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Evan Durbin (1906–1948)

Catherine Ellis

1 Introduction

Evan Durbin was born in 1906 into a devout Baptist family in Devonshire, the son of the Reverend Frank Durbin and his wife, Mary Louisa Mellor Mottram, daughter of William Mottram, a well-known Congregationalist and temperance campaigner. He enjoyed a happy childhood and grew up confident and articulate in a home where politics and religion were discussed both passionately and ‘without claim of prescriptive wisdom by the elders’ (Phelps Brown 1951: 91). After attending Taunton School, Durbin won an Open Scholarship to New College, Oxford, where he shared rooms with two other young economists, Reginald Bassett and his former schoolmate Henry Phelps Brown, both of whom were also later employed at LSE. Durbin completed a Second Class degree in Zoology in 1927 and was relieved to reach the end of this foray into the sciences. He transferred with greater enthusiasm into Philosophy, Politics and Economics—Modern Greats—from which he graduated with a First Class degree two years later.¹

¹Biographical details throughout this chapter are drawn from Phelps Brown (1951), Ellis (2004a), Durbin (2008) and ‘Marjorie Durban [sic]’, transcript of interview by Keith Hancock for *Economic Journal*, 1995, Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: COLL MISC 0978.

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Although ‘born and bred a Liberal’, Durbin was firmly committed to socialism by the time he arrived at Oxford.² He was active in the Oxford Union, where he and Phelps Brown were among the few socialists, as well as the Adam Smith Society and the Labour Club, which together facilitated his introduction to many of the people who strongly influenced his later work, including Hugh Gaitskell, Margaret and G.D.H. Cole, John Bowlby and Lionel Robbins, who was Durbin’s economics tutor at New College (see Durbin 1985: 99; Howson 2011: 128–129; Mayhew 2006: 24–25). Although his widow recalled that Durbin was later ‘horrified’ by the rightward shift in Robbins’s thought, as an undergraduate Durbin greatly admired his tutor and thanked him for the gift not only of ‘tuition as good as tuition can be; but an enthusiasm for your subject—my subject—and a personal interest that has been no part of your official duties’ (Howson 2011: 152; Durbin to Robbins, 24 August [1929?], Robbins Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/1/1).

The admiration was mutual. By 1928, Robbins was pleased to recommend his student as an adult education teacher, noting both Durbin’s academic success and the kindness and fondness for debate for which Durbin was known throughout his life: ‘He is quick to understand and very sympathetic, and the sort of argumentation so beloved of extra mural students, is the breath of life to him’ (Robbins to unknown, 3 November 1928, Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/4). Robbins’s support helped Durbin secure a Ricardo Scholarship to study under-consumptionist theories at University College London, in 1929, the same year in which Robbins was appointed head of LSE’s Economics Department. During this period of rapid expansion at the School under William Beveridge’s leadership, Robbins wasted no time recruiting economists who contributed diverse perspectives on the field. In the autumn of 1930, Robbins appointed Durbin to a lectureship in his department, where the new recruit worked alongside R.H. Tawney, Harold Laski, Friedrich Hayek and Eileen Power, among others (see Howson 2011: 170–171; Durbin 1985: 100–101).

The School remained Durbin’s professional home until he joined the war-time civil service in early 1940. He worked in a variety of posts throughout the war, most notably as assistant to Labour leader and Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee. In 1945, Durbin was elected Labour MP for

²Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, ‘Socialism and the Liberal Tradition’, n.d. [1935–1936]; Brooke (1996: 32). Durbin’s widow, Marjorie, believed it was Phelps Brown who persuaded Durbin to join the Labour Party, a decision that greatly upset Durbin’s mother who ‘thought she was breeding young liberals’ (Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: ‘Marjorie Durbin [sic]’, COLL MISC 0978: 88, 98).

the London constituency of Edmonton. In government, he served first as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Hugh Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and then as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works. He was tipped for higher office but drowned accidentally in September 1948 at the age of 42, leaving behind a widow and three young children.

Throughout his career, Durbin was a socialist first, an economist second. His commitment to democratic socialism shaped every facet of his economic thought and he considered economic theory to have little value or utility unless it was directed towards the creation of a more humane and equitable society. As he observed in one of his final publications, economists ‘must realise that they are studying human behaviour and not the formulae of logic and mathematics’ (Durbin 1949a: 175; see also Durbin 1949b). Despite his tragically early death, Durbin left an indelible mark on the Labour Party. In the 1930s, his work was central to Labour’s adoption of economic planning in lieu of large-scale nationalisation. During and after the war, Durbin championed a socialist planned economy that maximised individual liberty and rejected sectional interests such as those of trade unions. His distinctive formulation of socialism melded economics with ethics and insights drawn from psychology and psychoanalysis, underpinned by a strong belief in the superiority of English values and institutions. Durbin also drew attention to issues that would plague socialists well into the 1950s and beyond, particularly affluence, voter psychology and managerialism.

2 Planners and Planning

Durbin’s decade at LSE before the war was the most fruitful of his career, both in the breadth of his economic research and in the scope of his contributions to the Labour Party. He rapidly established his credentials as an academic and socialist economist with the publication of three books: *Purchasing Power and Trade Depression* (Durbin 1933a), *Socialist Credit Policy* (Durbin 1933b; revised 1935d) and *The Problem of Credit Policy* (Durbin 1935a). *The Problem of Credit Policy* sold moderately well for the remainder of the decade and Durbin developed a strong reputation as both a colleague and a lecturer.³

Notwithstanding his early success at the School, Durbin’s most significant contributions were more practical and political than theoretical or academic.

³Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 2/2, handwritten sales figures and graph, n.d.

He recognised that the second Labour government (which collapsed acrimoniously in August 1931) had been fatally reliant on orthodox finance, but unlike some socialists, such as Harold Laski and John Strachey, Durbin rejected Marxism as a viable alternative. Instead, he was instrumental in convincing the Labour leadership to reconfirm the party's commitment to democratic socialism supported by a programme of comprehensive economic planning and limited public ownership.

Much of Durbin's research in the early 1930s focused on the mechanics of planned economies, which he developed through three interconnected groups of economists and intellectuals.⁴ The first was the New Fabian Research Bureau (NFRB), which was founded in March 1931 in response to frustration with Labour in government and the impotence of the original Fabian Society. The NFRB's papers covered a range of topics but their focus was most often economic, a reflection of both its early membership, which included Durbin, Dalton, Gaitskell, Barbara Wootton, James Meade and Colin Clark, and the pressing need to revisit Labour's economic policies after 1931. The second group, the XYZ Club, began to meet regularly in January 1932 in rooms above a London pub. XYZ membership overlapped substantially with that of the NFRB but added emerging figures from the press and business worlds such as Douglas Jay, Nicholas Davenport and Vaughan Berry, who filled gaps in Labour's expertise on finance and the workings of the City. Finally, Dalton, chairman of Labour's influential Finance and Trade Committee, invited Durbin and several other young economists to develop policies that became the basis of Labour's new programmes in 1934 and 1937 and supported Durbin's contention that by the middle of the decade, Labour had become 'unquestionably a planning Party' (Durbin 1985: 80–83; Brooke 1992: 28; Durbin 1949a: 41).

In an essay first published in George Catlin's collection, *New Trends in Socialism* (Durbin 1935b), Durbin outlined the case for centralised controls as an essential step on the road to a socialist society. He anticipated that a future Labour government would enact controls in two stages, first 'grouping...production units making the same or closely related products into one corporation' and then bringing together groups of economic activities and industries under a new 'Supreme Economic Authority'. The result would be both greater efficiency and more equitable distribution of resources.

⁴As Ann Oakley has observed, it is 'impossible to read the intellectual and political history of the 1930s and 1940s without being impressed by the overlapping membership of the different circles participating in the debates and decisions which produced post-war Britain' (Oakley 2011: 162).

Democratic socialist planning should not, however, be confused with ‘*a Plan*’. In the absence of an ‘economic astronomer’, Durbin rejected any programme based on precise predictions of human activity and industrial production (Durbin 1949a: 43–44; italics in original). Moreover, in Durbin’s model, surpluses in socialised industries must belong to the State, not the workers. This was a contentious issue for the labour movement, but Durbin insisted from the outset that planning required workers to put national above sectional demands:

The organised workers who claim with justice that the interests of the community should not be over-ridden for the profits of the few should go on to add that those same interests should not be overridden for the wages of the few. The interests of the whole are sovereign over the interests of the part (ibid.: 56–57).

For Durbin, planning placed the onus for creating a socialist community on the State, but the State must in turn take responsibility for ensuring the cooperation of all its constituent parts. He would return to this issue after the war.

3 Economics and Ethics

Durbin believed that planning was essential to economic efficiency, but he also recognised that simply shifting power mechanically from private hands to the State was not sufficient to create a socialist society. Economic controls were merely ‘a means to an end’ (ibid.: 45). As Durbin elaborated with increasing vigour for the remainder of the 1930s, planning was much more than an economic endeavour; it was the foundation of a democratic community based on common humanity, fellowship and equality. As Jeremy Nuttall and Mathew Thomson have shown, Durbin’s work demonstrates that the ethical imperatives of British socialism remained very much alive during the Depression years despite the gradual shift to a more technocratic, Fabian-led approach throughout this period. Economics and ethics did not become ‘alternative creeds’ in this period, as earlier studies often argued (e.g. Macintyre 1980: 52–53), but continued to play a vital role in both economic and political spheres, and socialist moralism was ultimately strengthened by the popularity and success of large-scale economic planning (see Nuttall 2003; Thomson 2006).

The distinctively ethical vision within Durbin’s economic thought was evident in his responses to Keynes’s work. In the first half of the 1930s, Keynes’s theories aroused considerable controversy among economists of

many political persuasions, and the 'Hayek-Robbins nexus' at LSE became a focal point of opposition. Durbin and others in the NFRB and XYZ Club engaged actively in the debates. Douglas Jay became an early convert to demand management as a riposte to calls for greater public ownership but he was not joined by other socialist economists until *The General Theory* (Keynes 1936 [1973]) converted many earlier sceptics, including Meade and Clark (see Howson 1988: 547–548; Durbin 1985: 69–70, 106, 149–150).

Durbin was not among them. He remained unconvinced on both technical and moral grounds. On a theoretical level, he found that Keynesian models could not explain the phenomenon of trade cycles and were therefore far less effective than centralised planning to achieve long-term economic growth. More significantly, Durbin was suspicious of Keynes's Liberal roots and troubled by his apparent indifference to ethical concerns (see *ibid.*: 152–156; Brooke 1996: 34–35). Durbin was a strong critic of the roles that competition, private banks, property ownership and inheritance played in promoting deep class divisions and economic inequality. As he concluded in a 1934 NFRB memorandum: 'Capitalism is to be condemned far more on grounds of the social system to which it leads than on any inherent weakness in the institutions by which an active capitalism attempts to solve... economic problems'.⁵

In a speech to the Ethical Union the following year, Durbin strongly criticised economists who defended institutions that promoted inequality. He argued that John Stuart Mill's separation of 'the direct moral evaluation of equality' from an analysis of 'the beneficial consequences believed by economists to spring from the existence of inequality' had enabled economists to see 'the moral evil of inequality'. Therefore, there was no need for them to eliminate the possibility of a 'prosperous equalitarian state'. Durbin rejected his colleagues' claims both that government controls would be inefficient and that humans were motivated solely by 'private gain'. Indeed, the latter argument, he insisted, was a '*psychological* assumption' and therefore 'outside the realm of the science of economics' (Durbin 1935c: 17, 21, 23; italics added). Within another year, Durbin's emerging interest in human psychology would cause him to change his mind entirely on the proper scope of economics, but he remained a staunch critic of Keynes's commitment to ameliorating capitalism without addressing its fundamental flaws. While many of his colleagues considered *The General Theory* to be transformative

⁵Fabian Society Papers, BLPES Archives: J/25/3, Labour Party Policy Committee, Policy No. 197, 'Memorandum on the Principles of Socialist Planning', by E.F.M. Durbin (January 1934): 3.

for the field, Durbin wrote to Keynes expressing disbelief that the author of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* continued to support an economic system based on private enterprise that freed ‘certain privileged persons to exercise their sadistic impulses in the control of industrial workers’ (Durbin to Keynes, 29 April 1936, quoted in Durbin 1985: 159). Durbin admired aspects of Keynes’s work but his commitment to rational argument was never swayed by ‘eminence’ or ‘authority’ (Phelps Brown 1951: 92).⁶ By the mid-1930s, Durbin’s insistence on prioritising human welfare within capitalism and his continued criticism of Keynes set him apart from other democratic socialist planners.

Durbin shared many of his ideas with his students at the School, where his lectures demonstrated both the breadth of his interests and the development of his thinking prior to the war. In a series on ‘English Civilisation’, for example, he explored the historical origins and characteristics of ‘English consciousness’ from the religious and ethical traditions of the nineteenth century through to the aftermath of the Great War. Durbin highlighted the distinctive role of the Protestant faith, which incorporated both the ‘quiet rational traditional conformism’ of the Church of England and the ‘rebellious, vigorous...more mystical’ dimensions of Nonconformism that had shaped his childhood. England’s moral and democratic foundations were strong, Durbin told his students, but the country was threatened by the growing inequalities of ‘advanced capitalism’, which could—of course—only be reversed by ‘the direction of economic life from the centre’, or ‘planning’. Durbin observed that planning was compatible with many political ideologies, not only socialism, and insisted that, following Roosevelt’s example, ‘all young Conservatives in this country want to plan’. Within the Labour Party, Durbin found that reactions to planning were shaped by the coexistence of two groups: a ‘traditional element’ dominated by trade unions who favoured ‘moderation’ and the ‘bleeding of capitalism’ without any coherent replacement, and a ‘new element’ that reflected Labour’s openness to middle- and upper-class ‘intellectuals’ such as Cripps, Tawney, Laski, Cole, Attlee and Dalton, who supported a ‘fully planned and socially equalitarian State’.⁷ Both Durbin’s faith in planning and his scepticism about reformed capitalism and organised labour remained recurring themes in his work.

⁶See also Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/14, E.F.M. Durbin, ‘The Great Lord Keynes’, *Daily Herald*, n.d. [22 April 1946].

⁷Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 1/1, lecture notes on ‘English Civilisation’, n.d. [early 1930s].

Although he clearly enjoyed teaching, Durbin appreciated the flexibility his work at LSE allowed for the pursuit of his political ambitions (see Brooke 1996: 34). Building on his student involvement in Labour politics, he stood unsuccessfully as the Labour candidate first for East Grinstead, West Sussex, in the 1931 election and then in Gillingham, Kent, in 1935. Labour fought the 1935 election on a new programme, *For Socialism and Peace*, that both maintained the party's commitment to the public ownership of essential services such as water supply, iron and steel, and land, and also bore the imprint of NFRB and XYZ Club thought through the introduction of limited economic planning, most notably the establishment of a National Investment Board (NIB). This programme did not resonate with the electorate and the victory of Stanley Baldwin's National Government in 1935 spurred Dalton, Durbin, Attlee and Arthur Greenwood to begin work on a new blueprint for socialist government. The result, *Labour's Immediate Programme* (1937), reinforced the party's commitment to economic planning by pledging reforms to the ownership and organisation of finance, land, transport, and coal and power, as well as the creation of an NIB.

Labour's Immediate Programme was the culmination of the party's pre-war adoption of economic planning for socialism. As Attlee told the party conference in 1937, 'A Labour Government coming in will proceed to plan this country ... We have already got into an era of planning' (Labour Party 1937: Appendix X, 181–182). Even earlier sceptics were convinced, including Durbin's LSE colleague and admirer R.H. Tawney, who credited Durbin for convincing him that 'the central organization and control of economic life is essential' (Tawney 1931 [1964]: 127). XYZ Club members continued to develop the economic elements of Labour's programme for the remainder of the decade by fleshing out the party's monetary policy, particularly the nationalisation of the Bank of England, exchange control and the creation of the NIB. They also created a War Finance Group, whose work resulted in the publication of *How to Pay for the War* at the end of 1939 under Durbin's name. Unsurprisingly, the group prioritised equality in the distribution of economic burdens across social classes and the creation of 'a wide and efficient machinery of industrial control' (Howson 1988: 549–552).

4 Socialism and Psychology

In the later 1930s, the scope of Durbin's thought widened as he immersed himself in new psychological and anthropological research and attempted to develop both political and economic strategies to address the growing threat of war. From this point onwards, his work was strongly influenced by Freudians such

as John Bowlby, founder of the Tavistock Children's Clinic, as well as by studies of child development and animal behaviour by researchers, including Susan Isaacs and Solly Zuckerman (see Thomson 2006: 221). Indeed, Durbin was so impressed by their insights into human behaviour that he claimed the work of 'analytical psychologists' was 'the greatest single achievement of science in the twentieth century' and vital to virtually every field of study (Durbin 1940: 37).

Bowlby encouraged Durbin to join a study group on psychoanalysis, and the two men became close friends as well as research collaborators (see Brooke 1996: 37–38). Bowlby helped change Durbin's mind on the separation of economics and psychology, and henceforward, Durbin became an evangelist for greater cooperation across academic disciplines. As he explained in a 1938 article in *Economic Journal*, economists who sought to understand trade cycles must have a solid grounding not only in economic but also social and political history, and the use of terms such as 'expectation' and 'confidence' demanded a knowledge of psychology alongside economic theory. He did not advocate the creation of more sub-specialities, cross-disciplinary fields such as 'war studies', or unwieldy 'cooperative research' schemes. Instead, Durbin pleaded for greater cooperation among specialists from different fields through—to use current terminology—multidisciplinary teams, discussion groups and cross-appointed researchers. He was aware that these initiatives presented challenges, especially outside large universities; however, Durbin believed collaborative work would result in much higher standards of research (see Durbin 1938: 184, 191–195).

Durbin's growing confidence in psychological insights into individual behaviour was evident in a short series of lectures he delivered in 1937 on 'The Causes of War'. Speaking to Workers' Educational Association students at Oxford, Durbin focused on the origins of human cooperation and conflict, a topic to which he devoted increasing attention amid the mounting international tensions of the period. His lectures explored and rejected the prevailing view that wars resulted from capitalism, nationalism, economic gain or class conflict. Instead, he focused on human aggression. While he acknowledged that the ubiquity of fighting had made aggression seem 'natural' for human beings, he noted that examples of 'peaceful cooperation' were in fact far more common than hostility. Accordingly, he argued that 'the problem of policy' was not to overthrow capitalism or suppress nationalism, but to find ways to support human cooperation.⁸

⁸Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 1/5, 'Syllabus of a Special Course of Three Lectures on The Causes of War', by E.F.M. Durbin, University Extension Lectures Committee, Oxford, 1937: 3–5.

These lectures explored the origins of conflict but offered few solutions. The following year, however, Durbin was ready to offer political and economic direction at a symposium that brought together historical, psychological and political perspectives on the causes and prevention of war. Durbin and Bowlby's contributions to this 'primitive experiment in intellectual cooperation' (Durbin and Bowlby 1938: vii) were shared first in a lengthy chapter in the conference proceedings and then as a single volume, *Personal Aggressiveness and War* (Durbin and Bowlby 1939). Informed by Durbin's earlier zoological studies as well as Isaacs' and Zukerman's research, Durbin and Bowlby traced the origins of fighting and cooperation to different methods of child-rearing. They called for a focus on 'emotional education', a concept that reflected the warmth and freedom of Durbin's own upbringing as well as the development of Bowlby's belief in love as 'a natural potentiality within children' (Durbin and Bowlby 1938: vii, 44; Mayhew 2006: 20; Nuttall 2003: 241). As Europe descended into war, Durbin continued to argue that the outcome of rational thought was peace, not war, and he urged more attention to the 'irrational causes of warfare' (Durbin to Robbins, 8 December 1939, Robbins Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/1/1). Durbin attracted criticism for his insistence that socialists must incorporate the vagaries of human nature alongside economic models; however, the potential of his interdisciplinary approach to policy making was recognised both with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and in the work subsequently undertaken by LSE colleagues, including T.H. Marshall and Arnold Toynbee (see Thomson 2006: 222–223; Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/5).

It is important to note that Durbin's belief in reducing aggression did not make him a pacifist. Pacifism, as he and Bowlby explained, was nothing more than 'the passive acceptance of other people's aggression' and thus a 'profoundly neurotic' response in view of both the heightened international tensions of the period and the fact that it would take several generations for programmes of 'emotional education' to bear fruit (Durbin and Bowlby 1938: 44–45). Nevertheless, Durbin recognised the limits of his own willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice in wartime. Writing to his close friend Hugh Gaitskell in early 1939, Durbin noted that while Gaitskell claimed he would give his life not only for British democracy but also to defeat fascism in Italy and Germany, Durbin believed, 'I would die, or think I would, for two things and only two things—collective security and the preservation of democracy in Britain' (Durbin to Gaitskell, 3 January 1939, Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/12).

Durbin was extraordinarily active both professionally and politically at this time. By early 1939, he was serving on a total of 28 committees and

other groups. These included, by his own count, 12 committees and sub-committees at LSE (he chaired or vice-chaired four) and attendance at meetings of the Economics Department, the Economics Research Division, the Economic History Department and the Sociology Club Committee. He was also active on five NFRB committees, five Labour Party research groups and committees, the Oxford Summer Course Committee and the Chatham House Publications Committee.⁹ Durbin's income, which he recorded in detail from the early 1930s onwards, illustrates both the breadth of his activities and their significance to his family's standard of living. While the School was his main source of income until 1940, Durbin relied heavily on earnings from outside lecturing, conducting examinations and writing to support his household. From October 1938 to September 1939, for example, he was paid £590 by LSE and earned a further £415 from other activities, plus £10 in 'unearned' income. After deductions for taxes and 'expenses', he was left with £905, of which £855 was spent on 'housekeeping', holidays and 'extras' such as £100 for the arrival of a new baby.¹⁰ Durbin was remembered as a devoted family man (he married Marjorie Green in 1932 and they had three children), but other responsibilities were rarely far from his mind, as was apparent in a note he wrote to Robbins hoping the two men might find a moment to discuss 'plans for the Non Specialist classes during next session' at Durbin's young daughter's birthday party (Durbin to Robbins, 24 June [n.d.], Robbins Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/1/1).

4.1 *The Politics of Democratic Socialism*

This period of intense activity also produced Durbin's most significant book, *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* (Durbin 1940). Although it sold relatively few copies and was largely a product of the pre-war period, Durbin's main arguments were forward-looking and subsequently understood both as 'an archetypical statement of wartime socialism' and as an important influence on the 'revisionist' strain of socialist thought that emerged in the Labour Party after the war (Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 2/2/8; Brooke 1992: 296; Nuttall 2003: 243–244).

⁹Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 5/2, 'Committees' (March 1939).

¹⁰Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 2/1/8, 'Income and Expenditure Account Oct 1938–Sept 1939' [n.d.].

This book reflected the diversity of Durbin's interests, especially the role of psychology in politics. The first section outlined the preconditions for the development of the society he envisioned, particularly the need to preserve and strengthen democracy by reducing human aggression and fear. Durbin insisted that 'democracy is much more a result of character in a people than of law or learning. Its roots are emotional rather than intellectual. It is fundamentally a consequence of psychological health and the absence of neurosis' (Durbin 1940: 263). Accordingly, Durbin focused less on a 'cure' for the aggressor—such as build-ups of military force against Mussolini and Hitler—and more on the prevention of aggression in the first place. To that end, he deplored corporal punishment as it encouraged children to accept and normalise violence. Parents should 'spare the rod and make a free, independent, friendly, and generous human being' (ibid.: 65–66). Durbin's focus on human psychology attracted critics, including Herbert Morrison who found the first section of the book 'hard going' (Morrison quoted in Nuttall 2006: 53) and suggested it should be removed; however, Tawney concluded that his earlier 'Philistine scepticism' had been misplaced, while a young Tony Crosland was highly impressed after hearing Durbin speak about his book at the Oxford Union in 1940 (Tawney quoted in Nuttall 2006: 53; Crosland to Williams, 29 October 1940, Crosland Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/26/i).

Many of the points Durbin had made in his earlier writings were fleshed out in the more political and economic chapters of the book. At its heart was a compelling exposition of the internal inconsistencies of Marxism and a forceful argument for capitalism as the foundation for a more just and efficient democratic socialist society. This new 'middle way' would enable socialists to achieve their goals by combining ethical imperatives with Fabian-inspired planning and efficiency: 'The problem of policy can thus be defined as the search for a method whereby the virtues of capitalism—rationalism and mobility—can be combined with democratic needs—security and equality—by the extension of the State upon an ever-widening and consistent basis' (Durbin 1940: 148).

Durbin rejected Marxists' historical dialectic that excluded all but economic factors in the growing conflict between two distinct classes. As his psychological research had demonstrated, humans were affected by a multitude of forces, including nationality, government, social relationships, faith and family: 'We are more complicated than the Marxists have us believe'. Drawing on Tawney's *Acquisitive Society* (Tawney 1921), Durbin used the historical development of social class in Britain to demonstrate that the working classes had made great gains within the democratic system, advancing with the assistance of the expanded franchise, trade unions and universal

education from ‘a horde of dispossessed and ignorant peasantry’ to become a ‘lively and intelligent proletariat’. The main concern of the British worker, according to Durbin, was security, not equality, and therefore, civil war was neither inevitable nor more appealing than gradual, institutionally driven change (*ibid.*: 182–183, 199–200).

Durbin further echoed Tawney and discredited Marxism through his observation that higher levels of disposable income and the advent of limited liability had led to an increase in the holding of shares. The resulting split between owners and directors greatly increased the power of those who managed companies and created a new class of professional managers who held real power while owners became increasingly passive and parasitic (see *ibid.*: 120–128). Managerialism did not play a large part in Durbin’s analysis of the evolution of capitalism, but it strongly influenced socialist thought after the Second World War, particularly for Crosland (see Crosland 1956: Part 1).

In the face of war, Durbin concluded by urging his readers to look ahead to a society based on ‘the common happiness of mankind’. Given Britain’s past achievements—not least the work of the psychoanalysts—and the capacity of its people, he believed his vision was achievable within a single generation: ‘We have only to open our eyes and stretch out our hands to pluck this precious fruit from the tree of knowledge’ (Durbin 1940: 334). Durbin’s deep affinity for Britain comforted him during the early months of the war. The next five years tested his optimism.

5 War

Durbin had been keen to work in government since the prospect of war briefly threatened to close LSE during the Munich Crisis (Durbin to Beveridge, 28 September [1938?], Beveridge Papers, BLPES Archives: 5/21). In early 1940, he took a post in the Economic Section of the War Cabinet Secretariat, where he served in a variety of roles until October 1942 when he was appointed Assistant Secretary to the Labour leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. He also continued to teach part-time after the School was evacuated to Cambridge, lecturing there on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings before heading to Oxford both to see his family and to continue with Fabian and Labour meetings and conferences for the remainder of the weekend. As his widow Marjorie later observed of Durbin and his colleagues, ‘They were never at home these men, never’.¹¹

¹¹Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: ‘Marjorie Durban [sic]’, COLL MISC 0978: 93–94.

Durbin's wartime writing demonstrates the continued breadth of his interests and the distinctiveness of his socialism (see Nuttall 2003: 244–245). In 1942, he published *What Have We To Defend?* (Durbin 1942), a short, passionate book that made little reference to economic planning or controls but focused on the radicalising effects of the war and Durbin's conviction that the conflict presented a unique opportunity to rebuild society along the lines he had set out in his earlier work. The book sold well, assisted by Dalton's keen support: 'Your book is *bloody good!* So much so, in my view, that I have got 12 more copies and sent them out' (Dalton to Durbin, 6 September 1942, Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 7/7; italics in original).

Despite the wartime context, Durbin focused on threats coming from within Britain itself. He identified 'Four National Faults': economic and social inequality, 'vandalism' and 'lack of imagination'. The first two were familiar, while the third and fourth had been present but less prominent in his earlier writing. Durbin flagged 'vandalism' to draw attention not only to what the British stood to lose in the war but also how much senseless destruction of countryside and cultural monuments had already taken place well before 1939, particularly under the auspices of Conservative governments: 'Hitler's bombers have not yet wrought one-tenth of the aesthetic damage that we carefully accomplished ourselves, with full legal sanction' (Durbin 1942: 26). By 'lack of imagination', Durbin emphasised that he did not mean stupidity (although he had growing doubts about the intellectual capacity of his fellow citizens, which emerged more fully after the war). Rather, he was troubled by Britons' reluctance to 'look upwards', to think beyond their immediate troubles and believe in the possibility of a new world. Although there were advantages to the British tendency to plant their feet firmly on the ground—'France might not have fallen if her people had not possessed so sensitive an imagination'—this tendency also blocked the possibility of progress:

The man in the street must see a society that is strong and safe in the comfort of a wide association of states, a community in which no man is poor or unemployed, in which there is no servility or the pomp of wealth and of which children are the free and happy citizens. This society does not exist yet, but only because we do not see it—our eyes fixed upon the useful trifles of the world we know (ibid.: 33–34).

Durbin concluded *What Have We To Defend?* with a summary of the socialist programme he proposed to implement after victory. He underlined its moderate practicality but reminded citizens first of their duties in a country at war: 'None of us possesses any unqualified rights, not even to life itself. To every right there corresponds a duty and it may be our duty to die' (ibid.: 79, 84, 87).

Durbin's wartime writing supports Beech and Hickson's identification of him as a 'patriotic socialist' (see Beech and Hickson 2007: 88, 90); however, their claim that his patriotism was not based on racial or moral superiority is debatable. When Durbin asked, 'What, then, do we have to defend?', his answer originated in the superiority of the British, whom he described as 'the most tolerant people in the world' and 'the vanguard of the human mind'. Durbin contrasted the 'darkness in the German soul' that fostered 'a love of authoritarian discipline' with his own people's 'slowly growing faith in human liberty, equality and brotherhood'. While he supported nationalist movements in India and Africa and drew parallels between claims of white racial superiority and the Nazis' 'absurd racial doctrines', Durbin also looked forward to the 'slowly widening stream of liberty' through self-government which would ensure 'the permanence of a Greater Britain beyond the seas' (Durbin 1942: 37, 51, 54, 74, 66–67, 69–70; Brooke 1992: 274). Clearly, Durbin's prose reflects the heightened emotions of the period, but his wartime emphasis on the value of the 'British social tradition' aligns with his much longer-standing belief in the exceptionalism of British character, values and institutions. His vision of a new world was grounded not only in democracy and equality, but also in the superiority of British institutions and values.

As a civil servant, Durbin welcomed the opportunity not only to apply his expertise to the implementation of controls over the wartime economy but also to urge their continuation after the war. Eschewing any notion of political neutrality, he joined the 'tribe of experts' on Labour's Reconstruction Committee, along with XYZ Club colleagues such as Jay, William Piercy and Vaughan Berry. His contributions focused primarily on finance and international economic policy and built on Durbin's continued conviction that long-term peace necessitated both greater global prosperity and international economic cooperation.¹² Accordingly, he argued for ongoing exchange controls and a new international bank to facilitate international lending, the latter modelled on plans published by Keynes and American economic advisor Harry Dexter White in 1943. Durbin was willing to use Keynesian methods to control inflation, but otherwise he maintained his earlier scepticism, particularly about Keynes's support for a permanent low interest rate policy (see Howson 1988: 553–555; Brooke 1989: 165–166). Dalton described the Reconstruction Committee's final

¹²National Peace Council, BLPEs Archives: 13/3, E.F.M. Durbin, 'A Four Point Programme', in *The Economic Basis of Peace*, Peace Aims Pamphlet No. 16 (London: National Peace Council, n.d. [1942]): 22, 28.

report, *Full Employment and Financial Policy*, as ‘largely Keynesian’ with ‘some socialist additions’ (Dalton quoted in Howson 1988: 556). Durbin accepted that compromise but continued to insist that centralised controls were ‘the instrument naturally favoured by Democratic Socialists...to preserve a state of full employment without inflation and, therefore, without the necessity for deflationary measures’.¹³

In his less partisan capacity as Assistant Secretary to Attlee, Durbin turned his mind to directions for post-war foreign policy, including the possibility of returning to imperial isolationism, resuming a ‘great powers’ alliance along pre-1914 lines or creating a new ‘collectivity of peace-loving nations’ similar to the League of Nations. After outlining the few strengths and many weaknesses of each choice, Durbin concluded glumly that none of them avoided the necessity for Britain to commit considerable resources to armaments after the war: ‘If we are to have peace for the remainder of the twentieth century, we must pay for it—in tanks, in military aircraft and in conscription’. Above all, Durbin argued that foreign policy could only be effective if all political parties agreed on a common strategy.¹⁴ This approach was consistent with his thinking about human nature and the causes of war in the late 1930s, and it is no surprise that he used his first speech in the House of Commons (shortly after the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) to reiterate both his opposition to pacifism and his hopes for international cooperation. It was the ‘grim paradox’ of the time, Durbin told his fellow MPs that ‘we cannot have peace unless we are prepared to fight for it’.¹⁵

Durbin’s experience as a civil servant and his commitment to a considerably enlarged role for the post-war State were reflected in several articles he wrote on government administration for *Political Quarterly*. In the first, published in 1943, he argued that economists should be more active in government on issues such as the management of employment rates and expansion of social services. More importantly, they must be the ‘paid “remembrancers” of the public conscience’, whose duty was ‘to denounce the specious pleas of monopolist and trade unionist and to summon the lazy citizen to repentance’ (Durbin 1943: 265–267). Durbin’s second article made a

¹³Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/3, ‘Economics of Democratic Socialism’, n.d. [1945–1948]. In 1940, Durbin had also identified large-scale nationalisation as an effective, if problematic, strategy to pay for the war while limiting inflation. See Fabian Society Papers, BLPES Archives: K/18/1, War Economics Committee Memorandum No.1, E.F.M. Durbin, ‘The Financing of War’, 12 March 1940.

¹⁴Dalton Papers, BLPES Archives: 2/7/10, Evan Durbin, ‘British Foreign Policy After the War’, 1 April 1943.

¹⁵Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/14, E.F.M. Durbin, MP, ‘Charter of the World Organisation’, House of Commons, 22 August 1945.

case for the inspirational leadership of economists among other civil servants who, although ‘clever and pleasant’, lacked the energy of ‘young scientists, or young socialists, or young doctors’. Durbin blamed a civil service selection process that favoured men who sought a ‘safe’ job, compounded by a lack of specialised training for new recruits. Acting on his faith in psychological profiling and commitment to adult learning, Durbin recommended a more ‘scientific’ civil service selection process, including ‘intelligence tests, practical tests and psychiatric examinations’, culminating in interviews that favoured ‘vitality’ over ‘charm’ (Durbin 1949a: 109–110). Such reforms, combined with greater efficiency and coordination in the day-to-day operations of government departments, would equip the civil service to meet the challenges of post-war reconstruction.

6 Reconstruction

Durbin predicted a Conservative victory in the 1945 election but, to his surprise, Labour swept to power and ‘The Man with a Plan’ entered Parliament at last with a decisive win in the North London constituency of Edmonton.¹⁶ Durbin hoped Attlee would reward him for his wartime work—and shared fondness for detective stories—with a ministerial post. He was ‘bitterly disappointed’, then, when the new Prime Minister instead appointed him Parliamentary Private Secretary to Dalton, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer.¹⁷ Durbin’s disappointment notwithstanding, the Treasury was central to the new government’s reconstruction programme and with Gaitskell also elected to a parliamentary seat in 1945 and Jay the following year, the New Fabian planners were firmly established in Whitehall (see Brooke 1992: 328–329).

The next three years tested Labour’s socialist credentials and highlighted many of the tensions Durbin had foreseen between social democracy, Britain’s economic weakness and the vagaries of human nature. Moreover, the 1945 victory was a very qualified one for ethical socialists such as Durbin, and in

¹⁶Durbin to Bassett, 23 June 1945, Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/1. Durbin’s campaign letterhead proclaimed him ‘The Man with a Plan’.

¹⁷To illustrate his ‘jolly’ life in wartime London, Durbin told his wife he sometimes had to wait late into the night at 11 Downing Street to get his detective stories back from Attlee, who read in his study with the blackout curtains open. See Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: ‘Marjorie Durban [sic]’, COLL MISC 0978: 92, 96. John Bew’s recent biography of Attlee, *Citizen Clem* (Bew 2016), makes no reference to Durbin, but Durbin seems to have been quite an admirer of Attlee both during and after the war. See Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/9, Evan Durbin, ‘C.R.A.’, n.d. [1945–1946].

practice, the government had closer affinity with Labour's Fabian roots than with Tawney's 'golden moment' of socialist transformation. Before the end of the decade, tensions had increased significantly between those whom Durbin called 'consolidators', who wanted to improve on existing controls, and 'anti-consolidators', who demanded more socialisation.¹⁸ Such divisions can be understood as one of the consequences of Labour's experience in power; however, they also suggest that the success of ethical socialism is dependent upon the material circumstances that surround its presentation. Labour's ethical foundations played an essential role in its election victory but once in government and facing challenges from the party's trade union base and a resurgent Conservative Party, the limits of ethical appeals became painfully clear.

Durbin's contributions to a discussion of 'Future Policy and Problems' in the summer of 1945 demonstrated that Labour needed to be on the defensive from the outset:

Mr. Durbin said he was somewhat gloomy about the whole position with which we were faced. The major problems—food, homes, fuel—were extraordinarily difficult to hurdle at any rate in the first two years. It was, therefore, necessary that there should be first-class publicity to make it clear that those difficulties were inevitable and inherited by the Labour Government.¹⁹

Labour moved quickly to demobilise servicemen and women into peacetime jobs, build new homes and lay the foundations for cradle-to-grave security through National Insurance and the National Health Service. Durbin was initially pleased with the government's progress but he still saw a substantial gulf between these reformist measures and his ideal socialist society. Looking back on the first year of Attlee's government, Durbin lamented 'the inevitable tendency for Conservatives to move Left—and Labour to the Right'. Still, he believed Labour remained true to its democratic socialist roots, and he hoped the party could secure its uneasy coalition of trade unionists and 'educated men' for at least a decade in power.²⁰

In 1947, Durbin's cautious optimism was shattered by a severe manpower shortage in staple industries, which led to a crisis in coal production that

¹⁸Durbin Papers, 4/7, BLPES Archives: 'Labour in Power', n.d. [1946?].

¹⁹Dalton Papers, BLPES Archives: 9/1, 'Notes of an Informal Discussion on Future Policy and Problems', 30 July 1945. Participants included Durbin, Crosland, Gaitskell, Richard Crossman and Harold Wilson.

²⁰Durbin referred to the Cabinet as 'half old Etonians—and half errand boys' (Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, 'The Fundamental Paradoxes' and 'The Present Party Position', n.d. [1946?]).

strained Britain's already delicate balance of payments and undermined public confidence in the government. The crux of the problem was the need to attract workers to undermanned areas without infringing on the freedom of the labour market—a classic example of the need for compromise between competing interests in a planned economy. Writing in the *Evening Standard* in September 1945, Durbin had called for wartime manpower controls to be dropped as soon as possible and reminded trade unionists that the goal of planning was 'to increase liberty not destroy it'.²¹ Two years later, Durbin's priorities were unchanged. He strongly resisted government proposals to direct labour into essential industries, arguing instead for a differential wage structure to strengthen socialist planning and avoid driving British people to work 'by threats'.²² His support for a wage policy put Durbin at odds with many of his colleagues, but as his long-time friend Phelps Brown observed, Durbin never hesitated to 'Dare to be a Daniel' (Phelps Brown 1951: 92).

Ultimately, the government was unable to arrive at an agreement with the unions and Labour's 1947 conference rejected formal wage policies. This episode demonstrated the fragility of economic controls and their dependence on the subordination of the interests of organised labour to the needs of the nation. It also effectively marked the end of Labour's distinctively socialist economic policies and demonstrated the limits of pre-war socialist thinking on monetary policy (see Brooke 1992: 334; Howson 1988: 564). The government's subsequent White Paper on Personal Incomes (1948) 'walked a fine line between the disinflationary and socialist schools of thought', but it nonetheless met with Durbin's approval for including a wage stop and maintaining wage differentials in essential industries.²³

Durbin's interest in financial rewards and other methods of persuasion drew not only on his strong commitment to individual freedom in a planned economy, but also his continued interest in human psychology and emotional development. Contemporary research into IQ levels suggested to Durbin that 'quite simple work can be satisfying to large percentages of the population'. Therefore, he supported the use of material incentives while increasingly doubting the effectiveness of appeals to the greater social and

²¹Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/15, E.F.M. Durbin, 'The Right to Choose Your Job', *Evening Standard*, 24 September 1945.

²²Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, 'Britain's Economic Crisis', January 1948; Durbin (1948: 9–10, 23); Jackson (2007: 131–132).

²³Brooke (1991: 699); Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, 'White Paper on Personal Incomes', 1948.

moral good.²⁴ To clarify the situation, he urged more investigation of the underlying reasons for workers' reluctance to enter certain industries and proposed to use advertising campaigns to counter the low social status of some occupations (see Durbin 1948: 24–25). Above all, as Durbin had insisted during the war, 'there is no ground for economists to prefer restriction to adaptation' (Durbin 1943: 268).

Durbin recognised that the government's vulnerabilities extended beyond economic fragility and declining electoral support, and took him back to the question of 'emotional education' that he and Bowlby had explored in the late 1930s. Durbin and his circle believed strongly in 'the power of reason to legislate for practice', as Phelps Brown put it, and during the war, Durbin was optimistic that growing State control reflected 'the substitution of reason for instinct in the ordering of human affairs'.²⁵ However, his experiences in peacetime government increased his pessimism about human nature and intellectual capacity. Publicly, he remained positive about the government's record in the face of 'remorseless criticism and misrepresentation',²⁶ but privately he identified more fundamental barriers to the creation of the New Jerusalem:

British people tired of austerity
British people not socialists
Government not solved problem of public relations.²⁷

Increasingly, Durbin doubted that formal education could overcome the deficiencies in average intelligence that stood in the way of educating for socialism. As a result, he looked for alternative solutions (see Thomson 2006: 232; Nuttall 2006: 57–58). In September 1945, for example, Durbin presented his views on hereditary intelligence at the Fabian Society's conference on 'The Psychological and Sociological Problems of Modern Socialism'. He claimed that no more than half the population could truly benefit from school or university education and he equated communal 'wickedness' with widespread mental illness. Since nationwide psychoanalysis was impractical, he believed 'selective breeding was probably the answer'. Other participants were sceptical about the results of mass psychoanalysis and more optimistic

²⁴Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, 'Incentive in Industry', n.d. [1945–1948].

²⁵Phelps Brown (1951: 92); National Peace Council Papers, BLPES Archives: 13/3, E.F.M. Durbin, 'A Four Point Programme', in *The Economic Basis of Peace*, Peace Aims Pamphlet No. 16 (London: National Peace Council, n.d. [1942]): 23. See also Nuttall (2006: 54–61).

²⁶Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, 'A New Year Message from Evan Durbin', n.d. [1946–1947].

²⁷Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 4/7, 'The Next Five Years', n.d. [1947–1948]

about the potential for social institutions to improve ‘national character’, but Durbin insisted that his goal was ‘a psycho-analysed pedigree herd’.²⁸

At another Fabian conference the following year, Durbin encouraged Labour to use modern insights into voter psychology to increase the party’s chances of re-election. Cleaving to ‘mixture as before’—more socialisation and social services—would neither galvanise electoral support nor make socialists. Durbin recommended instead more ‘systematic and scientific’ studies to illuminate ‘what people really want from the state’ and strengthen democracy through improved communications such as government-issued pamphlets and films.²⁹ Durbin’s electoral canvassing also uncovered other barriers to Labour’s electoral success. On the doorstep, he met the ‘wretched housewife’ who laboured to meet ever higher standards of domestic cleanliness, nutrition and child-rearing. His constituency work led Durbin to conclude that at least 40% of individuals were either ‘caught in a pattern of rights, regulations, historical events and public policies they cannot possibly understand or master’ or suffer from inadequately treated ‘neurotic impulses’. He offered no immediate relief to overworked women but proposed that ignorance and neuroses could be reduced through the creation of a new ‘Household Visiting and Advisory Service’ and a ‘revolutionary increase’ in psychiatric care.³⁰

Many of Durbin’s observations and recommendations smack of the ineffective ‘gentlemanly expertise’ that Mike Savage has highlighted among sociologists and policy makers of this period and reduce the distinctiveness of the ‘breadth’ and ‘synthesis’ Nuttall has noted in Durbin’s thought (see Savage 2010: 107–109; Nuttall 2003: 236–237). More importantly, however, Durbin drew attention to weaknesses in Labour’s popular appeal that would haunt the party over the following two decades. In response, he urged Labour to lighten its touch—to focus less on nationalisation and economic reforms and demonstrate socialists’ commitment to human happiness through measures such as paid holidays, shorter working hours and even ‘a

²⁸Fabian Society Papers, BLPES Archives: G/49/10, Report on Weekend Conference on the Psychological and Sociological Problems of Modern Socialism, Session III (15–16 September 1945): 14–18; Nuttall (2006: 56–58).

²⁹Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/15, E.F.M. Durbin, ‘Beyond Socialism’, Fabian Society, Conference on Labour’s Second Five Years, 4 November 1946.

³⁰At the same time, he was pressing Herbert Morrison, the Deputy Prime Minister, to increase government funding for psychological research. See Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/15, E.F.M. Durbin, ‘Beyond Socialism’, Fabian Society, Conference on Labour’s Second Five Years, 4 November 1946; Durbin to Morrison, 15 April 1946 and 18 October 1946, Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/14.

slice of frivolity'.³¹ Durbin's sustained interest in psychology demonstrated that he was both alert to growing Conservative criticisms of austerity and firm in his commitment to a multidimensional democratic socialism that recognised emotional and physical comforts alongside economic and moral reforms. Very few of his colleagues were as clear-sighted.

7 Conclusion

In the autumn of 1947, Attlee appointed Durbin Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Works to replace Harold Wilson, who had been made President of the Board of Trade. Privately, Durbin was angered by Wilson's elevation but he consoled himself by looking to the future. After a calming cup of tea, he told his wife, 'Hugh'll be Prime Minister. I'll be his Chancellor of the Exchequer and to hell with Harold Wilson'.³²

It was not to be. Durbin drowned off the Cornish coast on 3 September 1948 after pulling one of his daughters and another child out of dangerous surf. His friends and colleagues recalled his 'complete intellectual integrity', his 'modest and unselfish nature', a life inspired by 'noble idealism' and a promising political career cut short.³³ At his memorial service, Tawney spoke of Durbin's deep commitment to democracy and 'the substitution of reason and public spirit for the scramble for wealth and power as the determining factor in economic life'.³⁴

Notwithstanding his dim view of average intelligence, Durbin was also remembered for his inspirational teaching in both university and extra-mural classrooms.³⁵ Some BBC radio listeners may have found Durbin 'self-satisfied and patronising', even 'lazy and bored',³⁶ but to his many friends, he was anything but. In addition to his very broad intellectual interests and passion for detective stories, Durbin enjoyed walking holidays,

³¹Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/15, E.F.M. Durbin, 'Beyond Socialism', Fabian Society, Conference on Labour's Second Five Years, 4 November 1946.

³²Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 'Marjorie Durban [sic]', COLL MISC 0978: 101.

³³'Mr. E.F.M. Durbin', *The Times*, 8 September 1948: 6; Attlee, 'Foreword: An Appreciation of E.F.M. Durbin', in Durbin (1949a: vii).

³⁴Tawney Papers, BLPES Archives: II/90, 'The Address by Professor R.H. Tawney at the Memorial Service', 16 September 1948.

³⁵'Mr. E.F.M. Durbin', *The Times*, 8 September 1948: 6; Tawney Papers, BLPES Archives: II/90, 'The Address'.

³⁶Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 5/2, BBC Listener Research Report, 'Money', 9 September 1943.

racquet sports and the cinema. In the early 1930s, he wooed his future wife, Marjorie, with a ‘wonderful lunch’ he had specially prepared by the chef at New College and he later told his friend Gaitskell, ‘The three greatest pleasures in my life are food, sleep and sex’. Gaitskell likely spoke for Durbin’s many friends when he wrote to Robbins at the School in 1950, ‘It would be so much less lonely if he were here still’.³⁷

With hindsight, it is easy to be critical of some aspects of Durbin’s work. He was a product of the English public school system and Oxbridge education of his time and he remained within that world. For all the breadth of his interests, he had significant blind spots. For example, despite Durbin’s ethical vision and his interest in ‘emotional education’, he was distant from contemporary dialogue on the left about gender and sexuality (see Brooke 2011: Chapter 3). As Ben Mayhew has also pointed out, both Durbin and Bowlby were unduly optimistic about the ability of the institutions of the State to reduce aggressive tendencies among humans and they seemed oblivious to the extent to which their own value systems had been shaped by their interwar upbringing (see Mayhew 2006: 30). Although his work addressed both equality and economic planning, Durbin’s focus lay on the latter and his almost casual resort to eugenic solutions to address natural inequalities sits uneasily with the high moral bar he applied in many other areas. His confidence in reason and rational argument, although less strong towards the end of his life, is nonetheless at odds with both his low opinion of average intellectual capacity and the findings of the psychological research that so fascinated him. Also, his thinking was highly insular. His unquestioning confidence in British (chiefly English) institutions and lack of interest in international perspectives, while not entirely unusual on the left, were nonetheless conservative and notable among his colleagues (see Ellis 2012; Meade 1950: 122).

However, these observations should not detract from the originality of Durbin’s thinking and the impact of his contributions to Labour’s ideological and policy development. His distinctiveness makes him ‘difficult to pigeonhole in terms of ideological groupings in the Labour Party’ (Beech and Hickson 2007: 80), but he has attracted many labels, including ‘psychological socialist’, ‘patriotic socialist’ and ‘militant moderate’ (Nuttall 2003; Beech and Hickson 2007: 87). The most persistent area of disagreement is Durbin’s connections to the ‘revisionism’ that emerged

³⁷Gaitskell (1940 [1954]): 13; Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: ‘Marjorie Durban [sic]’, COLL MISC 0978: 88; Gaitskell to Robbins, 28 October 1950, Robbins Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/3/9.

in the Labour Party in the late 1940s. While Kevin Jefferys warns against seeing Durbin ‘simply as a forerunner of 1950s-style revisionism’ (Jefferys 2004: 71), Beech and Hickson consider him ‘overtly a rightwing revisionist’ (Beech and Hickson 2007: 83). Durbin’s daughter, Elizabeth, referred to *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* as ‘an influential statement of the revisionist case’ (Durbin 2008), a view likely more influenced by the criticism the book attracted from the Labour left than by its central arguments. As Stephen Brooke reminds us, however, these disagreements highlight the ‘historical complexities and disjunctures’ of revisionism and the ‘radiant ambiguity’ that Tawney celebrated in the term ‘socialism’ (Brooke 1996: 51–52). Moreover, Durbin worked during a period of significant transition in the balance between political theory and technocratic action. His ethical vision bridged both, persisting through two decades in which political theorising, in general, and idealism and altruism specifically were otherwise in decline (see Harris 1996: 21–24).

The difficulty of classifying Durbin reinforces the enduring impact of his ideas. He recognised the range of responses to his ideas and thrived on them. Durbin told his friend Reginald Bassett in 1945 that his detractors considered him a ‘dangerous milk and water, pseudo-Conservative’ (Durbin to Bassett, 10 June 1945, quoted in Brooke 1991: 690). In his final book, he thanked all of his LSE colleagues, particularly Robbins and Hayek, ‘who, by criticising and disagreeing with almost everything I have ever said about this subject [economics], have kept me thinking about it’ (Durbin 1949a: x).³⁸ Whether Durbin’s blend of ‘revisionist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ ideas would have outlasted the 1940s or forestalled the divisions that dogged the party in opposition after 1951 can only be speculated, but notes for the unfinished companion volume to *The Politics of Democratic Socialism*, provisionally entitled ‘The Economics of Democratic Socialism’, do not suggest much deviation from Durbin’s commitment to a blend of planning and nationalisation (see Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 6/1). At the same time, Durbin’s resistance to controls, his concern for human happiness and belief that ‘there is a good deal of entertainment to be got out of living’ suggest that his views on affluence might have brought him closer to Crosland than the ‘fundamentalists’ of the Labour left.³⁹ In any case, Durbin’s rejection of Marxism and pacifism and his championing of distinctly British ethical and democratic

³⁸Durbin engaged in considerable debate with Hayek over his *The Road of Serfdom* (Hayek 1944). See Durbin (1945).

³⁹Durbin Papers, BLPES Archives: 3/15, E.F.M. Durbin, ‘Beyond Socialism’, Fabian Society, Conference on Labour’s Second Five Years, 4 November 1946; Ellis (2004b: 69–84).

socialist traditions had continued appeal among centre-left politicians, most notably Social Democratic Party leaders David Owen, Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers (see Jones 1998: 5). Above all, as Tawney observed, despite Durbin's tremendous intelligence, 'the secret of his power was less intellectual than moral' (Tawney Papers, BLPES Archives: II/90, 'The Address').

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