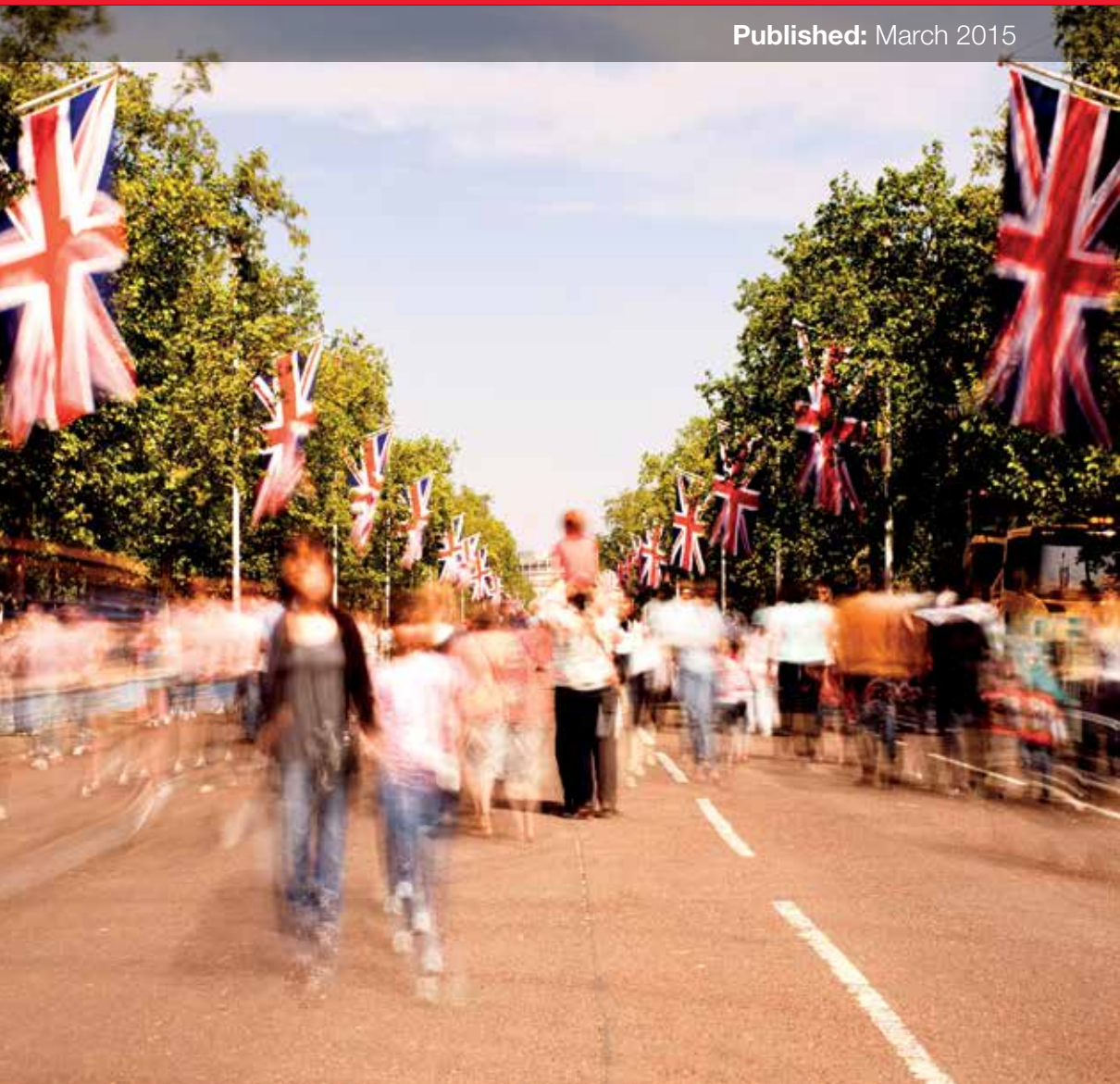


# IMAGINING ONE NATION BRITAIN

**A Programme at the Institute of Public Affairs**

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# Imagining One Nation Britain

## A Programme at the Institute of Public Affairs

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## Foreword

### Professor Conor Gearty

#### One Nation

One of the core missions of LSE's Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) is the engagement of LSE's academic community in the work of policy leaders and the political community, in the United Kingdom and abroad.



Most excellent scholars are interested in ways of achieving impact and influence for their work, just as diligent civil servants and imaginative politicians are open to the insights that world-leading academic research can provide.

It is the IPA's task to bring these various audiences together, and through such connections to generate both fresh ideas and new ways of imagining and articulating themes that may be already current but which are in need of intellectual re-invigoration. Knowledge grows out of such encounters; it is not delivered on high from one side to the other but co-produced through collaborative partnership.

The One Nation project is the inaugural IPA venture along these lines. In publishing this short report of our findings, in advance of the May 2015 general election in the United Kingdom, we are hoping both to inform discussion on a core issue at an important time and demonstrate the vitality of this kind of work, generating new perspectives out of a sharing across disciplines, fields of expertise and professional vocation.

**CONOR GEARTY**

March 2015

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## Introduction

“Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.”

“You speak of —” said Egremont, hesitantly.  
“THE RICH AND THE POOR.”

*Disraeli in Sybil, 1845*<sup>1</sup>

As the UK nears the 2015 general election voters are defying the political pundits by not giving any one party the grounds to feel confident as they woo voters.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) has launched a profound assault on the collective imagination of Britain, in terms of how citizens think about their nations. What the British nation looks and feels like is contested territory between the Conservative and Labour parties, both having laid claim to the idea of One Nation.

The idea of One Nation is popularly attributed to Disraeli, though his use of the term is disputed as he wrote of two nations rather than one. However it remains closely associated with the branch of Conservative political thought which asserts an obligation among the wealthy and privileged to serve the less well off. This call resonates in contemporary Conservatism, with Prime Minister David Cameron having named Disraeli as his favourite Conservative.

In September 2012, the Labour Party leader Ed Miliband MP, raided the idea of One Nation for the Labour Party. He used it 44 times in his speech to that year’s annual Party conference. It has provided the thread running through Labour’s policy approach under his leadership. Media and

<sup>1</sup> *Disraeli, Benjamin. Sybil, Or the Two Nations, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.66*

other commentators were surprised, perhaps not so much by Ed Miliband's aspiration to the Nation being as One, but that he used a concept the Conservative Party has taken and promoted as theirs.

Without a proper political home, Alan Sked sees the term itself as having little purchase: "The Tories of course invented the slogan, it's now being claimed by Labour; if there's any proof that it's meaningless, that's probably it."

This jostling for political territory provided both the prompt and the backdrop for the IPA inaugural public engagement and research programme, *Imagining One Nation Britain*. This consisted of a series of debates between politicians from the two main parties, commentators, journalists, activists and LSE academics, such as Alan Sked, quoted above.

The debates took place before the election campaign took centre stage, at a time when there was still some conversation between parties that went beyond electioneering. Even so, opening the first event in the series, Maurice Glasman bemoaned the absence of public debate between politicians long before the tribal rivalry of an election campaign begins. He argued that Britain's political culture rests upon civil disagreement and is fundamentally diminished by its absence arguing that "civility is not a virtue opposed to politics, but a condition of it".



Maurice Glasman

The IPA is grateful to the politicians and other participants who were ready to engage in thoughtful and collegial debate. This document captures the main themes of the programme, recording the areas of contention and of agreement. It is not an attempt to analyse the meaning of One Nation in any full or academic sense; rather it serves to capture the essence of the debates that took place under the aegis of the programme.

The full debates are available in pod casts online and are listed on page 30, along with participant details.

Key themes of debate and contest emerged during the programme:

- I. **What is One Nation?**
- II. **Globalisation, state and statehood**
- III. **Inequality and education**
- IV. **Identity and belonging**
- V. **Values**

They are discussed in this pamphlet.

## I. What is One Nation?

Contributors sought to flesh out the meaning or desirability of One Nation by consideration of the endpoint as well as the process of getting there. Drawing on Aristotle, Professor Francesca Klug made reference to the good life, in which the individual is embedded in the collective:

“[A] good life requires a good society, and a good society is one that enables human beings to realise their highest nature, and hence, to live the good life. This good life is achieved not just by citizens pursuing their own goals, but by contributing to the common good.”



Francesca Klug

Alan Sked talked of the poor as the rightful core of the idea: “One Nation Britain should mean a consensus that looks to help the poor and not the elite; it should be aware that there are more nations in Britain apart from England” while Maurice Glasman, one of the intellectual architects of Blue Labour, drew attention to the importance of tradition in our construction of the future. As other speakers did in subsequent debates, Maurice Glasman placed value on the non-material in his vision of a valuable future and a meaningful life: family, identity and tradition being core elements of this broader and richer life.



"The electorate will abandon us, not the other way around, or rather they'll think we've abandoned them and they'll abandon us."

**David Davis**

For John Denham MP, long interested in national identity and national stories, the question of how we construct the national is a major challenge. He saw the need to build "a shared national story about what sort of people we are, how we behave towards one another and how responsibilities are exercised" and called for One Nation to be about "the valuing, properly again, of common life, the institutions of local communities".

Are there certain values that underlie or strengthen the idea of One Nation? Many speakers in our programme believed so. "One Nation is not simply a more pious way of saying 'we're all in this together'" according to Francesca Klug, "it's about cherishing collaborative means of working and living that foster a sense of connectedness and reciprocal duties." Jon Cruddas MP wanted us to think about intermediate institutions, such as local networks and relationships, as well as the virtues of caring, mutuality and 'even love'. In fact, Cruddas wanted Labour to reclaim the "exiled nature of virtue" to replace liberal individualism.

If One Nation Labour claims these values, it launches two attacks at once, according to Francesca Klug. Firstly, it attacks the Conservative Party by stealing their clothes and secondly, it attacks New Labour's "fascination with the wealth-creating aspects of a globalised economy" by moving to the more values-based, networked, collective identity which underlies the idea of One Nation. She continued that, "Labour is clearly seeking to persuade us that, tinged with blue, they are the rightful inheritors of this unifying tradition of British politics, whilst the policies of the current government foster dwellers of different zones or inhabitants of different planets, to draw from Disraeli's famous quote in his novel *Sybil*."

The media in contemporary Britain is full of accounts of the breakup of two-party politics. The Conservative former Minister, David Davis MP also predicts this, and places the responsibility squarely at the door of the two main parties, for failing to undertake necessary reform of the close relationships between governments and the finance

sector: “We see a banking sector that is not reformed and governments of all sorts, too close to finance – all of them, too close to big business – all of them, who haven’t reformed them either, and unless both of our parties, not just mine, get that sorted out, then I’m afraid it won’t be a choice between Labour and Conservatives in a couple of elections’ time. I think it will be some other party that will have come up; I don’t think it will be UKIP... the electorate will abandon us, not the other way around, or rather they’ll think we’ve abandoned them and they’ll abandon us.”



David Davis

Both Maurice Glasman and Michael Gove MP are interested in the strength and relevance of intermediary institutions, but how they are to be enabled remains contested ground. Michael Gove sees the route for addressing inequality as involving the creation of space for intermediary institutions through paring back the state. Maurice Glasman interprets Michael Gove’s vision of modernity of being one of relentless change, and charged him with condemning the concept of One Nation Britain as “too conservative, an impediment to modernisation and competition, a hindrance to aspiration, excellence and innovation, and a lame defence of a failed status quo... identified with reactionary failed public sector unions, bureaucratic inertia, and a fear of risk”.

Maurice Glasman laid claim to “the wisdom of the Conservative tradition” in finding a place for the past in the construction of the future. His collaborator in the shaping of Labour’s One Nation vision Jon Cruddas argued in a similar vein, recognising:

“... conservative traditions within Labour, defending us against relentless commodification, defenders of home, place, tradition, nation. Labour is not just the domain of liberal progressives. The danger for Labour is of [casting] its opponents, and this can include an awful lot of the electorate, as reactionary, nostalgic, and ignorant. One Nation gives us some distance from this exclusively liberal and progressive conception of politics that by its nature is disruptive of tradition and institutions.”

One Nation, in claiming tradition and values, presents a profound departure from a neo-liberal world view where atomised individuals simply seek their own best interests, argues Jon Cruddas. In contrast, it claims human virtues and corrals them so as to build a good society.



John Denham

Our programme was held against the backdrop of a nationalist struggle for independence in Scotland. “The (potential) breakup of the state raises a profound challenge to the very idea of nation – what its constituent parts are and how it operates, what territory it covers and what impact it has on national identity. Fragmentation of the Nation in a globalised world is a misplaced dynamic”, according to the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown MP. The pooling and sharing of resources is something at the heart of the Union and that would be significantly ruptured by Scotland’s independence. These issues were discussed by Gordon Brown and in a session on the ‘many roots’ of One Nation. This theme was the source of a lively debate about the behaviour of the visitor in the hosts’ house, as Dr Ruth Dudley Edwards described immigrants and natives in the UK, and the challenge of creating a new national narrative of identity and belonging in contemporary Britain.

John Denham outlined his sense of how the debate clusters around different themes, coincidentally mirroring the content of the programme already underway at that point, noting that “protagonists tend to cluster around the economicalists: these are the people who want to reduce everything down to the economic inequalities, and the unfairnesses in the distribution of wealth, and the ways in which our economy doesn’t operate properly; the culturalists, who are interested essentially in the debate about a multi-ethnic society and how you deal with that; and then you have the constitutionalists who are interested in Europe, devolution, or the future shape of the English state, whatever that might be.”

He concluded this line of thought by invoking principles of participation and engagement, saying that much more than a slogan, Ed Miliband’s call to One Nation is about the challenge and choice before the country in shaping the future and as “an invitation to participate in that exercise and to make it happen”.

“The (potential) breakup of the state raises a profound challenge to the very idea of nation.”

**Gordon Brown**

“One Nation is about... shaping the future.”

**John Denham**

One area absent from discussion was gender in One Nation. Inequalities that had attention were primarily economic and to some extent about ethnicity, though primarily in relation to belonging rather than discrimination. Gender inequality in One Nation seemed not be a concern for our speakers, though it has been for others, such as the Young Fabians and Progress.

## **II. Globalisation, state and statehood**

The challenges and opportunities of a globalised world and economy were strong themes of debate.

A world worth sharing, marked by interdependence was provided as the stage for Gordon Brown's defence of the Union, who advocated interdependence, not independence. He argued that a globalised world has globalised problems that require co-ordinated action to resolve; national or local action alone is insufficient and ineffective. Financial crises are not contained within national boundaries, nor can a single country insulate itself from global contagion. The 2008 crisis was not one that could be dealt with by one or two countries alone; co-operation across continents – from Europe to the USA – was essential.

The same co-operation is required also to deal with other global issues such as economic growth, climate change and international development. Each has also been frustrated by a lack of international co-operation. Gordon Brown cited the case of the 2009 Copenhagen summit on climate change where the 190 countries present could not even agree on who should chair the event, let alone on a treaty. Greater co-operation and connection is what, he argued, will address pressing issues.

Maurice Glasman and Michael Gove debated the role of education and tradition in a globalised world. Gordon Brown pointed to Scotland's independence efforts to argue against the fragmentation of the nation and state

in a globalised world. Looking at the many roots of One Nation Britain, Sunder Katwala, John Denham and Ruth Dudley Edwards spoke explicitly to immigration and inter-ethnic engagement. Their focus was on the people side of globalisation. Alan Sked argued for a withdrawal from the European Union to ensure One Nation, as “the best way to get a One Nation is to rule ourselves democratically outside the European Union.”



Flagging up two main strands of this theme Maurice Glasman identified the relationship between modernity on one hand and an era marked by economic globalisation on the other. The Blair inheritance, he argued, embraced the challenges and possibilities of globalisation within a progressive ideology.

The idea of One Nation is profoundly challenged by the unavoidability of globalisation, according to Michael Gove, and protectionism and a halt in immigration are not options. In fact, globalisation brings many benefits including that of ensuring that industry remains competitive and that higher education institutions have a diversity of voices and views. “Our society”, he said, “benefits from the presence here of the talented and the innovative.” Yet he also believes that migration from Eastern Europe has put a downward pressure on wages and this has made salient the work of many who research or advocate the ‘living wage’.

It has also brought a clear and increasingly important relationship between skills and income, noting that “over the last 20 or 30 years the more qualified you are, the more you will earn relative to others.”

This gulf in earnings now includes a ‘super class’ that sits above the professional classes. They are in the financial sector, mostly concentrated in the City of London, commanding massive salaries and are, Michael Gove argues, globally footloose. Passivity in the face of these dynamics is not ideal. In fact, rather than accepting a completely open market economy, however virtuous that might be, the state must act to deal with forces which risk making society less equal.

“Our society benefits from the presence here of the talented and the innovative.”

**Michael Gove**

The state must be concerned, Michael Gove argues, for two reasons. Firstly, a ‘heartless’ state that cares only for national efficiency in the generation of wealth is inadequate. There is a need to educate and train people to the highest level; this will bring creativity and ingenuity that benefits the economy. The second reason is that those on the centre right of politics have regard for each individual in society which in turn requires the development of their skills and talents for the common good: “you’ve got to be concerned about inequality. You’ve got to be One Nation.”

This focus on the individual was at odds with Maurice Glasman’s analysis of economic success, as he challenged Michael Gove to “explain how the country with the greatest degree of worker representation in its corporate governance structure, the greatest degree of vocational regulation of labour market entry... with the greatest constraints on capital... as well as a pension system that is administered on parity terms between capital and labour, all working within a federal structure with strong city government, should have the most successful economy in Europe... The overwhelming lesson of Thatcherism... and the hardest to face, is that Germany won.”

Attention was also given to the prospect of a disintegrating Union. Four parts of the United Kingdom – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – have achieved a

remarkable level of co-operation argued Gordon Brown; a foundation of sharing has enabled the welfare state and the NHS. The UK has done something unique: the pooling and sharing of resources. Rather than developing four sets of arrangements for health services and national insurance, a single set of structures was developed into a welfare state across the nations, access to which is “according to need, not nationality”.

Gordon Brown argued that a similar national base underpinned the foundation for the minimum wage in 1997. Had there been four minimum wage levels, there would have been downward pressure on incomes and a race to the bottom. The principle of sharing, and of the solidarity that underlies it, is not shared elsewhere. Looking at the European Union, which could be argued to be founded on the principle of commonality and pooling, Gordon Brown noted that Germany was not prepared to finance services for the people of Greece or Romania: “The European Union is a single market but not a social market.” Beyond the European Union, the federal USA may have a strong sense of national identity where everyone is an American, but they cannot agree on economic and social rights, only civil and political rights. There is agreement on voting and freedom of expression, but not on the right to healthcare or social security. In contrast, the UK has created economic, social and cultural rights of citizenship. Beyond civil and political rights, this has not been done elsewhere – not in New Zealand, Australia, Asia or America. Here, as Brown puts it: “Nations with distinct identities that are strong... have agreed to pool and share their resources.”

There is a history of shared and strong institutions that underlie the common endeavours of the Union. However, Gordon Brown remarked upon the weak nature of contemporary institutions as a surprising backdrop to the push for Scottish independence. He observed a loss of authority in legal institutions, universities, colleges and schools over a forty year period and made particular mention of the Royal Bank of Scotland. And churches, in

“ Nations with distinct identities that are strong... have agreed to pool and share their resources.”

**Gordon Brown**



what was traditionally a religious country, have recently 'lost' one million people. A weak institutional backdrop gives a shaky foundation to any true sense of national unity, he argued; no longer is it possible to build unity around empire or military pre-eminence and our nations cannot build it around race or nation. It can be built, however, around the popularity of shared institutions, but these are weak so "people are looking to political nationalism as a solution".

The state and intermediary institutions were debated. For Michael Gove, still Secretary of State for Education when he joined our debate, the state and its agents, such as the Audit Commission, need to be pared back so that the real experts, such as teachers and heads, can take control of the curriculum and of the relational world in which they engage. Michael Gove declared, that, "What's striking about a smaller role for local authorities, is that actually there are more intermediary or middle-tier institutions evolving as schools work together: academy chains, teaching school alliances, federations, are replacing the role that local authorities used to play... it is the reinvigoration of civil society and the empowerment of professionals rather than the desk-bound bureaucrats in many local government town halls" that should be valued.



Michael Gove

"I think one of the things that Iain Duncan Smith MP<sup>2</sup> has very successfully done is to ask the question, 'to what extent do we need to support intermediate institutions in order to deal with poverty?' Yes, the state has a role in redistribution, yes the market has a role in helping to provide work, but we also need to consider... how [can we] support the family?"

*Globalisation, integration and complexity in the modern world, the idea of pooling and sharing resources were at odds, for some contributors, with forming new national identities and the valuing of intermediary institutions, such as the family and local communities. The latter has on the Left too often been dismissed as backward or nostalgic, whereas it should be at the core of what we should value and has been so, for Conservatives. Global imperatives are also profoundly at odds with nationalist dynamics in British politics and institutions.*

"We do not regard inequality as worthwhile or a virtue or, in all circumstances, a price worth paying."

**Michael Gove**

### III. Inequality and education

Should the concept and reality of One Nation deal with (growing) inequality and if so, how? From different parts of the political spectrum, speakers drew attention to the impact of inequality and the challenges it poses.

Alan Sked said of Disraeli's 'discovery' of two nations, one rich one poor, that, although Disraeli came and went "the rich and poor remained, and of course they still do. Inequality is a growing fact of life in Great Britain." He then identified the data that concerned him: "the top 1 per cent of the population takes 15 per cent of national income, compared to 6 per cent in 1979. The share of national income of that top 1 per cent<sup>3</sup> is growing, and even the share of the 9 per cent that come after that is relatively diminishing... One Nation Britain should mean a consensus that looks to help the poor and not the elite."

"I find a 'bedroom tax' probably the most iniquitous and appalling device ever thought up by government in recent times."

**Alan Sked**

<sup>2</sup> Former leader of the Conservative Party and currently Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

<sup>3</sup> See [www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/jun/27/century-income-inequality-statistics-uk](http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/jun/27/century-income-inequality-statistics-uk)

Sked is alarmed at not only the good fortune of the elites, but at the fact that they are being left in peace to continue their wealth accumulation while “disabled people are being penalised if they’re not using every inch of available space in their bedrooms. I must say... I find a ‘bedroom tax’ probably the most iniquitous and appalling device ever thought up by government in recent times.”

David Davis was in agreement, at least about inequality being a problem: “One Nation politics... as it is a Tory invention I can claim the definition... is about protecting the least well off. It is really as simple as that. It’s not about being a woolly Liberal - it’s about protecting the least well off... We’ve lived in an era of about 3 per cent growth for the past 50 years, which broadly speaking has given us employment, broadly speaking everyone gets a bit better off, broadly speaking everyone establishes some wealth. One per cent is dramatically different. One per cent is a lost generation of unemployed. One per cent [means] people not getting better off every year, just the reverse.”

Michael Gove also took this view. The political right not only ought to but does have an interest in inequality, he argued, necessarily ‘having a care’ about those who are less well off. Growing inequality is internationally driven: “We’ve all got to recognise that globalisation unmediated is making our society less equal.”

Education is the route through which inequality can be addressed, said Michael Gove. This requires the educational sector to be free from state interference, so that professionals can best deliver their expertise. Britain has one of the developed world’s highest rates of inequality in educational outcomes and Michael Gove was very concerned about the widening gap between children from the wealthiest homes who attended the ‘best schools’ and those from the poorest backgrounds, especially in England. Our education system, he noted, is far from delivering reduced inequality, in fact it is exacerbating it.

Politicians have been complicit, both Maurice Glasman and Michael Gove agreed, on structuring a hierarchy between different types of education. This has meant that the people who write, talk, debate and chart a course for education have a limited experience of what it has to offer. This has meant a stress on academic education with vocational education being relegated to being a less desirable option. Occasionally this has meant dressing up vocational education as somehow 'quasi-academic' (Michael Gove). In fact, even a brief conversation with academics would illustrate the folly of thinking that they had all the answers, claimed Maurice Glasman, who is himself a visiting lecturer at Oxford University and Queen Mary's College, London: "We thought that people who read books knew more than people who worked with others and did things. We still do, and that needs to change."

Maurice Glasman sees the existence of two nations in the structure of the education system and valorisation of different types of education. By privileging academic education, a barrier is erected between vocational pathways and the academic – which includes most politicians. Because of this hierarchy, explicit or not, what has happened is that politicians have sought to place a cloak of academic credibility around vocational training, instead of recognising that it is both different and inherently valuable.

Seeing inequality as antithetical to a moral canvas, Jon Cruddas suggested the following as necessary policy approaches: "Regional banks to address gross regional inequalities, a living wage to halt the slide in wages that the minimum wage has not protected." Yet current practice undermines the virtue claimed by Labour on One Nation, said Francesca Klug: "To what degree could a social security policy that reduces universality to increase the contributory principle that Ed Miliband discussed... to what extent can that be One Nation?" For John Denham "tackling the extremes of inequality is not a luxurious extra in one's vision of society, but necessary to produce a One Nation feeling". He also identified the living wage as part of this work but also names the "mechanisms of corporate high pay and the

" We thought that people who read books knew more than people who worked with others and did things. We still do, and that needs to change."

**Maurice Glasman**

introduction of a mansion tax in order to lower taxes for others” as part of that project.



Also interested in the tax structure, Gordon Brown contented that the SNP's policies would not address inequality. "Scotland would be a less, not more, equal country" if energy companies enjoy the cut in business tax promised by the SNP instead of being subject to the price freeze proposed by Ed Miliband.

"Because of the morality of respecting each individual in their own right as worthy of respect, you've got to be concerned about inequality."

**Michael Gove**

There's another reason for giving a care about inequality, argued Michael Gove, "both for economic efficiency and also because of the morality of respecting each individual in their own right as worthy of respect, you've got to be concerned about inequality. You've got to be One Nation."

*Politicians from both main parties were animated about (growing) inequality and its impact on the possibility of One Nation. Speakers identified education and the opportunities it can provide for the flourishing of talent and the skilling of the workforce as a means through which to address inequality. Though they did not agree on what sort of change would improve education there were several calls for changing the way we organise and value education.*

## IV. Identity and belonging

"I thought that if you went to live in somebody else's house, it was your job to try and see how they liked their house to run, be of assistance, and maybe when you got to know them well, liven it up a bit, but that it was your job to follow their house rules, and I found this country extraordinarily welcoming and I never experienced anti-Irish prejudice, even when my countrymen were blowing up London." (Ruth Dudley Edwards)

Ruth Dudley Edwards damned the multi-cultural experiment and its inherent cultural relativism, as she saw it. It built, she argued, a sense of competitive victimhood, a fear of criticising immigration and made Britishness a "totally out of date concept". Instead of a sense of Britishness, Ruth Dudley Edwards observes that there has been a rush to claim other spheres of belonging – being a Londoner or a European. In contrast, being English or being British was something undesirable, in fact being British was something that was favoured by immigrants, such as Ruth herself (Irish) and others she knew from Canada and Jamaica. "I wasn't born here – I can be British as well as Irish. I treasure that fact, but immigrants were taught in schools that they were victims and that they were not part of this."

Sunder Katwala took issue with suggestions that all immigrants have similar experience or status. Referring to his mother, an Irish immigrant, Sunder drew a line from Irishness and Britishness, to citizenship: "She's never become British or English, in fact, but she's voted in 14 or 15 elections because you don't treat Irish citizens as foreigners in Britain."

"I found this country extraordinarily welcoming and I never experienced anti-Irish prejudice, even when my countrymen were blowing up London."

**Ruth Dudley  
Edwards**



Ruth Dudley Edwards

Ruth Dudley Edwards has found the UK to be an “amazingly tolerant country” where the British National Party (BNP) never got many votes, because they were generally seen as “rather indecent and unpleasant”. Nevertheless, there are decent people who have been overwhelmed by immigrants and just wish they could talk about it. On the other side, immigrants themselves, who make a significant contribution to this country, must recognise whose house they are in and “continue to behave politely in it”. Immigrants and natives alike have, she says, to “try and work [towards] pulling this nation together into One Nation”. Disagreeing with Ruth Dudley Edwards’ sense that it has not been possible to talk about immigration, Sunder Katwala says that there has been a lot of shouting about not being able to talk about immigration; these 40 years of silence have been noisy.

While most contributors welcomed, accepted or recognised the value of immigration, David Davis argued that it has been harmful to some: “The people who suffered from the ridiculous relaxation of immigration during the Labour years were the least well off. Competition over jobs, housing and public services kept their wages down.”

The debate about multiculturalism, integration and assimilation has become sterile, says John Denham. The preferable focus should be on the powerful idea that we “share a nation, a place in the world, a physical space... trying to build a community with shared values... what we need is to consciously build a common history to have a common story about how we all came to be in the same place at the same time, as we did”. For John Denham, knowing shared histories is part of the project of building a story of this nation. It requires, for example, recognition that there were 2 million volunteers in the Imperial Army from India in World War II, teaching this in schools and “understanding that the Sikhs who live in Southampton, for example, have grandfathers who fought on the same side as us in the Second World War, and indeed even in the First World War”. However, while that history is not known, we cannot tell that story (‘our common history’) together.

John Denham says that he wants to be “an activist in nation-building and not just a passive observer” and that was his challenge to the audience. Sunder Katwala also takes up a similar theme, talking of different ways of being British. One is being ‘born under the oak tree’, or many generations being born in the same place. This he calls an inward looking version, while another global. The second is the Britishness of history – which involves being part of the story of “British history of empire, of colonisation and decolonisation, of Commonwealth and of diversity and integration”.

Sunder Katwala recognises the vast range of stories of Britishness, including experiences of migration and of very local experience too: “I don’t think there’s a more British story than mine, but it’s only one of 60 million stories of being British, and actually one in three of us has a parent or a grandparent who wasn’t born in this country,<sup>4</sup> but 50 per cent of the population of England” has no family member born outside England in the past three generations.<sup>5</sup>

“ [I want to be] an activist in nation building and not just a passive observer.”

**John Denham**

<sup>4</sup> Katwala, Sunder, Ballinger, Steve and Rhodes, Matthew, *How to Talk About Immigration, British Future*, 2014, p.84

<sup>5</sup> [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/findings/2012](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/findings/2012)



"Britain has become enormously less racist, but we haven't become less anxious about our issues, our diversity."

**Sunder Katwala**

Unlike Ruth Dudley Edwards, Sunder Katwala argues that Britain has dealt with its complex stories of migration, immigration and local histories with relative success (compared to other parts of Europe) and currently does so in a way that is better than in previous decades, saying that Britain has "become enormously less racist, but we haven't become less anxious about our issues, our diversity."

Diversity is a fact of British life, census data show that the country has 7.5 million people born abroad; 37% of London's population is born abroad and 60% is white.<sup>6</sup> Katwala challenges us to accept this diversity as fact, for it will not be reversed, and step up to the shared responsibility to make it work.

Echoing Ruth Dudley Edwards' comment about Jamaican people claiming the mantle of Britishness, Sunder Katwala spoke of the Windrush travellers and the reception they found on their arrival:

"The Windrush went to Jamaica to pick up people who were on leave from the RAF, and to bring them back, and then other people bought a ticket for £28 and decided to cross the world, and they knew they were British. They had been taught Michael Gove-type history in their schools and they knew every river in England, and they arrived and they found people who hadn't heard of Jamaica... so there was actually a clash and a conflict... integration is about wanting to commit to where you are and being part of it, and it's about accepting that people who want to do that are fully and equally us."

Construction of that shared sense of Britishness remains contested though, suggested Katwala, notably tested by the place and treatment of Muslims who considered whether "young Muslims are still thinking, 'will Britain ever really accept me as me?' And other people are saying, 'do the Muslims really want to be British anyway because I'm okay with the Hindus and Sikhs now – that's worked out okay...'"

<sup>6</sup> See [www.newstatesman.com/staggers/2013/02/truth-about-londons-white-flight](http://www.newstatesman.com/staggers/2013/02/truth-about-londons-white-flight)



*Debate in this programme, on identity and belonging was heated. Rather stark differences emerged on whether and how many cultures and ethnicities can coalesce into One Nation. From a rejection of the relativist aspects of multi-culturalism to a focus on the need to build shared narratives for the future, immigrant contributors offered gratitude to this country or spoke of embodying and valuing the mixed country it has become. Powerful commitments were made to the political activism of creating a new national narrative of identity and to the richness of having 60 million contributions to that identity.*

## V. Values

The values behind One Nation were debated throughout the programme, well beyond the session devoted explicitly to the subject. From the family to community, to social cohesion and social justice – a great deal was said about how the envisioning and building of the One Nation rested on, or contributed to, values that bind that community.

For Labour, Jon Cruddas' concern was about our connections with each other, so we must address fundamental issues, such as "what we're about, community, and how you rewire communities and patterns of connectedness... you can't just do it financially or transactionally." The values that underpin One Nation, said John Denham, will be expressed in "a shared national story about what sort of people we are, how we behave towards one another, and how responsibilities are exercised."

Any belief in the worth of individuals, argued Michael Gove from the Conservative Party, results in a moral challenge if "individuals are not in a position where their skills and their talents are capable of being used for the common good". The task is then to "support the family, in various forms, to pass on its virtues to others [and] support those institutions which go with the grain of virtue and commitment, grit and persistence, those elements in character, which Tories, with their respect for human nature, believe are important for promoting a sense of greater social cohesion and social justice."

One Nation has, at its core, concern for family life and obligations to those we love.

**Jon Cruddas**

Labour's One Nation, in claiming tradition and values, presents a profound departure from a neo-liberal world view, where atomised individuals simply seek their own best interests, argued Jon Cruddas. In contrast, Labour's One Nation claims human virtues, and corrals them towards the building of a good society.

Aristotle informs Jon Cruddas talk of human flourishing. Aristotle's interest, he says, was in creating the "state of human life that could only be properly achieved by the

city-state community, not the world of individual atomised exchange favoured by variants of Liberalism.”

In valorising these connections and these relational characteristics, Jon Cruddas then asked what policy and practice would deliver this state of human flourishing. Human virtues would be exemplified through “compassion in the health service among public service workers, wisdom in the education service, and civility across our public services; it implies a new covenant between state and citizen”.

“Think of these words: power, organisation, organising, leadership, conflict. Liberal citizenship is not good with these words in this terrain. So, can a notion of virtuous citizenship address these things directly by having a role for institutions, relationships, good practice, skill, leadership, and action in its political locker?”



Contrary to a liberal perception of the Left, Jon Cruddas argues that One Nation has, at its core, concern for family life and obligations to those we love – our parents, our children. “Our rediscovery of family and place, of work and wages is organising the policy positions we’re developing: regional banking, housing policy, vocational colleges, worker representation, a much more radical series of labour market interventions, the control of modern day usury.”

Francesca Klug also applauded and valued connections: “One Nation is ...about cherishing collaborative means of working and living, that foster a sense of connectedness and reciprocal duties in a society that has been “crushed by commodification and gross inequality.” The connectedness and mutuality, she argued, means two virtues are paramount – to be able to see beyond the boundaries of the nation and more fundamentally “not walk by on the other side”.

*All speakers saw a fundamental connection between One Nation and the values that underpin it. They also shared a commitment to the importance of values that bind people and communities together including at the very local level of the family. On a larger scale the notion of a citizenry and citizenship that builds human flourishing and compassion in public life, after Aristotle, was the underpinning of what the One Nation should be, alongside social cohesion and justice.*

## Conclusion

So where did our discussions take us? What is One Nation? The contours in our programme were clearly cast between shaping a common story, our construction of a national identity and at the same time addressing growing inequalities in wealth and opportunity – all in the context of globalisation. Politicians, commentators and academics all drew our attention to the importance of the non-material, the place, and the challenge of building, values that underpin a shared sense of the Nation.

There was shared concern, for example, with inequality – whether for its intrinsic harm or for the impact it has, socially and politically. However, whether the state is minimal, or more than that, was unsurprisingly contentious, though it should be noted that none of our speakers seemed to seek a maximalist role for the state.

Values and virtues were a consistent theme: every speaker referred to One Nation in the context of a set of values and behaviours that were intrinsic to it. A common life and shared institutions make up the foundations of One Nation, our speakers agreed. Several attended to the place of the Nation in a bigger world and exhorted us to have international reach in our values beyond the reality of economic globalisation.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for One Nation, pointed out by Sunder Katwala, is that the one-ness does not yet exist and therefore has yet to be made real: “One Nation is a powerful idea that appeals to most people in this society, partly because it is not true. The challenge is to make it much more true.”

## Debates and programme participants

### **Who Owns the “One Nation” and What Does It Stand For?**, 15 May 2013, with:

- Michael Gove MP, Conservative Party, Secretary of State for Education (at the time of this debate), formerly Shadow Minister for Housing and Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
- Lord Maurice Glasman, Labour peer and Visiting Professor at Oxford University and Queen Mary’s College London

### **One Nation, Many Roots**, 9 June 2013, with:

- John Denham MP, Labour party MP, former Minister in various departments. Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
- Ruth Dudley Edwards, Journalist and historian
- Sunder Katwala, Director of the British Future think-tank

### **Virtuous Citizenship and the Moral Values of One Nation**, 12 June 2013, with:

- Jon Cruddas MP, Labour Party Policy Coordinator
- David Davis MP, Conservative Party, Formerly Foreign Office Minister and Shadow Home Secretary
- Professor Francesca Klug, LSE Professorial Research Fellow
- Professor Alan Sked, UKIP founder and LSE academic

**My Scotland, Our Britain: A Future Worth Sharing,**

10 June 2014, with:

- Gordon Brown, Labour Party MP, former Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister



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