

Equality and the British Left

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The demand for equality has been at the heart of the politics of the Left in the twentieth century, but what did theorists and politicians on the British Left mean when they said they were committed to 'equality'? How did they argue for a more egalitarian society? Which policies did they think could best advance their egalitarian ideals? Equality and the British Left provides the first comprehensive answers to these questions. It charts debates about equality from the progressive liberalism and socialism of the early twentieth century to the arrival of the New Left and revisionist social democracy in the 1950s. Along the way, it examines and reassesses the egalitarian political thought of many significant figures in the history of the British Left, including L. T. Hobhouse, R. H. Tawney and Anthony Crosland. This book demonstrates that the British Left has historically been distinguished from its ideological competitors on the Centre and the Right by a commitment to a demanding form of economic egalitarianism. It shows that this egalitarianism has come to be neglected or caricatured by politicians and scholars alike, and is more surprising and sophisticated than is often imagined. Equality and the British Left offers a compelling new perspective on British political thought that will appeal to scholars and students of British history and political theory, and to anyone interested in contemporary debates about progressive politics.

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