights, and reform of the House of Lords. The 'perfect progressive' positions in these areas were not spelled out but assumed to

be self-evident.[48] Far from the promised interrogation of the concept of progressivism, this exercise relied upon an established understanding of exactly 'what it meant to be a progressive'. Similarly, Gordon Brown tried to reassert what he saw as the timeless moral distinction between 'Left and Right, Labour and Tory, progressive and conservative', while Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg argued that the Conservatives' 'claim to the progressive mantle rings hollow' and noted that the words '"progressive conservatism" […] contradict one another'.[49]

New Progressives

Despite Clegg's condemnation of 'progressive conservatism', the Conservatives' position was in fact rather close to his own attempt to reclaim 'the progressive mantle' for the Liberal Democrats—also through the medium of a publication for Demos. Clegg introduced his pamphlet with a chapter setting out the academic debates surrounding the viability of the Edwardian Lib–Lab progressive alliance and the inevitability (or otherwise) of Labour's rise to power. Yet while Clegg acknowledged the interdependent heritage of the Labour and Liberal traditions, he depicted Labour as betraying that inheritance. Just as Labour had superseded the Liberals in the early twentieth century, Labour's failure to deliver progressive outcomes meant that it was now time for the Liberal Democrats to replace Labour as Britain's primary progressive party.[50]

It is worth emphasising that Clegg's argument here was based on the idea that the Liberal Democrats would inherit the progressive mantle precisely because they wanted to depart from central aspects of its legacy. While Labour's strength a century before had lain in its recognition of the need for collectivism, this was no longer appropriate. Power should now be devolved and dissipated, not hoarded at the centre. The argument that progressive politics is by its very nature adaptive should by now be familiar, as should the idea that a big state hampers progressive initiatives. Clegg talked about this as a 'reverse switch' from Labour to the Liberal Democrats, but we could also understand it as a reverse switch within liberalism itself. Whereas the New Liberals associated with the *Progressive Review* had argued in 1896 that in order 'to be regarded as the progressive party of the future', liberalism would have to accept an 'enlarged and enlightened conception of the functions of the State', Clegg now suggested the opposite.[51] This echoed many of the arguments of Jo Grimond that I examined in Chap. 6, and also reflected wider discussions within the

Liberal Democrats in the mid-2000s.[52] Perhaps most significantly, though, it also chimed with the Conservative argument that 'The size, scope and role of government in the UK has reached a point where it is now inhibiting, not advancing, the progressive aims of reducing poverty, fighting inequality, and increasing general well-being.'[53]

Throughout the period of the coalition talks, Labour politicians and commentators reminded the Liberal Democrats of their shared heritage, their status as the two progressive parties of British politics, tragically divided through much of the twentieth century but now given a chance to reunite.[54] As Brown's binary emphasis on 'Left and Right, Labour and Tory, progressive and conservative' demonstrates, though, this was an argument that the Labour Party had studiously ignored throughout the election, attempting instead to present itself as the *only* progressive party. It was also an argument of which Nick Clegg needed no reminding. His line, as we have seen, was not that the Liberal Democrats did not share a political past with Labour, but rather that Labour had squandered and betrayed that legacy. The evocation of a historical 'progressive alliance' between Labour and Liberals failed to gain ground. It was dismissed (even by many within the Labour Party) as a convenient fiction devised to allow Labour to cling to power. As Paddy Ashdown put it, 'The Labour Party had an opportunity to create a progressive coalition and they walked away from it.'[55]

The eventual resolution of the hung parliament into a Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition can be attributed to many factors, by far the most important of which was the electoral arithmetic. The fact that the two parties were speaking the same language did, however, make it somewhat easier for the Liberal Democrats to swallow. The 'progressive conservatism project' was part of a broader strategy of 'love-bombing' Liberal Democrat sympathisers,[56] underpinned by articles written by leading Conservatives for the centre-left press stressing their 'progressive' credentials.[57] At the press conference announcing the coalition, Cameron declared the new government to be 'a progressive partnership'.[58] Moreover, the novelty of the coalition itself seemed to offer confirmation that this really was the 'new politics' for which both Cameron and Clegg had called, separately, before the election. It was striking that in the early days of the coalition, its leading players delighted in emphasising its *lack* of history, its *lack* of tradition. The self-image of the coalition was that of an alien hybrid, an extraordinary departure from 'politics as usual'. Neither of the partners suggested that this marked the reconciliation of two compatible political

traditions, conservatism and liberalism, in the way that their predecessors had suggested throughout the twentieth century. Instead, the rhetoric focused on the idea of a heroic and self-sacrificing attempt to set aside significant political differences for the good of the country.

Although Clegg was initially sceptical about the notion of 'progressive conservatism' and remained committed to the idea of the Lib–Lab tradition, by November 2010 he had attempted to draw a new dividing line in British politics between 'new progressives' (the coalition partners) and 'old progressives' (Labour). The basis of 'new progressivism' was to be exactly the kind of decentralising, localist politics upon which both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats had based their appeals before the election.[59]

Rethinking Labour

This latter argument resonated with many of the critiques of New Labour coming from within the party at this time. Following the 2010 general election, Labour entered a period of introspection. As we have already suggested, one of the angles here was that New Labour had remained too committed to the big-statism of post-war social democracy; in effect, that it had not followed its own project to its conclusion.[60] For some sections of the party, this was about reaffirming the value of the 'progressive settlement' that had been enacted by 'progressive people' in the New Labour period, as well as considering the changes that would have to be undertaken in order to imagine 'A Progressive Future for Labour'.[61] Others suggested that Labour had been too focused on change and modernisation, at the expense of more rooted forms of politics. Rather than proposing that 'change was always good and, in any case, inevitable', the party now needed to 'dig deep into its own political traditions' to understand the past, including past mistakes.[62] This would involve recognising that

> Large numbers of Labour's traditional supporters no longer believe it is on their side. The middle classes view it as a threat. Amongst many in the younger generation it is the party of the authoritarian state, war and illiberalism. Labour cannot presume to be the progressive party.[63]

For others still, it was exactly the desire to be 'progressive', with all its connotations of liberal intellectualism and rational modernity, that had been the party's undoing.[64] This latter view was most strongly associated with

the group that became known as Blue Labour, and particularly Maurice Glasman, an academic later ennobled by Ed Miliband. Glasman characterised the Labour Party as a marriage between a 'traditional' working-class dad, with an Aristotelean conception of the common good, and a 'progressive', educated middle-class mum, with a Platonic faith in expertise. For Glasman, it was the mum who dominated the 'increasingly abusive' marriage 'as the party became increasingly dominated by middle-class policy technocrats'.[65] This gendered association of cold progressivism with the educated female, in contrast to the vital authenticity of her husband, is reminiscent of some of the arguments around women's role in politics and the fear of national degeneration that we saw in Chap. 4.[66]

The Blue Labour project was also noteworthy for the way in which it combined a left-leaning critique of New Labour's economic policies with both an argument against the big-statism and bureaucracy of Labour in power (including the 1945 government) and an emphasis on the traditional values of 'faith, flag and family'. While Cameron's 'progressive conservatism' married the politics of the small state with a more cosmopolitan ethos in order to show that it was keeping up with cultural change, this 'conservative radicalism' was designed to reassure social conservatives that Labour understood the value of tradition. Above all, it emphasised the importance of stability, of settled ways of life, and of the politics of place. While most of the Blue Labour thinkers maintained a commitment to progressivism as a political tradition, Glasman linked his critique of the unrelenting pursuit of change to Labour's entanglement with social liberalism. He was fond of observing that when the doctor says you have a progressive illness, that is not a good thing.

Although Blue Labour collapsed following Glasman's suggestions that immigration should be stopped and that there was a need to listen to supporters of the English Defence League, certain elements of the project were later rehabilitated as part of Ed Miliband's One Nation Labour.[67] This combined a commitment to 'progressive' principles (i.e. social justice and diversity) with 'a politics that is both radical and conservative'.[68] Yet although Miliband's leadership was framed around the symbolic reassertion of a more positive relationship to the party's traditions (most notably his appearance at the Durham Miners' Gala[69]), this was made possible by the extent to which New Labour seemed to have effected such a definite break with the past. It was precisely because there were no expectations that Miliband's Labour Party would be reinstating the old Clause IV, establishing a significantly different industrial relations policy, or returning

to a large-scale programme of nationalisation that he could afford to take a more conciliatory stance to the politics of memory. As he joked at the 2012 conference, his late father, the Marxist thinker Ralph Miliband, 'would've loved the idea of "Red Ed." But he would have been a little bit disappointed that it isn't true.'[70] When Miliband talked about 'Moving on from New Labour. But not going back to Old Labour', the former gained most attention because this past was still open; the break with Old Labour had already been achieved.[71]

Rage Against the Establishment

For all the media speculation that Miliband aimed to take both Labour and the country 'back to the 1970s',[72] it was, of course, under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership that a more pronounced reversal of the party's temporal positioning took place. During his 2015 leadership campaign, Corbyn deliberately reopened many of the questions that had seemed settled (Clause IV, nationalisation, coal mining). Peter Kerr et al. have suggested that the support for Corbyn among Labour's grassroots should be understood as part of a wider backlash against the 'modernisation' discourse of both New Labour and Cameron's Conservatives. They place this both within a wider European framework, in which a new cleavage seems to be emerging between the 'winners' and 'losers' of globalisation, and within a UK context, in which these trends have crystallised around the rise of UKIP, but also speak to a longer battle between modernisers and traditionalists within the Conservative Party (and, I would add, the Labour Party). Kerr et al. emphasise that this should be understood primarily as a discursive battle: it was the rhetoric of modernisation that created the anti-modernisation backlash.[73]

From the point of view of 'progressive' politics, the dynamics here are interesting. As we have seen, this language inter-cuts with *both* specific political traditions on left and right *and* more generic notions of forward movement and modernity. I have also suggested that, over the course of the final decades of the twentieth century, the term became 'almost exclusively' associated with a particular form of left-liberal politics, despite its previous use in service of an economically liberal agenda. Economic liberalism then resurfaced not as 'progressive' in itself, but as a seemingly inevitable and uncontestable part of modernity, to which any progressive political project would have to adapt. There are a number of different angles to unpick here. Claims to represent a 'progressive' position are

based on the idea that the proposed policy is in some way inevitable, that it is aligned with the zeitgeist in a way that its opponents are not. Yet they also suggest a capitulation to external forces. Although it is still possible to 'make progress' on social liberal issues, this must be done within the framework of economic liberalism, which is seen as simply the external context, rather than as a political choice. To return to Dommett's explanation of modernisation as 'diagnos[ing] a disjuncture between [the party's] practices and/or ideas and contemporary society', in the case of Cameron's Conservatives this disjuncture was diagnosed as the unwillingness to embrace socially liberal policies; in the case of New Labour, it was the failure to adapt to the context of economic liberalism.

With regard to Corbyn, Labour's 'modernisers' attempted to delegitimise him as 'a backward looking, intellectually deficient politician painfully out of touch with modern realities'.[74] Similar arguments had been made against the left of the party at the outset of the New Labour project, particularly around the change to Clause IV, part iv of the Party's constitution. While opponents of the change tended to voice their objections in terms of policy and ideology, the modernisers dismissed them as nothing more than sentimental nostalgia.[75] The irony this time was that the arguments for modernisation were based on a somewhat dated conception of what this should look like. As several commentators noted, the 2015 modernisers seemed 'rather retro, stuck in a late 1990s groove'.[76] In contrast, Corbyn's supporters insisted that they were 'looking to the future'. As one 'young Labour voter' wrote in the *Guardian*, 'I don't view Corbyn as some kind of vintage nostalgia, tied up in bunting with a Keep Calm and Renationalise the Railways poster. He offers progress, not the safe stasis of the other candidates.'[77]

Corbyn has not made much use of the term 'progressive'. For many of his supporters, however, it remains a self-evident signifier of left-wing politics. For instance, Momentum, the grassroots organising body built on the back of Corbyn's leadership campaign, describes its aim as being 'to secure the election of a progressive left Labour Party'.[78] This is also the context in which the term has been used by the SNP, the Green Party and Plaid Cymru: to indicate a broadly left-wing, anti-austerity politics (although these parties have also been through their own processes of party modernisation, which, in the case of the SNP, involved embracing the idea of low taxation to underpin a form of nationalism based on the Irish model[79]). The idea that these parties (along with Labour and the Liberal Democrats) make up a latent 'progressive' coalition has

proved sustaining for elements of the left in recent years. The think-tank/pressure group Compass has been particularly influential here; in 2011 it opened its membership to members of other parties as well as Labour, and began to strongly advocate cross-party working with Liberal Democrats, Greens and other left-wing parties. This rhetoric also made a strong appearance in the wake of the vote to leave the European Union (EU).[80] Perhaps more surprisingly, UKIP attempted to piggyback on the idea of a 'progressive coalition' for electoral reform in the run-up to the 2015 General Election, at which it achieved 12.6% of the vote but only one parliamentary seat.[81]

UKIP representatives have also made use of anti-establishment rhetoric to underpin their 'progressive' credentials more broadly. In April 2015, a Conservative councillor in East Yorkshire announced his defection to UKIP on the grounds that 'they are a progressive party with a "Grass Roots" foundation'. He particularly praised the party's lack of a whip and observed that 'Its relative newness will allow development of thought process, experience and knowledge to be used effectively'.[82] Another UKIP candidate in Wigan contrasted 'the general decline in living standards and quality of life in the UK caused by successive government policies' with the 'progressive policies' of UKIP. Again, the characterisation of UKIP as progressive was tied to its being a *new* party, in opposition to the established modes of party politics: 'The emergence of UKIP as a new political party with a refreshing straight-talking approach and creative innovative policies, provide a perfect platform and a firm foundation for progressive proactive changes that will benefit all of us in Britain.'[83] This is not dissimilar to the idea of progressive, businesslike government that we saw from anti-socialist municipal progressives in Chap. 3.

The most sustained use of 'progressive' language within UKIP has come from its sole MP, Douglas Carswell.[84] Carswell has long been an advocate of radical decentralisation, and has consistently framed this in terms of reclaiming a 'progressive' anti-establishment tradition from the left, who he claims have become distant from the working people they are supposed to represent. Carswell has specifically referenced the Levellers, Chartists and suffragettes, and suggested that in the place of the church and aristocracy, progressives should now turn their ire on 'Eurocrats and human rights judges, BBC executives and quango heads'.[85] Initially these arguments were made from within the Conservative Party, but after Carswell's 2014 defection to UKIP the target shifted slightly: now it was UKIP who could offer the 'progressive, radical alternative to corporat-

ist Toryism' in place of Labour, who were dominated by the politics of Islington—whether its 'elites' and 'Champagne socialists' (like Blair) or its 'Maoists' and 'bohemians' (like Corbyn). Again, this was placed in the context of a historical 'progressive' tradition: like 'the levellers and the Chartists, UKIP stands for the ideals of liberty, democracy, low taxes, and free markets that made Britain great'.[86]

We saw in Chap. 5 that in the 1970s these kinds of complaints tended to be framed in terms of the 'ordinary' people against the 'progressive Establishment'. Carswell has continued to make use of this language, but has also supplemented it by referencing (or reclaiming) an older language of anti-establishment 'progressive' radicalism, of the kind that under-pinned the Popular Front of the inter-war years. Yet while some commu-nists worried that this was a liberal tradition, too entwined with the history of capitalism, for Carswell that is precisely its appeal. The implication of his argument is that, in ceasing to be an anti-establishment force, Labour has ceded the ground of progressive politics and has, in effect, joined the regressive forces of 'corporatist Toryism'. The depiction of interven-tionist corporatism as conservative and free markets as radically progres-sive is striking in the way in which it evokes nineteenth-century political divisions.

The Regressive Left

In this context, it is also worth noting the recent (if so far rather niche) debate around what has become known as the 'regressive left'. This term was first used by Maajid Nawaz, a former member of the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir (and later Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate), in reference to left-wing activists, who he believed were defending reaction-ary views and practices within Islamism through a misguided desire to be culturally sensitive.[87] The term 'regressive left' has since been taken up by well-known public figures, including Richard Dawkins and Nick Cohen, who used it to mount a defence of Enlightenment values (particularly sec-ularism and free speech), which they felt were under attack from cultural relativism. These arguments explicitly invoke a linear narrative of progress from religious past to secular present, which is now threatened by the 'regressive' privileging of faith claims. There are similarities here with the form of argument (if not the content) that we saw from philosophical radi-cals in Chap. 2, who feared that state intervention would take humanity back to the 'dark days' of authoritarian governance. Both were attempting

to retain their claim to be progressive in the face of what they saw as erroneous uses of the term by people who seemed to be anything but.

The attack on the 'regressive left' also needs to be placed in the context of the War on Terror and the wider discourses of 'democracy promotion' that it has produced. One of the central arguments here has been that radical Islam is 'medieval' and that the countries with which it is most associated need to be modernised into Western forms of liberal democracy. At root this is an argument about time and progress, based on something like the ladder of civilisation we looked at in Chap. 2. As Cathy Elliott has pointed out, it has led to the rather paradoxical attempt to fight the radicalisation of ('modern') British citizens by promoting democracy in Pakistan. This has the effect of reducing the problem to one of chronology rather than politics: it is a simple matter of bringing Islamic nations 'up to date'. The same logic is also applied to the struggle to define 'British values' and their role in delineating legitimate forms of citizenship.[88] The 'regressive left' are those who, through a misguided or obstinate commitment to anti-imperialism, oppose this process.

To complicate the matter still further, the term has also been taken up by far right activists, particularly in the United States (known as the 'alt-right'), who use the Twitter hashtag #regressiveleft to attack a far broader range of perceived infringements on free speech—particularly from feminists and anti-racism campaigners.[89] Though pitched as a matter of free speech, the peculiarities of US ideological positioning mean that this is primarily an anti-liberal discourse, which bears far more similarity to the anti-Establishment populism that we saw in Chap. 5 than to the thought of the left-Liberals from whom it has borrowed the term. Rather than being based on a strong conception of progressive humanism, its targets are in large part those aspects of modernity that usually figure as 'achievements' in linear narratives of liberal progress.

Wasted Effort?[90]

So far in this chapter I have examined a series of complex and often rather convoluted engagements with various incarnations of 'the progressive tradition'. As the latter example suggests, political discourse is fluid and open to any number of interpretations. In the case of the different parties' attempts to claim the 'progressive mantle' in 2009/10, it is not clear that the distinctions, nuances and associations they invoked meant much to anyone outside Westminster. Indeed, it is possible that they were never

intended to. Speeches to think-tanks and party political pamphlets operate in a closed environment. They could be seen as coded or shorthand messages directed at journalists, by whom their intentions will hopefully be translated to the outside world. Yet, because terms like 'progressive' are so well understood within the political class, they may be repeated with little attempt at translation or contextualisation. It is therefore not clear how far their intended implications travel with them. During both the 2010 and 2015 General Election campaigns, BBC News produced an online 'explainer' of the term 'progressive' to try to help citizens navigate this complex terrain.[91] This indicates not only that the term was felt to be the subject of some contention, but also that it was prominent enough in the parties' discourse to need explaining.

Effective political rhetoric 'orients its audience [...] by refiguring the situation',[92] but this must depend upon a shared understanding of the terms in which it is conducted. This is especially crucial where the rhetorical strategy involves challenging the established associations of a particular word. So how did voters hear the word 'progressive'? A YouGov survey, commissioned for this book, shows that in April 2012 most respondents felt unable to define 'progressive', and those who did tended to use politically neutral terms such as forward movement, improvement and change, and were more likely to associate it with the royal family and celebrities like Jamie Oliver and Stephen Fry than with political figures or parties. Moreover, Conservative politicians were judged to be more progressive than either their Labour or Liberal Democrat counterparts.[93] The timing of the survey complicates matters—we cannot read public understandings of the political rhetoric of 2010 from the vantage point of 2012, particularly given the self-declared 'progressive partnership' of the coalition. Yet there was little in the survey results to suggest either that respondents associated 'progressive' politics with social democracy, or that they believed the Conservatives to have moved towards those values. Indeed, the breadth of their answers casts serious doubt upon the idea that 'progressive' politics has any settled or widely held meaning.

When asked to define the term 'progressive' in their own words, a plurality (37%) of respondents simply did not know, or were not prepared to say. Of the remaining 1084 answers, 317 (18% of the total) spoke of a rather general sense of forward thinking, modernity and movement towards the future. A further 201 (12%) indicated that this should be improvement or change for the better but went no further towards specifics, and another 73 (4%) defined it in terms of innovation. Although the

question mentioned a political context, it is striking how few answers were explicitly political or ideological.[94] For instance, only 17 respondents (1% of the total) used the word 'liberal'—and of those two were negative:

> wishy-washy liberal politics

> too liberal. anything goes policies, espcially for minority groups and wastin g precious government time on rediculous things such as gay marriage when there is so much more of vital importance to be dealth with [sic]

Four respondents specified that it meant 'not Conservative', but another said that 'In Conservative political terms it means change and streamlining to make cuts or make money for private enterprise'. Two said that it meant 'socialistic' or 'a new word for socialism'. When the answers were coded, 72 (4%) could be categorised as relating to redistribution, social justice or left-wing politics. To put this in context, it was barely more than the 3% who gave cynical or anti-political answers such as 'Progressing their career' or 'progressivly [sic] looking after rich theives [sic] criminals immigrants mps police judges'. As an aside, it is worth noting that while this latter answer certainly chimes with the critique of 'trendy liberalism' that I examined in Chap. 5, its inclusion of the traditional forces of law and order takes it into rather more eclectic territory. The association with left politics was stronger among Labour and Liberal Democrat voters—6% and 7%, respectively—but still overshadowed by those saying they did not know or describing it in terms of being forward looking or modern.

A small number (15 individuals, 0.9%) defined 'progressive' in terms of private enterprise or capitalism. While this sample is too small to allow for meaningful analysis, it is comparable to that relating to Liberal politics. And the variety of answers is particularly interesting here. The fact that they are not all positive suggests that there is a connection that transcends the tendency to describe one's own policy preferences as 'progressive'. Here are some examples:

> Acting in a way that improves the economy by investing in it

> Being able to provide the same level of service for less cost.

> privatising what they can for maximum profit whilst ignoring what services are left

> Modernising work practices and realising we are in a competitive world. Training of young people who want to work must be improved and the 'benefit' system must be re-appraised.

> double speak for capitalism

When respondents were asked to choose the three words or phrases that they felt were most 'progressive' from a list of twelve, 'enterprising' was the fourth most frequently chosen answer—after social improvement, political reform, and 'don't know'. It was selected by twice as many respondents as the next most common answer, 'human rights' (13%), and six and a half times as many as the 4% who chose 'solidarity'. Significantly, this appealed to both Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters. There was nothing that united Labour and Liberal Democrat voters in the same way. A YouGov/Cambridge survey undertaken in September 2012 also suggested that public understandings of 'progressive' values were linked to enterprise and business. In marked contrast to political figures (with the exception of Boris Johnson), business leaders, including Richard Branson and Alan Sugar, were thought to be progressive by overwhelming numbers of respondents. These results were strongly linked to popularity. Respondents were asked to rate each figure on a scale from 'very favourable' to 'very unfavourable' and also to rate each as 'generally progressive' or 'generally not progressive'—the two were closely aligned.[95]

Given the extent to which 'progressive conservatism' was framed as a move away from the legacy of Thatcherism, it is particularly interesting to note that slightly more of our survey respondents classified Thatcher as 'progressive' than Cameron (12% and 11%, respectively). Among those who defined 'progressive' as forward/future/modern, the gap widened slightly to 16% and 14%, and among those who defined it in relation to innovation it spread to 14% and 4%. Moreover, of the 181 respondents who said that they considered David Cameron to be progressive, 42% said the same of Margaret Thatcher. It does not seem, then, that survey respondents were distinguishing between modernising 'progressive conservatives' and Thatcherites. Given Simon Griffiths' suggestion that Cameron's progressivism is actually closer to Thatcherism than to the One Nation Conservative tradition, this is perhaps more insightful than it might appear.[96]

It was particularly striking that the political figures judged most progressive were all Conservative: Boris Johnson (14%), followed by Margaret Thatcher (12%), and David Cameron (11%). Ed Miliband and Tony Blair trailed them with 9% each. The only Conservative politician to do badly

was George Osborne with 4%. This could perhaps be taken to indicate that David Cameron's rhetorical strategy had worked: that two years after the election, Conservatives had cemented their 'progressive conservative' position. This theory is undermined, however, by the poor showing of the Liberal Democrats (Vince Cable 7%; Nick Clegg 6%; Liberal Democrat Party 6%). As we have already seen, the progressive credentials of the Conservatives in office were underpinned by the 'progressive partnership' of the coalition. Moreover, the Labour Party was considered the most progressive of the political parties (12%, with the Conservatives on 10%) and was the only party judged more progressive than any of its politicians. This pattern is reminiscent of other polling data at the time, which put Labour (41%) ahead of the Conservatives (32%) but David Cameron (31%) ahead of Ed Miliband (22%). In both cases the Liberal Democrats (10%) and Nick Clegg (5%) trailed far behind.[97] It would seem that 'progressive' may simply mean 'popular'.

No Future?

Perhaps the most important finding from our survey was that a clear majority of respondents (57%) thought that being progressive was a 'good thing'—even though 23% of these had previously said that they did not know what it meant. Even more impressively, a plurality (41%) were prepared to describe *themselves* as progressive, with 19% of these respondents having answered 'don't know' to Question 1 (see note 94). Only 9% said that it was a bad thing and 22% that they were not progressive. This is worth reiterating in a context in which the idea of a backlash against both modernisation in general and the idea of 'progressive' politics in particular is gaining ground. While interpretations of what that means may encompass almost every political identity, a forward-facing temporal position (however ill-defined) remains broadly desirable. This was at least partly true of the campaign for the United Kingdom to leave the EU in 2016. This has largely been interpreted as a backward-looking campaign, exemplified by rhetoric of wanting to take the country 'back', in a way that appealed to older 'little Englanders' (and their Welsh equivalents) at the expense of younger, optimistic Europeans. Much of the early interpretation of the result suggested that it was a 'referendum on the modern world'[98] or that it expressed 'a destructive urge' by 'those that have given up on the future already'.[99] In response, we have seen an outpouring of calls for 'progressives' to 'buck up', come together, and build an effective strategy for forging the post-Brexit agenda.[100] This discourse should, however, be set alongside the argument that the EU is and has been a sluggish organisation that impedes progress, particularly in economic terms.

Leading figures in the various Leave campaigns explicitly presented their case as 'progressive'. In 2014, Nigel Farage, then leader of UKIP, claimed that 'now the Eurosceptics are the progressives'.[101] Unlike arguments that put forward a 'progressive' (i.e. left-wing) case for euroscepticism,[102] this was a deliberately provocative claim, based on the temporal logic that European unity was a 'model invented 50 years ago', whereas his vision for a 'modern Europe' was based on wanting 'a global future for our countries, not to be trapped inside this museum'.[103] Similar reasoning seems to have underpinned Michael Gove's argument that a Leave vote in the 2016 referendum would allow the United Kingdom to be a 'progressive beacon to the world'.[104] Likewise, Boris Johnson described Brexit as 'our chance to think globally again, to lift our eyes to the horizon, to bring our unique British voice and values: powerful, humane, progressive to the great global forums without being elbowed aside by a super-national body'.[105] Regardless of how this will play out in reality, there are rhetorical echoes here of the ideas of expansive, progressive nationhood that I examined in Chap. 2.

The inter-generational narrative that underpinned many interpretations of the result relied heavily on the idea that having enjoyed the benefits of the post-war welfare state, expansion of education, and the housing boom, baby boomers were now denying their children and grandchildren the ability to enjoy a similarly secure future. This argument had been developing for some time and crystallised in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, with the decision to raise tuition fees while protecting pensions.[106] Part of the 'Progressive Conservative' position involved the claim that 'There's nothing progressive about asking the next generation to pay off the debts we couldn't be bothered to deal with; nothing progressive about robbing from our children.'[107] For Conservatives, the idea that future generations need to be protected from the consequences of present decisions is understood as the Burkean contract 'between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'.[108]

The message from the centre-left has been rather different. Ed Miliband expressed concern about 'the erosion of what I call the promise of Britain—the expectation that [the] next generation will do better than the last, whatever their birth or background'.[109] This directly echoed Tony Blair: 'These aspirations—the basis of the British dream that our children can do better than us—are under threat.'[110] This could be seen as a social democratic perspective that, in Walter Benjamin's terms, focuses on the hope of 'liberated grandchildren' rather than the socialist dream

of avenging 'enslaved ancestors'.[111] Yet the idea that the whole trajectory of post-war social development involved the expectation of social mobility—that this was somehow *promised*—has also been heavily underscored by popular culture and 'common-sense' politics. Although, as we saw in Chap. 5, declinism was a dominant narrative in late twentieth-century Britain, fears of relative decline have always run alongside faith in absolute improvement in both living standards and life chances. Therefore, the revelation that millennials are the first generation in living memory to experience declining living standards seems to run not only against recent experience, but against the very nature of historical time.[112] Both the Conservative and Labour versions of this argument also demonstrate the extent to which contemporary politics revolve around the futurity of the symbolic Child, as I discussed in Chap. 2.[113]

Conclusion

It would be easy to dismiss the idea of 'progressive conservatism' as a cynical and empty form of 'political cross-dressing', an attention-grabbing stunt with little of significance to say. There have been many similar examples over the past six years: Red Toryism, Blue Labour,[114] One Nation Labour (and its 'conservative socialism'), not to mention the various incarnations of 'progressive' and 'regressive' politics that we have seen in this chapter. This is not a new political tactic. Politicians have long delighted in stealing one another's best phrases and turning their opponents' rhetoric back on them; we have seen various examples throughout this book. There does, however, seem to be something distinctive about the way in which the ideas of right and left have been destabilised in this period. The claim to be in opposing political territory now operates as more than a clever political tactic—it has become a marker of *modernisation* itself. It speaks of a general fear that the future is always in the opposition's hands. One of the manoeuvres employed to counter this is to appropriate the past that underpins it. We might think of David Cameron's explicit claim to be 'the heir to Blair', coupled with his taunt that Blair 'was the future once'.[115] Cameron's final speech as Prime Minister reused this phrase:

> The last thing I would say is that you can achieve a lot of things in politics. You can get a lot of things done. And that in the end, the public service, the national interest, that is what it is all about. Nothing is really impossible if you put your mind to it. After all, as I once said, I was the future once.[116]

The reference to being 'the future' at the end of this passage seems to be a non sequitur; however, the depiction of politics as a means of 'get[ting] a lot of things done' echoes the rhetoric that I examined in Chap. 4, as does the reference to the 'national interest'. Cameron seems to associate *getting things done* with *being the future*. Activity is thus seen to be inherently progressive—regardless of its political ends.

If progressivism became particularly attached to the left in the 1960s and 1970s, then the way in which it has been claimed across the political spectrum since 2010 only serves to highlight the fluidity and malleability of political rhetoric in the recent past. As we have seen, the claim to be 'progressive' in this period has not only been a matter of temporal positioning, it has also involved repeated and contradictory claims on the very specific history of the Lib–Lab 'progressive tradition'. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, because it continues the trend that I noted in Chap. 6, whereby 'progressive' is as much of a historical identity as an attempt to 'seiz[e] hold of the future'.[117] And second, because it betrays a gulf of understanding between political parties and those they seek to persuade. It depends upon familiarity with a historical and political tradition that simply does not exist outside the politically committed. Indeed, all of the examples of political 'cross-dressing' noted above seem to have functioned more effectively as in-jokes than as persuasive appeals to voters. Ed Miliband unveiled the One Nation Labour slogan at the 2012 Labour Party conference in a speech replete with knowingly counter-intuitive references to the Conservative Prime Minister from whom it was (almost[118]) borrowed. Yet this seems unlikely to have resonated with viewers outside the hall. In fact, many might have been left wondering (along with John Prescott), 'Who the hell is Disraeli?'[119]

Notes

1. Tony Blair, speech to Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth, 1999. http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=205. Accessed 10.06.2016.
2. Nick Clegg, Hugo Young lecture, 22 November 2010. http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/nov/23/nick-clegg-hugo-young-text. Accessed 06.06.2016.
3. Philip Gould. Quoted in David Moon, *'Modernisation' vs. 'Progressivism': New Labour and the Progressive Tradition* (London: Compass, n.d., 2006?), p. 6.

4. Cathy Elliott, *Democracy as Foreign Policy: Temporal Othering in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016).

5. Based heavily on the work of Anthony Giddens, for instance his *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

6. For a recent critique of its failure on this agenda, see Stuart White and Martin O'Neill, 'That was the New Labour That Wasn't', *Fabian Review* 125:1 (2013), pp. 14–17.

7. Jonathan White, 'Left and Right as political resources', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16:2 (2011), pp. 123–144 (139).

8. Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Right and Left: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p. 2.

9. ibid., p. 1.

10. ibid., p. 2.

11. Giddens preferred to talk about 'high' or 'post-traditional' modernity.

12. *Manifesto for New Times*, printed in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), pp. 23–37 (24).

13. Hall and Jacques, 'Introduction', in ibid., pp. 11–20 (16).

14. *Marxism Today* [hereafter *MT*], November 1998, front cover.

15. David Allen, *News and Views*, no. 44, July 1989, p. 12.

16. *Manifesto for New Times*, p. 24.

17. See for instance, Francis King, *News and Views*, no. 39, February 1989, p. 13; Jim Tait, *News and Views*, no. 37, January 1989, p. 13. While neither of these letters refers to 'progressive' explicitly, they do critique the use of 'vague verbiage—meaningless chatter about "new agendas", "modernisation" and so on' (King) in the place of 'a revolutionary strategy for socialism' that was no longer expressed 'in solitary words nor organised concepts' (Tait). As the latter noted, 'Words are important things', and the word 'revolution' seemed to have fallen out of the socialist lexicon.

18. Moon, *'Modernisation' vs. 'Progressivism'*.

19. Tony Blair, 'Let Us Face the Future: the 1945 anniversary lecture' (London: Fabian Society, 1995), pp. 3; 4. For more on this, see Emily Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition in Contemporary British Politics: past politics and present histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), Chap. 5.

20. Moon, *'Modernisation' vs. 'Progressivism'*, p. 3. Moon's analysis here covers Neal Lawson and Neil Sherlock, *The Progressive Century* (2001); David Marquand, 'Premature Obsequies: Social Democracy Comes in From the Cold', in *The New Social Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Paul Thompson and Philip Gould, 'Thompson vs. Gould: is New Labour still new?', *Renewal*, 11: 1 (2003); Tom Bentley, Anna Coote et al, *Compass: The Statement* (London: Compass, 2005).

21. Marquand, 'Premature Obsequies', pp.13–14. Quoted in Moon, *'Modernisation' vs. 'Progressivism'*, p. 2.

22. Speaking at 'A Roundtable Discussion on the Prospects for a Progressive Century', *The Progressive Century*, 2001, p. 211. Quoted in ibid., p. 3.

23. Philip Gould. Quoted ibid., p. 6.

24. Tony Blair, speech to Labour Party Conference, Brighton, 1997. http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive. htm?speech=203. Accessed 24.06.2016.

25. Alan Finlayson, 'Tony Blair and the Jargon of Modernisation', *Soundings* 10 (1998), pp. 11–27 (23).

26. Blair, speech to Labour Party Conference, 1999.

27. Tony Blair, *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century* (London: Fabian Society, 1998), p. 1. For a more detailed discussion of New Labour positioning here, see Stephen Driver and Luke Martell, 'Left, right and the third way', *Policy and Politics* 28:2 (2000), pp. 147–161.

28. Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010), p. xvii.

29. For instance, those surveyed in Moon, *'Modernisation' vs. 'Progressivism'*.

30. Murdo Fraser MSP, 'Giving Scotland a Party to Believe in Again', 18 October 2011. Available at: http://www.platform10.org/ 2011/10/murdo-fraser-msp-giving-scotland-a-party-to-believe-in-again/. Accessed 14.11.2011.

31. BBC News, 'Scottish Tory leadership favourite "to split party"', 4 September 2011. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/ mobile/uk-politics-14778353. Accessed 14.11.2011.

32. Greg Clark and Jeremy Hunt, *Who's Progressive Now?* (London: Conservative Party, 2007), pp. 3–4.

33. Tim Bale, *The Conservative Party: from Thatcher to Cameron* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 381.

34. Robert M. Page, '"Progressive" Turns in Post-1945 Conservative Social Policy', *Political Studies Review* 12:1 (2014), pp. 17–28 (23); Matthew d'Ancona, 'Last Chance Saloon: The history and future of Tory modernisation', in Ryan Shorthouse and Guy Stagg (eds), *Tory Modernisation 2.0: The Future of the Conservative Party* (London: Bright Blue Campaign, 2013), pp. 12–24 (14).

35. See, for example, Shorthouse and Stagg (eds), *Tory Modernisation 2.0*; Ryan Shorthouse, Kate Maltby and James Brenton (eds), *The Modernisers' Manifesto* (London: Bright Blue, 2014).

36. Katharine Dommett, 'The theory and practice of party modernisation: the Conservative Party under David Cameron, 2005–2015', *British Politics* 10:2 (2015), pp. 249–266 (250).

37. Richard Hayton and Libby McEnhill, 'Cameron's Conservative Party, social liberalism and social justice', *British Politics* 10:2 (2015), pp. 131–147.

38. George Osborne, 'Progressive Reform in an Age of Austerity', Demos, 11 August 2009. Available at: http://www.demos.co.uk/press_releases/george-osborne-progressive-reform-in-an-age-of-austerity. Accessed 08.09.2010.

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40. Ibid., p. 3; Osborne, 'Progressive Reform in an Age of Austerity'.

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42. David Cameron, 'We stand for social responsibility', Conservative Party Conference, 1 October 2006. Available at: http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2006/10/Cameron_We_stand_for_social_responsibility.aspx. Accessed 21.09.2013.

43. Cameron, 'Making Progressive Conservatism a Reality', p. 2.

44. Osborne, 'Progressive Reform in an Age of Austerity'.

45. Tristram Hunt, 'Reviving our sense of mission: the decentralized tradition and Labour's way forward' in Robert Philpot (ed.) *The Purple Book: A Progressive Future for Labour* (London: BiteBack

Publishing, 2011), pp. 61–79 (68). See also Maurice Glasman et al (eds), *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* (The Oxford London Seminars, 2011); Jonathan Rutherford and Alan Lockey (eds), *Labour's Future* (London: Soundings, 2010).

46. Hayton and McEnhill, 'Cameron's Conservative Party'.
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50. ibid.
51. 'Introductory', *Progressive Review*, 1:1, October 1896, 1–9 (4).
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54. Polly Toynbee, 'Lab-Lib—the only legitimate coalition', *Guardian*, 10 May 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/may/10/brown-lib-dem-labour-coalition; Neal Lawson and Richard Grayson, 'Lab and Lib: a dream team', *Guardian*, 9 May 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/may/09/labour-liberal-democrats-progressive-alliance. Both accessed 23.07.2016.
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57. Greg Clark and Jeremy Hunt, 'Cameron is proving Tories are the true progressives', *Guardian*, 16 December 2007. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/dec/16/comment.politics2. Accessed 17.09.2013; David Cameron, 'Labour are now the reactionaries, we are the radicals', *Guardian*, 8 April 2010. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/08/david-cameron-conservatives-radicals. Accessed 17.09.2013.
58. David Cameron, Rose Garden Press Conference, 10 Downing Street, 12 May 2010.
59. Clegg, Hugo Young lecture.
60. Hunt, 'Reviving our sense of mission', p. 68; Glasman et al (eds), *Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox*; Rutherford and Lockey (eds), *Labour's Future*. More recently, see White and O'Neill, 'That was the New Labour That Wasn't'.
61. Douglas Alexander, 'Renewing our offer, not retracing our steps: building a sense of national purpose', in Philpot (ed.) *The Purple Book,* pp. 19–31 (23).
62. James Purnell, 'The reform agenda is still crucial', in Rutherford and Lockey (eds) *Labour's Future*, pp. 71–75 (72); Jonathan Rutherford, 'The Future of Labour', in ibid., pp. 76–82 (77).
63. ibid.
64. Maurice Glasman, 'Labour as a Radical Tradition', in Maurice Glasman et al (eds), *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* (Oxford: The Oxford London Seminars, 2011), pp. 14–34.
65. ibid., pp. 22–23.
66. For a critique of Blue Labour's treatment of gender, see Helen Goodman, *Tradition and Change: four people, a response to the Politics of Paradox* (June 2011), p. 15. http://liberalconspiracy.org/images/misc/Helen%20Goodman%20MP%20-%20Tradition%20and%20Change.pdf. Accessed 19.06.2016.
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Conclusion: The Consequences
of Progressive Thinking

Completing this book amidst the fallout from the vote for Britain to leave the EU makes any conclusions even more tentative than they might otherwise have been. As I write, the radio is full of talk of party splits and realignments. A new 'progressive alliance', drawing in socially liberal Conservatives, centrist Labourites and the Liberal Democrats, has been widely mooted, and analyses of the legacy of the SDP are once more shaping political debate. While Theresa May's appointment as Prime Minister seems to have removed the conditions for a Conservative split, Labour's fate remains uncertain.

On the one hand, this is a debate shaped by the past and by memories of the form that 'progressive' politics have taken in that past. On the other, it is undertaken in the name of the (imagined) future. The various divisions that have been heightened and exposed by the crisis—across generations, between classes, and within both main political parties—are often cast in temporal terms. This is a story about those who have benefitted from 'progress' and those who have not, those who are comfortable with 'the future' and those who are not. Such discussions adhere to a rather fixed view of what 'progress' and 'the future' look like. The most banal observation would be to note that the Leave vote necessarily redraws this 'future'. Yet this is not about possible scenarios; it is about an ideological conflation of cosmopolitanism, economic liberalism and social liberalism with 'progress itself'. The relationship between such views and 'progressive'

politics is more contentious. It is not yet clear how (or indeed whether) the imagined 'progressive alliance' of the centre overlaps with the more explicitly left-wing, anti-austerity 'progressive alliance' proposed between Greens, Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalists, Labour and some parts of the Liberal Democrats, which I noted in Chap. 7.

In such a fast-moving and turbulent political situation, any attempt to speculate about the future of either party political alignments or claims on the word 'progressive' is foolish. Whatever twists and turns the coming months bring, nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the work that this word has done in British politics over the past century, and what its use might tell us at this particular juncture.

We began this story with the supposed opposition between progressive and conservative mindsets, which has been seen to structure not only party politics, but also fundamental responses to the human condition. We have seen, however, that this opposition no longer stands: progressive views of both time in general and parliamentary politics in particular have become so dominant that they have either subsumed or silenced other possible temporalities. To a certain extent, this has been true since the very beginning of the period we have examined here. Conservatism arose as a counter to the progressive mindset, but this was never an equal relationship, and even the most traditional conservatives have often been drawn into defining their politics as 'progressive' in one sense or another.

Part of the reason for this dominance is the extent to which modern parliamentary politics is an intrinsically progressive activity, in the sense that it is always concerned with *getting things done*. Although conservatives like the philosopher Michael Oakeshott have decried the tendency to subject citizens to continual schemes for improvement, they have also recognised that this has long been the nature of politics across the party spectrum.[1] The definition and form of 'improvement' may be deeply contentious, but its basic necessity is not. 'Progressive' in this context suggests a programmatic approach to change as a political project. Yet, as we have seen throughout this book, it is also frequently used as a way of depoliticising debate and making ideological proposals appear to be simply apolitical, 'sane' reforms. Here, 'progressive' functions as a technocratic term, transcending both the stasis associated with party political bickering and the rigidity of ideology. It is what happens when sensible politicians of the centre ground are able simply to *get on with things*.

Underpinning such attitudes runs a broader faith in progress as a historical process, bearing (according to preference) ever greater liberty, tolerance, equality, technological innovations, and material comforts. The role of politics here is to provide the conditions in which such progressive developments can take place—whether through direct state intervention or a more *laissez-faire* approach. While the former fits more clearly with the implied activism of progressive politics, the latter can more easily claim to be avoiding obstruction. The changing nature of liberalism is significant in this regard. Since the late nineteenth century, both positions have been present in the various splinters of the old Party of Progress and they have carried their legacies into both the Labour and Conservative Parties. There are two understandings of progress at work here—whether it should be seen as an inevitable process or a contingent project, an abstract force or a deliberate undertaking. In practice, though, such ideas often thread through one another. The external forces of globalisation require a deliberate national project in response; the desire to build a socialist commonwealth necessitates seizing hold of the abstract forces of progress and redirecting them in a particular direction.

These meanings of 'progressive' politics are reflective of wider social and cultural attitudes. We have seen that from the late nineteenth century British citizens have been continually encouraged to 'be progressive'. This has involved embracing ongoing social and cultural changes, 'keeping up' with technological and scientific innovations, and engaging in processes of continual self-improvement—whether psychological, educational or socio-economic. Being progressive has been presented as both an active obligation and an inevitable process. Those who do not manage it will be 'left behind'. We have also seen, however, the various forms of resistance that have built up around this imperative—from the fear that scientific developments were leading humankind to 'progress backwards' into self-destruction, to nostalgia for older and more established ways of life. Perhaps the clearest objection has been that voiced from the early 1960s that a self-appointed 'progressive' Establishment was intent on foisting reforms on the British people that seemed to many to be leading towards moral and cultural decline.

The extent to which 'progressive' became attached to a particular political programme in this period was indicative of a wider shift, whereby it moved from being a generally positive term, claimed right across the

political spectrum, to being indicative of centre-left politics. Significantly, this was a historical association, which involved resurrecting the 'progressive alliance' between new liberalism and social democracy at the twentieth century's turn, in order to reshape the political alignments of its final four decades. Ironically enough, this shift occurred at a time when the centre-left was struggling to keep abreast of social and economic change and seemed itself in danger of being 'left behind'. Yet by the time the first Thatcher government came to power, the term 'progressive' could no longer be used to describe a project of the political right—no matter how concerned with economic liberty, national 'improvement', or *getting things done*.

Since then, 'progressive' has been used by Conservatives anxious to distance themselves from Thatcher's legacy, through the claim to be both the 'heir[s] to Blair' and the inheritors of an older, softer, One Nation Conservative tradition. There is, however, an important distinction to be drawn here between the use of this language among political elites, and the way in which it is heard by the citizens to whom they hope to appeal. There is little evidence that these nuanced invocations of political traditions or party alignments travel very far outside Westminster. Indeed, to many voters 'progressive' is more likely to suggest the politics of Thatcher than those of her opponents. To be progressive is, nevertheless, widely seen to be a desirable political and cultural trait.

It is worth asking what this ubiquity means, what consequences it has. Progressive time is anticipatory: it is always positioned towards the future, but it also imagines that future as an ordered and predictable development from the present, not as a radical departure. This is why progressive logic is employed to sanction certain kinds of reforms, but also why it seems to preclude others. Although, as I suggested in Chap. 2, cyclical time and repetitive time remain central to everyday social practice, they are rendered invisible by the construction of linear, progressive time as uniquely *modern*.

There is a great deal at stake here. If progressive time is understood to be masculine and individualist, associated with the public sphere and with rationality, might attention to different temporalities allow for a politics more attuned to the feminine and the relational, to the private sphere and to emotions? I considered some of the ways in which feminists and queer theorists have attempted to navigate this terrain in Chaps. 2 and 4,

but there are wider implications. Victoria Browne has asked what would happen if, for instance, we cease to see pregnancy as a teleological process, valued only for its end product.[2] Similarly, what if we abandon the idea of economic growth as the only route to modernisation? What would this mean for international politics, and for ecology? With regard to the latter, we might also consider the different temporalities at play in the cyclical time of the seasons, or the interruptive projects of rewilding.[3] More broadly, is it possible to create a form of politics in which lost paths and unfinished projects can be recovered without fear of regression, and in which standing still is not automatically taken for stagnation?

We are at an important political juncture. It is becoming increasingly clear that passion, emotion and identity cannot be sidelined in political debate; that appeals to 'progressive' rationality do not work. Might such a reconsideration of the terrain of the political allow for the development of a language that speaks not of 'modernisers' and 'left behinds'? Or a notion of political choice that is not constructed as a competition between those who are comfortable with 'the future' and those who are not; a competition in which there can only be one possible outcome? This need not entail the social conservatism associated with projects like Blue Labour. As I have suggested, there are potentially radical implications for feminist, queer, racial and ecological politics. These will not be universally accepted, and political struggles and contestation will, of course, continue. Yet simply framing this as a debate about the common good *in the present*, rather than as an encounter with the impersonal and inevitable 'forces of progress', could enable a different kind of political conversation. It might even create space for something genuinely new.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Michael Oakeshott, 'On being conservative' (1956), reprinted in Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and other essays* (Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1991 [Methuen, 1962]), pp. 407–437.
2. Victoria Browne, 'The Temporalities of Pregnancy: On Contingency, Loss and Waiting', in Victoria Browne et al (eds) *Motherhood in Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Europe* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

3. I am grateful to Cathy Elliott for these observations.

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Browne, Victoria, 'The Temporalities of Pregnancy: On Contingency, Loss and Waiting', in Victoria Browne et al (eds) *Motherhood in Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Europe* (London: Routledge, forthcoming)

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Note: Page numbers followed by "n" refers to notes.