

‘An ideology is a set of beliefs or principles, especially one of which a political system, party or organisation is based’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Governments are shaped by ideologies and society is shaped and changed by Government and the laws that they enact. Each political party will have their own ideologies on which voters will respond to and which will impact upon what they prioritise; an indication of the plans on which to act. Some ideologies will be focused towards change such as Marxism, some towards equality such as socialism and some will sit at the opposite end of the spectrum, towards preservation such as Conservatism (Brown et al, 2018). The purpose of this assignment is to discuss how socialist ideology has impacted upon policy affecting the LGBT community with a focus on how this led to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 (Gov.UK, 2022) being introduced under a coalition Government of the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats, despite the opposition from the majority of the Conservative Party. It will argue whether, although the Labour Party have been at the fore front of legislation supporting LGBT equality, it has done so only where this is considered timely as opposed to fighting the socialist agenda for equality

Socialism is defined as being:

‘A political and economic theory or system of social organisation based on collective or state ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange’ (Brown et al, 2018).

While this description states the economic aspect of socialism, it does not fully explain the social beliefs of the ideology. For this there is no single definition, however, it can be said that socialism is supportive of everyone’s rights and individual liberties as no person is free unless they are equal (Dorrien, 2019). Henri De Saint Simon is named as one of the pioneers of socialism. The post French Revolution political theorist’s theories for society and governance have been described as not purely liberalism but a merge of progressive liberal ideals and a call for social control. Often called a Utopian Socialist, Simon believed that reformation of society would not be a natural process but would need “mobilization and collective action” (Eijking, 2021). The same moniker of Utopian socialist was given to Robert Owen, who espoused the ideal of an egalitarian society based on cooperation and equality. Owen’s view of a new moral society was criticised as being incoherent and ambiguous, as it was difficult to balance his ideals of a society where men and women were born free and equal and his anti-political arguments with viewing people as a workforce to be optimised (Allison, 2021). While these early ideals have been heavily criticised, De Saint Simon and his contemporaries are acknowledged as being pioneers of socialism, and gave rise to differing branches of socialism.

The development of realistic and pragmatic approaches emerged from the early theoretical ideals although the key themes of societies of workers associated and having a common vision remained (Frobert, 2011). The Fabien Society was established in 1884 by a likeminded group of left-wing influencers who believed in the importance of utilising local government and trade unions as a mechanism for change. The society was instrumental in the founding of the Labour Party in 1900 and remains affiliated with the Party to the present day and participated in creating policy such as the implementation of the modern welfare state, in standing with the socialist commitment of equality for all (The Fabien Society, 2023). One prominent member of the Fabien Society, poet and socialist Edward Carpenter, who wrote of the need for acceptance for LGBT individuals.

“It seems almost a law of nature that new and important movements should be misunderstood and vilified – even though afterwards they may widely be approved” (Carpenter, 1908)

In his writings early support for what he termed the intermediate sex (homosexual) can be established as being representative of the ideals of the socialist movement and ideology towards equality for all.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans (LGBT) individuals have long campaigned to have the same rights as heterosexual people (Stonewall UK, 2022) and any gains towards such equality can be seen to be intrinsically linked with progressive ideologies such as liberalism and socialism. Following the Wolfenden Report, sex between two men (over the age of eighteen and in private) was decriminalised under the Sexual Offences Act 1967 (Gov.UK, 2022). This law was a milestone in the fight for equality in law reform and was championed by the Home Secretary of the then Labour Government, Roy Jenkins, who believed that the Gay community should not be oppressed but protected by law from prosecution for what he believed was a fact of life not choice. Despite not being a popular issue within the Labour Party, the vote was allowed and passed (Joyce, 2022). Despite pushing for the decriminalisation of sex between two men (under certain conditions), the Labour Party stopped short of public support for the LGBT community and it was the Liberal Party (now called the Liberal Democrats) who were the first political party to publicly support the LGBT right to equality by passing a resolution at the 1975 Party conference showing their support for the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and the push for law reform (LibDems.Org, 2022). However, by the 1980's the support for LGBT communities from the two main left leaning parties can be seen to be offset by the

opposition from the more traditionalist Conservative Party. As the Labour and Liberal Democrat Party were vocal in their support of LGBT rights, The Conservative Party, along with the right-wing media, created a moral panic by conflating the support that the Labour Party and Labour led Local Authorities had shown towards LGBT communities and anti-discrimination policy with the indoctrination of homosexuality upon schoolchildren and the promotion of what it termed as unsafe lifestyles. This played amid the backdrop of the AIDS and HIV crisis of the time, in which the press placed the blame on the shoulders of the gay community (Petley, 2005). This led to the introduction of the controversial Section 28 clause of the Local Government Act 1988 (Gov.UK, 2022) in which the promotion of homosexuality and the acceptability of homosexuality as a family relationship was prohibited in Local Authorities and schools. Despite being repealed in 2003 by The Labour Government (Gov.UK, 2022) this legislation has had a lasting impact as it allowed for a culture of homophobic bullying and left many teachers still unsure of what they are able to discuss within the school setting (Greenland, Nunney, 2008). Another milestone piece of legislation, the Civil Partnership Act 2004 (Gov.UK, 2022) was the first step towards marriage equality for same sex couples in the United Kingdom. Introduced by the Labour Government with support from the Liberal Democrats, this bill faced opposition from religious institutions as being ‘marriage in all but name’ (The Christian Institute, 2022) and from many within the Conservative Party, who had built a foundation on support for the nuclear family and traditional values. The compromise towards marriage equality, while not actually being equal allowed for the Conservatives to claim their support for equal rights for same sex couples while still opposing same sex marriage (Barker, Monk, 2015). The different terminology used, despite very few legal differences, was a steppingstone towards equal rights for the LGBT community. By this time there was a general support amongst the population for equal rights and civil partnership moved towards this while appeasing segments of society that were opposed to marriage equality (Jowett, Peel. 2017). After the defeat of Labour in the 2010 election, the Conservative Party formed an unlikely coalition with the Liberal Democrats to form a new Government. While previously, the Conservative Party had taken an anti-gay stance by placing the LGBT community as the antithesis of the nuclear family (Smith, 1994), the Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister David Cameron attempted to reposition the party’s stance on the issue after realising that such a position was out of step with public feeling and opinion. Claiming himself to be a Liberal Conservative, Cameron retained the Thatcherite economic politics and Euroscepticism while supporting a more liberal social policy (Monahan, 2019).

The Liberal Democrats had long support LGBT equality and had placed the issue of same sex marriage as a priority, Cameron seized the opportunity to improve his Party's agenda by supporting the motion, drawing criticisms from within his own Party. The Marriage (Same sex Couples) Act 2013, legalising same sex marriage, was passed by parliament due only to cross party support from The Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and other opposition parties. The Conservative Party MPs were split on the vote with 127 voting in support of the bill and 136 voting against - 37 MPs either abstained or did not vote. Although Cameron's support to LGBT rights had aimed to modernise the Party image with the general public, the law allowing equality in marriage for same sex couples was passed despite the Conservative Party rather than thanks to it (Porion, 2014). It is to be noted that the same sex marriage act still cannot claim equality to opposite sex marriage as the legislation states that religious institutions cannot be forced to marry couple of the same sex if it against their beliefs and also adds protections from prosecutions to religious institutions if they do not perform same sex marriage ceremonies (Gov.UK, 2013). In this respect same sex couples are still discriminated against.

While the Labour Party's contribution towards LGBT rights and equality is significant and cannot be dismissed, could more have been done? Had the Party picked the right battles at the right time rather than fought for equality? Social democracy is the meeting point of liberalism and socialism, a left wing ideology that encompasses both sets of ideals. It is suggested that in moving towards the centre of politics and so away from the left wing, the modern Labour party has also moved away from a commitment to social democracy, and that rather than standing staunchly against conservatism ideology the Party instead presents a weak equality (Fitzpatrick, 2003). By advocating a third wave of socialism, New Labour have been criticised that their thrust of politics had shifted towards the centre and had therefore moved away from recognisable socialist commitments (Panitich, Leys, 2001). It is however, argued, that although New Labour did step away from radical socialist politics on economic issues this was less evident in social policy. Tony Blair was aware of past media manipulation by the conservative press and of the social changes in voter characteristics and so supported policies on issues that were evidenced as having support within the population (Heath et al, 2001). In this regard, the decision to introduce civil partnership as an alternative to same sex marriage may have been the pragmatic course of action.

The campaign for equal rights for the LGBT community is still a current issue, with much recent debate. Although not representative of the entire socialist movement the Labour Party of today still stands in support of LGBT rights promising to fight for stricter legislation to

protect the community (Labour.Org, 2023). This is reinforced by the Fabien Society aiming to promote greater diversity in parliament to ensure representation for the entire community and to tackle any homophobia within the Labour Party (Bailey, 2016). The history of support that the Labour Party has campaigned towards is detailed (LGBT, Labour, 2023) and cannot be detracted from. It is argued throughout this discussion that a socialist ideology has driven the campaign for equality for all in society, particularly in this case, those of the LGBT community and same sex couples and it would be difficult to argue against this as it is the very basis of the socialist ideology (Stanford, 2019). The discussion of whether their support has been hard fought enough or if it was a more pragmatic matter of timings may not even be strictly relevant as it is surely better to pick a fight that you know can be won, and to that end the results can be seen.

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