4 A Telling Absence

Race, Multiculturalism, and Modernisation

> [U]ntil Labour is truly prepared to listen to what its black members are saying, we will fail to modernise our party
>
> —Ken Livingstone, 1989.[1]

> Multiculturalism is also contested by modernizers of different political persuasions
>
> —Stuart Hall, 2000.[2]

There is a historical puzzle at the heart of this chapter. In Westminster politics of the early twenty-first century, the concepts of ‘modernisation’ and ‘multiculturalism’ were loosely associated with each other. This is most apparent in the ‘modernisation’ agenda of David Cameron’s leadership of the Conservative Party. Like it was for Labour, ‘modernisation’ was a contested concept for the Conservatives of the 2000s and 2010s, covering everything from the ‘Big Society’ to environmentalism.[3] But multiracial representation and notions of multicultural sensitivity were visible ingredients in this mix. During a 2010 interview, Cameron described ‘one part of modernization’ as the need to ‘change the Conservative Party, literally, to be more reflective of the country we wanted to govern’. This involved tackling ‘the shortage of women candidates, the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities, the fact that we were representing mainly rural seats, many in the South of England’. He added that ‘Britain had become a more open, more tolerant society over issues like race and sexuality and I think the Conservative Party needed to modernize to catch up there as well’.[4]

[1] Livingstone, *Livingstone’s Labour*, 124.

[2] Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays. Vol. 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (London, 2019), 96.

[3] See the special issue on Cameron’s ‘modernisation’ in *British Politics* 10:2 (2015). See also Jack Newman and Richard Hayton, ‘The Ontological Failure of David Cameron’s “Modernisation” of the Conservative Party’, *British Politics* 17 (2022), 253–273.

[4] Quoted in Katharine Dommett, ‘The Theory and Practice of Party Modernisation’, *British Politics* 10 (2015), 256–257. See also Peter Dorey, ‘A New Direction or Another

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Cameron's remarks about race, ethnic representation, and 'modernisation' can be read through several prisms, not least the internal politics of the Conservative Party in the early twenty-first century and through an existing conservative tradition of multiculturalism, as identified by David Feldman and Matthew Francis.[5] But, at least in part, they should be seen as a direct response to Labour's then electoral dominance and to the Tories' own wilderness years of 1997–2010.[6] For in the 2000s, it was common to associate New Labour's government, and its own projects of 'modernisation', with an agenda of 'multiculturalism'. The sociologist Tariq Modood, for example, suggested in 2016 that the 'first New Labour term (1997–2001) has probably been the most multiculturalist national government' in British history.[7] Crucial to this impression were landmarks of the New Labour era, like the 1997–1999 Macpherson Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager, which introduced the concept of 'institutional racism' to Whitehall, and new legislation like the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) and the Equalities Act (2010).[8] So too was the rhetoric of New Labour ministers, such as Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's famous 2001 speech to the Social Market Foundation, which declared tikka masala to be the national British dish and stressed the 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' of 'modern Britain'.[9] New Labour's leaders are also keen to retrospectively claim credit for mainstreaming 'progressive attitudes' towards race and ethnicity.[10]

Several scholars of race, and significant parts of the left, do not agree with much of this narrative. Influential essays have discussed the

False Dawn? David Cameron and the Crisis of British Conservatism', *British Politics* 2 (2007), 137–166. There were limits to this agenda, as the Conservatives often projected different messages for different audiences. See Bale, *The Conservative Party*, 300, 303.

[5] David Feldman, 'Why the English Like Turbans: Multicultural Politics in British History', in Feldman and Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 2011), 281–303; Matthew Francis, 'Mrs Thatcher's Peacock Blue Sari: Ethnic Minorities, Electoral Politics and the Conservative Party, c. 1974–86', *Contemporary British History* 31:2 (2017), 274–293.

[6] For the connection between the Conservative 'modernisation' debates and Labour's electoral dominance, see Bale, *The Conservative Party*, 237.

[7] Tariq Modood, 'Whatever Happened to Multiculturalism?', *Fabian Society*, 10 August 2016 [fabians.org.uk/whatever-happened-to-multiculturalism/].

[8] I am aware of the argument in favour of capitalising 'Black' and 'White'. I have decided not to do so, largely to follow the usage of many of the historical subjects in this chapter, including theorists of race like Stuart Hall. But I have, on that same logic, capitalised 'Black Sections' as this was the favoured usage of its supporters. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black', *The Atlantic*, 18 June 2020 [www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159].

[9] The speech can be read here [www.theguardian.com/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity].

[10] Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London, 2010), 90; Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor* (Basingstoke, 2012), 250.

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'post-colonial paradoxes' of New Labour and its awkwardness over advancing racial and ethnic equality, or have used Cook's speech to interrogate racist hierarchies behind superficially multicultural phenomena.[11] While government ministers may have waxed lyrical about multicultural Britishness, they also prosecuted the War on Terror at home and abroad after 2001, and pursued a tough anti-crime agenda, which raised new racial, interfaith and intercommunal tensions. However, there is agreement on one aspect. Much of this literature assumes that the ideal of multiculturalism was bound up with New Labour's famed attachment to 'modernisation', even if in their view the reality fell short. In their critique of New Labour's 'white heart', several sociologists suggested in the early 2000s that New Labour 'was keen to present a commitment to modernising Britain, embracing diversity and valuing cultural mix'.[12] The kind of rhetoric found in Cook's speech was probably at the forefront of their minds.

One might assume, therefore, that the myriad arguments for 'modernisation' covered in this book, from the early 1970s until the late 1990s, grappled with questions of race and multiculturalism in 'modern Britain'. After all, both were hugely contentious issues throughout this period. As a new historiography is increasingly showing, conflicts over multiracial society repeatedly destabilised British politics since the Second World War. The arrival of the Windrush generation in the 1940s and 1950s under the 1948 British Nationality Act led to a succession of immigration acts with escalating levels of racialisation and restriction.[13] The ever-growing non-white population unsettled the assumptions of many politicians as they tried to forge a stable, post-colonial British identity, leading some into racist backlash – the most infamous example being Enoch Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech.[14] Over the 1970s and 1980s, the far right revived politically through organisations like the National Front.[15] Meanwhile, as scholars like Rob Waters have shown, the 'long 1970s' witnessed the growth of a new political force, black radicalism. Furnished with a burgeoning 'Black Atlantic' political culture and a rich engagement with a post-1968 new left politics, organisations like

[11] Elizabeth Buettner, '"Going for an Indian": South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain', *The Journal of Modern History* 80:4 (2008), 865–901; Kalbir Shukra, *The Changing Pattern of Black Politics in Britain* (London, 1998), 93–96.

[12] Les Back et al., 'New Labour's White Heart: Politics, Multiculturalism and the Return of Assimilation', *The Political Quarterly* 73:4 (2002), 445–454, at 446.

[13] Nadine El-Elnany, *(B)ordering Britain* (Manchester, 2020), chap. 3.

[14] Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

[15] Ben Bland, 'Global Fascism? The British National Front and the Transnational Politics of the "Third Way" in the 1980s', *Radical History Review* 138 (2020), 108–130.

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the Institute of Race Relations and the *Race Today* Collective sought to challenge racism, forge cross-ethnic alliances, and overthrow what they saw as a fundamentally oppressive white capitalist society.[16] In many campaigns, they were joined by a mainly white anti-racist movement centred on the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism, though this relationship was not without its tensions.[17] Superficially, it would seem plausible that any argument for 'modernisation' would engage directly with these important developments. Indeed, Waters has stressed that this emerging political culture was infused with a powerful sense of a 'black future', premised on a belief in the acceleration of epochal historical change.[18] Many contemporaneous arguments for 'modernisation' shared this accelerated temporality.[19]

Yet, it is actually quite difficult to find detailed considerations of multiracial society within left-wing debates over 'modernisation', 'modern socialism', or Labour's place and role in 'modern Britain' between the 1970s and the 1990s. As this chapter will show, links were made between 'modernity' and anti-racist politics by the Gramscian Marxists connected with *Marxism Today* and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). In Labour itself, the politician who most explicitly made the connection between antiracism and 'modernisation' was the leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) and later Labour MP, Ken Livingstone. Apart from this, however, race is noticeably marginal to Labour discussions of its modernisation. The Alternative Economic Strategy, the Policy Review, John Smith's leadership, and New Labour all tended to discuss other issues in relation to 'modernising Britain'. When race did come up, the innate value of formal equality before the law and the inherent evils of discrimination were the trusted conceptual resources; its relevance for adapting Labour's agenda to 'modern Britain' was not.

This relative absence from discourses of modernisation is particularly striking, given that, as this chapter will show, the issues of race and multiculturalism themselves were *not* absent from Labour politics. Race and multiculturalism became sharper issues of party competition between the leaderships of Labour and the Conservatives. At a local level, municipal socialist councils placed antiracism at the centre of their agenda, which in turn sparked a right-wing backlash. Internally, the 1980s Labour Party was itself sharply polarised on the debate over the introduction of 'Black

[16] Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain 1964–1985* (Oakland, CA, 2018).
[17] David Renton, *Never Again: Rock against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, 1976–1982* (London, 2018).
[18] Waters, *Thinking Black*, 211.
[19] Robinson, *Language of Progressive Politics*, 14–15.

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Sections' to the party's organisation and constitution. As this chapter explores in some depth, the divisive debate over Black Sections, which pivoted on questions of positive action and ethnic minority representation, raged during most of the 1980s, including throughout the early years of the pivotal Policy Review (1987–1991), when 'modernising the Labour Party' became a prominent theme. The lack of attempts to link black and Asian representation to a 'modern Labour Party' by either the opponents or *most of the supporters* of Black Sections is, at first glance, surprising. In light of the subsequent association between party modernisation and multiculturalism in the 2000s, it is especially intriguing.

An interrogation of this historical puzzle tells us much about the Labour Party and its divergent theorists of modernisation. It illuminates the thinking behind Labour's struggle to construct a viable electoral alliance in 'modern Britain' that would return the party to government – a crucial part, if not the sole aim, of many modernisation projects. In addition, it underscores the importance of factional dynamics in shaping the party's political thinking. But, alongside the enduring forces of electoralism and factionalism, this absence also tells us something about those parts of the left which were most enthused by the new black politics of the 'long 1970s', and the difficult and sometimes conflictual relationship they had with concepts like 'modernisation'. In turn, this reminds us of the origins of 'modernisation' in the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment, and therefore of some of the more Eurocentric and ethnocentric undertones buried within its universalising claims. This chapter is largely a study of absence – discourses of 'modernisation' will not appear until deep into the discussion – but it will, through examining those absences, illuminate the awkward relationship between the politics of modernising social democracy and that of antiracism and multiculturalism in late twentieth-century Britain. Finally, by combining this insight with a recognition of the status of 'modernisation' as a core intellectual and political resource for Labour by 1997, we can identify some tensions lying behind the party's ambiguous approach to questions of race and multiculturalism once it entered government.

Growing Partisan Competition over Race

It is hard to escape the conclusion that, at least for the metropole of a decolonising British empire, the politics of race transformed over the 1960s and early 1970s, in ways that profoundly shaped the rest of the century. Britain was already a multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural society, and in the modern era it had ruled over a sprawling empire that spanned, and unequally ordered, skin colours and creeds. But it

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was over the late twentieth century that Britain shifted from being an 'emigration state',[20] where the empire was spread through institutional encouragement of outward white migration to the settler colonies, to a post-Windrush society, where the empire (or later the Commonwealth) 'came home' through inward non-white migration, which 'fundamentally shaped the politics of race in post-war British society' and 'transformed notions of citizenship and ideas about what it meant to be British'.[21] These developments sparked a backlash on the fringes through the emergence of Powellism and later the National Front. For mainstream British politics on both right and left, the initial response was one of awkward avoidance, although there were elements of backlash here too. Most clearly, migration laws became noticeably stricter. The desire to limit non-white migration was a key driver behind the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the 1971 Immigration Act, and the 1981 British Nationality Act.[22]

Alongside this backlash, anti-racist movements sprang up around Britain, responding to these new forms of discrimination and the resurgence of the far right. These included anti-fascist groups like the Anti-Nazi League which tackled the National Front. But they also included a new movement of black radicalism.[23] Importantly, these diverse groups collectively forged a distinct unifying identity of 'political blackness'. In this understanding, the category of black people 'sought to unite all people of colour who had been exploited by colonialism, and oppressed by racism and capitalism'.[24] It was defined, in other words, by subalternity within a post-imperial capitalist world. As the writer Ambalavaner Sivanandan put it in a retrospective interview, 'black is a political colour, not the colour of your skin'.[25] Emblematic of this new political force were new activist groups like Sivanandan's repurposed Institute of Race Relations,

[20] Freddy Foks, 'Emigration State: Race, Citizenship and Settler Imperialism in Modern British History, c. 1850–1972', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 35:2 (2022), 170–199.

[21] There was, it should be said, significant overlap between these trends of inward and outward migration. Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London Is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (Oxford, 2016), 4. See also Marie Sobolewska and Robert Ford on the significantly divergent scale of the non-white population of the island of Britain before and after the 1950s–1970s period. Marie Sobolewska and Robert Ford, *Brexitland: Identity, Diversity and the Reshaping of British Politics* (Cambridge, 2020), 27–28 and 27n18.

[22] Perry, *London Is the Place for Me*, chap. 5.

[23] Anandi Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', *Race & Class* 48:2 (2006), 38–60; Robin Bunce and Paul Field, *Renegade: The Life and Times of Darcus Howe*, 2nd ed. (London, 2017).

[24] Leila Hassan, Robin Bunce, and Paul Field, 'Introduction', in Field, Bunce, Hassan, and Margaret Peacock (eds), *Here to Stay, Here to Fight: A Race Today Anthology* (London, 2019), 1–8, at 5.

[25] [https://tamilgenerations.rota.org.uk/ambalavaner-sivanandan/].

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the Southall Black Sisters, the Asian Youth Movements, and the *Race Today* Collective, including the activist and writer Darcus Howe. Race relations also rocketed up the agenda after the riots[26] of Brixton, Toxteth, and elsewhere in 1981, and Broadwater Farm in 1985, which propelled debates over police racism and racial inequality into the limelight. At a local level, antiracism and multiculturalism were also deeply contentious issues in local government, education, and social services. As Jed Fazakarley shows, it was often path-dependent processes in local government that spearheaded multicultural policies, rather than initiatives from the centre.[27]

These broader forces shaped party politics in two ways. First, antiracism and multiculturalism became a more common site of party competition from the mid-1970s onwards. There were moments in the post-war years when race became a 'wedge' issue; most infamously in the 1964 general election, which led Harold Wilson to condemn the victorious Conservative candidate in Smethwick constituency as a 'parliamentary leper' for his naked mobilisation of racism. Yet, as the political scientist Anthony Messina has argued, after Smethwick the mainstream parties avoided making race an issue of party competition, in spite of the clear wish of voters for more visible action on migration, leading to a 'bipartisan racial consensus'. Messina traced how the party leaderships pursued 'conspiracies of silence' over the issue (hence Ted Heath's sacking of Powell after the Rivers of Blood speech), shared a legislative agenda that combined 'cosmetic' anti-discrimination legislation with restrictive migration control, and outsourced, as much as possible, the questions of multicultural and racial politics to 'racial buffers' such as quangos and local government.[28]

This fragile consensus did not neutralize the explosive questions of racial inequality and racism, as seen in the growth of Powellism, the National Front, antiracism, and black radicalism.[29] Under pressure from

[26] Riot and uprising are used interchangeably.

[27] Jed Fazakarley, *Muslim Communities in England, 1962–90* (Basingstoke, 2017), 17, 41, 202.

[28] Anthony M. Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (Oxford, 1989), especially 36–46. See also Jim Bulpitt, 'Continuity, Autonomy and Peripheralisation: The Anatomy of the Centre's Race Statecraft in England', in Zig Layton-Henry and Paul B. Rich (eds), *Race, Government & Politics in Britain* (Basingstoke, 1986), 17–45. Bulpitt's case for the existence of a 'statecraft' in which the centre deliberately offloaded race issues to the 'periphery' of local government is interesting. However, it underplays the growing prominence of race and migration in national political discourse in the 1970s and 1980s. See in the same volume: Zig Layton Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', 73–100, at 97. See also the discussion of the 'loony left' attacks below.

[29] Messina, *Race and Party Competition*, 47–48; Amy Whipple, 'Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell', *Journal of British Studies* 48:3 (2009), 717–735; Waters, *Thinking Black*, 5.

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various directions, it collapsed from the mid-1970s onwards. Differing attitudes to migration and racial equality subsequently became points of contestation between Conservative and Labour. Under Thatcher's leadership, the Conservatives more consciously appealed to those sectors of society who felt 'swamped' by immigration, as Thatcher infamously put it in 1978, and while it did not achieve all of its 1979 manifesto commitments on migration restriction, it pushed through more restrictive border controls and nationality laws.[30] During the 1980s, the Conservatives also attacked anti-racist politics in local government, deriding municipal anti-racist and equal opportunities agendas as 'loony left'.[31] Importantly, the 'loony left' assault on Labour-run councils by Thatcher's government eroded the boundary between the centre and periphery and helped to nationalise the politics of race.[32]

Meanwhile, Labour moved, unevenly, in a more liberal direction on race. Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) issued an advice leaflet to constituency labour parties in 1980, which was notably self-critical on the party's lack of action on racial discrimination hitherto. Frontbench politicians like Roy Hattersley (Shadow Home Secretary from 1980) even publicly apologised for supporting restrictive migration laws in the late 1960s – a rare sight in professional politics. In the early 1980s, Hattersley's team mounted a 'strong offensive' against the Conservative government's race agenda.[33] Thus, Labour committed to removing racialised elements of migration and border laws and pledged more legislation to tackle discrimination, in both the 1983 and 1987 elections. The 1983 manifesto was more forthright, pledging a 'political offensive against racial disadvantage', which included greatly expanded funding for targeted projects, positive action programmes in employment and social services, a senior minister on racial inequality, the repeal of the 1971 Immigration act and 1981 British Nationality Act, and a bolstered Race Relations Act.[34] The 1987 manifesto was notably more cautious than 1983, but still pledged 'firm action to promote racial equality' and to 'attack racial discrimination'. It promised that a Labour government would strengthen the law to combat racial hatred and racial

[30] Layton-Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', 75, 79.
[31] Anne Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968–1990* (Cambridge, 1994), 35.
[32] Colm Murphy, 'The "Rainbow Alliance" or the Focus Group? Sexuality and Race in the Labour Party's Electoral Strategy, 1985–7', *Twentieth Century British History* 31:3 (2020), 291–315.
[33] Marian Fitzgerald and Zig Layton-Henry, 'Opposition Parties and Race Policies, 1979–83', in Layton-Henry and Rich (eds), *Race, Government & Politics*, 100–125, at 104–105.
[34] Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos*, 274–275.

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attacks, ensure that immigration law did not discriminate by race, and use contract compliance to improve racial equality.[35]

These changes in Labour's positioning were partly a response to longer-term changes in the British left within a global context of the emerging 'new left' after 1968, which took great interest in civil rights, anti-racist, and 'Third World' politics.[36] The scale of this change is sometimes exaggerated: constituency parties did not churn in membership as much as is sometimes assumed; meanwhile, Labour politicians like Joan Lestor and Barbara Castle took an interest in both antiracism and in Third World politics before 1968, the latter serving as president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). Nonetheless, over the 1970s and 1980s, the membership of many constituency Labour parties was increasingly influenced by the post-1968 new left.[37] Meanwhile, though in existence since the 1950s, the global movement against South African apartheid surged over the later 1970s and 1980s, and was particularly strong in Britain.[38] The AAM overlapped considerably with anti-Conservative and left-wing politics, particularly after Thatcher diverged from the Commonwealth consensus over sanctions against the Pretoria regime. In the 1980s, voting Labour and boycotting South African goods were two markers of a broader 1980s left-wing, anti-Thatcher subculture.[39] All this meant that, as Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam have noted, challenging racism was one of the 1980s left's most distinctive features, with long-lasting effects on political culture more broadly.[40]

[35] Ibid, 307.

[36] Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford, 2002), 8–9, 10–11, 462; Alastair J. Reid, 'The Dialectics of Liberation: The Old Left, the New Left and the Counter-culture', in Feldman and Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations*, 261–281.

[37] Steven Fielding and Duncan Tanner, 'The "Rise of the Left" Revisited: Labour Party Culture in Post-War Manchester and Salford', *Labour History Review* 71:3 (2006), 211–233.

[38] Rob Skinner, 'The Anti-Apartheid Movement: Pressure Group Politics, International Solidarity and Transnational Activism', in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton, and James McKay (eds), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-state Actors in Society and Politics since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2009), 129–147.

[39] Simon Stevens, 'Why South Africa? The Politics of Anti-Apartheid Activism in Britain in the Long 1970s', in Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (eds), *The Breakthrough: Human Right in the 1970s* (Philadelphia, PA, 2015), 204–226, at 222–223. The AAM did, however, range far beyond committed political activists. See Stephen Bentel, 'Limits of Conviviality: Cosmopolitan Convivial Culture: Contact Zones, and Race in Late-Twentieth Century London', unpublished PhD thesis (Queen Mary University of London, 2021), 370–371.

[40] Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam, 'Introduction: New Histories of Labour and the Left in the 1980s', in idem (eds), *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*, 1–23, at 3–4.

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The Black Sections Controversy in the 1980s

These developments would all affect the Labour Party's internal debates in meaningful ways over the 1980s, as both external critics from the new left and a new generation of black and Asian activists tried to reshape Labour into a more multiracial party in terms of representation, and anti-racist party in terms of politics. Most clearly, this manifested in the debate over the establishment of 'Black Sections', a constitutional question which dominated the internal Labour politics on race for most of the decade. The literature on the Black Sections controversy is still sparse. Existing material clusters around the contemporary and retrospective accounts of the campaign's supporters, or in some cases the critical voices of an extra-parliamentary tradition of Marxist-influenced black radicalism, hostile to the Labour Party as such.[41] While these important works contribute insights into the aims of the campaign, the barriers it faced, and some of its weaknesses, they do have limitations. Most importantly, the positions of important players, especially of prominent ethnic minority *opponents* of Black Sections within Labour, are poorly served by the lack of historical research on the topic.[42] As the biographers of Diane Abbott suggest, the subject desperately needs more study.[43] Before considering the relationship of these debates to 'modernisation', therefore, we will discuss the Black Sections controversy in some detail.

The campaign for Black Sections emerged in the summer of 1983, out of existing networks of Afro-Caribbean and Asian councillors in London. The crux of the campaign centred on ethnic minority representation in the Labour Party. In proportional terms, the 1980s Labour Party was overwhelmingly white (as, indeed, the party is at the time of writing), with black and Asian ethnic minorities accounting for only 4 per cent of the membership.[44] That was broadly reflective of the proportion

[41] For supportive accounts of Black Sections, see Hilary Wainwright, *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties* (London, 1987); Sydney Jeffers, 'Black Sections in the Labour Party: The End of Ethnicity and "Godfather" Politics', in Pnina Werbner and Muhammed Anwar (eds), *Black and Ethnic Leaderships: The Cultural Dimensions of Political Action* (London, 1991), 43–58. For a critical reading that calls for a 'black political leadership' that is 'fully class conscious' and that engages in a 'real-liberatory strategy', which would 'break free of the restrictive Labour Party and parliamentary political framework', see Shukra, *Changing Pattern of Black Politics in Britain*, 121–124.

[42] As far as I can see, only Terri Sewell's valuable account has given these arguments extended attention. Terri A. Sewell, *Black Tribunes: Black Political Participation in Britain* (London, 1993), 105–114.

[43] Robin Bunce and Samara Linton, *Diane Abbott: The Authorised Biography* (London, 2020), xiv.

[44] Seyd and Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots*, 36–37.

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of black and Asian people in the country as a whole.[45] However, the Labour Party was electorally strong in places where the ethnic minority population was much higher.[46] In addition, according to the available polling data, ethnic minority voters strongly supported the Labour Party. The party polled 81 per cent among Asian voters and 87 per cent among Afro-Caribbean voters in 1983 (by the 1987 election, though, there was more divergence; while 86 per cent of Afro-Caribbean voters backed Labour, Asian support dropped to 67 per cent).[47] Finally, there were no black or Asian Labour MPs after the 1983 election.[48]

This appeared increasingly unjust to a growing proportion of black and Asian activists who joined the Labour Party in the 1970s and early 1980s, and yet another example of racial inequality.[49] To these activists, it was incongruous that constituencies which contained increasingly large ethnic minority populations were almost all represented by white, male Labour MPs. Roy Hattersley, by now Labour's deputy leader, was particularly criticised in this regard. Hattersley's increasingly liberal politics on migration has already been discussed. However, Hattersley was also a white man who had long represented Birmingham Sparkbrook, a constituency with a high Asian population, and had been known to speak of 'my Asians'.[50] Hattersley enjoyed strong links with his Asian constituents.[51] But his opponents within Labour criticised his mode of engagement as a form of white paternalistic, even colonial, politics, focusing on Hattersley's wooing of often conservatively minded 'community leaders', who would then be tasked with 'getting out the vote'. A 1985 documentary by Darcus Howe and Tariq Ali's *The Bandung File* made these accusations directly.[52] As Black Sections activist Sydney Jeffers explained, part of the impulse of creating Black Sections was to challenge what they saw as this 'godfather' style of politics.[53]

Thus, Black Sections began appearing in local Labour parties, aiming to tackle this underrepresentation head on. A 'Black Section' would act as a caucus dedicated to ethnic minority Labour members and, as a

[45] Sobolewska and Ford, *Brexitland*, 28.
[46] Fitzgerald and Layton Henry, 'Opposition Parties', 103–104.
[47] Messina, *Race and Party Competition*, 152.
[48] In 1983, the newly elected Conservative MP for Bristol East, Jonathan Sayeed, was half Asian. Tariq Modood points out that most political commentators overlooked Sayeed when discussing the arrival of 'black' MPs in 1987. Tariq Modood, '"Black", Racial Equality and Asian Identity', *New Community* 14:3 (1988), 397–405, at 403n3.
[49] Bunce and Linton, *Diane Abbott*, 157.
[50] McSmith, *Faces of Labour*, 234.
[51] Fitzgerald and Layton-Henry, 'Opposition Parties', 105.
[52] Bunce and Linton, *Diane Abbott*, 177.
[53] Jeffers, 'Black Sections in the Labour Party', 43, 55.

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Section rather than just an affiliated Society, would also be given guaranteed representation on key committees, all the way up to the NEC. The purpose was to 'increase party membership among black people', 'help integrate black people into the party', and 'offer an opportunity for local parties to discuss and respond to specific issues relating to black people'.[54] Part of the motivation was to increase the likelihood of the selection of black candidates in winnable Labour seats, thus diversifying Labour's parliamentary representation. The Section also hoped to influence policy; it published a wide-ranging policy document in 1988, which called for (among other things) democratic oversight of the police, the removal of migration control, school curriculum reform, positive action in hiring practices, and seed money for black cooperatives and enterprise.[55] The party's long-established women's and youth sections were explicit inspirations.[56] However, the original Black Sections were technically unconstitutional. As a result, the Black Sections campaign emerged, whose cause was to amend Labour's constitution and legalise the Sections through passing a motion at the party's annual Conference. Early supporters included councillors and activists like Russell Profitt, Phil Sealey, Ben Bousquet, and Diane Abbott.[57] The movement was strongly centred in London, although there were other centres of support in cities like Nottingham. It was the establishment of a Black Section in Vauxhall in April 1984, under the impetus of activist Marc Wadsworth, that first drew a critical response from Kinnock's party leadership, propelling Black Sections up the agenda of Labour politics.[58]

Alongside underrepresentation, there were two other crucial elements that led to the emergence of the Black Sections campaign. The first was rising self-organisation among ethnic minority communities over the long 1970s. For Diane Abbott, Black Sections arose from 'the emergence in the Labour Party of a different generation of black activists, who took for granted that they should organise themselves'.[59] Key landmark protests of this period, such as the 1981 Black People's Day of Action after the New Cross Fire and the 1981 uprisings, injected urgency into the idea of making Labour a more explicitly

[54] Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination: Black People and the Labour Party* (London, 1985), 27, 43.
[55] Labour Party Black Section, *The Black Agenda* (London, 1988).
[56] Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination*, 13; Letter from Eric Heffer to Larry Whitty, 14 June 1985, in PHM, The Papers of Hilary Wainwright (hereafter: WAIN) 2/4.
[57] *The Labour Party Black Section Newsletter*, no. 2 (1984), in BI The Papers of Bernie Grant (hereafter: BG)/P/11/5/1.
[58] Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination*, 30–31, 33; Bunce and Linton, *Diane Abbot*, 159.
[59] Diane Abbott et al., 'Black Sections: Radical Demand … or Distraction?', *Marxism Today* (September 1985), 31–36, at 31.

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anti-racist party.[60] The emergence of Black Sections in the early 1980s was thus no coincidence. Black and Asian Labour councillors were trying to tap into the new wave of ethnic minority mobilisation.[61] For the Black Sections activists, their cause was part of the wider struggle against racism in 1980s Britain.

The Black Sections campaign, therefore, shared more with the black mobilisations outside the party than simply timing. Many of these activists drew on the popular concept of 'political blackness', through which majority Asian activist groups self-described themselves as 'black'. It is only in this context that the name 'Black Sections', which was intended to span both Asian and Afro-Caribbean members and which numbered prominent Asian supporters like Keith Vaz, made any sense.[62] Relatedly, Black Sections supporters often situated their campaign within a global context of Third World politics. In his 1984 conference speech introducing a pro-Black Sections motion, Bernie Grant appealed to the oppression of black people in South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Grenada, India, and Sri Lanka, arguing that these should be priority debates for the Labour Party and linking these international events to racist discrimination in the UK.[63] When elected as an MP in 1987, Black Sections supporter Paul Boateng famously declared: 'Today Brent South, tomorrow Soweto'. Echoes of the diasporic imagination of black radicalism can thus also be discerned within the Labour Party. They are clearly apparent, for example, in the Section's 1988 policy document, which declared that '[o]ur struggle for Black self-organisation is intertwined with the fight for genuine self-determination and national independence in the Black world … We must therefore wage an international struggle as the Black diaspora to regain our land, history, culture and inalienable right to run our own affairs'.[64]

The second factor that fuelled the emergence of the Black Sections campaign was the rise of the left over the 1970s and early 1980s, epitomised in the growing sway of Tony Benn. This is not to say that the relationship between the Black Sections campaign and the Labour Left was simple – quite the reverse. Influential socialist groups thought that class, not race, should be the overriding identity and that racial

[60] Paul Boateng, 'Preface', in Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 11–12, at 12.
[61] Black Sections National Committee, 'The Labour Party Needs Black Sections', n.d. in PHM WAIN 2/4.
[62] Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination*, 33.
[63] Grant's conference speech can be watched here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLVIXAkmFCs].
[64] Black Section, *Black Agenda*, 39–42. There is even some indication of support for the black nationalist Pan Africanist Congress of Azania on p. 41.

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inequalities could often be attributed to class inequality. Among the most bullish proponents of this position were the Trotskyist entryists Militant Tendency.[65] Hence, in Abbott's 1984 speech to the Labour Conference in favour of Black Sections, she attacked those connected to a 'certain newspaper' (*Militant*).[66] Some prominent Black Sections supporters were also not straightforwardly on Labour's left. A good example is Boateng, who wanted Black Sections to facilitate the emergence of black 'role models' in party politics, rather than through any attachment to more bracingly new left ideas. The selection meeting which chose Boateng as the Brent South candidate, paving the way for his election to Parliament in 1987, even attracted a hostile demonstration by the more radical members of the Black Sections campaign, like Linda Bellos and Marc Wadsworth, because it followed Labour Party rules and thus did not formally recognise Black Section delegates. Boateng was reportedly unimpressed with his nominal allies.[67]

Nevertheless, there was a clear affinity between influential wings of the Labour left, especially the London left clustered around the *London Labour Briefing*, and the Black Sections campaign. Key figures in this grouping, like councillor and later MP Jeremy Corbyn or the GLC's leader Livingstone, were strong supporters of the cause (though, despite his theoretical support for more black candidates, Livingstone beat Abbott to the candidacy for the Brent East constituency in the 1987 election).[68] On the flipside, many, though not all, of the Black Sections activists had clear links with this wing of the left. Indeed, the Black Sections campaign possessed familial traits shared with other left-wing groups of the period. The movement's operation was very similar to the Bennite Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, spreading its cause through model resolutions and reselection attempts, and fighting its war on the familiar terrain of constituency Labour party General Management Committees and Conference compositing meetings.[69] This meant that there were some early links between the Black Sections debate and the 'soft left' Labour Co-ordinating Committee, which also grew out of the Bennite constitutional wave. Notably, Kinnock's press secretary Patricia

[65] See, for example, Labour Party Young Socialists, *Black Workers and the Labour Party*, n.d. [c.1985], in BI BG/P/11/5/1. The pamphlet argued that Black Sections was tokenistic and unnecessarily divided the working class. LPYS was in this period a stronghold of Militant Tendency. See Michael Crick, *Militant*, new ed. (London, 2016), 177, 285.

[66] Bunce and Field, *Diane Abbott*, 163–164. See also McSmith, *Faces of Labour*, 231–232.

[67] McSmith, *Faces of Labour*, 233.

[68] Bunce and Linton, *Diane Abbott*, 167–169.

[69] There is a huge literature on this. A classic remains Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*. More recent work includes Leys and Panitch, *Searching for Socialism*, especially chap. 4.

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Hewitt, who had been involved in the late 1970s campaigns for activist democracy, was initially named as a supporter of Black Sections on its literature and, reportedly, unsuccessfully tried to convince Kinnock to support the idea once she went to work in his office in 1983.[70]

Despite these forces pushing it onto the agenda of party debate, however, the Black Sections campaign suffered several defeats over the 1980s. The organisational efforts of the Black Section campaign decisively contributed to the watershed election of four black and Asian Labour MPs in the 1987 general election. Yet, it failed to achieve its internal constitutional goals. Beginning in 1984, the legalisation of Black Sections was brought to several Labour Conferences and repeatedly voted down by large majorities. Aside from these set-piece defeats, the controversy fuelled several public spats between the leadership and Black Sections activists. A 1985 NEC working group failed to solve the problem – while a majority of the working group recommended their implementation, it failed to reach a unanimous decision.[71] The nadir of relations between the Black Sections campaign and the party leadership was probably reached in the run-up to the 1987 election, when the NEC forcibly deselected Sharon Atkin from the candidacy for the Nottingham East constituency. At a Black Sections rally in Birmingham, Atkin controversially said, in response to hostile questioning from black radical activists, that she cared more about black people than a 'racist Labour Party'. The NEC insisted on deselecting her on the grounds that she could not plausibly represent Labour in the upcoming election after these remarks, in the face of opposition from many in the constituency Labour party. The divisive case, further complicated by the illness of both Atkins and her severely sick partner, resulted in a wave of headlines in the hostile tabloid press on the 'black power struggle tearing Labour in two'.[72]

The campaign's struggles arose from a myriad array of obstacles. Partly, it struggled due to the leadership's interpretation of the imperatives of electoral politics. Over the decade, political opponents and a hostile media increasingly used the Black Sections campaign to paint the Labour Party as 'loony left' (one of their most common targets was Bernie Grant, who was repeatedly framed as a 'black extremist'), and

[70] *The Labour Party Black Section Newsletter*, no. 2 (1984), in BI BG/P/11/5/1; McSmith, *Faces of Labour*, 231.

[71] Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination*, which published both 'majority' and 'minority' reports in favour and against Black Sections.

[72] Letter from Roy Hattersley et al. to Bernie Grant and Linda Bellos, 3 April 1987, CAC KNNK 2/1/87; Fiona Millar, 'Black Power Struggle That Is Tearing Labour in Two', *Daily Express*, 9 April 1987, 7–8; Letter from Andy Mutter to Neil Kinnock, 3 April 1987, CAC KNNK 2/1/87.

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internal party opinion research suggested that this was harming Labour's support in swing seats.[73] All this made the leadership and electoral strategists at Walworth Road, such as Peter Mandelson, positively allergic to the Black Sections campaign.[74] Moreover, the campaign also clashed with Kinnock's own struggle to reassert control over the party during the 1980s. The Black Sections demand emerged first in 1983–1984 – in other words, precisely when Kinnock's majority on the NEC and power as leader was at its most tenuous.[75] Given that a key aim of the Black Sections campaign was the creation of another seat on the NEC, it inevitably raised the prospects of a further weakening of Kinnock's authority in the party. Kinnock's opposition should be viewed partly in this context.

There was also an instinctive emotional aversion to the idea from much of the Labour Party. Kinnock and Hattersley, for example, both saw themselves as principled anti-racists, and deeply resented the accusations of racism or white paternalism from the Black Sections campaign. They also reacted strongly to the very principle of dividing the party by race, hence Kinnock rashly suggested that the Sections proposal was a form of segregation, which, given the strong association of segregation with apartheid, was unsurprisingly offensive to many of the Black Sections advocates.[76] It is not hard to imagine, too, that, in a party that was 96 per cent white, of which most grew up in majority white communities, there was at least an element of racial discrimination present in the large majorities who voted down the proposal.[77] Certainly, the problem of underrepresentation in Labour was, for many Black Sections activists, compounded by incidents of racism experienced by the few black and Asian figures who did join the party.[78] Then, as now, Labour members could discriminate against ethnic minority members.

Much of the existing writing on Black Sections highlights these undoubtedly important factors of electoralism, leadership power centralisation, white emotional aversion, and racism. This was, however, not the whole story: the proposal faced other barriers too. Certainly, these

[73] Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 127–129.

[74] Letter from Roy Hattersley to Neil Kinnock, 1 May 1985, in HULL HATTERSLEY U DRH/3/1; Peter Mandelson, 'Marketing Labour', *Contemporary Record* 1:4 (1987), 11–13, at 12.

[75] Massey, *The Modernisation of the Labour Party*, 52.

[76] 'Kinnock Rejects "Black Sections Minefield"', *Guardian*, 11 April 1984, 26; Seamus Milne, 'Labour Rebels Defy Black Section Ruling', *Guardian*, 11 May 1985, 1; Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination*, 27–28; Wainwright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 203.

[77] See the revealing quote John Golding MP gave to Hilary Wainwright in *Tale of Two Parties*, 80.

[78] John Solomos and Les Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change* (London, 1995), 155.

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forces struggle to fully account for the phenomenon of black, Asian, and other ethnic minority Labour members, at all levels, who opposed Black Sections. For example, as John Solomos and Les Back recorded, of the 23 black and Asian Birmingham city councillors they interviewed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, only 20 per cent were supporters of Black Sections.[79] Any canvas of the Conference debates, moreover, reveals black delegates making impassioned speeches against the proposal.[80] Similarly, Bill Morris, the prominent black trade unionist in the Transport and General Workers' Union, and later the first black leader of a major trade union, opposed the establishment of a Black Section.[81] Morris instead publicly championed and privately advocated the compromise of an affiliated Black Socialist Society, which did not restrict membership to black people.[82] White politicians involved in anti-racist politics were sometimes ambivalent about the proposal too. The Labour MP Alf Dubs, who had been involved in equal opportunities work as a councillor and was a founding member of the Labour Party Race Action Group, actually switched his position.[83] Though initially supporting Black Sections in 1984, he changed his mind the following year, claiming at Labour's conference that, in his travels across the country as a frontbench spokesperson, 'black people have come to me and said that they did not want black sections'.[84]

Given the existence of women's and youth sections, and the vocal support for Black Sections among leading black and Asian activists, why were Black Sections opposed by many other black and Asian members of the party? The concern that Black Sections would, by feeding 'loony left' smears, harm Labour electorally was probably important to some degree. In addition, it does appear that many black and Asian Labour members saw themselves, first and foremost, as working class, as socialists, or as Labour supporters, and therefore, like many of the white opponents of Black Sections, disliked dividing the party by race. For example, similarly to Kinnock, Birmingham councillor Sardul Mara (who led the city's race relations structure) attacked Black Sections as 'segregation' and 'apartheid' in August 1984.[85] Marwa also referred

[79] Ibid, 91.
[80] For example, *Conference 1985*, 36–37. The speaker identified as black ('We blacks') and used their experiences as a black person in the party to illustrate their arguments against Black Sections.
[81] 'Black Sections "Wrong"', *Guardian*, 3 September 1985, 4.
[82] Bill Morris, 'Time for New Thinking in the Black Sections Debate', *Tribune*, 8 January 1988, 1, 11; Letter from Bill Morris to Bernie Grant, 4 January 1988, BI BG/P/11/5/5.
[83] Fitzgerald and Layton-Henry, 'Opposition Parties', 108.
[84] Dubs made his remarks during the 1985 Black Sections debate: *Conference 1985*, 35–36.
[85] Solomos and Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, 86. (See also 138–139.)

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to the pre-existence of ethnic minority councillors in Birmingham to criticise the proposal. This reveals another barrier: differences of opinion over the legitimacy of existing channels through which ethnic minorities engaged with the party. What for Black Sections activists was 'godfather' and 'patronage' politics was, for others in the party, community engagement.[86]

Furthermore, though aversion to patronage politics and white paternalism may have inspired the Black Section in the first place, there were also reciprocal complaints from the campaign's opponents. The core of the campaign was a group of black and Asian councillors and activists who were forging their own agenda on their own terms. Yet, as discussed, the issue was also taken up by large parts of the broader Labour left.[87] This was particularly the case from 1985. Terri Sewell has argued that a key turning point was the election of Sharon Atkin as the second national chair, at which point the more self-consciously left-wing Black Labour Activists Campaign (BLAC) took control.[88]

In turn, this embroiled Black Sections within a more fraught political context, which often distracted from the core of the argument. It was a crucial context, for example, behind the Black Sections' 1988 endorsement of the nationalisation of 'the banks and major private companies', at the very moment that Labour was moving decisively away from public ownership.[89] It influenced Kinnock's opposition, given the prospect of a Section dominated by the anti-Kinnock left gaining power in the party. But left-wing connections also alienated several ethnic minority Labour members. Ben Bousquet, a black councillor and one of the founding members of the Black Section, resigned when BLAC took control in 1985. Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz also increasingly attacked the movement's leadership in public in the later 1980s.[90] In their interviews of Birmingham's ethnic minority councillors, Solomos and Back noted that many were on the right of the party, and thus stayed clear of the Black Sections campaign, seeing them as vehicles for left-wing factional advancement. They also noted that while only 20 per cent of black and Asian councillors supported Black Sections, 33 per cent of white councillors did, all of whom were on the party's left. Some ethnic minority councillors told Solomos and Back that they thought the left

86 Ibid, 88.
87 This is implicit in Wainwright's identification of 'two parties' and inclusion of Black Sections in the 'emerging' new party, distinct from 'labourism': Wainwright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 8–9.
88 Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 105.
89 Black Section, *The Black Agenda*, 31.
90 Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 114.

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Table 4.1 *1987 Harris poll of non-white attitudes to Labour Black Sections (%)*

	Asian	Afro-Caribbean
Approve	31	39
Disapprove	46	44
Don't know/not stated	23	17

Source: Messina, *Race and Party Competition*, 177.

patronised them and were cynically using the Black Sections debate to advance their own agenda.[91]

Meanwhile, the Black Sections campaign was far from universally supported within the broader scene of left-wing black radical movements. While Darcus Howe ultimately backed Black Sections activists against what he perceived to be a racist and irredeemably reformist Labour leadership, he also criticised the 'careerism' of the campaign's leading lights, suggesting the Section was of material benefit to only the 'black middle classes'; it did little for the black working class, in which he placed much hope. Looking back from the 2000s, Howe was more unambiguously positive about the Black Sections cause, but at the time he was ambivalent – unsurprisingly, given his distaste for the Labour Party as such.[92] Sivanandan was even more dismissive on these lines, arguing that the Black Sections debate was a distraction from anti-racist and class struggle.[93]

The idea that Black Sections were a cause mainly for a Labour activist minority was not just one made from the extra-Labour left. Another recurring critique made by opponents of Black Sections within the party was that the idea was not supported by most black and Asian citizens. As we saw, this belief was crucial in convincing Dubs to change his position. The accusation that the Black Sections movement was detached from the 'black community' was also made by Bousquet after he resigned.[94] While arguments like this are difficult to conclusively settle, there is evidence that supports this claim. Polling of black and Asian voters over the 1980s consistently showed either majorities or pluralities opposed to the idea of Black Sections (see Table 4.1 for one example from 1987). One such poll

[91] Solomos and Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, 91, 136–137, 158.
[92] Darcus Howe, *Black Sections in the Labour Party* (London, 1985), 11–12; Darcus Howe, 'How Tony Blair Rewrote Our Past', *New Statesman*, 18 December 2007, 30. For opposition to the Labour Party generally, see *Race Today*, '"Building the Mass Movement", August–September 1982', in Field et al. (eds), *Here to Stay, Here to Fight*, 31–32.
[93] Abbott et al., 'Black Sections: Radical Demand … or Distraction?', 33.
[94] Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 105.

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in 1985, which found that 63 per cent of the 'black community' thought it was 'wrong to set up sections exclusively for black people', led *The Voice* to conclude that '[t]here remains a definite gap between the aspirations of the black sections leadership and the black community'.[95] Question wording may have shaped these responses, and (as Messina argues) support did rise over the decade, but it never outweighed the plurality of Afro-Caribbean voters, and even bigger proportion of Asian voters, who opposed the idea.[96] Many supporters of Black Sections rejected the relevance of survey data and preferred (for example) the submissions of black trade unionists to the relevant working group,[97] but it is difficult to avoid the impression of the campaign's 'failure' to garner significant and unified support in the wider ethnic minority community.[98] Even some of its supporters, like Boateng, admitted this. In 1988, Boateng told an interviewer that '[t]he majority of black people don't want Black Sections … I've found that most blacks see it as sectarian and marginalising'.[99]

A final, crucial problem the Black Sections campaign faced was its attempt to import the 'political blackness' concept into the 1980s Labour Party. This caused it several issues. Firstly, it opened up knotty questions of definition and entitlement to membership. If a Black Section was to have guaranteed seats on powerful committees, then it became organisationally and (crucially) factionally vital to have a robust definition of who could join. Yet, there was ambiguity here. Were Chinese, Turkish, Cypriot, Jewish, or Irish Labour Party members 'black', left-wing activists of all skin colours asked?[100] Questions like this often came from those who were already opposed on other grounds, but they were not trivial. To take the Irish example, many in the Black Sections leadership, especially those connected with the London left, supported the 'Irish liberation struggle' (as they characterised the brutal 'Troubles' in the northern Irish six counties) and, echoing Sinn Féin, often directly framed

[95] Tony Sewell, 'Black Section: Only One Slice of the Cake', *The Voice*, 25 May 1985, 14–15.
[96] Messina, *Race and Party Competition*, 176.
[97] See the majority report of the working party: Labour Party, *Positive Discrimination*, 12. According to a briefing note by Patricia Hewitt, the chair of the working party final meeting 'ruled out reference to the HARRIS poll'. Patricia Hewitt, 'Black Sections Working Party', CAC KNNK 2/1/54.
[98] Solomos and Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, 90. As well as consistent polling opposition, there was also some minority opposition within the Afro-Caribbean or Asian media landscape. For example, see a Letter from Caudley George, publisher of *West Indian World*, to Neil Kinnock, 17 April 1985, CAC KNNK 2/1/54.
[99] Quoted in Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 108.
[100] Bill Morris to Bernie Grant, 15 February 1989, enclosing a copy of a letter from Bill Morris to Larry Whitty, 9 February 1989 in BI BG/P/11/5/7; Nasreen Rahman and Doug Jones, 'Who Is Black?', *Marxism Today* (December 1984), 51.

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their support for a united Ireland as 'anti-colonial' and 'Third World' politics.[101] Some also suggested that 'many of the repressive measures being used by the British state against Black people were perfected by its forces of occupation in the North of Ireland'.[102] Meanwhile, prominent figures in the London left often discussed anti-Irish 'racism' to justify their controversial stances on Sinn Féin, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), and their support for 'Troops Out'. GLC leader and Black Sections supporter Ken Livingstone made this argument in startlingly strong terms. In one interview, Livingstone argued that the historical treatment of Ireland by Britain was 'worse than all the Boers have done to the blacks in South Africa' and that while the 'classic Guardian liberal' was conscious of their 'racism about black people', their 'racism against the Irish is so much deeper'.[103] Diane Abbott, meanwhile, suggested in 1984 that the Irish in her council ward 'know from their own experiences what Black people suffer', and that 'another thing Black people and Irish people have in common' is 'having to cope with racism'.[104]

All this is relevant because in the eyes of its supporters, political blackness was explicitly defined not on the colour of somebody's skin, but rather on their structural position within an unequal, post-imperial world, and their political outlook with regard to anti-colonial politics. All these quotes linking the Provisional IRA to anti-colonial struggle, and about the shared experiences of black and Irish people, thus posed the question of what exactly distinguished 'Irish' from 'black' in the self-consciously inclusive and political understanding of the latter term. Most Black Sections activists did want to make that distinction and reacted angrily to the suggestion that white people could join the Section. Indeed, in that 1984 interview, Abbott was anxious to stress that 'I don't think it's exactly the same – if you're white you're white'.[105] Yet, these conceptual ambiguities within the 1980s left complicated their definition of 'blackness'.[106]

Even trickier for the Black Sections proposal, though, was the increasing criticism within left-wing circles of the use of the term 'black' for Asian people. As the Black Sections debate rumbled on, growing

[101] Black Section, *The Black Agenda*, 44–45.

[102] See the inclusion of a demand for the 'withdrawal from Ireland' as a part of 'the Black Section's anti-imperialist intervention in politics', in 'Black Section Candidates', n.d., BI BG/P/11/5/5; 'Stop the Strip-searching', *Black Sections* (Autumn 1986), 2, PHM WAIN 2/4.

[103] Quoted in John Carvel, *Citizen Ken*, new ed. (London, 1987), 162–163.

[104] 'Withdrawal? No Question about It Says: Diane Abbott', *Labour & Ireland* 2:5 (1984).

[105] Ibid.

[106] Relatedly, see Natalie Thomlinson's discussion of the growing prominence of Ireland within 1980s feminism and links with Black women's groups, but also the tensions this caused. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement*, 153–155.

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criticism of political blackness emerged from the 'Bristol school of multiculturalism'.[107] A particularly robust critic was the sociologist Tariq Modood, who argued that the blanket term black 'harmed British Asians' by eliding their specific experiences and downplaying their own cultural inheritances. While Modood was primarily taking aim at sociologists and cultural theorists, such as Paul Gilroy, he also singled out a passage from the Labour Party working group's 1985 Black Sections report as a telling example of the 'doublethink' that the 'political blackness' idea encouraged.[108] Modood was far from alone in disliking the term. Back and Solomos's interviews suggested that several Asian Labour councillors in Birmingham did not consider themselves 'black', and this is an especially noteworthy finding given that one of the arguments of their 1995 book was a defence of political blackness as an analytical tool against criticisms from cultural theorists like Stuart Hall.[109]

It is probably not a coincidence, therefore, that the Black Sections campaign lost momentum at the same time as the activist alliance over political blackness broke down. The divisions were already emerging, but potent confirmation of the fracture was the Salman Rushdie affair of 1989.[110] Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, which was widely perceived as offensive to Muslims, sparked protests, book burnings and the infamous *fatwa* from Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, and stimulated a prominent debate about censorship, tolerance, free speech, and multiculturalism. This debate polarised the Black Sections movement. Among the four black and Asian Labour MPs and supporters of Black Sections elected in 1987, Diane Abbott opposed censoring the paperback on the grounds of free speech and Paul Boateng dismissed the affair as having nothing to do with the 'black discourse', whereas Keith Vaz and Bernie Grant supported the censorship campaign, the latter explicitly as a 'black' struggle.[111] This division came at a crucial juncture, as the conflict began to slowly reach a conclusion. In 1989, the party's NEC floated the compromise idea of a Black Socialist Society, which allowed white members to join if they wished but would not allow them to serve as its officers

[107] Geoffrey Brahm Levey, 'The Bristol School of Multiculturalism', *Ethnicities* 19:1 (2019), 200–226.
[108] Modood, '"Black", Racial Equality and Asian Identity', 399, 400, 404n13.
[109] Solomos and Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, 136–140, 212–213.
[110] For an interesting if somewhat stylised personal account of the Rushdie affair as a watershed controversy for political blackness, see Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: How the World Changed: From the Satanic Verses to Charlie Hebdo*, new ed. (London, 2017), especially the introduction.
[111] Fazakarley, *Muslim Communities*, 173, 176, 180; Benn, *End of an Era*, 558–559 [15 February 1989]; Tariq Modood, 'Political Blackness and British Asians', *Sociology* 28:4 (1994), 859–876, at 869.

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or NEC representative. The Society would also gain representation on the NEC when its membership exceeded 3,000. It was this proposal that Bill Morris championed as a unifying alternative.[112] It failed to pass Conference in 1989, however, garnering strong opposition from many Black Sections supporters who attacked it as a 'choc ice' solution.[113] It took until 1990 before the Black Socialist Society was established.[114] Even then, controversy over membership definition and who exactly could join the society did not abate.[115] It was only later that black and Asian members began to achieve guaranteed representation on party committees. In 1997, the society was granted an NEC seat provided it hit a requisite membership quota (2,500); this was achieved in 2007, at which point Keith Vaz MP became the NEC representative of the newly renamed BAME Labour.[116]

Flashes of Modernisation

The messy debate over Black Sections perfectly illustrates the contentiousness of the politics of race in the 1980s Labour Party. The issues of both underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in positions of power and the strength of Labour's commitment to antiracism were live and divisive in internal left-wing debates. Given this, the politics of race possesses potentially decisive significance for the wider questions of this book. Its other chapters show that, over the same period as the Black Sections controversy, various parts of the left increasingly drew on a pre-existing language of 'modernisation' to conceptualise and advocate for a diverse array of competing agendas of party reform and socialist regeneration. One might think that these arguments for 'modernisation' at least touched on the polarised issue of racial representation and antiracist policy.

There were indeed figures both inside and outside the party who sometimes made this connection. In the intellectual left, two thinkers in

[112] Michael White, 'Kinnock Backs Deal Deflating Party Row over Black Sections', *Guardian*, 28 September 1989, 2.
[113] Paul Hoyland, 'Blacks Reject NEC Compromise: Black Sections', *Guardian*, 4 October 1989, 4.
[114] Sewell, *Black Tribunes*, 117.
[115] Letter from Jatin Haria to Bernie Grant, 9 August 1991, BI BG/P/11/5/3; 'Black Socialist Society: It Must Be Black', in *Black Sections* (Autumn Winter/1991), 1, BI PG/P/11/5/6.
[116] Massey, *The Modernisation of the Labour Party*, 204; Ann Black NEC report, 20 March 2007 [www.annblack.co.uk/nec-meeting-20-march-2007/]; Chuka Umunna's BAME Labour Update (2007) [www.tmponline.org/wp-content/071223-bame-labour-report.pdf].

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particular flirted with describing the evolving relationship of the left and race in terms of modernisation. They were Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, both cultural theorists who wrote on the politics of race in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Both had been involved in the CCCS at Birmingham, which had published a number of highly influential Gramscian analyses of the 'crisis' of the 1970s. Hall co-authored *Policing the Crisis* (1978) which used the keyword 'mugging' to analyse racial tensions, along with class conflict, decolonisation, and decline in British society after 1968.[117] Gilroy contributed to the edited collection *Empire Strikes Back*, which analysed police racism in response to the upheavals of the 1970s and clashes of the early 1980s.[118] These interventions did not just have immediate political implications but also theoretical import for Marxist theory. Gilroy and his collaborators argued in 1982 that the 'crisis' could not be boiled down to an economic conflict in the 'base', as a simplified Marxism would have it, but was rather a Gramscian 'organic' crisis, 'the result of the combined effect of economic, political, ideological and cultural processes'. This was relevant because 'race has become one of the means through which hegemonic relations are secured in a period of structural crisis management'. Race, understood as a historically contingent ideology, was not a superstructure to social reality, but was itself a critical contributor to the upheavals and racist backlash of the 1970s.[119] Gilroy developed this argument over the decade. By 1987, when he published his famous *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Gilroy discussed his work partly in terms of 'modernising' Marxist theory: 'If class analysis is to retain a place in explaining contemporary politics in general and the relationships between black and white workers, citizens, neighbours and friends in particular, it must be ruthlessly modernized.'[120]

Why 'modernised'? Gilroy was still operating within a recognisably Marxist analytical frame, in which the concept of modernity had real importance. The Marxist urge to relate political conflicts to underlying social conflicts in contemporary society, and its analytical dependence on an industrialised, capitalist 'modernity' as a distinct era in human history, encouraged talk of 'modernising' politics or ideology in response to new forces in 'modern society'. Gilroy put it in these terms: referring to the 'decline of the workers' movement' in the West over the 1980s,

[117] Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law & Order*, 35th anniversary edition (London, 2013 [1978]).
[118] CCCS, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London, 1982).
[119] John Solomos et al., 'The Organic Crisis of British Capitalism and Race: The Experience of the Seventies', in *Empire Strikes Back*, 7–45, at 9, 11–13.
[120] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, new ed. (London, 2002), 7–8.

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and the 'new movements' of the post-1968 generation (antiracism and feminism in particular), he argued that they were 'part of a new phase of class conflict so far removed from the class struggles of the industrial era that the vocabulary of class analysis created during that period must itself be dispensed with, or at least ruthlessly modernized'.[121] For Gilroy in 1987, race was becoming the new central category of a modernised Marxist analysis.

On the surface, this may seem to have little to do with the Labour Party. Gilroy certainly made no secret of his disapproval of Labour, attacking its leadership as complicit in British racism and its white left as naïve in its anti-racist praxis.[122] But as we have seen in other chapters, Stuart Hall did take a greater interest in the political future of the Labour Party in the 1980s.[123] What is more, he pursued his analysis in similar terms. Like Gilroy, Hall also saw great importance in the shifting terrain of social class in a deindustrialising, post-colonial Britain. In a 1985 response to Labour's Black Sections debate, which was published in the *Guardian* and broadcast on BBC 2, Hall noted some of the criticisms from black organisations that the Sections campaign was a distraction. Yet, he still offered his tentative support for the idea. This was because 'British society – in particular, the working class and radical and progressive opinion – has been transformed by the historical presence of substantial numbers of blacks – men and women – working in it. They've changed the nature of class relations and the composition of class. Yet', Hall added, this 'is not reflected' in organisations like Labour, which 'partly through their racism, partly through prejudice, partly through an old habitual instinct', carry on 'as they always have', neglecting black constituents.[124]

For Hall, the cause of Black Sections was, in this context, 'perfectly legitimate'. Indeed, Hall saw the Sections controversy as symptomatic of a wider malaise of a 'traditional Labour movement' caught in the maelstrom of modernity: Labour and the left were 'deeply in crisis, because their relationship to a variety of contradictions and struggles – not only among black people, but among women, in sexual politics, in poverty, among people in the dispossessed classes of modern Thatcherism'. The party still relied on an 'undifferentiated' conception of the 'working class', but '[t]he fact is that the Labour movement and the Left and the popular

[121] Ibid, 306–307.
[122] Paul Gilroy, 'The End of Anti-Racism', in Wendy Ball and John Solomos (eds), *Race and Local Politics* (Basingstoke, 1990), 191–210, at 201; Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*, 197–198.
[123] See also Abbott et al., 'Black Sections', 34.
[124] Stuart Hall, 'The Gulf between Labour and Blacks', *Guardian*, 15 July 1985, 18.

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constituencies are no longer like that … to be a black unemployed youth gives you a different experience, confronts different sources of opposition, than to be white'. Hall concluded that the 'Labour movement in the future is going to have to recognise this much more differentiated nature of the constituencies it represents'.[125] Following Labour's third consecutive defeat in 1987, Hall returned to this argument in a deeply pessimistic essay for *Marxism Today*. He blamed Labour's electoral wilderness partly on its loss of the 'new working class' of southern England but also warned of fraying support among some black and Asian voters, especially small business owners. All this meant that Labour needed to recalibrate its politics in response to wider social changes in modern Britain. Labour needed to move beyond its dwindling base of 'traditional Labour voters', and devise 'a strategy of modernisation and an image of modernity' to construct a new 'social bloc' of support.[126]

Readers will, by now, probably recognise the resonances of this discussion with another famous *Marxism Today* essay which was discussed in the introduction: Eric Hobsbawm's 'Forward March of Labour Halted'. Just like the socialist feminists in the previous chapter, Hall was tapping into a much wider debate about the 'future of the left', destabilised by apparent transformations in class structure and class voting patterns; indeed, his own 'The Great Moving Right Show', with its warnings of the rising hegemony of the 'radical right', had been a foundational text for this debate.[127] This impression of structural change in Labour's electoral base animated a whole host of arguments for 'modernising' the party.[128] By evoking the image of a dwindling 'traditional Labour voter', and pointing to a new 'social bloc' to be forged from the 'dispossessed social classes of modern Thatcherism', Hall was suggesting in 1987 that a socialist 'strategy of modernisation' in response to Thatcherite hegemony had to make antiracism more central to its appeal, and place non-white Britons at the centre of its core constituency.

This gave the Black Sections controversy potentially deep significance. Could it be a symptom of Labour's transforming electoral base over the longer term? There were some elements within the Labour Party that made this argument. The most prominent was the iconoclastic GLC leader, Ken Livingstone. As Chapters 2 and 3 explored, for many on the left – including Stuart Hall – the radical administration of the GLC that he headed from 1981 to 1986 was nothing less than the

[125] Ibid.
[126] Stuart Hall, 'Blue Election, Election Blues', *Marxism Today* (July 1987), 30–35, at 34.
[127] Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today* (January 1979), 14–21.
[128] Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Class', 336–338.

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future model of a successful Labour Party. A rare municipal island of vibrant and creative socialist governance in the 1980s, it was watched closely by many socialist and Labour intellectuals as offering potential lessons for the national party. In this context, it was significant that the GLC made several high-profile interventions into the debate on racial inequality in 1980s Britain. Following the 1981 Brixton riots, the GLC published its own report, which went further than the official Scarman inquiry and identified 'institutional racism' in the Metropolitan police as a cause of the uprising. Boateng, the future Black Section advocate and Labour MP, wrote the preface.[129] In 1984, the GLC hosted a year-long 'London Against Racism' campaign, distributing information leaflets and holding public events highlighting racial discrimination and calling for institutional and societal reform. Away from the headlines, the GLC set up an Ethnic Minorities Unit that increasingly tried to challenge racism in London's institutions, and tackle racist discrimination in wider London society.[130] Other local institutions, like the Inner London Education Authority, were also increasingly preoccupied with challenging racial inequality in schools.[131]

The activities of this council, and its brief surge of popularity following the 1984 campaign against its abolition, seemed to echo the broad thrust of Hall's analysis about 'modern Britain'. Other writers explicitly championed the GLC in these terms. For example, in a response to Hobsbawm's pessimism, Doreen Massey, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright offered a more optimistic reading. They argued that, rather than look to the centre and swing voter, the left should first seek a 'new kind of alliance', which mobilised marginalised social groups (the disabled, ethnic minorities, the homeless) along with 'new social movements' (such as unilateralism, feminism, and assertive trade unionism). They contended that this new electoral constituency was already being forged 'at the grass roots' by the municipal socialists in London and Sheffield.[132] Similarly, at the point of its abolition in 1986, Hall's fellow

[129] Greater London Council, *Policing London: The Policing Aspects of Lord Scarman's Report on the Brixton Disorders* (London, 1982).
[130] Hatherley, *Red Metropolis*, 119; Brooke, 'Space, Emotions and the Everyday', 110–142, at 132–141. There were limits to this agenda. See the lack of attention given to black workers in the GLC's economic policymaking, as admitted in Mackintosh and Wainwright, 'Introduction', in idem (eds), *A Taste of Power*, 10–12. I am grateful to Nick Garland for alerting me to this discussion.
[131] Although there is some doubt on the extent to which the ILEA's policymaking affected teaching practice. See Fazakarley, *Muslim Communities*, 57.
[132] Doreen Massey, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, 'And Now for the Good News', in Curran (ed.), *The Future of the Left*, 211–231, at 214, 216–217. See also Wainwright, *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*. Recent scholarship has stressed regional variation and the distinctiveness of Sheffield. See Payling, 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire'.

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Marxism Today writers Martin Jacques and Beatrix Campbell argued that the GLC showed the way for a future strategy: race, along with gender and sexuality, would 'surely be a central part of the agenda of the 1990s'.[133]

Over the 1980s, Livingstone himself made several remarks along these lines. In 1984, Pluto Press published a 1983 conversation with Tariq Ali, the anti-Vietnam campaigner and veteran of the International Marxist Group who had more recently mounted an unsuccessful attempt to join Labour. Livingstone argued to Ali that the 'Labour Party's almost exclusive concentration on the employed male white working class was a weakness … You need a coalition which includes skilled and unskilled workers, unemployed, women, and black people, as well as the sexually oppressed minorities'.[134] In other words, Labour would need to build a 'rainbow coalition', to borrow the American term popularised by Jesse Jackson.[135] In his 1987 book, Livingstone repeated this claim, explaining the current 'weakness' of the Labour Party partly because 'more women and black people had become part of the workforce, [but] the Labour and Trade Union movement had not adapted rapidly enough to the changing pattern'.[136] This belief, along with his factional connections to the London Left, made Livingstone an instinctive supporter of the Black Sections campaign. In a 1984 interview with two academics, Livingstone argued that Labour needed to downgrade the trade unions in its structure because of the contracting industrial base and pivot to new social bases: 'Black political organisations should be affiliated to the Labour Party, as should various feminist groups'.[137] After Livingstone became an MP and engaged, to some extent, with the Policy Review, he developed a new language for this. In his 1989 book *Livingstone's Labour*, which he advertised as 'an achievable package of modernising reforms', Livingstone included a robust defence of the Black Sections movement, arguing: 'until Labour is truly prepared to listen to what its black members are saying, we will fail to modernise our party let alone create the unity which can help defeat the Tories'.[138]

[133] Beatrix Campbell and Martin Jacques, 'Goodbye to the GLC', *Marxism Today* (April 1986), 6–10.
[134] Ken Livingstone and Tariq Ali, *Who's Afraid of Margaret Thatcher? In Praise of Socialism* (London, 1984), 66–67.
[135] For the connections between Jesse Jackson and the London left, see Bunce and Linton, *Diane Abbott*, 210–212.
[136] Ken Livingstone, *If Voting Changed Anything They'd Abolish It* (London, 1987), 242–243.
[137] Ken Livingstone, interviewed by Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, in Boddy and Fudge (eds), *Local Socialism*, 260–283, at 270.
[138] Livingstone, *Livingstone's Labour*, 113, 124.

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There were, therefore, some hints of an emerging interpretation of modernisation in 1980s left-wing discourse. This understanding of modernisation was a response to the broader upheavals of the long 1970s, which drew on debates within Gramscian Marxism about the importance of race, and the wider Hobsbawmian spectre of the 'forward march of labour halted'. Grounded on the perception of a transforming social base, with profound implications for a vote-seeking left-wing party in modern Britain, it represented initiatives like Black Sections as part of a necessary 'modernisation' of Labour to respond to contemporary society.

Absence

However, as may be apparent from the above discussion, linkages between 'modernisation' and race are scattered, infrequent, and difficult to piece together. When considered as a whole, they do not possess enough coherence to be described as a fully fledged 'modernisation' agenda that shaped national Labour politics. Indeed, the literature connected to the Black Sections campaign itself avoided the topic of 'modernisation'. The campaign's attention was of course devoted to the gruelling trench warfare of Labour Party constitutional and organisational debates. This meant that the energies of Black Sections activists were expended on procedural battles over standing orders and model resolutions. Yet, even in their longer reflections on British society, detached from the day-to-day manoeuvres, Black Sections activists did not use the language of modernisation. For example, in 1989 Kingsley Abrams internally circulated a paper on 'Building for the 1990s' that drew on the increasingly popular concept of a culturalist 'New Racism', but within this discussion, languages of 'modernisation' (that their cause was increasingly relevant to either 'modern Britain' or a 'modern Labour Party') were mostly absent.[139] Moreover, as many scholars like Meg Russell and Christopher Massey have convincingly established, other disputes about Labour's organisation and constitution, such as the structure of the Policy Review (1987–1991), the introduction of 'OMOV' (1993), and the revision of Clause IV (1995), *were* invested with discourses of 'modern socialism' or 'modernisation'.[140] The fact that the Black Sections debate pivoted on questions of procedure and constitutional legality is not an explanation in itself.

Nor is it easy to find discussion of modernisation and race together in other parts of the left. Bill Morris is quoted in 1990 speaking in support of the Black Socialist Society by saying that 'Black representation is

[139] Kingsley Abrams, 'Building for the 1990s', June 1989, BI BG/P/11/5/5.
[140] Massey, *The Modernisation of the Labour Party*; Russell, *Building New Labour*, 19.

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a cause whose time has come'.[141] But supporters of the Black Socialist Society, including Morris, seemed to justify it most often on 'the principle of adequate black representation', and did not usually link it to the wider discourse of 'modernising' the party.[142] The 1989 Policy Review report *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* did, like the 1983 and 1987 manifestos, discuss Labour's policies on migration and racial discrimination. However, it expressed these commitments through a discourse of 'equal rights', not a 'modernising' project.[143] A similar observation could be made about the 1992 manifesto. Its policies on anti-discrimination and migration were placed within the section 'A modern democracy'. However, as Chapter 5 will show, this title referred to an emerging constitutional interpretation of modernisation, in which questions of racial inequality were subsumed within seemingly race-neutral terms like 'citizenship'. The specific policies on race and multiculturalism were, again, underpinned by a discourse of equality.[144] Nor was race a feature of arguments about 'modernisation' during the 1992 leadership election. In his speeches as candidate and as leader John Smith considered British and Scottish national identity in his discussions of constitutional 'modernisation', but not race or ethnicity.[145] Bryan Gould devoted a pamphlet to the issue of racial equality during his leadership campaign but, unlike his other pamphlets which sometimes referenced 'modern socialism', this did not deploy a language of modernity.[146]

What about the 1990s arguments for 'modernisation' that fuelled the emerging agenda of New Labour? Again, race and multiculturalism are noticeable by their relative absence. The burgeoning centre-left think tank world did sometimes engage with the issues. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published essays on multiculturalism, religious identity, and the utility or otherwise of political blackness by Tariq Modood and Bhikhu Parekh.[147] Similarly, the 1995 Demos pamphlet *The Battle over Britain* considered the implications of multiculturalism for national identity.[148] Yet, again, 'modernisation' or 'modernity' were

[141] Patrick Wintour and Nicki Knewstub, 'Black Groups Win Own Organisation', *Guardian*, 5 October 1990, 6.
[142] Letter from Bill Morris to Bernie Grant, 4 January 1988, BI BG/11/5/5.
[143] Labour, *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*, 62–64.
[144] Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos*, 307.
[145] John Smith, 'Reforming Our Democracy', in idem, *Guiding Light: The Collected Speeches of John Smith*, ed. Brian Brivati (London, 2000), 176–188, at 183.
[146] Bryan Gould, *Labour and Race* (1992), MRC BICKERSTAFFE 657/34.
[147] Tariq Modood, 'Ethnic Difference and Racial Equality: New Challenges for the Left'; Bikhu Parekh, 'Comment: Minority Right, Majority Values', in Miliband (ed.), *Reinventing the Left*, 86–111.
[148] Phillip Dodd, *The Battle over Britain* (London, 1995), 25, 27, 31.

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not key intellectual resources. Though the *Battle over Britain* pamphlet even managed to represent 'Georgian doors' on former council houses as a 'sign of modernisation', it did not frame multiethnic national identity in these terms.[149] Similarly, while the IPPR did try and consider multicultural debates, it appears not to have conceived these questions as 'modern'. Consider its *Next Left* pamphlet of 1992, an extended attempt by Patricia Hewitt, James Cornford, David Miliband, and Tessa Blackstone to rejuvenate social democracy for 'the 1990s', which other chapters discuss. Early in the pamphlet, they revealingly suggested: 'Old questions of race, nation and religion are regaining prominence, while issues concerning gender, the environment and demographic change have to be central to new political thinking.' Thus, they recognised the growing importance of race, nation, and religion in 1990s politics, but conceptualised these issues as 'old questions … regaining prominence', not as *modern* issues. The distinction may seem subtle, but it had important implications for an agenda so obsessed with 'modernisation' and novelty. The rest of the pamphlet highlighted the 'modern' agenda that a social democratic government in the 1990s should pursue: European models of managed capitalism, the embrace of transforming gender relations, support for European macroeconomic integration, and constitutional reform. In contrast, despite the odd allusion, this pamphlet did not explicitly discuss multifaith and multicultural policies, or legislation tackling racist discrimination. The polarised politics of race and multiculturalism was, it seems from this pamphlet, a bear-trap to avoid, rather than a constitutive theme for the politics of a modern social democracy.[150]

Faction, Vote, and the Enlightenment

This relative absence sheds light on the emerging project of a modernising social democracy in late twentieth-century Britain. Partly, it underscores the enduring importance of a familiar theme: the factional nature of the Labour Party and its organisation. Factional contexts not only limited the support for Black Sections. They also increasingly defined the meaning of modernisation in the 1990s. As this book shows more generally, there were a wide array of modernisation discourses across the left and right of the Labour Party in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. With the emergence of 'New Labour', however, this began to change. As alternative modernisation discourses fell by the wayside, 'modernisation' increasingly came to mean the agenda of Tony Blair and Gordon

[149] Ibid, 15.
[150] Blackstone et al., *Next Left*, i.

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Brown: welfare to work, human capital, constitutional reform, the minimum wage. Thus, for left-wing activists opposed to New Labour, 'modernisation' came to take on evermore negative connotations. As a result, during the 1995 Conference, Diane Abbott pointedly told a television reporter that she wanted Blair to give a 'stirring' speech endorsing 'real, old-fashioned socialism'.[151] As she well knew, saying this in the year that the party voted to revise Clause IV clearly signalled her opposition to the 'modernisation' agenda of Blair's leadership. But it also meant that her positioning to the call for 'modernisation' was to defend 'old-fashioned socialism', rather than outline an alternative 'modern' agenda.

Yet, while factionalism is clearly relevant, it is far from sufficient. Though the Black Sections cause was strongly associated with the Labour left, this began to break down in the later 1980s and 1990s: Boateng, for example, joined the frontbench team under Kinnock, contributed to the Policy Review, and later became a New Labour minister. Moreover, when the political boundaries of a 'modernisation' agenda were fluid and open in the late 1980s, there was the *potential* for an interpretation of modernisation that foregrounded the agendas of vocal antiracism and multiracial representation. Livingstone's attempt to forge his own 'modernising' agenda in 1989 shows that the raw materials of left-wing politics in the late 1980s did provide the opportunity for such an interpretation. As the concept of 'modernisation' gained prominence during the Policy Review, the Black Sections controversy and the Rushdie Affair demonstrated the topicality of race and multiculturalism. Why did they not make a greater mark on the modernisation debates?

A crucial reason must be the emergence of a powerful competing interpretation of a successful electoral strategy for Labour, which undermined the very foundations on which politicians like Livingstone constructed their case. The arguments of those like Livingstone, Hall, and Wainwright depended on the idea that a corollary to a declining 'traditional' white, male, unionised working class was the growing *electoral* importance of race, gender, and sexuality politics. Yet, for other left-wing thinkers and many Labour strategists and politicians, while antiracist politics may be right in principle and of growing social relevance, it was far from clear that it would help to rebuild an election-winning voter base. This was, firstly, due to the imperatives of vote-seeking under first past the post. Many Labour figures (on the party's left as well as its right) put a far higher premium on seeking 'target voters'. For example, after the 1983 disaster, Labour Co-ordinating Committee activists Peter Hain and Nigel Stanley concluded that Labour *already* had a strong

151 The interview clip can be seen here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iWdRI-cOCQ].

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voter base among ethnic minorities and that the focus should instead be on winning over Thatcher-voting constituencies. Labour needed to 'go beyond our existing vote – the inner-city, "old", declining working class in heavy manufacturing, middle-class Left and blacks' and develop a '"modernising socialism" appeal' to the '"upwardly mobile" … new working class'.[152] It is notable that one of the authors of this article was Hain, a prominent anti-apartheid campaigner and anti-fascist activist who fled South African persecution as a teenager. While antiracism was utterly central to Hain's politics, he did not interpret it through the lens of 'modernising socialism' – they were simply separate issues for him. Similarly, in 1986 Kinnock himself argued that Labour needed to add to its strong support among the 'traditional' working classes and 'minority groups' the 'modern working classes' experiencing 'upward social mobility, increased expectations, and extended horizons'.[153] Because ethnic minority voters tended to already vote for Labour, and live in Labour-held constituencies, strategists habitually excluded them from the 'modern working classes' in swing seats that they identified as target voters.

Moreover, party political competition over the 1980s seemed only to strengthen this argument. Firstly, as discussed earlier, the hostile tabloid media seized on the Black Sections controversy and the various anti-racist initiatives of left-wing councils. While much of this reporting was either sensationalist or at times pure fiction, it had political implications. Crucially, when combined with changing practices in opinion research within the upper echelons of the Labour Party, the 'loony left' smear helped marginalise Livingstone's GLC as a model for an electorally successful 'modern socialism'. From the mid-1980s onwards, Labour began to use focus groups of target voters. Several of the resultant reports produced for the party leadership argued that, rather than pioneering a new social bloc, municipal socialists like Livingstone were actively dragging Labour's vote downwards among target constituencies, partly because voters were hostile to their championing of pro-minority politics. These focus group and polling reports mainly explained this target voter opposition to the municipal left in terms of hostility to same-sex relationships (more visible during the AIDS crisis), but they also talked about voter aversion to performative anti-racist politics. One suggested that even if voters 'acknowledge that Blacks get a rough deal, it's a low priority'.[154]

[152] Peter Hain and Nigel Stanley, 'The Modernising of the Labour Party', *Tribune*, 7 October 1983, 9.

[153] Neil Kinnock, *The Future of Socialism* (London, 1986), 2.

[154] Anonymous, 'The London Labour Party: Voters' Perceptions' (n.d.), CAC KNNK 2/1/95. See also Shadow Communications Agency et al., 'Labour & Britain in the

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As I have argued elsewhere, these opinion research practices – situated in a rancid political atmosphere, poisoned by 'loony left' smears from the right – encouraged Labour's leadership to downplay, though not abandon, its policies on minority rights.[155] None of this meant that Labour politicians did not support racial equality in principle. Yet, because opinion research influenced the attempts of Kinnock, Blair, and Brown to 'modernise' their party's policies and image, it did help ensure that an emphasis on racial equality was largely absent from their arguments for modernisation.[156]

The role of electoral strategy and the leadership's political practice in undermining the assumptions of an argument that linked race and 'modernisation' becomes clear if we compare race to another 'new social movement': feminism. In the 'rainbow alliance' arguments on Labour's future electoral coalition, race and gender were often bundled together. Yet, their actual trajectories within Labour's electoral strategy over the 1980s and 1990s were different. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, while it was never central, a distinct gendered interpretation of modernisation did develop over the 1980s and 1990s in left-wing policy circles, which influenced some figures in New Labour. Electoral considerations encouraged this association between gender relations and modernisation. Qualitative opinion research by consultants like Deborah Mattinson helped influential politicians like Harriet Harman flag the importance of women's support for the party and argue for some longstanding feminist policies. Indeed, they used focus group data and electoral arguments to support their own campaign for more positive discrimination for women in the party's constitution.[157] While feminism did not influence the Labour leadership's 'modernisation' as much as they would have liked, their arguments did shape Labour's policies and campaigning. It seems a safe bet to make changing practices of opinion research and electoral strategy formation at least a part of the explanation for this divergent prominence. Women were extensively focus-grouped as target voters (even gaining the shorthand 'Worcester woman' to accompany 'Basildon man'), who were more likely to vote Conservative than men and were spread across the entire country. Ethnic minority voters already mostly supported Labour and were more likely to live in seats that Labour already held.

1990s', 19 November 1987, PHM The Papers of Philip Gould (hereafter: PG), fol. 16r; Gould Mattinson Associates, *Qualitative Research amongst Waverer in Labour's Southern Target Seats* (London, 1992), 16.

155 Murphy, 'The "Rainbow Alliance" or the Focus Group?'

156 Smith was not as keen on qualitative opinion research, though the extent to which he ignored it is disputed. Stuart, *John Smith*, 309–310.

157 Hewitt and Mattinson, *Women's Votes*, 2, 21; Mattinson, *Talking to a Brick Wall*, 51.

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The different trajectory of race and gender shows the role of electoral strategy in shaping, even if subconsciously, the 'modernisation' arguments of a party exiled from power and desperate to find a way back.

Yet, important as it was, the debates over 'modernisation' were never just about electoral strategy. As Chapter 2 showed with the marginalisation of the 'stakeholding economy' idea, focus groups could be overpowered by other forces, including intellectual debate. Ideas mattered in discussions of the future of the left, and that includes the debate on the place of race and multiculturalism. There were intellectual tensions lurking within any attempt to connect 'modernisation' and race or multiculturalism, which only magnified as the 1980s moved into the 1990s. To discern these barriers, we must return to the work of Hall and Gilroy.

As we saw, both Hall and Gilroy sometimes drew on languages of 'modernisation' in the 1980s, and both were convinced that left-wing politics had to place the struggle against racism at the heart of its agenda. In Hall's case, this also shaped the way he analysed the prospects of the 1980s Labour Party. Yet, in the 1990s, both became more uneasy with this language. The concept of 'modernisation' usually draws on an Enlightenment temporality and is therefore heavily reliant on ideas of 'progress'.[158] Yet in the 1980s and 1990s, the confidence of many theorists in these 'grand narratives' was severely shaken by the growing strength of post-structuralist philosophy in British academia. This in turn shaped how these theorists, including Hall and Gilroy, analysed politics. The influence of Foucault and other critics of structuralism is clearly apparent, for example, in Hall's emerging scepticism of 'political blackness'.[159] But it also meant that left-wing social scientists increasingly complicated their use of terms like 'modernity'. Hall had always been conscious of the possibility of plural modernisations; he had discussed the co-existence of both 'socialist' and 'conservative' modernisation in the 1980s. However, in the 1990s he went further. In sociology textbooks, Hall began to draw from the post-modern idea of the deconstructed self and critiqued Enlightenment metanarratives and totalising theory. While Hall continued to stress transformative change – particularly the process of 'globalisation' – he saw its effects as plural and contradictory. Indeed, he discerned in the resurgence of nationalism and ethnic particularism a profound challenge to 'the modernizing Enlightenment' perspective and to both 'liberalism' and 'Marxism'.[160] Similarly, in his hugely influential

[158] Margetts, Perri 6, and Hoods (eds), *Paradoxes of Modernization*, 9.
[159] Hall, *Essential Essays Vol. 2*, 65–66, 77.
[160] Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in Hall, David Held, and Tony McGrew (eds), *Modernity and Its Futures* (Cambridge, 1992), 273–327, at 275, 314.

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Black Atlantic, Gilroy ditched the demand for 'modernising' Marxist class analysis and moved towards a more ambivalent language. He instead conceptualised the 'Black Atlantic' as simultaneously a 'modern political and cultural formation' and a 'counterculture of Modernity'. Gilroy also criticised Enlightenment philosophy for its blindness to the constitutive role of slavery for modernity and suggested that particularity and ethnocentrism resided within its claims to universality.[161]

These arguments unsettled appeals to 'modernisation'. As a result, though they had used the term in a positive sense in the 1980s, during the 1990s intellectuals like Hall largely stopped calling for 'modernisation'. By the late 1990s and 2000s, they even seemed to become hostile to the concept. In 1998, writing for *Soundings*, a journal Hall co-founded, the academic Alan Finlayson critiqued Blair's use of 'modernisation', perceiving within Blair's rhetoric a suffocating determinism, 'populist patriotism', and 'nationalism'.[162] In 2000, Hall himself gave a lecture on 'multiculturalism', in which he pitted 'modernisation' *against* 'multiculturalism':

> Multiculturalism is also contested by modernizers of different political persuasions. For them, the triumph of the universalism of Western civilization over the particularism of ethnic and racial belonging established in the Enlightenment marked a fateful and irreversible transition from Traditionalism to Modernity … [which] must never be reversed.[163]

Thus, while New Labour loudly predicted and celebrated sweeping transformations of the modern world, Hall and Gilroy increasingly critiqued the universalising and neophilic Enlightenment assumptions of progress that underpinned these discourses. For them, a framework of 'modernisation' was now *harmful*, rather than helpful, to any agenda that wished to accommodate cultural difference, reduce racial inequality, and tackle discrimination against ethnic minorities. When situated in a changing intellectual context, the origins of 'modernisation' in a Eurocentric Enlightenment complicated any attempt within the left to tie it to multiculturalism.

1997 and After

Given the marginality of race and multiculturalism to the 1990s Labour debates on a modernising social democracy, it should not surprise us that

[161] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1993), 19, 36, 38–39, 42–43, 55.
[162] Finlayson, 'Tony Blair and the Jargon of Modernisation', 24–25.
[163] Hall, *Essential Essays Vol. 2*, 96.

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neither Blair nor Brown addressed the issues in any great depth while in opposition. Symbolic of this absence is Labour's landslide-winning 1997 manifesto. Neither racial equality nor multiculturalism were mentioned much at all and were largely irrelevant to New Labour's promise to 'modernise Britain'.[164]

Yet, this brings us back to the historical puzzle introduced at the beginning of this chapter. If both race and multiculturalism awkwardly fitted in the 'modernisation' debates of the late twentieth-century left, then where did the association of the 2000s and 2010s come from? To a significant extent, it appears that Labour's agenda on discrimination and multiculturalism arose once the party entered government, rather than in the 'modernisation' debates of its opposition years. The policy and strategy debates over Labour's 'modernising' agenda in opposition did not significantly shape the party's post-1997 governance of cultural difference.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry is a case in point. In their memoirs, New Labour politicians highlight their facilitation of the Macpherson report on police racism, which introduced the concept of 'institutional racism' to the agenda of government. Yet, as admitted by Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, the Lawrence murder was barely on the radar of the Labour leadership when they were in opposition. While Doreen and Neville Lawrence had campaigned for justice since his murder in 1993, Labour avoided mentioning the case in its manifesto or election campaign in 1997 as they did not want to make an ongoing investigation a 'political football'. It was only once in power that Straw began to investigate an inquiry, and that cause gained momentum only after a wider public campaign (spearheaded by the *Daily Mail*, of all things) jolted the government into action.[165]

Even landmark reports on multiculturalism published during the first New Labour government, such as the Runneymede Trust's major, controversial report into the 'future of multi-ethnic Britain', confirm this impression of New Labour. Chaired by Bhikhu Parekh (and thus known, against his wishes, as the 'Parekh report'), it was launched in 1998 by Straw and used focus group research by Philip

[164] Labour pledged to create a new criminal offence of racial harassment, promised to reform migration controls and end 'arbitrary and unfair' outcomes, and pledged to tackle 'unjustifiable discrimination wherever it exists'. But none of these pledges were linked to the 'new centre-left politics' and none appeared in the ten key pledges to 'modernise Britain'. See Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos*, 343–383.

[165] Straw, *Last Man Standing*, 231, 234. See also Richard Power Sayeed, *1997: The Future That Never Happened* (London, 2017), 84–85; Stuart Hall, 'From Scarman to Stephen Lawrence', *History Workshop Journal* 48 (1999), 187–197, at 196–197.

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Gould Associates. Its argument, which attempted to synthesise communitarianism and liberalism by conceiving Britain as a 'community of citizens and a community of communities', was 'Third Way' in style. It also drew on 'modernising' temporal arguments. For several decades, transformations and trends including devolution, globalisation, European integration, shifting gender relations, changing attitudes to sexuality, and rising multiculturalism, had 'come together so powerfully and momentously' to bring Britain to a 'turning point': the country could either 'turn the clock back' with a 'narrow English-dominated, backward-looking definition of the nation' or 'seize the opportunity to create a more flexible, inclusive, cosmopolitan image of itself'. All this shows clear synergies with New Labour 'modernisation'. Yet the report was, to Straw's annoyance, critical of New Labour in revealing ways. It noted the relative absence of racial equality and cultural diversity in Blair's speeches and in key 1990s social-democratic texts. It accused New Labour of adopting a doomed 'colour-blind' and 'culture-blind' approach to its key projects, like the Social Exclusion Unit and the New Deal for Communities. Its criticism was muted by the observation that Blair's government had more recently begun 'to drop its colour- and culture-blind approaches to social policy and modernisation'. But this had only happened from 1999.[166]

Accidents and contingency, like the *Mail*'s unexpected stance on the Lawrence case, do not explain everything. It did matter that the New Labour government came from the centre-left: it was far from inevitable that Blair's government would stand by the Macpherson inquiry's labelling of the Metropolitan police as institutionally racist. New Labour's policies and initiatives drew on equal opportunities agendas of the 1970s and 1980s, and its appointees to key positions had backgrounds in anti-racist organisations.[167] Subsequent legislation like the Equalities Act (2010) (a recommendation of the Parekh report)[168] also reflect the liberal and centre-left origins of New Labour's ministers. Nonetheless, it does seem that New Labour only really did serious policy work on multiculturalism *after* it was elected, when the pressures of government forced it to tackle head-on issues like the Lawrence inquiry and, later, the 'War

[166] *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (London, 2000), 2, 14–15, 47, 82, 250–251, 344n1, 350–351. On the savaging of the report by the press and Straw's later criticism, see Bhikhu Parekh, 'The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain: Reporting on a Report', *The Round Table* 90:362 (2001), 691–700.

[167] See Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Rob Waters, '"The Privatisation of Struggle": Anti-racism in the Age of Enterprise', in Davies, Jackson, and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (eds), *Neoliberal Age?*, 199–226, at 200–206.

[168] *Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, 267.

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on Terror'.[169] The New Labour agenda of 'deliberative multiculturalism' was real, but it was reactive and pragmatic, rather than strategic. By its very nature, therefore, it wrestled with contradictory impulses and internal tensions.[170]

It is perhaps in helping to explain the reactive nature of Labour's multiculturalism agenda in government that the significance of 'modernisation' lies. The key strategic debates within the left in the 1980s and 1990s extensively drew on the concept of 'modernisation'. While developing an agenda of 'modernising social democracy' helped the party reformulate its economic policies, constitutional reforms, and electoral strategy, its psephological and intellectual assumptions pushed against an explicit and coherent approach to the politics of race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism. The 'modernisation' debates of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were thus of only limited use to New Labour when it entered Downing Street, suddenly obliged with the task of governing the fraught and paradoxical politics of race and multiculturalism in early twenty-first-century Britain.

[169] See, for example, the scramble to develop a positive action agenda in the latter months of 1997: Alan Travis and David Rowan, 'A Beacon Burning Darkly', *Guardian*, 2 October 1997, 17.

[170] Nam-Kook Kim, 'Deliberative Multiculturalism in New Labour's Britain', *Citizenship Studies* 15:1 (2011), 125–144, at 138.

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