

Liberalism and/or socialism: tensions, exchanges and convergences from the 19th century to today

Stéphane REVILLET

*Centre Interlangues-Texte, Image, Langage (EA 4182)
Univ. Bourgogne Franche-Comté, F-21000, Dijon*



The Conservatives' representation of socialism and liberalism during PMQs since the 90s

'Ideologies are not exact representation of an ideational reality, but a symbolic reconstruction of it' (Michael Freeden, 2003)

PMQS = Prime Minister's Question Time = adversarial nature of the debates

OUTLINE :

- *The Conservatives' representation of socialism as a mirror image of their own ideology*
- *The effects on identity of the parties*

Ideologies and movements associated with Labour's socialism	Key concepts of Labour's socialism	Liberalism in practice
<p>Marxism</p> <p>Stalinism</p> <p>Communism</p> <p>Unionism</p> <p>Trotskyism</p> <p>Luddites</p>	<p>a centralist state controlling private sector</p> <p>(re)nationalisation</p> <p>corporatism</p> <p>common ownership</p> <p>trade Unionism</p> <p>welfare (state)</p> <p>state Interventionalism</p> <p>unilateralism</p>	<p>high spending (socialist councils)</p> <p>borrowing</p> <p>higher taxes</p> <p>state subsidies</p> <p>Keynesian tradition</p> <p>giving up nuclear deterrent</p> <p>high benefits and allowances</p>

Exaggerations	insults and jibes	straplines + soundbites + repetitions
<p>Marxist universe appealing to tribal socialism</p> <p>Labour only trade deals with Venezuela, Cuba and North Korea</p> <p>Labour dislike choice of almost any sort + the hatred of diversity and excellence</p> <p>unilateral disarmament with labour we would be living in an underprotected overtaxed socialist backwater</p> <p>Labour party obsessed with bigger and bigger benefits (16/02/11; 11/01/12) : labour= out-of-control benefit system = (+01/02/12) + he is the party for unlimited welfare</p> <p>Labour hates privatisation and it hates profit. It cannot stand share ownership</p>	<p>Labour's bossy centralising interfering approach (27/10/10/) /19/07/17 : labour : a hard-left, old-fashioned Socialist gvt Reheated hard left Marxism</p> <p>The Red Princes/ peaceniks</p> <p>Loony left (27/04/11) / Calls for more taxes are being made by the ever-loony lab (04/11/93)</p> <p>(27/02/13) they are not only socialists but incompetent socialists to boot</p> <p>Labour= want to borrow / spend less by borrowing/spending more = LO Bert in the Muppet show living on Sesame Street</p> <p>Common ownership = a dinosaur (07/03/95) the nature of the Labour beast Labour needs more democracy (17/07/93)</p> <p>The unions are the dog and the Labour is the lamppost (15/07/93)</p> <p>He (J. Corbyn) is Caracas (04/09/2019)</p>	<p>If you vote red you live in the red</p> <p>one size fits all, take it or leave it IF LO is trying to move left, I'd give him full Marks</p> <p>Greeconomics / nannyng intervention 19/11/96 Because of last socialist gvt = Britain was sick man of europe</p> <p>Lab party = anti-enterprise, anti-business, anti-growth (05/02/14 /+ 02/04/2014) anti-market, anti-competition 04/02/15</p> <p>tax, tax, tax, injustice, injustice, injustice (10/07/19)</p> <p>unions own the Labour Party practically lock, stock and barrel vote for it, pay for it sthg-for-nothing culture = lab welfare</p>

Labour and socialism merge into a negative symbol

What is a symbol ? 'a symbol is a human invention and arises from the process of attributing meaning to an object' (C.D.Elder & R.W.Cobb, 1983)

condensational symbols (as opposed to a referential symbols which is purely denotative and stipulative) serve to summarize and condense experiences, feelings and beliefs (E. Saphir, 1934, M. Edelman, 1971; 1972; 1988)

Condensation symbols are heavily laden with **emotive content** (D. Ketzer, 1988) = very powerful emotional impact on the audience

One exemple of a strategy to increase emotional force of the negative representation of socialism:
undermining moral values of socialism

Socialism linked with :

CORRUPTION : the depth of **corruption** and despair=result of labour local authorities →**the worst local authorities are socialist local authorities**

Tax avoidance (ref to ken livingstone) = **modern socialism** (18/04/12) **Cronyism** 21/11/96 : **crony** politics = lab get \$ from union and silence on strike Labour and Liberal councillors are more interested in **jobs for the boys** than in value for money for the ratepayers

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND DEMOCRACY

Labour = donations (from unions) buy + trade **unions buy their lab candidates and buy their policies and pick LO** = that is **wrong with British politics** (25/02/15)/ rigged appointments = a sad day for democracy (03/07/13)

+ Labour's relationship with unions is **a disgrace to British democracy**

Labour = **Quangocracy**

09/06/2010 : lab becoming **more and more authoritarian**

living up to the words of Marx : « those are my principles, and if you don't like them, well, I have other = Groucho Marx

DEVIANT / UNAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Unison threatens councils if they accept contracts from private firms = **labour using bully-boy** tactics

(20/02/19) chosen to leave Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party and join the Conservatives, due to the **bullying and antisemitism** that she has received **from Momentum** and the **hard left**

Lab **Marxist** and **antisemite** (03/04/19)

Schools hijacked in 60s/70s by the **trendy lefties** and now **no moral base** (02 /03/93)

Ideologies in a mythical world

- Symbols are used to establish or to **affirm social identities**
- **to create a clear-cut ideological divide = 'US vs THEM'**

↳ Labour = has become an **enemy : an unacceptable opponent** (≠ adversary)

Their collusion with socialism marks them as **evil and immoral**

↳ Justification for *ad hominem* attacks

☞ Labour's socialism= **have become the symbol of a threat to people's basic right to freedom**

≠ The conservatives = the 'liberal saviours' restoring people's liberty

The Conservatives' representation of liberalism

☞ Defined in strict opposition to socialism

Process of symbolization of liberalism:

- Decontestation
- Positive notions (with a focus on core concept = freedom)
- Positive moral values

💣 Evolving process backfiring on the Conservatives

☞ Conservatives' liberalism turned the party into **'The nasty party'**

Social liberalism as a tool to detoxify the party

Liberalism as a **dog whistle** ➡ overt social liberal tenets

➡ references to neo-liberal practices

Way of reaching 'the many not the few' through symbols = semantic short-cuts = oversimplification of concepts = 'easier for people to treat concepts as things' (M. Eldelman)

➡ **reification of political ideological lines**

When the lines get blurred

Labour's new scheme = **stakeholding society**

'we shift the emphasis [...] towards a vision of the company as a community or partnership in which each employee has a stake'
(T. Blair, 1995) = *'an economy run for the many, not for the few'*

↳ **social and neo** liberal overtones

⇒ Conservatives fought back for their territory (=issue ownership) = defining the stakeholder society from two different perspectives

Conservative's stakeholding society
January 1996

...to give people a stake in society is **to allow them to own their homes, to own shares, to have their own pension schemes and, above all, to pay low taxes?**

We know and have been practising what it means for the past 16 years. It means **giving people a direct, personal interest in what happens—lower taxes, more home ownership, more personal pensions**—exercised by the holders themselves

Private ownership enables people to have, if I may use the phrase, a stake in this country

Conservatives's view on Labour's stakholding society
January 1996

The Leader of the Opposition now tells us that it is a slogan, and the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) tells us that he has not the faintest idea what it means.

Labour party's vision of a stakeholding society, which **would place burdens on business men and, indeed, bring back vested interests in Labour's old friends?**

exercised by the holders themselves

We know who Labour's stakeholders are. **We know who owns 50 per cent. of the votes at the Labour party conference.** We know who pays 50 per cent. of the money that the Labour party gets . They are Labour's stakeholders.

That union sponsors the deputy leader of the Labour party: it is one of the stakeholders in the Labour party

The Conservatives claiming credit for Labour's achievements

➡ The National Minimum Wage = The National Living Wage

19/07/17 [Theresa May] But what is important for Government as well is to ensure that we provide support to people. That is why we created the national living wage. That was the biggest pay increase ever for people on the lowest incomes. **When did the Labour party ever introduce the national living wage? Never! That was a Conservative Government and a Conservative record.**

➡ The NHS

21/01/97 : [John Major] it is perfectly true that the Labour party established the national health service **but it is the Conservative party that has built up the health service.** We have been in power for two thirds of the period that has elapsed since then, **and we have built up the health service from its beginnings** into a service that is now recognised as the best in the world. + 18/03/97 : The Labour party may have set up the health service, but **we have built it up.**

Claiming filiation with Labour's prominent figures

- ♦ 01/05/19 : We have been ensuring that we provide for people **at every stage of their lives**. For young people [...] for them not just through the welfare system but with our long-term plan for the national health service. **At every stage of life**, we are ensuring that we as Conservatives are improving people's lives

↳echoing 'from the cradle to the grave' (Beveridge report)

- ♦ 24/02/16 : I think that if **Nye Bevan** were here today, **he would want a seven-day NHS**, because he knew that the NHS was for patients up and down our country.
- ♦ 29/06/11 [...] **Aneurin Bevan would be turning in his grave as he sees a Conservative Secretary of State increase spending on the health service** in England while a Labour Government in Cardiff cut spending on the NHS ?