

Interview with Lord Maurice Glasman

by Chris Garvin, Director Young Fabians, Australia. July 2013

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Chris Garvin:

Hello. My name is Chris Garvin and I am director of the Australian Young Fabians. This afternoon we have with us Lord Maurice Glasman, a Labour peer from the British House of Lords. He's in Sydney, Australia this week as the keynote speaker at the 13th Biennial National Labour History Conference, and we're glad he's given us some time to talk about the *Blue Labour* movement.

Maurice Glasman:

Lovely to be here.

Chris Garvin:

Thank you for coming. What should I address you as?

Maurice Glasman:

Maurice.

Chris Garvin:

So Maurice, for those listening who are not familiar with the concept of *Blue Labour*, how can you best outline its history and goals?

Maurice Glasman:

Blue Labour is a very strong resurrection of the labour tradition with the stress on labour – work, the importance of labour value, very committed to resisting the domination of capital, but also of the state. So restoring traditions and institutions of the labour movement.

Chris Garvin:

How's it different from the *Big Society* concept pushed by the conservatives in the United Kingdom?

Maurice Glasman:

Well the fundamental difference is that we take the battle to the market which they couldn't do. So we see society in Britain as dominated by finance, finance capital and the state, and they both have be resisted through building relationships with democracy. So we take the battle to the banks about debt, usury. We want workers on boards of regional banks. So, as I said to you, the *Big Society* died because they couldn't take the argument to the power elites in the private sector.

Chris Garvin:

There has been a criticism of *Blue Labour* ideas especially around the emphasis on the idea of family, flag and faith. What do you say to these criticisms especially in regards to

ensuring equal rights and social justice, for example, on LGBTI rights, equal marriage in the secular state?

Maurice Glasman:

Ok, so, the first thing is we never said family, flag and faith. That was Sarah Palin. And somehow that got spread around. We absolutely support equal marriage, we support faithfulness, we support family life wherever we find it. We support that. It was just a kind of mad criticism from people who didn't get it.

Chris Garvin:

Ok then. What is the difference between *One Nation Labour* and *Blue Labour*?

Maurice Glasman:

Not much is the answer, although *One Nation* has yet to be really defined I would say. So, it comes sort of out of what we're talking about. What we want to see is a greater emphasis on working class and immigrant communities developing their own leaders. We think they've been too dominated by a sort of progressive elite that doesn't like working class people very much. Or, as we like to say sometimes, that they're pro-immigration, but anti-immigrant. A lot of immigrant communities are religious and quite conservative, and we don't talk to that. So, *One Nation* is a very good political idea that's in need of definition, but it is being defined now.

Chris Garvin:

It was reported that you made some controversial remarks about immigration and multiculturalism in the United Kingdom. Could you please clarify your views around this issue?

Maurice Glasman:

Yes definitely. I worked with London citizens for 15 years. Working with immigrant communities. This idea is barmy. What I said was that immigration – which was very high in Britain – was a bosses agenda. It was people moving, huge pressure at the low end on wages, no consent of the people for it. It was seen as a human rights issue and not a political issue.

We all just wanted to say immigration is a political issue, and if we're going to build a common life with the new immigrants, we have to have some stability in this, it can't be a relentless churn. It was this idea that politics is impossible unless you can build stable relationships and a common life with the immigrants is crucial to that. I think that's calmed down now.

Chris Garvin:

So in regards to the *Blue Labour* movement, what is its current relationship to the British Labour Party and how much influence does it hold over the party?

Maurice Glasman:

It's up for grabs. It's a sort of growing thing. Initially people were a bit shocked by the kind of boldness of it and had become so progressive. This idea that you actually build a

democratic politics with other people and not concentrate exclusively on the leadership of the party and that sort of thing came as a bit of a surprise.

So I would break it down into three areas. I would say that in terms of party organising it's really very strong. A guy called Arnie Graf has come over to Britain – he's an American community organiser – and he's been really received very well. So we've been working a lot in the north of England on moving from what we call the task based culture to the relational culture where people actually talk to each other and campaign on the things they care about. That's family, place – trying to make the place better – work, against debt and those things. So, organisationally it's very strong.

In terms of the ideological side, Jon Cruddas who's a very close ally, (he's head of the policy review), and that's going strongly.

And in relation to the party leadership, it's always going to be complicated. They've got party management to do. We completely understand that. We're a bit insurgent and troublesome, but on the whole I got to give Ed Miliband great credit, he's really engaged with it.

So, I would say that it's a very open space, we represent right, left. It's people who just want to do politics, democratic politics and not retreat into a legal, legalistic politics. That's where we are going. So, bear in mind that it's just a young baby, just beginning to walk. I'm happy.

Chris Garvin:

The community organising agenda is something that particularly caught my eye. Could you elaborate a bit on that, and has it been used by the British Labour Party today?

Maurice Glasman:

Yes, it genuinely has. Ed Miliband bought Arnie Graf over from America, and he's now director of organising. He's got a very good, very good working relationship with Ian McNicol who's the General Secretary. It's a big culture change. It's the opposite way of doing politics.

So, Labour votes a position, where it began with its position and then tried to persuade people of its position. We begin with the people and they have to define the position. So relationships first, then build power among those people where they agree.

So, based on support for things like regional banks, interest rate cap, living wage, a very, very different kind of agenda.

The words we don't use much are equality, diversity, accessibility, inclusivity, because that's not where people are.

We work on living wage, anti-usury, regional banks, vocational colleges, workers on boards.

And it's a real change in the way that the party works. So, it's been the most interesting change that there's been from my point of view. The way that a very administrative task based machine is opening up.

And you can see what happened in Falkirk. The local party just said, 'we're not having it'. They tried to fix the candidate. It was the local party that said, 'we don't want it', and they didn't want it. That's a big victory for us.

Chris Garvin:

Definitely.

So, how do you think the UK Labour policy redevelopment process can apply to the Australian Labor Party?

Maurice Glasman:

Well, you've just got to move, you know that you can't move closer to the people unless you talk to the people. It's quite laborious. It's not conceptually very difficult. You do what we're doing.

You have one-to-one conversations with people. You talk to them. So we're moving, the party's moving from employing regional officers to local organisers. People whose job it is just to have five one to one conversations a day with Labour people, and it's changing the agenda.

So that feeds into policies. Jon Cruddas said: 'don't come to me with ideas, come to me with things that you've done' – and that's changed everything.

So, what do you do locally? People are beginning to do things like build local banks and things like that. They bring together the church, the mosques, unions, labour people. So, it's really feeding in.

The speech I recommend you look at by Jon Cruddas is a speech called *Earning and belonging*. So those are the two pillars of the policy review – how to earn and belong to a place. <http://labourlist.org/2013/02/earning-and-belonging-by-jon-cruddas-full-speech-text/>

Chris Garvin:

What's your preferred Labour leadership selection process, and what are some of the concerns you have about leadership change, especially in regards to the direct election of party leaders?

Maurice Glasman:

We've got a system in England – which isn't that bad – which is a third, a third, a third. So Kevin Rudd's put forward fifty/fifty: fifty parliamentary party and fifty... Now I'm actually into a union participation in this, but not as a dominant force. So, a third from the unions.

But the problem we had at the last election was a very, very low percentage of union members voted. There has to be a lot of work on union organising, unions, the leadership has become very distant from their members, and that's an issue.

So my preferred one is a third parliamentary party, a third Labour Party members and a third union. I think that works well. A third, a third, a third.

Chris Garvin:

How does the ALP do you think, reconnect with its traditional supporters to the point that we can get them to join the ALP?

Maurice Glasman:

Well, I think that it's got to just stop imposing a progressive or ideological barrier, and people have got to be free to speak, and free to... in organising we call it 'name your pain'.

The party has got to be able to hear why people are angry and estranged from it in order to reconstitute itself as a party for the good, for the common good. So, if people thought that they could they could go to a local meeting of the ALP, that they would be heard, that they would be able to engage with changing things, it will open up.

Chris Garvin:

Do you think that it's possible for social democratic parties to reclaim working class votes without adopting a more conservative social agenda, or do believe that this is the only way forward?

Maurice Glasman:

Well it's complicated. It's not quite like that. We did 3000 one-to-one conversations in the north of England. We didn't ask people what they wanted, we asked people what they cared about. For progressives it wasn't a very great... for statist social democrats it wasn't very good news.

Overwhelmingly people cared about their family life, they cared about how to look after their parents, how to care for their children, and how to keep their marriages together. That was overwhelming. Not something we think about terribly often, but people are worried about that. They're worried that their parents will be in homes where they're neglected and abused, and they don't want that. They want a partnership to do that. So family life.

The second thing that people cared about is the place they live. That doesn't sound very complicated, but we've kind of assumed that new technology – Twitter and the internet – that it doesn't matter where you live. But it does matter where you live. It matters a huge amount. So a strong sense of place.

The third thing that people cared about was work and how they were treated at work. You would think that would be our area, but they don't think we're on their side with that at all. They care about work and everybody doing their work. That's an issue.

Fourth was wages – that they didn't earn enough to live.

And the fifth was a real hatred of debt.

You could put that as socially conservative, but I would just put that as really normal to human life.

And that we've just got into a very weird, very progressive external position where things like family and place and work and debt didn't matter. What mattered was equality or multiculturalism. And none of these things resonate.

We are viewed as socially conservative, but we're not. We're building a broad-based politic that can take on capitalism and that can't be done. The capitalist progressives and the state progressives are in the same camp, and they're hostile to people. We just take it.

People say we're socially conservative, where in fact we're developing quite radical opposition to the domination of capital and the state, which would be considered absolutely central to Labour. Just being aware... Not poking people in the eye... If people believe in God, that's cool, if people want to honour their family obligations, want to work. Since when has that been socially conservative? That's crazy. So, just to say we take it and don't argue with it, but we believe we're both radical and conservative simultaneously.

Chris Garvin:

Australia's banking sector is also heavily concentrated. In a recent *Guardian* article addressed to Ed Miliband, you spoke of a plan for regional banks. Do you think this could have relevance for us here?

Maurice Glasman:

Yes, definitely. This is the way. Capital has just become completely disconnected from the people. Labour was born in the world to resist the domination of capital. That's our thing.

So we say that five percent of the bailout should be used to recapitalise local banks. It's our money anyway. Those local banks should only lend in the area that they're in. Germany's a very successful, a very, very successful example of how this can work. But it's got to be done.

We're exploring a relationship with churches as places where people can go. For the local banks. So it opens up a whole space for rebuilding local relationships towards the good. Banking and opposition to debt and usury is really huge for them.

Chris Garvin:

You have written of the need to acknowledge the difference between speculative and

productive business. Have you heard of the Robin Hood tax, and do you think this proposal could help with this difference?

Maurice Glasman:

Yes. I'm not fully 'paid up', because it is just another tax, it's just another central redistribution. I'm in favour of it, but that's not the key. The key is to build the institutions locally that can constrain capital. So it's a democratic politics and not exclusively the use of the tax system that we're about.

Chris Garvin:

Do you see a role for nationalisation as a key policy background for the future?

Maurice Glasman:

No. I think that the idea of centralised state control is definitely not the way to go. What I want to see is community land trusts. Local people owning businesses like Dover. And Dover redeveloping this idea of the people's port – local people own the port. So local control.

So I'm in for technical socialisation of the means of production, but not the nationalisation, the state control. I think there may be a case for the railways, but once again it must be combined with much stronger local control, worker representation. Because the nationalised industries were too centralised, too remote and had the same problems as centralised capital.

Chris Garvin:

Maurice, what do you think of the current proposal by the coalition government to privatise Southeastern Rail?

Maurice Glasman:

Very bad. I think that it's just another sell-off that leaves people without – and it could lead to the usual stuff with – and what goes on here – selling off the assets and then selling it back to the state. That's what happened with the last privatisation. Deeply, deeply opposed to that.

But we've got to have a constructive alternative. We've got to stop being either nationalisation or privatisation. We're arguing for community control.

Chris Garvin:

Was the removal of Clause Four – the British Labour Party's socialist pledge – a good move forward or useless symbolism?

Maurice Glasman:

Well it was a combination. A good move forward and useless symbolism. What it got rid of was something that was never going to happen which was the nationalisation of distribution, production, exchange. So it meant the party was in bad faith. It was never going to do that and yet that was what the party stood for. So it was very good to get rid of it.

However, what there wasn't, was any notion of what Labour does in the economy to control capital. So we're in favour of regional banks, of worker representation on boards, of vocational labour market entry. So the problem was they abolished it, but didn't put anything in its place and that led to the domination of the market. The legacy of New Labour is effectively the continuation of Thatcherism for that reason.

Chris Garvin:

What does socialism mean for you today and *Blue Labour*?

Maurice Glasman:

Oh socialism's key. We are socialists. We believe in that on many, many levels. It begins with human nature. We believe that we are social beings. That we need relationships. That who we are and our flourishing is not individual and external to relationships, but based on loving relationships with others. That we grow and flourish with others and not in isolation.

So we've got a social view of the person, then we believe in the strengthening of society – socialism. Institution, political institutions, unions, vocational colleges, regional banks. We are completely for the restoration of the social. So with like to say we are socialists, not statist. That's where we're at.

Chris Garvin:

Do you see a role for Fabian gradualism in your *Blue Labour* ideology?

Maurice Glasman:

Oh definitely. We've got our historical problems with the Fabians summarised as eugenics and Stalinism roughly. But we know that the Fabians have moved beyond that, but we still think that there's a lingering faith in the superiority of science and technology. So we are gradualists, but the end we want to see is a self-organised society committed to the good, to the common good.

So it goes a bit beyond the origins of Fabianism which wished to see a state-based society based on rational scientific principals and equality. I've given more Fabian talks than any other person in Britain, just to let you know. I go 'round to the Fabian Society's, and a really loving and great relationship has developed.

Chris Garvin:

Do you think that *Blue* and *Red Labour* are destined to be bitter enemies?

Maurice Glasman:

It depends. We've got our problems with the *Red*, because it's about blood, martyrdom and revolution. We're not *Reds*. We're just not. That's why we're *Blue*. We don't see ourselves as a persecuted minority who... None of that. So we don't have the narrative of bloody revolution. *The people's flag is deepest red, to remind us of our martyrs dead.* We remember them.

If *Red* means to impose a sectarian view against the wishes of the majority, then there will be a problem. But we're socialists, we're deeply *Red*. And so, it doesn't need to be that way, but it's a different approach to politics.

That's why we're *Blue*. To say there's a reason. Because when we talk about family life, and when we talk about work ethics, and when we talk about responsibility we notice that there's a *Red* group that go 'no, no, no, no. Justice, equality, diversity', and we don't think there's any mileage in that politics.

Chris Garvin:

A criticism of social democracy is that it recognises the injustice caused by capitalism, but fails to implement socialistic policy to counteract them. Would *Blue Labour* take a more antagonistic stance towards capital than has been seen in the British Labour Party recently?

Maurice Glasman:

We believe that capitalism, and unfettered capitalism poses a threat to human existence through the commodification of the person and nature. And we believe in defending people and nature through democratic association, and confronting and constraining the domination of capital through building a balance of interests in corporate governance and public sector. We take on, we've taken on the banks in the city of London. That's who we are.

Chris Garvin:

One of our members wanted to pose this question to you. It's in regards to unpaid internships.

They are very attractive to businesses, both for profit and not for profit. This is so called voluntary labour, and is provided by youth, graduates, long term employed, older workers and disabled. It still contributes to the profitability of organisations.

Do you think there is a fairer way to provide on the job experience as well as protect workers rights?

Maurice Glasman:

Yes. I've got a problem with the unpaid internships because on the whole I really love the idea... But on the whole it's middle-class children who's parents can support them getting political experience, and it's just not right. I believe in a living wage – pay it, or don't take people on. That's where I'm at with that one.

Chris Garvin:

In regards to what I can see as an attempt to localise welfare, do you think that this will compromise the integrity of the governments providing secular services to those who need it?

Maurice Glasman:

This is a huge issue. We've been on a needs based system, and it's alienated people and

disaffected people. So we believe in contributory support. You put in to get out. What constitutes giving, putting in, should be generous – looking after parents, looking after children is putting in.

So we want to break with the exclusive needs-based system which we think rewards people who don't give, and reorientates the traditional Labour view that it's a mutual system, and it can't be mutual. So we've got to ask much more of people to give.

Chris Garvin:

My last question for you today Maurice is in regards to what you dislike as unconditional welfare. How can this be managed? I do see however, that you have not chosen to leave those who participate in non-productive labour – such as those who raise children – in the lurch. In the interview on Radio National recently, you emphasise the need to have a conversation with these people. But this seems unrealistic. What are your thoughts on this?

Maurice Glasman:

Well it's how it has to go. We don't want to leave anybody in the lurch, but we believe that a life without reciprocity, without giving back to people, is no life at all. Our concern is with the conditions of poor people. Giving them \$45 dollars a week for sitting on their own in a room watching telly is no life.

What we want to do, as opposed to saying you've got to get a job, and we're going to cut your welfare unless you don't get a job. We want to go and talk to them, see where they're at, and see what we can do to engage them in a life with other people. It's a loving and gentle thing.

But it's got its hard edges. If people refuse to give when they can give, then we don't care for them. They've got to give.

I misquoted. It wasn't Mel Gibson, it was Russell Crowe – for what it matters – who said if somebody spoke about his mother like they spoke about Julia Gillard, he'd have a serious conversation with them.

We've got to have a serious conversation. What are you doing for other people? And get to the point, get to it get to it. If you think you can live without regard for others, we're saying, that's not going to work. It's our money and that's not going to work out for us. It'll be better for you if you can find a way of giving to others. You'll have a better life.

We mustn't abandon people. That's the key thing. And that conversation bit is an act of love and concern.

Chris Garvin:

Thanks for your time today Maurice.

Maurice Glasman:

Pleasure. It was really lovely to meet you, and I really appreciate your questions.

Chris Garvin:

Thank you very much.

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