STEPHEN DRIVER

Roehampton Institute London

LUKE MARTELL

University of Sussex

New Labour's communitarianisms

Abstract

This article argues that communitarianism can be analysed on different levels - sociological, ethical and meta-ethical - and along different dimensions - conformist-pluralist, more conditional-less conditional, progressive-conservative, prescriptive-voluntary, moral-socioeconomic and individual-corporate. We argue that New Labour's communitarianism is a response to both neo-liberalism and old social democracy. It is sociological, ethical and universalist rather than particularist on the meta-ethical level. Labour increasingly favours conditional, morally prescriptive, conservative and individual communitarianisms. This is at the expense of less conditional and redistributional socioeconomic, progressive and corporate communitarianisms. It is torn between conformist and pluralist versions of communitarianism. This bias is part of a wider shift in Labour thinking from social democracy to a liberal conservatism which celebrates the dynamic market economy and is socially conservative.

> There is no community in England: there is aggregation, but aggregation under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating, than a uniting, principle.

(Benjamin Disraeli in *Sybil)*

New Labour sell community as the hangover cure to the excesses of Conservative individualism. Community will create social cohesion out of the market culture of self-interest. And in Labour's *dynamic market economy,* community will also be good for business, underpinning economic efficiency and individual opportunity.

If communitarianism is New Labour's answer to Thatcherism, so

too is it Tony Blair's rebuff to Old Labour. Community will restore the moral balance to society by setting out duties and obligations as well as rights. And where Old Labour looked to the state for action, New Labour talks of *reinventing government* through collective action in the community.

Which communitarianism?

But what kind of communitarianism is Labour espousing? And where is it taking the party on the major economic and social policy questions? Communitarianism after all comes in various guises, often with quite different policy implications.

New Labour thinking is often associated with the work of Amitai Etzioni. But other communitarian influences are clearly apparent among Labour modernizers: Anglo-American political philosophers like Alistair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel, for example; John MacMurray, the Scottish philosopher who influenced Tony Blair; ethical socialists like R.H. Tawney; and New Liberals like Leonard Hobhouse and T.H. Green. The debates on stakeholding and alternative forms of capitalism have also thrown up communitarian arguments.

To help disentangle New Labour's communitarianism we shall start by distinguishing three *levels* at which communitarian thinking operates: sociological, ethical and meta-ethical. We shall then highlight six possible communitarian *dimensions:* (i) conformist-pluralist; (ii) less conditional-more conditional; (iii) progressive-conservative; (iv) prescriptive-voluntary; (v) moral-socioeconomic; and (vi) individual-corporate. These are conceptual categories, not boxes to pigeonhole individual communitarians. In the early parts of this article we will distinguish these different levels and dimensions of communitarianism. We will then go on to look at the way in which New Labour relates to each in the later sections.

Levels of communitarianism

Communitarianism starts off from a philosophical critique of liberalism, most notably that of John Rawls. Communitarian political philosophers like Alistair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer attack the liberal conception of the person, its asocial individualism and its universalistic claims (see Avineri and de-Shalit,

1992; Mulhall and Swift, 1992). Corresponding to their criticisms are three communitarian alternatives at the same levels: sociological, ethical and meta-ethical (after Caney, 1992).

First, there is a sociological level: individuals are not asocial creatures but are shaped by their communities. They become what they are through their social experiences and relations.

Second, there is an ethical level: community is a good thing. As social beings, individuals will be left alienated and bereft of the social context they need to develop as full human beings if communities are fragmented. The community as a set of institutions, values and relationships should, therefore, be supported and enriched. Communitarians, then, take a normative view on what makes a good community. It is not one which elevates the individual above all else. Rather it is one which recognizes the embeddedness and interdependence of human life, and promotes social and civic values above individual ones.

Third, there is a meta-ethical level. This concerns less our ethics and more the basis for making ethical claims. Communitarians like John Gray and Michael Walzer challenge the universal assumptions of doctrines like liberalism - that there can be a philosophical case for ethical principles applicable across places and times (see Walzer, 1983; Gray, 1995). Instead they argue for a more particularist meta-ethics. The proper values of a community are simply those shared by the members of a particular community. There is no philosophical basis for asserting the universal priority of any particular set of values. Questions of value and justice are essentially local because they are embedded in, and relative to, particular communities.

So there is a sociological strand in communitarianism which is *descriptive and explanatory* and about how humans become what they are-in a social context and not atomistically. Then there is an ethical communitarianism which is *normative* and says that community is a good thing. And finally there is a meta-ethical communitarianism which is about the *philosophical bases* for ethics and tends to say that it is not possible to find universal foundations for ethics and morals: these have to be relative to the communities in which they arise.

Six communitarian dimensions

We shall now further explore the nature of communitarian thinking by highlighting the six communitarian dimensions mentioned earlier.

i. Conformist-pluralist

One difference is between conformist and pluralist forms of communitarianism. In the former, community is composed of norms which we should adhere to. In the latter, it is not about commonality but the opposite - the recognition of diverse communities in which difference can develop. In other words, there is a difference between the communitarianism which is about building commonality and the communitarianism which is about recognizing difference.

In *conformist* communitarianism the community is bound by commonly held norms, values and practices which individuals are expected to go along with. Individuals are viewed as having duties to the com

munity. If they do not fulfil these then they lose the right to be included. Rules, explicit or not, exist regarding identity and behaviour, rights and duties. Individuals must adhere to these at the risk of stigmatization, penalty, loss of rights or even expulsion from the community. This form of communitarianism is about building commonality: there is pressure on the individual to conform.

Then there is a communitarianism which is looser and more *pluralist.* It is a communitarianism of many and diverse communities. Community here is not about subservience to community norms but about the recognition of diversity and of different communities. It is about communities rather than community. It is decentralizing and heterogeneous rather than homogenizing. It leaves more space for the individual to have choice and be different. Commonly held values and rules may exist to create a framework within which pluralism can exist. And some of the plural communities may be internally conformist. But the overall thrust is towards recognizing the diverse nature of society.

ii More conditional-less conditional

We can also distinguish between more conditional and less conditional dimensions to communitarianism. In *more conditional* communitarianism emphasis is placed on duties we owe in return for rights we are entitled to as members of the community. In taking advantage of the rights offered by the community, we are bound by reciprocal duties. Duties are something we have as a result of taking advantage of rights.

Less conditional communitarianism rests on ideas of fellowship and solidarity. Individuals feel responsible for others in society for its own sake rather than out of feeling obliged to reciprocate. Less conditional communitarianism has in the past been expressed in ideas on the Left

and Right: in socialist ideas about redistribution; in conservatism with ideas of charity and one-nation paternalism. True altruistic relationships are marked by no requirement for reciprocity at all.

iii. Progressive-conservative

Our third dimension concerns the substance of community. Communitarianism has, as we have seen, a fundamental normative element: community is a good thing. But judging whether a particular community is good or bad usually involves the substantive values of the community in question.

We can distinguish different forms of communitarianism on the basis of such values - in this case using a progressive-conservative continuum. In western societies, progressive values are associated with, among other things, equality and liberty, multiculturalism, female liberation, homosexual rights, a focus on the social bases of crime and penal reform, alternative forms of family and child-centred education. Conservative values may include hierarchy and authority, national culture, the domestic role of women, limits to homosexual rights, individual responsibility for criminal acts, the nuclear family and 'chalk and talk' teaching.

So a *progressive* communitarianism would be one which promoted the idea of a community containing and supportive of progressive values. A *conservative* communitarianism would be one whose idea of the good community was based in, and supportive of, conservative values.

iv. Prescriptive-voluntary

Next we might identify a communitarian dimension which encompasses the prescriptive or voluntary character of the community. In a *prescriptive* communitarianism, individuals abide by the values and practices of a community because they have to. There are duties, norms and values set down by the community or its rulers saying how members should behave and perhaps even what they should believe. Versions of prescribed communitarianism are found in traditional religious societies and certain versions of conservatism and state socialism.

By contrast *voluntary* communitarianism is where common values or rules are freely entered into by individuals and it is largely self-regulated. Individuals abide by the values and practices of a community

because they choose to. This form is favoured by libertarians and anarchists, for example. The defining feature here is that community is sustained by the voluntary action of its members.

v. Moral-socioeconomic

Our fifth communitarian dimension distinguishes between community seen as residing at the socioeconomic level and community seen as existing through shared moral or value beliefs.

Socioeconomic communitarianism is about community being supported by socioeconomic foundations. Arguments for universal social rights as part of citizenship made by postwar welfare reformers, or socialist arguments for greater material and social equality relate community to socioeconomic conditions. Community here can be fostered through greater universal commonality and equality at the socioeconomic level. The creation and sustenance of a common community and culture is rooted in shared experiences of education, in common health and welfare provision and in greater material equality.

By contrast, we can see a form of communitarianism whose principal concern is with social cohesion in the community secured by adherence to a common set of *moral* values. This form highlights the importance of the creation and stability of common values as the best way of dealing with social fragmentation. Social cohesion is essentially a question of shared morals, not material circumstances.

vi. Individual-corporate

Communitarianism can be applied to different entities - states, trade unions, businesses, professions, individuals, etc. The final distinction we shall make is between a communitarianism which focuses on the individual and one which focuses on the corporation.

In *individual* communitarianism, it is the individual who is subject to obligations, responsibilities, rights and duties. Individuals are entities who, in return for rights they enjoy, owe duties or responsibilities to society. But in *corporate* communitarianism, the business (or other sort of corporation) is a holder of rights and subject to duties to the community. Rights businesses have over their property may be seen as requiring corresponding obligations to the state, who is the protector of their rights, or to the community they are members of.

New Labour and communitarianism

So there are different levels and dimensions of communitarianism. In this section of the article we will discuss how New Labour relates to these.

Labour's communitarianism has two principal objectives: first, to provide an alternative to conservative neo-liberalism; second, to distance the party from its social democratic past. Communitarianism offers Labour modernizers a political vocabulary which eschews market individualism, but not capitalism; and which embraces collective action, but not class or the state.

Beyond neo-liberalism and social democracy

Labour's communitarianism challenges the neo-liberal market model in three ways. First, it denies that successful economies live by competitive individualism alone: community values like cooperation and collaboration are just as vital to a successful market system. Second, it challenges the neo-liberal assumption that general welfare is best left to the free play of private enterprise. There is a role not just for government but for collective action through the intermediate institutions of civil society. Third, market individualism, it is argued, has eroded those institutions seen as vital for social cohesion. Unrestrained market egoism has in this way contributed to social fragmentation: a dangerous cocktail of poverty and moral anomie.

Against social democracy, Labour's communitarians challenge what they see as a state-dominated approach to welfare. This, they argue, has been too universal, expensive and bureaucratic. It has not allowed sufficient space for devolved management or individual choice. Moreover, they see communitarianism as challenging a rights-based culture which has ignored duties and responsibilities and led to dependency on the welfare state. This, they argue, has not only placed a huge fiscal burden on society, but has further contributed to social fragmentation and a moral vacuum in society. (There are numerous sources for New Labour's dual critique of neo-liberalism and postwar social democracy. They include: Blair (1994, 1995a, b, 1996a, b); Brown (1994); Commission on Social Justice (1994); Miliband (1994). See also Blair (l996c) for a collection of his writings and speeches.)

For Labour's communitarians, then, the circumstances of contemporary society are, to use Disraeli's words, dissociating rather than

uniting. Too much laissez faire, too little concern for others, too many rights and too few responsibilities; these are the conditions communitarians believe have undermined the fabric which binds individuals to society. In Labour's communitarian thinking three themes - economic efficiency, social cohesion and morality - are interwoven. Economic success - particularly more jobs-will bring greater social cohesion, which is further strengthened by a more dutiful and responsible citizenry, and more social cohesion will in turn help create a more viable market economy.

New Labour and the three levels of communitarianism

If it is clear why New Labour has embraced communitarianism, it is less obvious what kind of communitarianism the party is operating with. To start with, how does New Labour thinking relate to the three levels of communitarianism outlined earlier?

First, sociological communitarianism offers Labour a retort to the neo-liberal 'no such thing as society' view. Take, for example, Tony Blair's own definition of socialism: 'individuals are socially interdependent human beings . . . individuals cannot be divorced from society in which they belong. It is, if you will, social-ism' (Blair, 1994: 4). New Labour draws deeply on the communitarian idea of there being a common stock of values, meanings and institutions which give shape and structure to the lives of community members. The communitarian view of the relationship between the individual and society has the added advantage for Labour modernizers that it does not rest on notions of class affiliation: we are all part of 'one nation, one community' (Blair, 1996b: 2).

Second, New Labour is obviously ethically communitarian because community is presented as a good thing. Moreover, New Labour offers its version of community as morally superior to the neo-liberal one: a good society is more than one in which everyone runs around relentlessly pursuing their own self-interest-and, of course, relentlessly claiming rights. Here is one example of where Tony Blair develops the sociological view of the person and tries to set out a normative argument for the good community:

> For myself, I start from a simple belief that people are not separate economic actors competing in the marketplace of life. They are citizens of a

community. We are social beings, nurtured in families and communities and human only because we develop the moral power of personal responsibility for ourselves and each other. Britain is stronger as a team than as a collection of selfish players. (Blair, 1996b: 3)

This brings us to the third level: meta-ethical communitarianism. Here New Labour fights shy of the anti-universal ism of communitarian political philosophy by claiming that there is a strong moral agenda which transcends communities. 'The only way to rebuild social order and stability', Blair (in Radice, 1996: 8) argues, 'is through strong values, socially shared, inculcated through individuals, family, government and the institutions of civil society'. Certainly, by adopting the Disraelian One Nation, Blair has ridden roughshod over a more pluralist understanding of British society. Communitarian thinking usually asserts that questions of value and justice are essentially local because they are embedded in, and relative to, particular communities. The 'local' to New Labour is the United Kingdom. Yet New Labour has opted for moral values that transcend communities within the UK.

New Labour and the six communitarian dimensions

i. Pluralist or conformist?

New Labour thinking is drawn towards both pluralist and conformist poles. On the one hand it is attracted by the idea of a pluralist civil society and those intermediate institutions between the individual and the state. On the other hand, it is drawn to notions - often not clearly defined - of the strong community drawing on the political rhetoric of 'One Nation'. Here the family and education have special prominence.

New Labour's interest in a pluralist civil society is part of its attempt to break with postwar forms of socialism and social democracy-in particular with state intervention in the economy. Community as civil society acts as the central metaphor in Labour's shift away from the perceived era of big government, as well as being a stick to beat market individualism. Labour's interest in 'reinventing government' along more communitarian lines marks a shift in politics which, in ambition at least, would leave more to voluntary endeavour, whether by individuals, families or other non-state institutions. This means, of course, a positive commitment to private enterprise and the

market economy. But it also marks an interest in other institutions in civil society capable of becoming agents of collective action.

The emphasis on civil society gives New Labour the kind of post-Thatcherite edge it wants. Across a whole range of policy areas - social security, pensions, training, the NHS, the management of schools, local government, constitutional reform - Labour now advocates decentralized and devolved forms of governance and public administration, as well as greater emphasis on individual choice and responsibility (especially in areas like pensions, education and training) (see, for example, Labour Party, 1995a, b; see also Crouch and Marquand, 1995; Mulgan and Landry, 1995 on the voluntary sector; Pierson, 1996).

Certain caveats must, however, be added. First, New Labour's commitment to independent local government, strongly worded in policy documents, needs to be questioned in the light of Blair's commitment to retaining central government's right to limit local spending *in ex-tremis.* Second, there is little commitment to political pluralism to match the institutional pluralism in New Labour thinking. For example, Blair is lukewarm on proportional representation, and collaboration in government with the Liberal Democrats looks like Labour's least favourite option. New Labour seems just as attracted to Westminster majority politics as Old Labour. Third, Labour modernizers like to talk up *community responsibilities* and the *power of the community,* but often fall short of identifying exactly what agency is to carry those responsibilities or exercise that power. In the absence of detailed policy proposals, there remains a nagging doubt that *community* may just be a synonym for the *state.*

But alongside New Labour's interest in civil society is a parallel political discourse which emphasizes the 'strong community', demanding adherence to common norms and values. Leaving aside for the moment the vital questions of the content of such values and how they are to be enforced, the central concern here is that New Labour seems to be constructing a politics in which the members of the community live their lives through common meanings and understandings, norms and values: 'one nation, one community', as Blair puts it.

In this One-Nation discourse Labour is searching for firm – even punishable - ideas about the community duties and obligations individuals should live up to. Blair has expressed this in terms of a *new social morality.* This contains ideas and even tentative policy proposals about the place and shape of the family; about the responsibilities of

parents and pupils; about how teachers should teach; on behaviour in public and private spaces-all of which we shall return to shortly. By comparison to the communitarianism of a pluralist civil society, the space for the individual to be different is more limited. Labour's interest in institutional pluralism, then, is to be contrasted with what appears to be a leaning towards ethical conformism.

ii. More conditional or less conditional?

As an alternative to competitive individualism, New Labour thinking has drawn on traditional centre-left themes such as cooperation, fellowship and mutualism. New Labour modernizers talk about a stakeholder One-Nation society. Essentially this means helping the poor and long-term unemployed - the excluded - get a stake in society by increasing job opportunities (see Blair, 1996a). The means to deliver those opportunities may have changed - markets and supply-side micro-economics rather than planning and Keynesian macro-economics - but this version of the stakeholder theme is reasonably consistent with traditional centre-left concerns.

We want to suggest, however, that, for good or ill, it has been joined-and in many instances, is being modified by a much more conditional form of communitarianism, where assistance and fellowship increasingly requires reciprocal obligations. This partly reflects the modernizers' unease with postwar social democracy, where it is perceived there was a culture where individuals had become too accustomed to claiming rights without having to fulfil responsibilities in return (see Blair, 1995c). So, for example, welfare rights should be conditional on recipients fulfilling certain responsibilities and duties, like accepting a training place when offered; or individuals should be partly responsible for contributing to the cost of their Learn as You Earn accounts or the fees for their university degree; and home-school contracts between teachers and parents have been suggested, where the latter have to fulfil obligations in return for the right to state education.

This raises certain problems, especially for a centre-left party. Under Blair's leadership, Labour's social policy has shifted away from the redistribution of wealth to creating opportunities for individuals to help themselves back into the labour market. In his 1996 social security plans, Chris Smith argued that the community is responsible for the poor *and* that individuals are responsible for making provisions for their own lives. But, as Roy Hattersley (1996) has pointed out, what

about those who are in no position now to make such provision: on what basis will the community help them?

So while there is a strong and clear intention to help the disadvantaged and excluded, this communitarianism is not merely one-way. Helping others becomes conditional on reciprocity. Helping the long term unemployed, the group Labour's stakeholder policies are most geared towards, is based decreasingly on need alone and is increasingly seen in terms of rights and responsibilities: a shift from a more unconditional communitarianism to a more conditional form.

iii. Progressive or conservative?

New Labour's rights and duties communitarianism is also more conservative, crowding out the more progressive ethics of much centre-left thinking. New Labour has increasingly conservative moral views on family form, parenting, education and social destitution. To be sure, not all of these views have taken a policy form in Labour's manifestos, but they have been frequently stated in Labour speeches and policy suggestions.

Tony Blair has argued that 'a child brought up in a stable and well balanced family is more likely to develop well than one who is not' and that the family is the place where moral codes and social discipline are learned by children *(The Guardian,* 30 March 1995). These themes were repeated in his 1996 speech in South Africa on 'family values' which, Blair argued, were the key to a 'decent society' *(The Times,* 14 October 1996: see also Blair, 1995c; Campbell, 1995).

New Labour figures have argued that sanctions should be imposed to ensure parents send their children to school regularly, ensure that they do a minimum amount of homework each evening, keep them off the streets after certain hours below specified age-limits and send them to bed at a recommended time. David Blunkett has spoken out against progressive teaching methods and in favour of whole-class chalk-and-talk teaching (Labour Party, 1995c; Richards, 1996). And there has been as much talk on getting the homeless, beggars and squeegee merchants off the streets as a nuisance to others as there has been on tackling the causes of their plight. Jack Straw has tabled proposals for fast-track sentencing for young offenders, neighbourhood nuisance squads and Community Safety Orders to crack down on anti-social behaviour (Labour Party, 1996a, b; Straw, 1995, 1996a, b). Again, talk of toughness on the *causes* of crime has often been surpassed by talk of toughness on the *criminals* themselves.

As a consequence there are progressive values on such issues that Labour is in danger of throwing out: the value of non-nuclear forms of family and different ideas of parenting and education, and different explanations and methods for dealing with social destitution, crime and the criminal justice system, for example. More progressive views on such issues seem to be finding less and less favour and space in New Labour thinking.

Labour have denied the charge that they are being morally prescriptive. They have argued that their proposals are just plain common sense, the property of the left that has too often in the past been monopolized by the right. The arch Labour conservative, Jack Straw, is also a liberal on many social questions, such as race relations, the gay age of consent, and the ban on gays and lesbians in the military. Blair accepts that abortion is a matter of conscience and says non-traditional families can be of worth. Leading Labour modernizers like Patricia Hewitt (in Radice, 1996) present progressive views on family policy.

But Labour's embrace of communitarianism has not only opened the window on a more value-driven politics. It has also led New Labour thinkers to take firm conservative positions on moral questions. The rhetoric of common sense cannot distract from the conservatism of Labour's social policies. The moral communitarianism (Hughes, 1996) of the Right, where the causes of crime and social breakdown are laid at the door of the family and liberal and relativist ethics, has crept into the social policy agenda of Blair's New Labour. There have been many strands of conservatism in Labour ideology in the past, but these, we would argue, were never a part of Labour's guiding public philosophy as they are now.

iv. Prescriptive or voluntary?

Tony Blair denies the charge that strong, socially-shared values are a 'lurch into authoritarianism or attempt to impose a regressive morality' (in Radice, 1996: 8). Yet in two senses - one to do with the content of moral values, the other with institutional agencies of implementation - Labour's communitarianism does look to be prescriptive rather than voluntary. First, Labour, as we shall argue, sees moral values as the basis for restoring social cohesion. And as we have outlined above there is a particular increasingly conservative content to these values in Labour thinking.

Second, at the level of the institutional agencies the enactment of

Labour's communitarianism looks set to be driven by government and by statute. In some policy areas, principally economics and public administration, there is, as we have seen, a real interest in devolved and decentralized forms of governance. There are the public-private partnerships, the interest in the voluntary sector and the role given to the family.

Yet often, in these areas and others such as Labour's moralism, this pluralism is absent. As we have suggested, Labour modernizers like to talk up the responsibilities of the community, but often fall short of, identifying exactly who or what the community is. There is often little real detail on what exactly the community *does* as distinct from the government or the state. When New Labour figures talk about the community helping individuals as well as individuals helping themselves, it is unclear who the community can be other than the state or government in code.

In the past, Chris Smith's welfare statements fudged the question of agency. Does he mean government when he talks of 'community responsibility'? Or is Labour proposing that individuals, families and the real communities in which people live and work take responsibility for welfare, including that of the poor? Responsibility, after all, requires agency: somebody or some institution must carry the can. Rights and responsibilities - including who is going to pay the bill - have to be allocated in a meaningful way.

Institutional pluralism is often absent from New Labour's moral agenda. Where communitarians generally look to the intermediate institutions of civil society to provide individuals with a bulwark against the state, the institutional implications of Labour's moralism look to be *dirigiste.* Not only are moral values prescribed from above, they will also have to be enacted from there. Labour's ethical politics looks set to be driven by government and law (see Twigg, 1996, for a Labour modernizer's concerns).

So we are left with a communitarianism which - for good or ill, perhaps by default or design - is prescriptive rather than voluntary in nature. Politicians have defined its moral content. And, in the absence of an alternative agency, it seems it will be politicians who will enact it when in power. A lot of the duties and responsibilities that are said to go with rights are to be defined by government from above and enforced by them.

v. Moral or socioeconomic?

Labour increasingly suggests that strong moral values are the answer to restoring social cohesion. Labour does not equate the restoration of social cohesion merely with reasserting conservative moral values. The socioeconomic communitarianism of the stakeholder society proposals for inclusion of, for example, the long-term unemployed is also seen as part of the way to social cohesion. Labour's micro-economics and education and training are aimed at increasing long-term growth rates, providing jobs and higher incomes and rebuilding the social fabric. But the role of moral values in this task is, as we have outlined, assuming a place of greater importance in such a task and Labour needs to take care it does not imagine that moralism alone can deliver social cohesion.

The conditional and moralist communitarianisms of duties and morality are different from that of social cohesion which Labour aims for. A communitarianism of restored cohesion in society to repair social fragmentation is not synonymous with the prescription of particular moral norms from above and particular ideas about the sorts of responsibilities people should be pursuing. Restored social cohesion may be much needed but this is not the same as moral communitarianism. Labour needs to get the two distinguished and make sure it does not think that moral prescription equates to moral cohesion.

There are plenty of ways of pursuing social cohesion, other than through moral invocations, that have been advocated on the left: re-distributional attacks on economic divisions at the basis of social frag-mentation, for example (an economic rather than a moral solution); or universalism rather than difference in the experience of things like welfare and education provision (a political and social rather than moralist solution). Yet socioeconomic measures such as redistribution to reduce divisions are less of a priority for New Labour. The development of a common, universal, citizen experience of education and welfare, through institutions such as the comprehensive education system or a universal welfare state, have less of a role in Labour ideas than they have often been given on the left. *Moral* routes to reducing divisions and fragmentation get much of the emphasis now.

Accompanying New Labour's shift to an increasingly conditional and moral communitarianism is a downplaying of ideas of redistribution. The post-Social Justice Commission Labour modernizers have laid more emphasis on *wider individual opportunities* and a welfare state

helping individuals help themselves back into work than on greater equality. New Labour is certainly concerned about the poor and long-term unemployed. It makes an ideological commitment to giving them a stake back in society. And it has policies, albeit timid ones according to some critics, for trying to pursue this (Hutton et al., 1996). However these policies have very little that is *redistributional* about them. Significant changes in taxation have been ruled out. Education and training measures, the main means put forward for welfare-to work, are not to be financed by redistribution of wealth from the more well-off. As we have argued elsewhere a commitment to a more egalitarian redistribution is one that is increasingly being reduced in significance in Labour ideology (Driver and Martell, 1996).

vi. Individual or corporate?

The moral communitarianism of personal responsibilities and obligations which go with citizenship rights has not been matched in emphasis and strength by the economic communitarianism of corporate responsibility and obligations which go with property rights. Stakeholding, which embodies the latter, has faded away relative to the personal conservative communitarianism of the former.

The more powerful and radical stakeholder idea - that companies have obligations to workers, suppliers, consumers and local communities, as well as to shareholders - has faded away fast while the communitarianism of personal responsibility has continued to be pursued. Stakeholding is used less in the stronger sense to mean obligations of companies to stakeholders other than shareholders. This was one aspect Blair proposed in the Singapore speech where he set out stakeholding as New Labour's big idea (Blair, 1996a). And it is what figures such as Will Hutton continue to advocate (see Marquand, 1988; Crouch and Marquand, 1993; Hutton, 1995, 1996; Wright and Marquand, 1995; Gamble and Kelly, 1996; Hutton et aI., 1996). However, stakeholding is expressed more as meaning, in a weaker sense, giving the unemployed a stake in society by helping them back to work; a leg-up into the economy through Labour's supply-side education and training proposals. Worthwhile as this may be, it is some distance from the radical stakeholding about corporate accountability.

So the discourse of personal moral duty (individual communitari-anism) has grown in strength while that of corporate responsibility to the community (economic communitarianism) has faded. And while

Labour has talked about using the law to enforce personal moral responsibility, it has shied away from using legal powers to make businesses act differently. Both Blair and Alistair Darling, when he was Shadow Chief Secretary, warned against the use of the law to change the culture of the corporate world. Persuasion and voluntary agreement are regarded as more effective in this sphere. While law is seen as appropriate for enforcing individual responsibility, Labour has shied away from legal powers for enforcing corporate responsibility. Again here the social democracy of Labour's past seems to be in a shifting balance now with its conservatism, its economic communitarianism and its moral communitarianism.

Conclusions

So Labour increasingly advocates conditional, morally prescriptive, conservative and individual communitarianisms at the expense of less conditional and redistributional, socioeconomic, progressive and corporate communitarianisms. It is torn between conformist and pluralist communitarianisms and this shows in its policies. Conservative moralism increasingly takes up a greater proportion of progressive moralism's space in the integrating community values proposed. There is a danger of moral communitarianism being seen as the solution to social cohesion at the expense of socioeconomic communitarianism. And the communitarianism of individual responsibility gets greater emphasis than the communitarianism of corporate responsibility.

One way the balance of New Labour's communitarianisms can be seen is as part of a wider shift from social democracy to 'liberal conservatism' in Labour ideas. The 'liberal' in 'liberal conservative' is of a market sort and the 'conservative' is in the conservative moralist version of communitarianism they propose (Driver and Martell, 1996). Labour has shifted from a pragmatic acceptance of markets counterbalanced by collectivism in a mixed economy to a positive celebration of the dynamic market economy to which collectivism is a support rather than a balance. Mixed with Labour's conservative prescriptive moral communitarianism, this shift to a greater emphasis on markets makes for a politics of the free market and conservative communitarianism, of liberal conservatism.

It is true that Old Labour politicians and voters may in the past have been pragmatic about the market and privately conservative. But

dedication to the market economy and conservative moral communitarianism were never a guiding part of Labour's public philosophy in the way that its liberal conservatism is now. Liberal conservatism certainly does not fully grasp Labour's politics because there is more than just liberalism in its economics (e.g. there are also its supply-side education and training proposals and commitments such as the minimum wage) and more than conservative moralism in its communitarianism (there are also conditional and other communitarianisms and non-conservative values). But it does capture a shift in emphasis to economically liberal and socially conservative ideas that are new to Labour, increasingly define its character and reduce the clear red water that separates it from the right.

Notes

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1. 'The risk of community becoming merely a synonym for government is met by re-inventing government. Co-operation, to ensure desirable social and economic objectives, need not happen through central government, operating in old ways. Indeed, often it is better if it doesn't' (Blair, 1995c: 13).

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Stephen Driver is a Lecturer in Politics at the Roehampton Institute London. He has written on the media and on regional development. Luke Martell is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sussex. He is author of *Ecology and Society,* Polity Press, 1994, and has written on socialism and neoliberalism in the journal *Economy and Society.* Together they are co-authors of 'Beyond Equality and Liberty: New Labour's Liberal-conservatism', *Renewal* 4(3), July 1996.