# Introduction

Throughout the 1920s, Labour candidates and activists promised voters that if Labour was returned to office, they would begin to build a new social order. In their view, Labour's position on the key issues of the day stood in stark contrast to those of their major rivals, the Conservatives and the Liberals. Unlike the old established parties of the past, Labour was a forward-looking party with a bold vision for the future.

But party activists also claimed that Labour had its roots in a much older political tradition. In their speeches and writings, Labour activists positioned their party as the rightful heir to a working-class radical tradition whose members had been at the forefront of campaigns for political and social reform in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Having emerged from this political tradition, Labour, it was argued, was best placed to put its historic ideals into effect.

This book contends that the emergence of labour politics in towns and cities across the East Midlands, East Anglia and the South West of England represented the renewal of the working-class radical tradition. In the mid- to late Victorian period, working-class radicals formed lively political subcultures in Bristol, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton and Norwich. With a distinctive set of discursive practices and a unique vision of the social order, working-class radicals sustained local political subcultures that were distinct from, and sometimes opposed to, mainstream liberalism. They also articulated a coherent ideology and a highly expansive workerist notion of democracy that led them into conflict with classical liberals and proponents of populist forms of radicalism.

During the 1880s and 1890s, working-class radicals played a pivotal role in building local labour parties that would eventually affiliate to the national Labour Party, formed as the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900. They also began to display an increasing interest in using the state to remedy social ills such as unemployment, long working hours and poverty in old age. But while the transition from radical politics to labour politics represented an important organisational development, it

did not reflect a substantive change in the way activists thought and spoke about themselves or the social order. Even as they formed new political organisations, labourists remained committed to the discursive strategies and ideological assumptions of their working-class radical predecessors.

## Continuity, populism and class

Establishing lines of continuity between working-class radicalism and later forms of labour politics challenges conventional understandings of English political history. The three-stage model of British political development suggests that social and economic developments in the final decades of the nineteenth century forced radicals to renounce their loyalty to the cross-class Liberal Party and embrace alternative frameworks for understanding the socio-political order.[1] Those swept up in the socialist revival of the 1880s began to advocate (among other things) the collective ownership of the means of production and direct labour representation on local and national governing bodies. The latter demand struck a chord with those who had come to describe themselves as labour activists, many of whom rejected the impractical doctrines of the socialists but supported the principle of labour (or trade union) representation. How to achieve this goal was a matter of heated debate within labour and socialist circles, but this did not stop activists from improvising at a local level. In some constituencies, socialist parties stood their own candidates in parliamentary and municipal elections. In others, socialists and labourists worked together to stand candidates in opposition to the Conservative and Liberal parties. And in others, labourists worked with the Liberal and Conservative parties to achieve their objectives, much to the chagrin of their socialist counterparts.

As this brief overview suggests, the business of achieving labour representation at the end of the nineteenth century was a complex affair. It was also a largely futile exercise. However, for proponents of the stagist interpretation, this is not the crucial issue. What is crucial is the fact that activists put the question of labour representation on the table at all, for it signified a decisive shift in the way workers thought about politics and society. In short, workers' political activity had increasingly come to revolve around the question of class. The formation of the LRC in 1900, renamed the Labour Party in 1906, was yet another sign of the rise of 'class politics'. Founded and largely funded by the trade unions, the Labour Party, which was set up to vocalise the concerns of the trade union movement, was the political embodiment of a new form of politics. The evolution of a class-based party from a trade union pressure

group to a party of government, a feat that Labour accomplished in a little under twenty-five years, symbolised the decline of populist politics and, with it, the demise of the Liberal Party.

The stagist narrative thus draws attention to major discontinuities in popular politics during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and stresses the importance of class as a determinant of political allegiance. But since the 1980s this once-dominant view has come under sustained attack from a diverse range of scholars who, to varying degrees, have embraced the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and social sciences.[2] Taken as a collective body of work, their studies have helped to dethrone the concept of class from its position as the main explanatory framework for understanding British politics before the First World War. The work of Gareth Stedman Jones and Patrick Joyce in particular has shed light on the importance of non-class identities in nineteenth-century England and questioned the extent to which material factors dictate the nature and pace of political change.[3] The work of Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid has challenged the discontinuous narrative of political change by suggesting that the revival of socialism and the emergence of labour politics in the 1880s and 1890s represented the recomposition of the 'popular radical' tradition rather than the beginning of a new phase in Britain's political development.[4] 'Popular' is the crucial word here, for Biagini and Reid contend that radicalism was a 'plebeian' or cross-class movement of 'the people', a group that included artisans, small tradesmen, organised workers and, in some places, gentlemen rather than the movement of a single class.[5] The work of Patrick Joyce, though differing from that of Biagini and Reid in its focus on the questions of identity and belonging, has also suggested that radicals generally avoided a language of class in favour of terms and phrases that denoted inclusiveness, reconciliation, fellowship and extra-economic categorisation.[6] In this view, popular radicalism was a populist movement that survived the tumultuous final years of the nineteenth century and continued to shape the tone of progressive politics until at least 1914.

There appears to be little middle ground between the two interpretations discussed so far. Whereas the stagist interpretation emphasises discontinuity and the rise of class politics, the 'continuity thesis' emphasises continuity and the survival of non-class politics. The aim of this book is to demonstrate that this dichotomy is unnecessary. Drawing on five local case studies, it suggests that a persuasive argument for continuity can be made without having to abandon class as a tool of historical analysis. It attempts to show that labour activists remained committed to the discursive practices and core ideological beliefs of their radical predecessors even as they formed new political organisations. But it argues that their

radical predecessors were *working-class* radicals rather than *populist* radicals. The distinction is not merely semantic. Differences between the two iterations of radicalism reveal themselves in several ways, not least in the way they spoke about the socio-political order and used certain terms, phrases and concepts. Where populist radicals saw the basic division in society as between 'the idle' and 'the industrious', working-class radicals framed their understandings of the social order in a language of class. Populist radicals tended to emphasise the benefits that political and social reform would bring to the community, while working-class radicals were more concerned with furthering the interests of the working class. And whereas populist radicals spoke of 'the people' as an intermediary social group situated between the idle rich and the idle poor, working-class radicals tended to use the term side by side with and sometimes as an alternative description for the working class (or classes).

The working-class radical tradition left an indelible mark on the political labour movement. Using the term 'populist' to describe the character of this tradition would only serve to conceal the complexities that characterised its relationships with other political and intellectual forces. It would also conceal the very real tensions that existed between radicals and liberals in the mid- to late nineteenth century. The existence of such tensions has not gone unnoticed. Since the early 1990s, the work of Antony Taylor, Mark Bevir and Jon Lawrence, among others, has brought to light the persistence of a vibrant and semi-independent radical subculture that existed outside the sphere of mainstream liberalism.[7] These studies have helped to show that the distinctions between radicalism and liberalism were far more pronounced and complex than scholars had previously acknowledged. Still, they have only gone so far in challenging the continuity thesis. For example, they have tended to focus on the continuities between radicalism and socialist politics rather than the continuities between radicalism and labour politics.[8] This is perhaps understandable given that socialists were often the most vocal, disruptive and, for some, interesting political actors at the time. It is important, though, not to overstate the numerical strength and political impact of the socialist movement. While the boundaries between socialism and labourism were far from clear-cut, socialist organisations such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) were always small minorities within the wider labour movement.

Moreover, these studies have only briefly considered the tensions that existed *within* the radical movement. Uncovering such tensions contributes to our understanding of later developments in British politics. For one thing, it makes it easier to account for the emergence

of a class-based and class-orientated Labour Party without having to abandon either an emphasis on class or an emphasis on continuity. While the creation of the Labour Party represented an important development in British politics, locating it as part of an older tradition in which class had served as a defining element makes it possible to understand the workerist tone of its early rhetoric. In addition, seeing local labour parties as successors to the working-class radical movements of the nineteenth century helps to explain the dynamics of progressive politics in the Edwardian era. For instance, it becomes easier to explain the nature of the relationship between local Liberal Associations and their Labour counterparts after 1900. In many towns and cities across urban Britain, progressive politics was often divided between a cross-class Liberal Party and an overwhelmingly working-class (and less electorally successful) labour movement. As in the Victorian period, activists on both sides of the progressive divide agreed on a broad range of issues, but there were also numerous questions, both strategic and ideological, on which they disagreed. Interpreting these developments as the outcome of a rise of 'class politics' would involve ignoring the similar relationship that had existed between organised liberalism and the radical movement in the mid- to late nineteenth century. And seeing Liberal and Labour activists as joint heirs of a populist 'radical liberal' tradition would mean overlooking the ideological and class-based tensions that so often characterised their relationship during the Edwardian period. It is only by seeing local LRCs or 'labour parties' as the descendants of a decidedly working-class radical tradition that we can fully explain both their character and their attitudes to the Liberal Party in the years before the First World War.

Exposing tensions in the Victorian radical movement goes some way towards reinstating the concept of class in discussions about British political history. Class-based terminology was an ever-present feature of both working-class radical and labourist discourse between 1867 and 1924. The tendency for some scholars to minimise the prevalence of class vocabulary in political discourse may have arisen because they have been looking for a conception of class that connotes conflict.[9] This is somewhat understandable given that an adversarial notion of class has informed so many studies of British history. Articulated most famously by E. P. Thompson, this notion suggests that:

> Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and *as against* other men whose interests are different from (and *usually opposed to*) theirs.[10]

In the towns and cities that form the basis of this book, working-class radicals and their labourist successors articulated a rather different conception of class. While they were committed trade unionists who proudly described themselves as members of the working class, they refuted accusations that they recognised or hoped to instigate a class war. And while they adopted a class-centred approach to politics and worked to place working-class representatives on local and national governing bodies, they did so to fix perceived defects in the political and industrial system rather than to subvert the existing social order. Resembling in many ways the 'introverted and defensive' sense of class that Ross McKibbin has identified among workers in the interwar period, though devoid of its 'defeatist and fatalistic' qualities, this was a shared tradition in which a language of class was strong but a language of class opposition was not.[11]

## Radical strongholds

This book uses case studies of five English towns and cities to reveal continuities between working-class radicalism and twentieth-century Labour politics. Focusing on Bristol, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton and Norwich addresses the geographical imbalance of previous scholarship on the topic. With a few notable exceptions, the historiography of progressive politics in pre-war England has tended to focus on constituencies in London, the North and the West Midlands.[12] Given the electoral importance of these regions for the Liberal and Labour parties, this is somewhat understandable. However, as Duncan Tanner showed, there were other important seats in England that needed to be won if the Liberals and, later, the Labour Party wished to form stable governments.[13] As the first study of its kind to integrate these case studies and examine them in parallel, this book provides a necessary corrective to a historiography that has often prioritised political heartlands or electoral anomalies.

On any conventional map, the area covered in this book stretches from Bristol in the South West via Leicester, Northampton and Lincoln in the East Midlands to Norwich in East Anglia. Despite their economic differences, these towns and cities shared a reputation as centres of religious and political radicalism. They also shared a broadly similar political trajectory. Between the mid- to late nineteenth century and the First World War, they were widely considered to be electoral strongholds of the Liberal Party, though divisions between radicals and liberals sometimes allowed Conservative candidates to win a plurality of votes. During the 1880s and 1890s, the Liberals began to face electoral challenges from their left flank, but the advance of socialism and labourism was uneven

before the First World War. At the 1923 general election, though, the Labour Party captured seats in all five towns and cities, and, while it lost some of them a year later after the fall of the first Labour government, they tended to fall into the hands of the Conservatives rather than the once-dominant Liberals.

It would be misleading to stress the typicality of these towns and cities. As a wealth of studies have shown, Britain's socio-economic structure was regionally diverse during this period. Its political culture was fragmented, and local peculiarities, contexts, pressures and traditions exerted an influence on electoral outcomes well into the 1920s. Many of the concerns of working-class radicals and labourists were also local in nature. Radical dissatisfaction with organised liberalism was essentially dissatisfaction with *local* Liberal Associations, and the emergence of local labour politics was often the product of *localised* political or industrial disagreements. While the establishment of a national Labour Party in 1900 served to impose a semblance of unity on these disparate political forces, there remained in effect hundreds of labour parties, 'all with similarities but all distinctive within their own geographical context'.[14]

By mapping the organisational trajectory of labour politics from its origins in the working-class radical movements of the 1870s through to its consolidation and triumph in the interwar period, this book sheds light on some aspects of the 'nationalisation' phenomena. Intentionally or not, the Labour Party made a strong contribution to a process through which 'highly localized and territorialized politics' gave way to 'national electoral alignments and oppositions'.[15] The presence of a small body of Labour MPs in the House of Commons provided local activists with an example to follow, and party head office began to act as a co-ordinating centre that drew together and offered guidance to previously disconnected local activists. In short, the party, its MPs and its leading spokespersons acted as poles of attraction towards which local activists could navigate. This imposed a degree of order on 'unofficial' forms of politics and, to some extent, served to standardise labourist discourse. While they may have disagreed with its tactics or seen little need to replicate its model at a local level, local activists considered Labour to be a party that was distinct from others and, therefore, worthy of sympathy if not active support. While this may seem like a modest change, it laid the basis for the growth of the party in interwar period.

Still, the growth of the party did not fundamentally alter the identities and ideologies of local activists. This is one of the reasons why in-depth local studies are so valuable. One of the aims of this book is to suggest that developments at the local level may have more accurately reflected changes in the way people spoke about politics, identity

and ideology. Examining political discourse at this level reveals much about the way in which widely used terms, phrases and concepts took on different meanings in different contexts, and suggests that discursive tussles over meaning could be initiated by localised statements and developments. Take, for example, the following hypothetical scenario, which closely mirrors an incident that will be discussed in Chapter 2. A prospective election candidate for a two-member constituency informs a group of voters that he is a staunch 'radical liberal' in politics. At subsequent meetings, he refers to himself as a 'working-man's candidate' and declares his opposition to both the Conservatives and the aristocratic wing of the Liberal Party. His speeches, reported in the largely unsympathetic provincial press, initiate a heated discussion in local political circles. Populist radicals rally around the candidate and announce that he represents the true spirit of liberalism. Working-class radicals also rally around the candidate but prefer to emphasise his working-class credentials and his promise to represent the 'working classes'. Radicals of different stripes then engage in a discussion about the true meaning of radicalism, and debate whether radicals should prioritise the claims of one section of the community over all others. Liberals, sensing the electoral implications of these divisions, accuse the candidate of stirring up class hatred and of deliberately seeking to disrupt the harmony of the radical–liberal alliance. Conservatives, keen to take advantage of radical–liberal disunity, accept the candidate's claim that he represents the true voice of liberalism, safe in the knowledge that by doing so, they will be strengthening their own appeal to voters who feel little sympathy with the candidate's 'extreme' views.

Untangling debates of this kind brings to light some of the complexities at the heart of popular politics. As the above example suggests, verbal contests over meaning were conducted as much at the constituency level as at the national, parliamentary level. Rather than simply adopting the views of high-level thinkers or politicians, local-level political actors played an active role in constructing and reconstructing the meaning of the terms and phrases that made up the language of politics. They engaged in contests over the meaning and significance of historical stories, traditions or myths and often referred to dramatic episodes in English history such as the Peasants' Revolt, the English Civil War, the Peterloo Massacre, Chartism, and, in exalted moments, the destruction of the golden age of Anglo-Saxon democracy and the imposition of the 'Norman Yoke'.[16] In an attempt to gain legitimacy, they also weaved stories about local rebellions, such as the 1831 reform riots in Bristol, the anti-enclosure Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk in 1549, and the firm support

afforded to the Puritan and parliamentary cause by Northamptonians during the Civil War, into their political appeals.

By constructing a narrative of popular rebellion against injustice, labour and socialist activists sought to demonstrate that the roots of their political visions lay deep in English history.[17] It is also likely that activists incorporated historical stories into their propaganda for electoral purposes. Keir Hardie, the 'father of the Labour Party', seemed well aware of the importance of sending the right message to voters, advising a Norwich-based activist in 1898 that he should replace sketches of foreign radicals in a forthcoming article with 'home patriots' such as 'the Levellors [sic] of the Cromwellian period' and 'the Radicals + Chartists'.[18] Still, even if there were strategic reasons for retelling these stories, labourists and socialists clearly demonstrated a strong affinity with the ideas and assumptions on which they were based. In short, they genuinely believed that the examples set by certain historical figures and traditions remained relevant in the modern era.

## Rethinking radicalism

Examining the content and tone of the discussions described above helps to identify the building blocks of political ideologies. Building on the work of political theorist Michael Freeden, this book takes the novel step of applying the conceptual approach to ideologies to the chaotic world of local politics.[19] This involves approaching ideologies as assemblages of concepts, the meanings of which are determined by their position in an ideology's internal 'morphology'. When the structure of an ideology is perceived in spatial terms, it takes the form of a concentric circle with 'core' concepts at the centre, 'adjacent' concepts in the next band and 'peripheral' concepts on the outer edge. At the centre of any ideology is a group of core concepts that, if removed from their central position, significantly alter the nature of an ideology. They are surrounded by a set of adjacent concepts that help to anchor the concepts at the core and limit the potentially infinite meanings that individuals could assign to them. Concepts in the periphery band, which take the form of specific practices, institutions, events or policy proposals, help to link core and adjacent concepts to their temporal and spatial context.[20]

For Freeden, it is the relationship between core, adjacent and peripheral concepts that gives them and their parent ideologies their distinctive meanings. The example of classical liberalism, which was arguably the dominant ideology in Britain during the mid- to late nineteenth century, can be used to illustrate this point. While liberals were not alone

in emphasising liberty, individualism and progress, they offered an interpretation of these concepts that differed from that of their rivals. This was because these concepts were located at the core of liberalism's morphology and positioned in close proximity to adjacent concepts such as democracy, equality and rights of property. The precise location and arrangement of these concepts, and the mutually influential relationship between them, generated a particular version of liberalism that led its proponents to advocate policies that encouraged moral improvement through self-help, thrift and individual exertion.

Seeing ideologies as distinct configurations of political concepts makes it easier to establish their uniqueness. For example, it allows us to see that the demand for the nationalisation of the railways is not necessarily evidence of a socialist perspective. Between 1867 and 1924, this demand was put forward by individuals from across the ideological spectrum, from socialists and labourists through to liberals and even conservatives. However, they favoured the proposal for different reasons. Whereas socialists saw nationalisation as a stepping-stone to a future socialist commonwealth, labourists tended to focus on the immediate, material benefits that nationalisation would bring to railway workers. To understand why this was the case, it is useful to look beyond political demands to the conceptual framework upon which these demands were based.

By exploring the ways in which 'ordinary' political activists articulated their understanding of political concepts, this book challenges the idea that ideology is primarily constructed and disseminated by high-level theorists or politicians. Very often, assessments of the Labour Party's political thought have been skewed towards those who have written or spoken in a theoretical way, which, for Jose Harris, has involved narrowing the focus to a 'tiny group of people … who have functioned as "academic" theorists'.[21] But as Michael Freeden has argued:

> Political thought is to be found at any level of political action, on different levels of sophistication. It is not necessarily identical with the coherent speculation of a number of isolated men regarded as having inherent worth and significant bearing on political life.[22]

By extending Freeden's analysis to the local level, it becomes clear that local political activists, whether or not they read a wide selection of political or philosophical works, made a strong contribution to the ideological landscape by refracting national-level messages through a local lens and by engaging in 'less sophisticated and more open' debates about the meaning of a concept or ideology.[23] Debates of this kind were vitally important in the development of the Labour Party, as it

was local activists who, in the words of Matthew Worley, 'most perceptibly encompassed Labour's actual and projected identity' and who 'propagated and articulated Labour policy' to the public.[24]

An exploration of these debates yields the conclusion that radicalism was a conceptually coherent ideology that should be treated separately from liberalism. Far from lacking 'any clear ideological basis', as Royden Harrison once argued, radicals offered a clear ideological vision and put forward a consistent set of demands that included the peaceful expansion of the franchise, a more equitable distribution of political representation and power, the protection and extension of workers' political and industrial rights, and the reform or dismantling of institutions, such as the House of Lords, which subverted the 'true' nature of the English (or British) constitution.[25] These demands rested on a firm ideological basis, and by constructing a conceptual framework for radical ideology we can more fully understand their nature and tone.

Political scientists have paid little attention to radicalism as an ideology.[26] Freeden, for example, has drawn upon Eugenio Biagini's work and suggested that radicalism was a member of the liberal ideological family rather than an ideology in its own right. But while the boundaries between radicalism and liberalism were certainly blurred and though conceptual overlaps did occur, it is possible to make a strong case for the distinctiveness of the radical morphology. Radicals were above all guided by the concepts of democracy, liberty, individuality, progress and rationality. These core concepts were situated at the heart of the radical worldview and were present in all known varieties of the ideology. They were surrounded by a set of adjacent concepts that included equality, the general interest and rights, as well as a set of 'marginal' concepts, including the state, whose importance to the ideological core was 'intellectually and emotionally insubstantial'. To prevent these concepts from existing at an abstract level with little relevance to the real world, radicalism, like all ideologies, contained a set of 'perimeter' concepts, including (male) adult suffrage, triennial Parliaments, vote by ballot, Irish Home Rule, equal electoral districts, and reform or abolition of the House of Lords.[27]

The relationship between radicalism's core, adjacent and peripheral concepts generated a highly expansive notion of democracy. Democracy, as Freeden has noted, is 'heavily packed with past associations, debates and prejudices stretching back to antiquity'.[28] But because of its proximity to liberty, long understood in the English 'idea environment' to mean non-constraint and the absence of impediments to making choices, and individuality, widely understood as the sovereignty of the individual, radicals saw democracy as a form of self-government in which

all adult males should exercise power through democratically elected representatives. The radical notion of democracy was coloured by a belief in the essential rationality of human beings and the assumption that at least half the population had the capacity to determine their own future. All these concepts were tied to the concept of progress, which in general terms means the movement from a less desirable state to a more desirable state but which for radicals meant gradual social and political progress along democratic lines. As radicals liked to remind their listeners and readers, 'radicalism' in its literal sense means 'to the root', which explains why they dedicated themselves to identifying defects in the existing order and seeking to resolve them as speedily as possible.

While democracy's adjacent position in liberalism often served to temper the democratic inclinations of its proponents, the presence of democracy in the radical core explains why radicals played such a prominent role in campaigns to democratise liberal politics and the political system. Discussions about historical events could help to tease out the differences between radical and liberal notions of democracy. One such debate about 'democratic principles' was conducted through the pages of the *Leicester Pioneer*, an ecumenical progressive journal that evolved into a mouthpiece for the Labour Party. In a discussion about Oliver Cromwell in 1902, one writer described the Lord Protector as a great benefactor of 'the common people' and 'a man of peace' who was 'driven to be a man of war'. In this view, the fall of the English republic was the result of 'treachery and dissension in the ranks of the people', a sign, perhaps, that the writer subscribed to a tempered view of democracy. This contrasted with the view of another writer who believed that Cromwell had acted like a 'prince or peer of the realm' in crushing Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, who had attempted to establish 'a true commonwealth'. Cromwell was also a despot who was guilty of violating the cardinal principle that 'in a democracy the people should govern themselves'. Rather than idealising men like Cromwell, reformers should idealise 'the people, the common, labouring, uncomplaining people, who bear the burdens of the world'.[29]

This exchange gives some indication of radicalism's adjacent concepts. Though it is not possible to provide a complete list of such concepts, it seems uncontroversial to state that equality exerted a strong influence on the radical core. As in classical forms of liberalism, equality was understood to mean equality before the law and equal civil and religious rights rather than equality of outcome. But unlike liberals, and because of its proximity to the core concept of democracy and liberty, radicals believed that equality also meant equal political rights and the right of all adult males, regardless of their educational or social worth and with certain

exceptions, to participate in the government of their country. In fact, rights could be considered an adjacent concept in its own right, as its role in protecting and prioritising the concepts of democracy, liberty and equality convinced radicals to demand the right to vote, the right to secrecy when voting and the right to nominate their own representatives. The general or common interest, or the assumption that human beings are social animals that thrive in communities of interdependent individuals, was also one of radicalism's adjacent concepts, which explains why radicals argued that their proposals for reform would accrue benefits to all members of society and prevent disruption to the social order by allowing voters to vent their anger through constitutional channels.

As political concepts are always located in specific historical and geographical contexts, their meanings are inevitably shaped by prevailing beliefs and attitudes, institutions, events, ideas, policy proposals, ethical systems, technologies and influential theories.[30] Some of the cultural constraints that influenced the articulation of radicalism may have already become apparent. Candidates for peripheral status in radical morphology during the late nineteenth century include the empire; patriotism; national self-determination; reform or abolition of the House of Lords; nationalisation of the land, mines and railways; old-age pensions; and free trade. Restrictive assumptions about work, place, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality also served to mould male activists' understanding of these concepts. As the following chapters will demonstrate, radicals rarely spoke about democracy, liberty or equality in an abstract sense; they spoke of 'the rights of Englishmen' rather than 'the rights of man'.

The constitution, one of the most important cultural influences on political discourse during this period, was also a peripheral concept in radical morphology.[31] Contrary to the claims of their critics, radicals were zealous constitutionalists who sought to bring the political system into line with the 'true' principles of the constitution.[32] For radicals, the English constitution guaranteed equality before the law, the liberty of the individual, political authority rooted in consent, limited and responsible government, and the sovereignty of the people through their representatives.[33] As Robert Saunders has noted, this highly democratic (and Anglocentric) reading of the constitution served as an 'ideal standard against which particular laws and governments could be held to account'.[34]

Because of the conceptual connections between democracy, liberty, progress, rights and equality, radicals saw themselves as part of the long struggle to protect the constitutional rights of the English people against infringements by tyrants and oppressors. As Jonathan Parry has shown, liberals also articulated a constitutionalist language of patriotism and a

progressive account of England's past, emphasising the country's 'constitutional distinctness' and insisting that reform was a crucial part of a native political tradition.[35] By binding patriotism to constitutionalism, radicals and liberals could claim that the 'particular British genius for reform', and the constitution that this genius produced, enabled them to achieve their objectives without resorting to the kind of violence found in countries such as France. Still, while there were similarities between radical and liberal forms of constitutionalism, patriotic celebrations of the constitution 'sat on top of numerous local variations and contests'.[36] And for working-class radicals who offered a class-based reading of the constitution, one of the evils of the system of government that contravened the constitution was the continued absence of working men from the House of Commons.

## The origins of labourism

Contests over the meaning of the constitution revealed differences not only between radicals and liberals, but also between populist radicals and working-class radicals. To some extent, these differences can be accounted for by seeing class and trade unionism as adjacent concepts in working-class radicalism and absent from populist radicalism. These concepts shaped working-class radical interpretations of democracy, which led activists to portray the struggle for political representation as a struggle of the working class against the intransigent upper classes and the ambivalent middle classes. The concepts helped to broaden the meaning of rights to include those of an industrial as well as a political nature, which encouraged working-class radicals to view liberty as the freedom to join a trade union as well as the right to vote. Class and trade unionism also informed working-class radical understandings of 'the general interest', which became subservient to class-orientated priorities. While liberals and populist radicals tended to emphasise the good of society as a whole, working-class radicals drew special attention to the concerns of the working classes.

Appending the prefix 'working-class' to 'radicalism' may bother those who do not believe that ideologies can be crudely associated with one social group. This is quite right, and it is not the intention of this book to claim that working-class radicalism was the sole preserve of those who fit the description of 'working class'. The focus of this book is on the languages of radicalism, and, to paraphrase Gareth Stedman Jones, an analysis of radical ideology must start from what radicals actually said and the terms in which they addressed each other and their opponents.[37] The term 'working-class radicalism' is simply used as a way of showing

that groups of mainly male manual workers, many of whom were involved in trade unions, friendly societies and similar organisations, tended to articulate a version of radicalism that differed from the populist variant offered by tradesmen, professionals and employers in the towns discussed in this book.[38]

By demonstrating that working-class radicals could subvert the dominant meanings of political concepts, this book challenges the idea that they were non-ideological creatures who were only capable of regurgitating 'middle-class' views.[39] In fact, they were also capable of modifying their views in response to political and intellectual developments. Inspired by the formation of socialist organisations, the demands of the 'new' trade unions, research into the conditions of the poor, and a broader acceptance of the doctrine of scientific and cultural evolution in the 1880s and 1890s, working-class radicals began to display an increasing interest in using the state to remedy social ills. This represented the emergence of the state as an adjacent concept in working-class radical ideology, a shift that served to alter the meaning of democracy, liberty, equality and other component concepts. It also added a collectivist gloss to working-class radical programmes, which began to include demands such as the municipalisation of local monopolies and public works schemes for the unemployed.[40]

For the sake of clarity, this book uses the term 'labourism' to describe this collectivist form of working-class radicalism. But except for the addition of the state, all working-class radical core and adjacent concepts were preserved in labourism. Because of the interrelationship between democracy, liberty, rationality and other concepts, labourists continued to favour a form of self-government in which adult males could exercise power through their representatives. And because of the presence of class and trade unionism in its adjacent band, labourists interpreted these concepts through the lens of class. They associated the principle of democracy with the struggle of the working classes for a fair share of representation and believed that increasing the number of labour representatives on local and national governing bodies would help to achieve this goal. They interpreted rights, liberty and equality in class terms, laying stress on the rights of labour and the liberties of trade unions. And like their predecessors, labourists claimed to be staunch defenders of the constitution who wished to reform or abolish institutions that subverted its foundational principles.[41] In essence, labourism was working-class radicalism in an updated form.

This is not the first book to use the term labourism. In the 1960s, new leftists such as John Saville, Ralph Miliband, Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson used the term pejoratively to describe the spirit of the

Labour Party. For Miliband, labourism was a theory and practice that involved an advancement of 'concrete demands for immediate advantage to the working class and organised labour', a refusal to work for 'a fundamentally different kind of society' and a 'very weak concern' for socialist objectives.[42] In this view, labourism evolved in response to the peculiarities of Britain's political and industrial development, which, for Perry Anderson, had invested the working-class movement with a 'coagulated conservatism', a 'philistinism' towards ideas, a 'mystagogy' towards institutions, an 'intense consciousness of separate identity' and an unwillingness to 'set and impose goals for society as whole'.[43]

Subsequent work helped to broaden the debate on the Labour Party's ideology. For Geoffrey Foote, labourism was a set of assumptions rather than an ideology, which allowed Labour to distinguish itself from other parties while successfully accommodating a diversity of opinion within its ranks.[44] For Ross McKibbin the early party lacked any 'ideological exactness', while for Gareth Stedman Jones it acted as a 'vacant centre' that could inhabit groups 'possessing different and sometimes incompatible political languages of widely varying provenance'.[45] Other scholars, such as Martin Pugh and Duncan Tanner, have sought to challenge the idea that Labour leaders were indifferent to theory by drawing attention to intellectual strands, including 'popular radicalism', 'Radical Liberalism', Fabianism and 'Tory-socialism', which exerted an influence on the party in its formative years.[46] After all, as Jose Harris has pointed out, the party's roots lay not only in trade unionism and democratic socialism, but also in:

> Radical republicanism and pro-Gladstonian Lib-Labism, Marxism and municipal reformism, positivism and idealism, Nonconformist and incarnationalist Christianity, anti-modernist mediaevalism and the quest for advanced 'scientific' modernity.[47]

This serves as a useful reminder that Labour has always been a broad church. It also highlights the futility in attempting to attach a single ideological label to a national political party. As Duncan Tanner's magisterial study of the pre-war Labour Party showed, there were pronounced local and regional variations in the strength of ideological groupings within the party, and the 'precise nature and meaning of ideologies or of class consciousness' tended to differ from place to place.[48] With this in mind, and as a way of addressing the geographical imbalance of previous scholarship on the topic, this book uses local case studies to identify the major currents of thought that influenced the intellectual development of local labour parties in their formative years.

As the following chapters will show, labourism was the dominant ideology among Labour Party activists and sympathisers in these localities. But the aim of this book is not to merely restate the case made by new left thinkers. Rather, it is to suggest that the conceptual approach to ideology can yield a more robust interpretation of what labourism was. Using such an approach calls into question the idea that by exhibiting a propensity for pragmatism and compromise, labourists were essentially non-ideological. For Henry Pelling, for example, many of those who worked for the party before the First World War were free of any commitment to ideas or programme because they simply wanted to 'defend themselves at Westminster against legislation or judge-made law which they regarded as hostile to the principles of unionism'.[49] But surely the very act of deciding to enter the political arena, to establish a party independent of both the Liberals and the Conservatives, and to seek direct as opposed to indirect representation in the House of Commons rests on a set of assumptions about, for example, 'the principles of unionism' and the ability of ordinary voters to seek redress for their grievances through parliamentary action?[50] This may seem like a fairly obvious point to make, but it is one that serves to demonstrate how the attitudes of ordinary voters and activists have been deemed non-ideological simply because they have not been codified in an official programme or statement of principles.

Labourism, like all ideologies, was not dependent for its existence on isolated thinkers or intellectuals. In fact, as political thought is to be found at all levels of political action, it may even be more appropriate to look to the local level to find exemplars of labourist ideology. Though there are numerous candidates who meet this criterion, William Hornidge stands out as particularly strong example. Hornidge worked in every major centre of the boot and shoe industry before settling in Northampton in 1889. He quickly worked his way through the ranks of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO), becoming its general secretary in 1899, a position he held until his death ten years later. He was a self-described collectivist who disparaged the socialist 'quest for visionary reforms' and its recognition of the class war. He was a pragmatist who allied himself to the Liberal Party in the 1890s and urged the newly formed Labour Party to accept assistance from those 'closest to them in thought'. But despite his hostility to socialism and his tendency towards organised liberalism, Hornidge articulated a class-based rather than a populist vision of politics. He worked with the Liberal Party to 'get out of it all he could for the good of Labour' and favoured a 'pure and simple' Labour Party that would contain 'workers' rather than 'middle-class men'. As a 1901 article in the *Leicester Pioneer* made clear:

> [Hornidge] is a fighter certainly; but not a noisy one. He may be an agitator; but not a stirrer up of needless strife … He is conciliatory so far as conciliation may tend to obtain the results he desires. He has a very considerable programme for the betterment of the wage-earner; but believes he can best obtain it by taking that which is within reach at the moment; still looking onward with unsatisfied ideals; yet seeing that more can be got easily, and with increased speed, by claim, continuous effort, than by violence more restive spirits might prefer – violence of speech even, that might at any time … lead to immense disaster.[51]

A trade unionist inspired by the slogan of 'defence not defiance', Hornidge was the archetypal labourist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Tracing the radical thread

The book is organised chronologically into eight chapters, each of which addresses a different historical theme, moment or development in English politics during the period 1867–1924. This structure serves the purpose of the book, which is to construct a narrative of continuity between older and newer political traditions. This is not to suggest that the transition from working-class radicalism to labourism was painless. As we shall see, there were moments when alternate paths of development presented themselves to working-class radical activists. At these moments, a change in circumstances, such as an electoral victory rather than defeat, could have disrupted this narrative and brought down the book's central argument. Consequently, each chapter considers paths of development that do not fit neatly into the book's dominant narrative and that, while essentially subplots to the main story, demonstrate that paths of political and ideological development are not teleological processes.

The narrative begins after the passage of the 1867 Reform Act, an Act that enfranchised a substantial portion of the male working-class population. The purpose of the first two chapters is to emphasise the vibrancy of a working-class radical tradition and its distinctness from both mainstream liberalism and populist forms of radicalism in the two decades after the Act's passage. The first chapter uses newspaper reports and election ephemera to explore the attempts of working-class radicals to challenge, either electorally or non-electorally, the unrepresentative nature of local Liberal Associations. It suggests that working-class radicals engaged in these activities because they formulated their understanding of the socio-political order through the lens of class. It also elaborates on the conceptual framework of radical ideology and its populist and working-class variants.

The exploration of late-nineteenth-century radicalism continues in the second chapter, which focuses on the campaign to elect the atheist Charles Bradlaugh to Parliament. One of the most controversial political and legal struggles of the Victorian era, this campaign has long been considered a broad-based populist movement in which social and political tensions were largely absent. This chapter, though, suggests that the campaign is better understood as an uneasy and fragile alliance of two mutually suspicious sections. By offering contrasting perspectives on the nature and importance of 'the Bradlaugh case' and on the 'true' meaning of the constitution, radicals and liberals served to reveal the important differences that separated the two traditions. The chapter also uses newspaper reports and election songs, poems and posters to uncover subtle differences in the way working-class and populist radicals handled certain political concepts and articulated their understanding of the social order. Establishing the existence of such tensions helps to account for the tone, strategy and ideological basis of 'newer' forms of politics that had begun to emerge in Bradlaugh's final years.

The third chapter considers how working-class radicals responded to debates about the role of the state in the final years of the nineteenth century. During this period, 'collectivism', a term often used synonymously with 'socialism', became a hotly debated topic in political and intellectual circles, and activists across England engaged in fierce debates about the merits and feasibility of using state power to alleviate social problems. Working-class radicals were not absent from these discussions. Those who established socialist societies lamented the moderation of their former allies and claimed that they were the true heirs of the radical legacy. Working-class radicals who came to describe themselves as 'labour' activists also embraced the collectivist spirit of the times. But, as this chapter suggests, while they came to see the state as an effective tool for alleviating social distress, they remained stubbornly attached to their old ways of thinking about democracy, liberty, progress and other concepts at the core of working-class radical ideology. The emergence of local labour parties in the 1880s and 1890s and the conceptual mutation of working-class radical ideology into labourism represented the renewal rather than the displacement of older traditions.

The fourth chapter examines some of the key electoral battlegrounds where intra-progressive divisions contributed to the defeat or near defeat of Liberal candidates in 1895. While these election and by-election contests have been relatively neglected in the historiography, they help to reveal the fractured nature of the radical tradition in the years prior to the formation of the national Labour Party. Drawing on correspondence, trade union records, newspaper reports, songs, handbills and

election addresses, this chapter suggests that there was an essential continuity in the way labourists thought and spoke about the socio-political order. This chapter also suggests that teasing out the differences between labourism, liberalism, conservatism, socialism and 'constructive' forms of radicalism in the 1890s makes it easier to explain the tone of popular politics in early twentieth century. Identifying the connection between working-class radicalism and labourism makes the foundation of the Labour Party seem less like a birth of a new epoch or the continuation of a populist 'radical liberalism' and more like the renewal of a 'class-conscious' radical tradition.

The fifth chapter examines the extent to which the Labour Party contributed to the nationalisation of British political culture in the period before the First World War. With a focus on local labour newspapers, trade union records and correspondence between local activists and Labour head office, this chapter suggests that the party, its MPs and its leading spokespersons acted as poles of attraction towards which labourists and sympathetic socialist activists could navigate. It also argues that the existence of a national party promoted the idea that Labour head office would act as a co-ordinating centre that could draw together previously unconnected trade unionists and socialists. Finally, the chapter argues that many of those who supported the Labour Party in the Edwardian period, as well as those who sympathised with the party while remaining outside of it, retained a strong sense of loyalty to the discursive and ideological frameworks of older radical traditions.

The sixth chapter examines the way in which Labour activists articulated their understanding of the working class prior to the First World War. It shows that Labour activists' definition of the working class, as well as their conception of the social order, owed a great deal to older notions of class relations. It does so by interrogating the way in which activists interacted with women, the unemployed, non-manual workers, foreigners, agricultural labourers, 'the poor' and others who had historically been excluded from labourist definitions of the working class. The aim of this chapter is to show that long-held and restrictive assumptions about gender, place, work, nationality and race were hard to shake off even in the face of social and political change.

The seventh chapter considers the extent to which the First World War contributed to the post-war realignment of progressive politics. With notable exceptions, scholars have largely agreed that certain developments during the war years, including splits in the Liberal Party, the expansion of the wartime state and the growth of trade unionism, provided the necessary framework for a political realignment in which Labour replaced the Liberals as the dominant force on the British left. This

chapter offers a fresh perspective on this debate by examining the ideological evolution of Labour activists in towns and cities at the forefront of this realignment. Drawing on trade union and party-political records, election posters and handbills, pamphlets, and newspaper reports, it argues that the theoretical framework that generated labourist responses to the war was not new. As before the war, labourists articulated a conciliatory vision of society that, while undoubtedly based on an exclusivist conception of class, was not rooted in a recognition of the class struggle. And far from undergoing a significant ideological conversion, labourists felt that wartime developments proved the veracity of their assumptions about democracy, liberty, the state and other concepts that had formed the core of both pre-war labourism and, before it, working-class radicalism.

The eighth and final chapter considers the impact of Labour's decision to adopt a new constitution and publish its first comprehensive policy document, *Labour and the New Social Order*, in 1918. These changes were part of a deliberate effort to shift Labour's image from a trade union pressure group to a party of government. As intended, middle-class defectors from the Liberal Party and women of all classes joined the party in considerable numbers from 1918 onwards. This chapter, however, argues that we should not overstate the intellectual significance of these changes. Male labourists continued to hold restrictive assumptions about groups that had historically been marginalised within the party. Labourist conceptions of the social order remained influential at a local level and, like their political ancestors, labourists exhibited a strong sense of class while rejecting the theory of the class struggle. And while the constitutional changes of 1918 expanded the intellectual space in which non-labourist currents could exist and grow, labourism remained a major intellectual current in the party as it prepared to form its first government in January 1924.

Constructing a general picture of popular politics at a local level has involved examining a multitude of sources held in libraries, archives and record offices across Britain. As the period 1867–1924 was a time when 'out-of-doors' speech-making became a technique of mainstream public life, a special effort was made to consult sources that contain reports of speeches delivered on street corners, in market places and at political clubs.[52] As well as interrogating speeches published in pamphlet form, this meant mining national and provincial newspapers, most of which were accessed at the British Library site in Colindale, London, before their migration to the online British Newspaper Archive.

The pace at which digitisation has occurred demonstrates the speed of technological development and its potential for historical analysis. After

all, as Luke Blaxill has argued, it is now possible to 'analyse the newly liberated textual sources of millions (sometimes billions) of words which are beyond feasible scholarly endeavour to read in entirety'.[53] Taking advantage of this development, this book is largely based on now-digitised political speeches, election addresses, letters, advertisements, poems, songs and meeting reports. For Blaxill, though, this analysis could be taken further by conducting an additional *quantitative* analysis of digital sources. Among other things, this could involve comparing language patterns across different regions, tracking the rise and fall of certain words and phrases, and, as Joseph Meisel has shown, identifying the 'overall patterns and underlying structures' of an individual's speech-making.[54]

This endeavour is not without its problems, especially for those wishing to study the language of local activists who operated on the fringes of mainstream politics. At the time of writing, the British Newspaper Archive is dominated by newspapers that aligned with the Liberal or Conservative parties. Though these papers reported on the activities of radical, labour and socialist activists, this was not consistent or comparable to the coverage given to the major political parties. Of course, this is likely to change as digitised versions of non-Liberal and non-Conservative newspapers are added to the British Newspaper Archive. But in the meantime, it is difficult to conduct a study of localised radical or labour oratory along the lines suggested by Meisel, who was able to compare the 'oratorical productivity' of William Gladstone and Winston Churchill because near-complete collections of their speeches have been published and digitised.

A more serious issue is the contestability of words, phrases and concepts. For example, the activists discussed in this book often used 'English' and 'British' interchangeably, which explains why the book's title refers to 'England' and not 'Britain'. Another reason is that the nations that make up the United Kingdom have separate national histories. As Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret Scull have recently argued, while the histories of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales shaped and informed one another's histories, 'developments in the one were not always present in the other(s)'.[55] This book, then, is a study of English politics rather than an Anglocentric study of British politics. Examining the interplay between 'British' and 'national' narratives is certainly a worthwhile scholarly endeavour, but it is something that falls outside the scope of this book.

The meaning of words like 'reform' and 'radical' also changed over time and could differ depending on the context in which they were used. In the 1880s, for instance, a 'radical' in Northampton, a 'labour' activist

in Bristol and an 'independent liberal' in Lincoln were all part of same intellectual tradition. In both national and provincial newspapers, the terms 'labour party' and 'liberal party' did not always refer to actual political organisations. The difficulty in conducting a quantitative analysis of 'unofficial' political languages becomes even more obvious when we consider that liberal-leaning newspapers often referred to labour activists as 'liberals' and socialists as 'progressives', and conservative-aligned papers sometimes described the Liberal Party as 'separatists' or 'the radical party'. While the innovative methods proposed by Blaxill and others merit more careful investigation than this study can provide, it may be necessary to wait until more sophisticated tools are available before conducting a comprehensive quantitative analysis of radical and labour languages.

## Notes

1 For examples of the stagist interpretation, see S. Webb and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism, 1666–1920* (London, 1920); G. D. H. Cole, *British Working Class Politics, 1832–1914* (London, 1965); R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861–1881* (London, 1965); E. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1984); N. Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society, 1850–1920* (Manchester, 1998).

2 For a comprehensive overview of the methodological differences between these historians, see J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 41–61.

3 G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 23; P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge, 1991); J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in the English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993).

4 E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid (eds), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 5; E. F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992). For non-traditionalist work that argues for important discontinuities in radicalism, see M. Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847–1860* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 331–346.

5 Biagini and Reid, *Currents of Radicalism*, p. 4; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 11, 51.

6 Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p. 11.

7 See J. Lawrence, 'Popular radicalism and the socialist revival in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 31:2 (1992), pp. 163–186; L. Barrow and I. Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880–1914*

(Cambridge, 1996); A. Taylor, '"The Old Chartist": Radical veterans on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century political platform', *History*, 95:4 (2010), pp. 458–476; M. Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton, NJ, 2011); J. Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working-Class Radicalism and Organised Liberalism in England, 1868–88* (Liverpool, 2014). See also Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class*, p. 185.

8 See also S. Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (London, 1973); E. Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980); L. Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London, 1986).

9 For similar criticisms, see J. Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York, 1996), pp. 2–3; Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 46; J. Thompson, 'After the fall: Class and political language in Britain, 1780–1900', *Historical Journal*, 39:2 (1996), pp. 793–794, 802; M. Worley, *Labour inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London, 2005), pp. 6–7; Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, p. 14.

10 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Aylesbury, 1968), pp. 9–10: emphases added.

11 They were more independent-minded than Patrick Joyce's deferential northern factory proletariat and more political than Gareth Stedman Jones's London-based working class. In some respects, this conception of class corresponds with what Peter Clarke described as 'the social democratic theory of the class struggle', whose proponents accepted the class dimension of democracy and worked within 'class parties' but denied the desirability of class conflict. Clarke, though, was describing the views of early Fabians and Edwardian new liberals. P. Clarke, 'The social democratic theory of the class struggle', in J. Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 3–18; P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Aldershot, 1991), pp. 291–292; Stedman Jones, Languages of Class, pp. 179–238; R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford, 1991), p. 36; R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford, 2000), p. 131; see also B. Jackson, *Equality and the British Left: A Study in Progressive Political Thought, 1900–64* (Manchester, 2007), p. 27.

12 For examples, see P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885–1914* (London, 1967); P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971); D. Clark, *Colne Valley, Radicalism to Socialism: The Portrait of a Northern Constituency in the Formative Years of the Labour Party 1890–1910* (London, 1981); M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, 1987); J. Lawrence, 'Popular politics and the limitations of party: Wolverhampton, 1867–1900', in E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid (eds),

*Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 65–85.

13 D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 284.

14 Worley, *Labour inside the Gate*, p. 2; M. Worley (ed.), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900–39* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 2–3; Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, pp. 13, 79.

15 D. Caramani, *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 1: emphasis added.

16 This is the belief that fundamental liberties were established under the Anglo-Saxons but suppressed or curtailed by the Norman Conquest of 1066. Historians have exaggerated the decline of this idea in the years after Chartism. C. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain, 1918–1939* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 25–50; M. Chase, 'George Howell, the Webbs and the political culture of early labour history', in K. Laybourn and J. Shepherd (eds), *Labour and Working-Class Lives: Essays to Celebrate the Life and Work of Chris Wrigley* (Manchester, 2017), p. 22.

17 P. Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880–1914* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 12.

18 Norfolk Record Office, Norwich (hereafter NFRO), MS 4265/26/1, papers of J. F. Henderson, letter from Keir Hardie to J. F. Henderson, 5 December 1898.

19 M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978); M. Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914–1939* (Oxford, 1986); M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford, 1998).

20 Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, pp. 77–84, 438, 444–449, 459.

21 J. Harris, 'Labour's political and social thought', in D. Tanner, P. Thane and N. Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 11.

22 Freeden, *The New Liberalism*, p. 246.

23 H. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892–1914* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 63.

24 M. Worley, 'Building the Party: Labour Party activism in five British counties between the wars', *Labour History Review*, 70:1 (2005), p. 75.

25 Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, p. 3.

26 Note its absence in M. Freeden, L. T. Sargent and M. Stears (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford, 2013).

27 Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, pp. 78–79, 156, 165.

28 Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 98.

29 *Leicester Pioneer*, 23 August 1902; 30 August 1902; 6 September 1902; 13 September 1902; 27 September 1902.

30 Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, pp. 69–79.

31 Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 7.

32 *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 21 November 1868.
33 H. Cunningham, 'The language of patriotism, 1750–1914', *History Workshop*, 12:1 (1981), p. 11.
34 R. Saunders, 'Parliament and people: The British constitution in the long nineteenth century', *Journal of Modern European History*, 6:1 (2008), pp. 75–76.
35 J. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 10; J. Parry, 'The impact of Napoleon III on British politics, 1851–1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), pp. 147–175; G. Pentland, 'Parliamentary reform', in D. Brown, R. Crowcroft and G. Pentland (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1880–2000* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 386–391.
36 Pentland, 'Parliamentary reform', p. 386.
37 Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, pp. 94–96.
38 For other discussions that focus on the way different groups contested the meaning of ideas, concepts and movements, see T. Tholfsen, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1976), pp. 16–17, 86; Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 296; M. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848–1874* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 221–222.
39 A view put forward in Webb and Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 362, 366, 369, 374.
40 Cole, *British Working Class Politics*, p. 81; W. Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism: Men and Ideas in the Formation of Fabian Socialist Doctrines, 1881–1889* (London, 1975), p. 70.
41 Harris, 'Labour's political and social thought', pp. 14–15.
42 R. Miliband, 'Socialist advance in Britain', *The Socialist Register*, 20 (1983), p. 107.
43 P. Anderson, 'Origins of the present crisis', *New Left Review*, I:23 (1964), pp. 40–43. For an overview of the new left and labourism, see M. Davis, "Labourism" and the new left', in J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam (eds), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour politics and history* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 39–56.
44 G. Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought* (Beckenham, 1986), p. 5.
45 Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 22.
46 D. Tanner, 'The development of British socialism, 1900–1918', *Parliamentary History*, 16:1 (1997), pp. 48–66; M. Pugh, *Speak For Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p. 9.
47 Harris, 'Labour's political and social thought', p. 47.
48 Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party*, p. 12.
49 H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1968), pp. 14–15, 118.
50 Harris, 'Labour's political and social thought', p. 9.

51 Modern Records Centre, Warwick (hereafter MRC), 547/P/1/9, National Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers: monthly reports (hereafter NUBSO MR), March 1893; *Northampton Mercury*, 18 August 1899; *Leicester Pioneer*, 6 July 1901; MRC, 547/P/1/18, NUBSO MR, April 1902; MRC, 547/P/1/18, National Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers: conference reports (hereafter NUBSO CR), 1902; *Manchester Evening News*, 8 September 1903. Note: the National Union of Operative Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers (NUBSRF) changed its name to the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO) in 1890. In references to primary sources I have used the latter acronym only for the organisation, even when referring to pre-1890 materials.

52 J. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 2001), p. 277.

53 L. Blaxill, 'Elections', in D. Brown, R. Crowcroft and G. Pentland (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1880–2000* (Oxford, 2018), p. 410.

54 J. Meisel, 'Words by the numbers: A quantitative analysis and comparison of the oratorical careers of William Ewart Gladstone and Winston Spencer Churchill', *Historical Research*, 73:182 (2000), p. 263.

55 N. Lloyd-Jones and M. M. Scull, 'A new plea for an old subject? Four nations' history for the modern period', in N. Lloyd-Jones and M. M. Scull, *Four Nations' Approaches to Modern "British" History: A (Dis)United Kingdom?* (London, 2018), pp. 4–6; Cunningham, 'The language of patriotism', p. 28.