

**The party has a life of its own: Labour's ethos and party modernisation, 1983-1997**

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Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis makes a theoretical contribution to interpreting the Labour Party and an empirical contribution to our understanding of Labour's 'modernisation', from 1983-1997. It significantly develops Henry Drucker's original insight – that Labour has an ethos as well as doctrine – and systematises it into a theoretical framework around four 'fault lines' within Labour's ethos. The fault lines are: the relative prioritisation given to articulating a coherent socialist theory; policies simultaneously regarded as both emblems and outdated shibboleths; tension between autonomy for Labour politicians and participatory approaches to decision-making; and more 'expressive' or more 'instrumental' political styles. The study argues that both an individual interpretation of the party's ethos, held by a political actor, and a dominant interpretation of the party's ethos, perceived by actors to have greater salience in the party as a whole, help to shape the strategic calculations actors make. Ethos is considered a distinct determinant of party change in this regard.

The empirical contribution challenges linear narratives of modernisation from Kinnock to Blair. The study argues that different interpretations of the party's ethos affected the pace and scale of modernisation after 1983. At times this made the political strategy of modernisation cautious and gradualist, sensitised as it was to Labour's competing traditions. Kinnock's leadership was inwardly pragmatic, yet outwardly cautious in engaging with Labour's creed and challenging emblematic policies. This led to periods of inaction, appearing to defy electoral rationality. Blair was more attuned to Labour's ethos than is sometimes suggested in the existing literature, selective in his challenges to Labour's traditions, and employing, at times, an expressive style of Labour politics. Through interviews, archival research and document analysis, this study delves into political processes. It examines the beliefs actors held, their judgements of the party and their strategies, to show the effect of ethos on political action.

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## Introduction

‘Let me be more honest than prudent. If the Conservatives have been guilty of betrayal, then so too has Labour. The Labour betrayal consisted in its failure over an extended and crucial period to be the kind of party, and to offer the kind of programme, that a majority of electors wanted to vote for. If the country has had to endure nearly two decades of one-party rule from the new dogmatists of the right, it is in no small measure because the forces of the centre-left made it so easy.’

Tony Wright, *Why Vote Labour?*

‘But was not the Labour Party brought into being for the very purpose of raising politics to loftier altitudes? Was not the vision of the new Jerusalem something which the Labour movement pursued as never before? Were not all, or almost all, the leading figures among the pioneers, or their successors, touched at some moment by this same dream? Was not part of their appeal the rejection of sordid practicalities...’

Michael Foot, *The Uncollected Michael Foot*

‘But you make a fundamental mistake by believing that by going on marches and passing resolutions without any attempt to try to tell the British people what the consequences were, you should carry their vote. And you lost millions of votes.’ [Shouting]

Jim Callaghan, Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1983

### **What it means to be Labour**

‘I have seen a much-loved figure on the Left of the party travel the last few hundred yards to a public meeting on foot, haversack on back,’ Henry Drucker wrote in his classic text, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*. ‘The ministerial car waited round the corner. For them such conceits are harmless enough.’<sup>1</sup> To be Labour, in this instance as a high-profile party member invited to address political meetings, is to stress one’s ‘ordinariness’. This can be difficult, particularly for Labour Party people who were not born or raised with a social or familial connection to the labour movement, but embraced the party because of their beliefs. Drucker noted that Labour politicians needed to stay ‘connected’<sup>2</sup> to the movement they were a part of. To buy a round of drinks at the Labour Club, for instance. Hugh Gaitskell would stay with friends while visiting his constituency of South Leeds, before holding Saturday

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<sup>1</sup> H. Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.



surgeries and ‘touring the working men’s clubs’.<sup>3</sup> As with Gaitskell, while Anthony Crosland was unable to pretend he was ‘anything other than an upper middle-class Oxford educated economist’,<sup>4</sup> he went and drank locally in Great Grimsby all the same. Following Tony Blair’s election as Labour leader, the manager of the Labour Club in Trimdon village, within Blair’s Sedgefield constituency, noted that Blair ‘likes a night in the club. People know him as a friend and tell him what their problems and hopes are. Tony knows what the people around here expect of him. We do want fairness and justice, and jobs and security. Tony’s listened. That’s what drives him’.<sup>5</sup>

Staying ‘connected’ in both presence and style (leaving the ministerial car around the corner) is a part of what Drucker called Labour’s ethos, the ‘traditions, beliefs, characteristic procedures and feelings which help to animate the members of the party’.<sup>6</sup> Such practices may not be the preference of the political actor. Perhaps the haversack Minister really would have preferred the comfort of the car, and considered the need to ditch it rather ridiculous. Yet they are considered to be appropriate behaviour in the context of the Labour Party and a person’s identity within it. What is and what is not appropriate is passed down, through the generations, with fellow Labour Party people becoming introduced to such practices. They are effectively ‘socialised’ into the party’s ethos. Other shared and accepted practices have been noted in historical studies, for instance Labour’s instinct for moralism, or ‘to be critical of affluence’.<sup>7</sup> Drucker offered some other examples illustrative of the ‘impact of ethos’,<sup>8</sup> though, it must be remembered, he was writing in the 1970s. These included the loyalty shown to Labour’s leaders among Labour Party people, the sacrifice expected from leaders and party employees, the hoarding of money (which has not aged well), and belief in a rule book.

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<sup>3</sup> B. Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell*, (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1997), pp.153-154.

<sup>4</sup> P. Diamond, *The Crosland Legacy*, (Bristol: Polity Press, 2016), p.33.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in G. Smyth, “‘The Centre of My Political Life’: Tony Blair’s Sedgefield’ in M. Perryman (eds.), *The Blair Agenda*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), pp.63-75, p.65.

<sup>6</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64, Old Labour, New Britain?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.40.

<sup>8</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.17.

Barbara Castle, writing in her diary in the mid-1970s about a Labour Party document on membership of the European Economic Community, noted how there were threats ‘to move a hundred amendments... while the International Committee has reversed the decision of the Home Policy Committee that a copy of the Government White Paper should be distributed to every delegate to the special Party conference’.<sup>9</sup> Such processes are not, Eric Hobsbawm argued, simply a way of getting through business. Derived from the customs and practices of the trade union movement, he suggested that ‘there is no escaping the impression that the formality itself provides a certain ritual satisfaction’.<sup>10</sup> It is hard to imagine the Labour Party’s fondness for committees and special procedures, and the special kind of madness they induce, being replicated within the Conservative Party. Indeed, the contrast speaks to a substantive difference in how Labour Party people understand internal party democracy and decision-making.

There is a fine line, however, between nurturing a connection with Labour’s ethos and attempting to define it for your own purposes. While challenging Jeremy Corbyn in 2016 for the leadership of the Labour Party, Owen Smith gave a newspaper interview in a café in his Pontypridd constituency: ‘Receiving his “frothy coffee” in Pontypridd’s Prince’s café, Owen Smith stopped mid-sentence to express some amusement. “I tell you it is the first time I have ever been given little biscuits and a posh cup in here,” Smith said, looking up at the owner... “Seriously, I would have a mug normally,” the MP added.’<sup>11</sup> Doubts over whether the South Wales MP really did normally have his cappuccino in a mug were raised.

In addition to shared traditions that are broadly accepted by Labour Party people, there are competing traditions within Labour’s ethos. Competing traditions offer divergent interpretations as to the beliefs and practices one should follow in the Labour Party. Drucker highlighted some of them, including: a simultaneous commitment to, and suspicion of parliamentary democracy as a route to socialism;<sup>12</sup> an oppositional tendency within the Labour Party which kicks back at the

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<sup>9</sup> B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1964-76*, (London: PAPERMAC, 1990), p.595.

<sup>10</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, (London: Phoenix Books, 2014), p.76.

<sup>11</sup> D. Boffey, ‘Labour is miles away from government, says man out to replace Corbyn’, *The Observer*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2016, accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/17/owen-smith-labour-leadership-interview>.

<sup>12</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.4.

establishment,<sup>13</sup> alongside a history of moderation as a ‘respectable’ institution;<sup>14</sup> the relative freedom Labour’s representatives in parliament should expect to enjoy, versus more mass participatory internal democracy;<sup>15</sup> and different takes on the nature of Labour’s progressivism<sup>16</sup> – something Robinson has noted in her understandings of progressivism as optimism, as rupture, and as social justice.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Drucker did not explicitly identify and expand upon, in a systematic way, the competing traditions within Labour’s ethos. Nor did he subject them to much empirical investigation. While emphatically stating the place of a concept – ethos – and the need for it to be taken seriously in political science,<sup>18</sup> Drucker’s book did not provide a framework for analysing the effect of ethos as a determinant of party change, despite viewing it as something which had undoubtedly affected Labour’s political trajectory. For example, Drucker argued that the ‘symbolic value’ of Clause IV for ‘a continuous tradition of opposition to capitalism’ was ‘ultimately’<sup>19</sup> why Gaitskell failed to change it. This study addresses this absence in the existing literature – that of a framework for analysing ethos as a determinant of party change, and one subjected to empirical investigation. The remainder of this introduction will present an overview of this study’s argument and my research questions. I then engage with the debate on Labour’s modernisation period, and outline the chapters that follow. I finish with a discussion of my methodology.

### **What is ethos?**

Labour’s ethos is comprised of shared traditions and competing traditions. There are distinct interpretations of Labour’s ethos, based on competing traditions that have long been contested, quite legitimately, through the party’s history. These traditions – and the fault lines they give rise to, which are the focus of this study – are inscribed in the institution of the Labour Party. They involve particular beliefs and practices

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<sup>13</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>17</sup> E. Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition in Contemporary British Politics*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.21.

<sup>18</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.vii.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

about how to conduct Labour's politics. What Hobsbawm called the 'ritual furniture'<sup>20</sup> of the British labour movement – including an elaborate approach to decision-making which I mentioned above – is the basis for some of these traditions. Identification with the rituals and language of the working class, either through birth or through a process of socialisation, are incredibly important to Labour's ethos. As both Hobsbawm and Ross McKibbin suggested, these traditions go further than 'ritual' too. Hobsbawm pointed to a working class tradition which took 'little interest'<sup>21</sup> in political theory alongside traditions of militancy and dissent.<sup>22</sup> McKibbin argued that the British working class 'inherited traditions which both burdened and liberated it', including 'an ambiguous set of social values which it shared with other classes and which gave legitimacy to institutions and sentiments whose ideological power precluded a revolutionary rhetoric or strategy'.<sup>23</sup> Both Hobsbawm and McKibbin set out how, in addition to more ritualistic displays of working class identity, the roots for the British Left's 'practical' reformism could be traced to traditions found within working class communities as well.

Reflecting upon Labour's origins, and its ethos, includes consideration of the building of institutions as a defence for working class communities in the face of untrammelled market forces. It involves comprehending the language and acts of 'solidarity' among working people, and the cautious engagement with parliamentary politics. So too the relationship between working class communities, trade unions and political movements of Liberal, socialist (of which there are many variants) and Marxist forms, as well as the powerful influence of Christianity and its different sects in Britain. These add up to more than iconography, important as that is. They demonstrate a blend of motivations, aspirations and objectives, all present – quite legitimately – in the competing traditions of Labour's ethos through the party's history. In analysing four key fault lines that result from these competing traditions, this thesis seeks to show how distinct interpretations of the party's ethos are factored into an actor's strategic calculations, affecting political actors themselves, as well as their strategic contexts.

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<sup>20</sup> Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, p.70.

<sup>21</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p.373.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.377.

<sup>23</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.17.

## **The argument**

This study contends that ethos, while often acknowledged, has not been subject to enough analysis in work seeking to understand Labour's political trajectory. It significantly develops and builds upon Drucker's definition of Labour's ethos, understood here as both shared and competing traditions. Because of the competing nature of some traditions, I argue for a dual understanding of Labour's ethos: an individual interpretation of the party's ethos which a Labour Party person holds, and a dominant interpretation of the party's ethos, perceived by Labour Party people to have greater salience and acceptance in the movement more widely. Both individual and dominant interpretations of Labour's ethos co-exist and can affect an actor's strategic calculations.

Labour's competing traditions give rise to four key fault lines within Labour's ethos. These are discussed further below. An actor's beliefs, derived from Labour's competing traditions, constitute their individual interpretation of the party's ethos, including on these contentious fault line issues. The dominant interpretation represents the beliefs and practices which are considered by Labour Party people to be the prevailing narrative within the movement as a whole, including on the four key fault lines. This is a distinctive analytical approach to our understanding of how and why Labour's political trajectory changes over time. I apply this theoretical framework to Labour's 'modernisation' period of opposition from 1983 to 1997. My principal argument is that Labour's ethos is an under-appreciated determinant of party change during this period, and that during Labour's modernisation the party's ethos – and the competing traditions within it – affected Labour's political trajectory. Distinct interpretations of the party's ethos – both individual and dominant – affected the pace and scale of modernisation prior to Labour entering government, making it (at times) a gradual political strategy that was sensitised to Labour's traditions.

Challenging an 'ethos gap' in explanations of Labour's modernisation, this study critically engages the existing literature in two ways:

- first, where some accounts have sought to portray political strategies motivated by the 'politics of catch-up' during this period, along with steadily

accruing outcomes of change and reform, this study presents instances where the party's behaviour appeared to defy electoral rationality and where political actions and outcomes (including inaction) were significantly affected by Labour's ethos;

- second, suggestions that Labour's modernisation witnessed the 'remaking' of Labour's ethos are disputed. Instead, this study contends that Labour's modernisers were, in different ways and to different degrees, engaged with Labour's ethos and affected by it. New Labour, as it moved from opposition to office, then began what would be better described as a disengagement with Labour's ethos, leaving the competing traditions within the party's ethos intact.

The contribution this study makes is twofold. First, it offers a distinctive theoretical framework for interpreting the Labour Party. This framework recognises the party's ethos as a distinct determinant of party change, separate, though relational, to other organisational, ideational and external factors. Ethos is relevant to our understanding of a strategic actor (the individual interpretation), their strategic context (the dominant interpretation) and the calculations they make before taking strategic action – the building blocks of Colin Hay's strategic-relational approach.<sup>24</sup> Second, this study puts forward an analysis of Labour's modernisation which challenges more linear narratives of modernisation from Kinnock to Blair, and defines both leaders in the context of the competing traditions within Labour's ethos.

This study's significance lies both in its contribution to understanding the nature of today's Labour Party, including retellings of its pasts, and in its potential for future application in political analysis. In relation to the Labour Party, this thesis shows how longstanding, competing traditions within the Labour Party affected the outcomes of Labour's modernisation – in other words, how factors long present *on the Left* of British politics affected the party's trajectory in the 1980s and 90s. Labour's modernisation, therefore, must be seen as a period of political change that was rooted,

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<sup>24</sup> Hay's description of the strategic-relational approach was summarised as the 'dynamic understanding of the relationship of structure and agency which resolutely refuses to privilege either moment (structure or agency) in this dialectical and relational interaction'. C. Hay, *Political Analysis*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.134.

still, in longstanding debates within the Labour Party and the distinct interpretations of the party's ethos held by Labour Party people. This has important contemporary relevance. Powerful retellings of Labour's past have, throughout the party's recent history, been utilised by Labour politicians to differentiate their own 'project'. Indeed, Blair and New Labour did so with some success, as I discuss below. Yet, in attempting to emphasise Blair's modernising approach, allies of Blair have, in part, fostered a story of upheaval and a focus on discontinuation – something that is only one element of the whole New Labour story, and least applicable to Labour's early modernisation period. Critics of Blair and New Labour, often focusing on personalities who have evangelised about modernisation too, have added to this narrative of upheaval and discontinuation, drawing connections between Blair's early reforms as Labour leader (portrayed as a simple accommodation with Thatcherism and an overt dislike of Labour's traditions) and his unpopular policy choices, mainly from his second and third terms as Prime Minister – for example, the war in Iraq. As such, modernisation and New Labour's tenure more generally – from opposition to the end of Labour's period in office – is seen by some Labour Party people as something that was 'done to' the Labour Party, ditching the party's traditions and associated practices and beliefs.

Jeremy Corbyn's election as Leader of the Labour Party was, in some ways, a reaction to this narrative. Subsequent retellings of Labour's recent past, from Corbyn and his supporters, have built on this. Jon Lansman, the former aide to Tony Benn and founder of Momentum, the campaign group which sprang from Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign, claimed that Blair 'was never in the right party' and that as a consequence of Corbyn's election 'there will never be a return to his [Blair's] politics'.<sup>25</sup> This thesis challenges the former assertion, showing how Blair worked within the competing traditions of Labour's ethos in his early years as leader. In terms of the latter prediction, the thesis provides a basis for exploration. Some of Labour's recent discord can be explained by the continued presence of fault lines in the party's ethos – issues that predated Blair, and continue to affect Corbyn's Labour.

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<sup>25</sup> J. Pickard and H. Mance, 'Tony Blair hints at creation of UK centrist party', *Financial Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/24237acc-b270-11e8-8d14-6f049d06439c>.

Through its systemisation of Drucker's concept of ethos, and the articulation of key fault lines in Labour's ethos, this study also provides an analytical tool for historical and more contemporary political analysis of the Labour Party in the future. While scholars have studied continuity and change in Labour's doctrine, and in Labour's organisation – literature I discuss in Chapter 1 – since Drucker's work in the late 1970s, Labour's ethos, and the distinct interpretations Labour Party people hold, have been under-theorised and under-analysed. With some exceptions – which I discuss in Chapters 1 and 2 – Labour's ethos has, to different extents, been ignored or misconceived as an assortment of old habits that can be easily dropped. Instead, this thesis seeks to justify consideration of ethos as a distinct determinant of party change in analyses of the Labour Party. It is a factor, or variable, internal to the party, one which interacts with other internal and with external factors, and one which affects an actor's motivations and judgements – featuring in a dynamic, continuous process of strategic calculation by political actors.

### **Research questions**

A delineation between 'doctrine' and 'ethos' in the Labour Party's ideology seems obvious to many observers of the party. Yet a focus in the literature on doctrine has meant the party's ethos is relatively neglected – an observation Drucker made writing in the late 1970s, and something which remains the case decades later. As a concept, ethos is under-theorised, and as such, while Drucker's work is rich and suggestive, ethos remains too broad and too vague to offer much explanatory power. This study seeks to address that problem. My research questions stem from Drucker's original insights, including arguments he began to make, but never fully developed.

Drucker suggested that both an institutional ethos, and an individual actor's own interpretation of what it is to be Labour, co-exist and can clash. For example, he noted that a defensive Labour ethos 'prefigures the lack of political grip which has characterised so many Labour administrations and paralysed so many of its leaders'.<sup>26</sup> In other words, that an institutional ethos has affected, and in this instance constrained, Labour's actors. He also recognised that a gap had developed 'between

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<sup>26</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.21.



those who operate within the terms of the party's ethos, the constituency parties, and those who march to new tunes',<sup>27</sup> meaning that Labour's ethos had come to mean different things to different Labour Party people.

My first two research questions take this argument – that Labour's ethos is contested, with competing traditions leading to divisive debates – as a starting point, leading to: **RQ1 Are there different interpretations of Labour's ethos held by Labour Party people?** Drucker argued that Labour Party people, at times, opposed what appeared to be a 'dominant' ethos, and instead followed a different path. This leads me to my second research question: **RQ2 Do both individual interpretations of the Labour Party's ethos and a dominant interpretation co-exist?** If there are different interpretations of Labour's ethos, are there a multitude of interpretations of the party's ethos held by individual Labour Party people, or is there a coalescing around a smaller number of interpretations? And, as Drucker suggests, does Labour's ethos have a dominant interpretation, perceived by Labour Party people as being prevalent within the institution?

Following on from RQ1 and RQ2, this study considers the substance of Labour's ethos and its competing traditions. If there is division and disagreement about what it is to be Labour, aside from doctrinal debates, what are those disagreements? This leads to my third research question: **RQ3 What are the different interpretations of Labour's ethos?** I see competing traditions in Labour's ethos giving rise to four key 'fault lines', defined in the OED as a 'divisive issue or difference of opinion that is likely to have serious consequences'. It is the nature of a fault line that you are either on one side or the other. I see some Labour Party people as holding views on competing traditions that are further away from the opposing argument than others, meaning there is something of a spectrum of opinion. However, broadly, there are two sides to each divisive issue. The term fault line is simpler for understanding the effect of competing traditions, while accepting that some people are closer to each other than others. Some of these conflicts were noted in early reviews of Drucker's

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<sup>27</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.111.

*Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*,<sup>28</sup> and I present them, briefly, in the chapter summary below.

My fourth and final research question asks whether the existence of different interpretations of the party's ethos affects Labour's political trajectory: **RQ4 Do individual interpretations of the party's ethos, and a dominant interpretation, affect a political actor's strategies and choices?** In relation to RQ2 (around the co-existence of both an individual and a dominant interpretation) how do these relational factors impact upon an actor's strategic calculations? This study contends that there is an 'ethos gap' in analyses of Labour's modernisation, defined as the period from Neil Kinnock's election as Leader of the Labour Party in 1983 to the advent of New Labour and Tony Blair's period as leader. Ethos is rarely mentioned in the existing literature, and nearly entirely absent when considering what shaped either the motivations of political actors or the political outcomes of the period.

### **Ethos as a determinant of party change – and narratives of modernisation**

Positing the effect of ethos as a determinant of party change during Labour's modernisation challenges the (relatively) linear narrative of the 'politics of catch-up' thesis. According to Heffernan, Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives 'successfully helped map out a dominant political agenda, one altering the environment(s) within which Labour is located. Where they led, Labour has eventually followed'.<sup>29</sup> The principal dynamic here is between 'an electorally successful Thatcher government and an unsuccessful Labour opposition'.<sup>30</sup> Labour's leadership accommodated itself to the electorally-successful and consensus-defining Thatcherite paradigm, thereby explaining how and why Labour 'modernised'. There is little room in such an analysis for consideration of an actor's beliefs. As such, Labour's leadership and associated political actors are lumped in together as one compliant bloc. 'In short, where Thatcherism has led, the Labour Party of Kinnock, Smith and Blair followed',<sup>31</sup> Heffernan reiterated. This analysis has been criticised in studies of

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<sup>28</sup> B. Cain, 'Reviewed Work: *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party* by H. M. Drucker', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.74, No.3 (Sept. 1980), pp.840-841, p.840.

<sup>29</sup> R. Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), p.ix.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.66.

Labour's doctrine and political philosophy. Diamond, for example, has noted New Labour's 'old roots in ethical socialism and revisionist social democracy'.<sup>32</sup> The argument that neo-liberalism has 'pervaded the body politic, colonising intellectual territory inch by inch'<sup>33</sup> has also been contested, with analysis of New Labour's legacy suggesting 'the track of left-wing ideas is... not only visible but impressive'.<sup>34</sup> This study focuses less on the substance of New Labour's policy programme and more on the political strategies of Labour's modernisers, adding further and different points of disagreement with those positing the replication of Thatcherism. It shows how the behaviour of political actors during modernisation, and resultant outcomes (including inaction), demonstrate, at times, a hesitant and disjointed route to party change that was significantly affected by Labour's ethos.

Wickham-Jones has noted that Labour's leaders set out to make 'rational' choices, in that 'after deliberation, Labour politicians seek to attain their preferences subject to the external constraints that they confront' with 'the perceptions of the actors concerned... a significant factor shaping these choices'.<sup>35</sup> This Wickham-Jones called a "soft" rational-choice perspective', in that the role of agency means 'different preferences coupled with varied constraints will result in different outcomes'.<sup>36</sup> This study questions, a little more than Wickham-Jones' 'soft' rationality, the extent to which we can understand an actor's political decisions through the lens of rational choice. It does so in part by inserting into an actor's strategic context their own interpretation of Labour's ethos – something which, rather than being understood as a 'constraint', is more like a 'preference'.

Describing it as 'rational', however, is insufficient. Rather, as Bale noted with the phrase 'culturally rational',<sup>37</sup> this study contends that an actor's strategic calculations are affected by their individual interpretation of Labour's ethos – which will affect what they consider to be an appropriate action within their institutional setting – as

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<sup>32</sup> P. Diamond, 'Introduction' in P. Diamond (eds.), *New Labour's Old Roots: Revisionist Thinkers in Labour's History 1931-97*, (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004) p.9.

<sup>33</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> A. Hindmoor, *What's Left Now?*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.5.

<sup>35</sup> M. Wickham-Jones, 'British Labour, European social democracy and the reformist trajectory: a reply to Coates', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (October 2002), pp.465-478, p.470.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> T. Bale, *Sacred Cows and Common Sense*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p.16.

well as their perception of the dominant ethos of the party, which depending on an actor's view and potential action, may be a constraint or a resource within the same institutional context. I do not dispute the usefulness of elements of rational choice-inspired analyses in understanding Labour's modernisation, particularly the electoral motivations of the actors involved. Inevitably, however, such parsimony – from motivation to outcome – overlooks the complexity of an actor's deliberations. I expand on this point in Chapter 1, and throughout the chapters in this thesis.

Some studies have considered, more directly, Labour's ethos and New Labour's articulation of 'Old' and 'New'. However, at times there has appeared too ready an acceptance of what New Labour's architects have sought to have people believe: that New Labour was 'literally a new party',<sup>38</sup> and that Blair and the New Labour leadership team were set on giving the party 'some electric shock treatment'.<sup>39</sup> Cronin suggested that New Labour's leaders undertook 'a kind of *Kulturkampf* aimed at displacing the party's inherited political culture'<sup>40</sup> resulting in the Blair and Brown teams taking on 'so directly the party's traditions, its doctrines and ethos'.<sup>41</sup> New Labour, it is claimed, 'mounted a frontal assault on the party's traditions. In so doing the modernisers took considerable risks'.<sup>42</sup> Cronin is not alone in reaching these conclusions. It has been claimed New Labour brought about a 'fundamental reordering'<sup>43</sup> of the party's ethos. These are overstatements, both in relation to the actions of relevant political actors – if not their words – and in terms of the effect of the New Labour period. Reflections on the latter, of course, have been aided by the passage of time.

I do not dissent from Cronin's analysis of some aspects of Blair's style. Indeed, I think he was right to argue that 'the desire to escape the constraints of party on their behaviour in government seems to have been especially attractive to the generation represented by Blair and Brown, for while Kinnock seems mainly to have wanted to

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<sup>38</sup> P. Mandelson and R. Liddle, *The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.211.

<sup>39</sup> P. Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, (London: Abacus, 2011), p.213.

<sup>40</sup> J. E. Cronin, *New Labour's Pasts: The Labour Party and its Discontents*, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2004), p.4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> A. Chadwick and R. Heffernan, 'Introduction: The New Labour Phenomenon', in A. Chadwick and R. Heffernan (eds.), *The New Labour Reader*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp.1-25, p.1.

taste victory, they wanted to win, to govern and then to win again and again'.<sup>44</sup> Blair as Leader of the Opposition was more willing than Neil Kinnock to challenge some of the traditions within Labour's ethos. However, he chose strategies that were, wherever possible, not openly hostile to those same traditions. Those at the top of New Labour recognised that their individual interpretations of Labour's ethos existed alongside, and sometimes clashed with, a dominant interpretation accepted across the movement. The early political strategies of the New Labour leadership also showed sensitivity to traditions they did not personally accept. As the years went by, Blair gradually ceased to engage with those traditions.

I am not seeking to dispute the argument that Blair and his team selectively associated themselves with certain aspects of Labour's history. Nor dispute that they retold Labour's history in a way which sought to portray elements of the 'Old' in a negative light, and to reconstruct the party's identity following the perceived embarrassment of the late 1970s and early 80s. I agree with Randall's argument that New Labour had a 'focus on particular moments in the party's history and... [a] differential gaze upon particular policy areas within the party's prospectus. As such, this mobilisation by New Labour is perhaps best understood as a *disarticulation* of the party from its past', better conveying 'the complexity of the pattern of recollection and forgetting in which New Labour was engaged'.<sup>45</sup> I develop this argument, with applicability to the party's ethos, by drawing a contrast to New Labour's (principally Blair's) early engagement with the party's ethos with a relative disengagement as the years of office ticked by. The result was similar to Randall's observation about New Labour's relationship with the party's past: one of disarticulation, leaving the project, its architects and inheritors unanchored when it came to Labour's traditions.

### **Structure of the thesis**

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical underpinning for my understanding of ethos, enhancing its effectiveness as a tool for political analysis. Based on Drucker's

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<sup>44</sup> Cronin, *New Labour's Pasts*, p.5.

<sup>45</sup> N. Randall, 'Time and British Politics: Memory, the present and teleology in the politics of New Labour', *British Politics*, Vol.4, No.2, (2009), pp.188-216, pp.193-194.

clearest definition of ethos – that is the beliefs, characteristic procedures and feelings<sup>46</sup> which help to ‘animate’<sup>47</sup> Labour Party people – Labour’s ethos is understood in this study as being comprised of shared and competing traditions. I argue in Chapter 1 that actors hold certain beliefs about what Labour’s ethos is which are derived from these traditions. Traditions can become dominant within Labour, gaining greater salience and acting as a constraint or a resource, depending on an actor’s individual interpretation. Labour’s ethos – through this dual understanding – can shape an actor’s ideas and actions. Chapter 1 also explores the relevance of Drucker’s ideas to more recent and contemporary debates regarding the role of ‘tradition’. In particular, I focus in Chapter 1 on the work of Bevir and Rhodes, and ‘the contestation between interpretivists and critical realists about whether meanings and traditions exist independently of individual subjects’.<sup>48</sup>

The argument I unpack in Chapter 1 is broadly consistent with the view that ‘agents interpret traditions, but these interpretations are constrained by the way in which those traditions are inscribed in institutions, processes and narratives’.<sup>49</sup> As an empirical question, the enduring nature of Labour’s competing traditions suggests they cannot be easily ‘changed’ or reinvented. Actors derive interpretations of the party’s ethos already ‘inscribed’ in the existing institution and narratives. I also set out how ethos *can* – and not necessarily always *will* – shape an actor’s chosen strategies, even when an actor’s motivation for a given action appears to go against what is perceived to be the dominant ethos. For example, the outcome of a political action may be presented by an actor in a subtler way to manage any consequences for having ‘gone against’ the party’s dominant ethos, meaning its effect shouldn’t be discounted simply because it didn’t fully constrain an actor or explain their motivation. The precise outcome of a political action – from timing to content – can be affected by the party’s ethos. Ontologically, this study posits that traditions are partly constitutive of an actor’s beliefs *and* their institutional environment.

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<sup>46</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> P. Diamond and D. Richards, ‘The Case for Theoretical and Methodological Pluralism in British Political Studies: New Labour’s Political Memoirs and the British Political Tradition’, *Political Studies Review*, Vol.10, No.2, (April 2012), pp. 174-194, p.181.

<sup>49</sup> D. Marsh, M. Hall and P. Fawcett, ‘Two Cheers for Interpretivism: Deconstructing the British Political Tradition’, *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol.73, No.3, (September 2014), pp.340-348, p.341.

Epistemologically, I consider an actor’s ‘process of strategic deliberation’<sup>50</sup> as an important part of understanding political action. This deliberation can be analysed to derive empirical findings about the role of ethos.

Chapter 2 sets out the substance of the competing traditions and beliefs within Labour’s ethos along four key fault lines, presented very briefly in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of fault lines**

<b>Fault line 1</b>	Objects – clarifying Labour’s aims and values.
<b>Fault line 2</b>	Emblems – deeply-rooted policies symbolic of Labour’s identity.
<b>Fault line 3</b>	Decisions – the parliamentary party and internal democracy.
<b>Fault line 4</b>	Outsiders – ‘expressive’ and ‘instrumental’ politics.

Fault line 1 – Objects – is the product of an enduring and divisive issue in the Labour Party: should the party prioritise the articulation of a coherent socialist theory, or should it retain what some analysts have called the ‘pragmatic and unintellectual’<sup>51</sup> nub of the Labour Party? This is a divide between what one could call ‘theoretical socialists’ and ‘practical socialists’. In the case of the latter, this is also connected to a belief that Labour already has a clear purpose – to represent the interests of the working class. This fault line is rarely subject to much empirical investigation in academic literature on the modernisation of the Labour Party. Some Labour Party people are committed to articulating clearer ideological goals, while others deem such activity to be divisive, unnecessary and out of kilter with the dominant ethos of the Labour Party.

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<sup>50</sup> Hay, *Political Analysis*, p.49.

<sup>51</sup> R. Desai, *Intellectuals and Socialism*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994), p.9.

Fault line 2 – Emblems – shows how, in Drucker’s words, some Labour policies can come to play a role in ‘solidifying the ethos of the party’,<sup>52</sup> blurring the line between doctrine (changeable) and ethos (something far closer to a Labour Party person’s identity). To some Labour Party people this results in the creation of shibboleths, distinguishing Labour from the opposition but appearing outdated. To others, it means unifying emblems, providing enduring and symbolic contrasts between Labour and its electoral foes. A fault line exists between those Labour people who accept that some of the party’s policies are emblematic and untouchable, and those who see such attachments as either an ideological shortcoming or an obstacle to ‘common sense’ pragmatism. Fault line 3 – Decisions – is derived from an antagonism between the power of the movement in the country and the power of the politicians in the parliamentary party at Westminster. For some Labour Party people, politicians are delegates of the wider movement. For others, Labour must recognise Britain’s constitutional settlement, and politicians making around-the-clock decisions which can adhere to principle, but rarely await conference directives.

Finally fault line 4 – Outsiders – stems from Frank Parkin’s insight that expressive and instrumental politics are a core tension of Labour Party politics.<sup>53</sup> Expressive politics places less emphasis on ‘fairly specific material ends’<sup>54</sup> while instrumental politics places great emphasis on ‘getting things done’.<sup>55</sup> Instrumental politics places less emphasis on ‘gestures felt to be morally right’<sup>56</sup> while expressive politics places greater emphasis on ‘the defence of principles’.<sup>57</sup> However, Labour Party people rarely take an absolutist position, in spite of some of the characterisations of expressive politics that tend to come from the Labour Right (‘the politics of protest’) and of instrumental politics that tend to come from the Labour Left (the ‘abandonment of principle’). Instead Labour Party people have a different interpretation of the *blend* of these traditions, giving rise to more expressive or instrumental political styles. The fault lines considered in Chapter 2, the products of competing traditions within Labour’s ethos, attest to an important point made by Bale: that Labour ‘is a complex and shifting amalgam whose traditions act both as a

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<sup>52</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.86.

<sup>53</sup> F. Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), p.35.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.



constraint and a resource for people capable of making their own history and competing quite legitimately within the same heterodox tradition'.<sup>58</sup> I agree both that Labour's ethos is a heterodox tradition – a tradition within which are shared and competing traditions – and that Labour Party people have been competing along these four key fault lines 'quite legitimately'. There is great pluralism within the Labour Party, in doctrine and in ethos. I also address, at the beginning of Chapter 2, Labour's origins in working class communities and the changing class composition of the Labour Party (particularly in the 1980s and 90s). While it is important to revisit Drucker's arguments regarding the class basis of Labour's ethos – in light of a changing Labour membership – I argue the presence and endurance of the fault lines in Labour's ethos, in part the products of Labour's origins, reaffirms the centrality of Drucker's thesis.

Chapters 3-6 of this study analyse the impact of Labour's ethos on the process of party change during the modernisation period. Presented as 'case study' chapters, each considers one of the key fault lines in Labour's ethos through a moment of Labour's modernisation which engaged with one of these divisive issues. In Chapter 3, I consider proposed reforms to Labour's 'Party Objects' – its aims and values as a political party – that came about through the *Aims & Values* process, bridging Neil Kinnock's first and second parliaments as leader. Often considered a precursor to the much-studied Policy Review process, and consistent with Labour's developing political economy, I argue that *Aims & Values* was a limited restatement of Labour's goals. While Kinnock believed Labour's existing Party Objects – contained within Clause IV of the party's constitution – were inadequate, his decision to leave them untouched can be better understood by appreciating the role of Labour's ethos. Both Kinnock's individual interpretation of Labour's ethos, and his perception of the dominant interpretation of the time, meant that he considered clarification around Labour's Party Objects to be an unnecessary and divisive risk.

Chapter 4 considers the place of emblematic and symbolic policies in Labour's ethos. As the case study, it analyses Kinnock's approach to Labour's policy on nuclear disarmament. Prior to unilateralism being adopted under Michael Foot, disarmament

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<sup>58</sup> T. Bale, "All poke and no soak?": interpreting the Labour Party', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol.19, No.1, (February 2006), pp.101-106, p.105.

had generated controversy within the party. It had proven its ability to become a factional weapon in the battle between the Gaitskellites and the Labour Left. Yet, despite its place as an emblematic policy in Labour's history, and the enormous energy expended in changing it, unilateralism has not been subject to much political analysis in studies of Labour's modernisation. Chapter 4 looks at the role of Kinnock's individual interpretation of Labour's ethos – one which valued pragmatism over 'emblems' – and his perception of the dominant interpretation as one which placed great importance on the retention of emblematic policies.

Chapters 5 and 6 move into the New Labour years. In considering approaches to decision-making – in particular, how policy is made in the Labour Party – Chapter 5 analyses the secretive process which culminated in one of the first acts of New Labour in government: independence for the Bank of England. Again, while this issue has been subject to policy analysis, its significance as a political decision has gone under-analysed. The decision-making process was one of control and secrecy at the top of the party, with details decided upon by Blair, Brown and close aides. Yet this is not the whole story in relation to Labour's competing traditions. During this period, Blair and Brown did not opt for a strategy of open confrontation with their party. And while bypassing decision-making structures, Blair simultaneously engaged with Labour's debates regarding internal democracy. He experimented with membership plebiscites, and he recognised the distance that could emerge between detailed policy documents from Labour conferences, and an unwilling Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet hoping for greater flexibility. The juggling of a leadership preference for autonomy, along with giving voice to the wider party in decision-making, is a familiar approach of Labour leaders past and present.

Chapter 6 looks at Tony Blair's leadership campaign in 1994 and offers an analysis which positions Blair and early New Labour as a more cautious political project than is suggested by those who were involved – from Blair himself to Phillip Gould. I take Blair's leadership campaign as an example of a political strategy seeking to work *with* what New Labour perceived to be the dominant ethos of the party: one attached to its past, fond of symbols, and necessitating a blend of expressive and instrumental politics. During Labour's leadership contest, Blair published the Fabian pamphlet, *Socialism*, aimed at regaining 'the intellectual high ground, stating with clarity its

[Labour's] true identity and historic mission'.<sup>59</sup> At the time of Blair's initiative to rewrite Clause IV of the party's constitution, Brown argued the process needed 'to show that fundamental socialist values endure and continue to inspire, which is why they should be clearly reflected in both the Labour Party constitution and in Labour Party policy'.<sup>60</sup> The 'early Blair' selectively challenged, but did not disavow all of Labour's traditions. In this sense, he was different, but connected to the leaders who had preceded him. The crude instrumentalist label with which New Labour is now often tagged is not appropriate to this earlier period.

The case study chapters all conclude by discussing how distinct interpretations of the party's ethos – both individual interpretations and the dominant interpretation of the time – affected the choices of the actors involved in Labour's modernisation. The study ends with Labour's period of opposition. From the day Blair and Brown entered Downing Street, governing and Whitehall became a key part of their institutional context, necessitating a separate study in relation to the party's ethos. Analysis of New Labour requires a recognition of the different phases of New Labour, and the 'different Blairs'. The Blair who worked for years to convince his party of a different kind of socialism, or social democracy, was very different to the Blair who left office focused on 'policies that work', and indeed the recent Blair incarnation as someone seeking policies to define an electoral centre, rather than the other way around.

## **Methodology**

Bale noted those 'who believe meanings and understandings – transmitted by and constitutive of traditions... still matter as much as incentives and institutions',<sup>61</sup> must embrace an approach of 'immersion in the life-worlds of those who create and carry those meanings'<sup>62</sup> and of 'talking to people, listening to their stories, understanding how they make sense of and thereby act upon the world'.<sup>63</sup> Whether such methods are the unique preserve of interpretivists is arguable, as Bale noted.<sup>64</sup> Immersion,

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<sup>59</sup> T. Blair, *Socialism*, (London: Fabian Society, 1994), p.2.

<sup>60</sup> G. Brown and T. Wright, 'Introduction', in G. Brown and T. Wright, *Values, Visions and Voices: An Anthology of Socialism*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1995), pp.13-29, p.13.

<sup>61</sup> Bale, "'All poke and no soak?': interpreting the Labour Party", p.101.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

particularly through interviews and the building blocks of many background conversations, can be found in the work of Lewis Minkin, among others. This study is the product of such immersion, using familiar qualitative research methods to ‘tell a story’. However, the methods I have used, and the analysis I present here, are both firmly rooted in a distinctive theoretical perspective – one which considers ethos to be a determinant of party change. The ‘processes’ I investigated, interrogated and analysed are those which – I believe – help us understand ethos as a part of ‘the dynamic relationship between structure and agency’.<sup>65</sup> Positing the presence and effect of ethos on both strategic actors and a strategic context was the ‘structure’ for my research methods – a less familiar outlook.

I employed a mixed methods approach in this study. Semi-structured elite interviews formed a key part of my research, shedding light on how actors felt and what factors they considered to be most important in their strategic calculations. The ‘structure’ of the interviews was the effect of the party’s ethos, both an actor’s own understanding of it, and their perception of an organisation-wide, dominant set of traditions. Interviews are surely critical to gaining as complete an understanding as is possible of the ‘dynamic’ between structure and agency. An actor – particularly reflecting with the benefit of time having passed, and the pressure of instantaneous judgements having been taken away – can provide crucial insights into their perceptions, both of their own agency and the structural obstacles or opportunities they encountered. Similarly, relationships between the internal and the external, or the domestic and the international, can be better understood with insight into an actor’s judgements – something greatly aided by hearing from the actors themselves. As a researcher, I also benefited from the passage of time. My interviews for this study began in earnest after Labour’s 2015 election defeat. Prominent members of New Labour’s leadership team had, by that point and for different reasons, become less affected by contemporary, day-to-day Labour Party politics and could reflect, more freely, on their pasts.

All of that being said, interviews can throw up inconsistencies in a story. People can misremember, or choose to dwell on particular details that have, over time, become

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<sup>65</sup> Hay, *Political Analysis*, p. 254.

an important part of their own retelling of events. The other key parts of my research helped to mitigate some of these risks, as well as providing another rich source of insight. Archival research and textual/document analysis helped to provide a fuller account of the case studies I pursued. Through memorandums between political actors, a researcher can follow the strategic deliberations of key players involved in political decision-making. Similarly, through analysis of documents subject to numerous revisions, and with the benefit of comparing different stages of drafts to a final product, one can see how outcomes were ultimately affected.

The interviews for this study covered a broad range of political actors. They ranged from the Labour Party leadership – from the leader and their close colleagues – to trade union leaders, senior members of the parliamentary party, party officers and members of the National Executive Committee (NEC). I spoke to senior journalists from the time, often to be seen mingling in and around Labour’s HQ when an NEC meeting concluded, waiting for the leaks and briefings that inevitably followed. As has been the case in recent decades, with the ‘professionalization’<sup>66</sup> of political life, many interviewees also had careers spanning the entire modernisation period, from staffers to politicians. I interviewed 24 individuals, the majority of whom were actors at the top of the party during Labour’s modernisation, taking key decisions, drafting policies, managing relationships and providing strategic advice. Some interviewees were close observers of events or key stakeholders – themselves actors, affecting the strategic context of others and reacting to political actions. Nearly all of these interviews took place from 2015 to early 2018 (one took place in late 2014), with later interviews focusing on specific points or processes that required checking.

In the case of Charles Clarke, Neil Kinnock’s chief of staff and later Home Secretary in Tony Blair’s government, and with Ed Balls, Gordon Brown’s chief aide and later Education Secretary in Brown’s government, I conducted more than one interview. This was due not only to the generosity of both in granting me the time to talk to them more than once, but also to their central role in the case studies I analysed for this thesis. Their respective roles were often remarked upon in early conversations and ‘scoping’ interviews that I conducted before my research interviews. Identifying

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<sup>66</sup> P. Allen, *The Political Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.4.

key individuals through scoping conversations, and research of both primary and secondary sources, can lead to elite interviewing of those ‘in the room’, or consistently mentioned by other actors as knowing the ins and outs of something. This forms a part of the ‘process-tracing’ method: ‘When researchers use process tracing, the key issues to consider when drawing the sample are to ensure that the most important and influential actors are included, and that testimony concerning the key process is collected from the central players involved.’<sup>67</sup>

The process of identifying interviewees, approaching them, and conducting long, in-depth conversations was aided, at least in part, by my institutional experience. While I was not a participant in the events analysed in this study (I was in my first year at secondary school when Tony Blair became Prime Minister), I began working in Labour Party politics as a young graduate after Blair’s departure from Number 10 in 2007. Over the years of working with more senior staff and politicians, I made connections that were very helpful in both the scheduling and process of elite interviewing. My work with some of the politicians I interviewed (however brief), and my institutional knowledge more generally, made the interview experience a more familiar one for me. Interviewees already had, of course, great experience of speaking to people about their judgements and their views – be they journalists, researchers, party members or voters. What I benefited from was, more than anything, time with elite actors and the opportunity to ask questions about specific processes and events. I defined my subjects of interest very clearly to those I interviewed, which provided some certainty for those involved about what they could usefully reflect upon, as well as some reassurance that more contemporary political affairs – such as what was in the newspaper on a given day – was not important to me. From my experience of working with politicians, clarity over subject matter is vital to an open and engaging interview experience.

In addition to the archival research I undertook for this study, I have also had access to unarchived papers, including notes produced for the policy of Bank independence, and speeches which are currently not available in research libraries. Memoirs and more contemporary accounts also helped provide a clearer picture of events, or the

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<sup>67</sup> O. Tansey, ‘Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-Probability Sampling’, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol.40, No.4, (October 2017), pp.765-772, p.769.

strategic calculations involved. Often these sources were mutually reinforcing, showing the distinct interpretations of Labour's ethos which individuals held – including the key political actors involved – as well as the perceptions and judgements from those at the top of the party about the dominant ethos of the movement. These perceptions and judgements were about what actors thought would 'work' and what wouldn't. Their judgements on what people could 'take'. Or, in Kinnock's words, what would make the Labour Party 'tanker' snap in half? These considerations – if not in the precise language I've presented here – came across strongly in the interviews, papers and other primary sources from the period. Overall, this study is an example of a 'high politics' approach, something which can help us understand how political actors think, 'even if they are more or less constrained and to some extent formed by... institutions and ideas'.<sup>68</sup> A risk and potential limitation of such an approach is to divorce the decisions taken at the top of political parties from our understanding of the 'grassroots'. This study does attempt to understand 'high' politics in the context of party politics more generally, including interactions with party members and perceptions of how they feel and what drives them. I do believe that chance encounters in Labour Party committee rooms can affect – however minimally – the strategic context of political actors. I discuss bridging this gap a little more in this study's conclusion.

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<sup>68</sup> T. Bale, *The Conservative Party, From Thatcher to Cameron (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), p.15.

## Chapter 1

### The party has a life of its own: ethos as a determinant of party change

‘No amount of instruction on the playing fields of Eton and Winchester could ever be a substitute for the lore to be learnt at Cardiff Arms Park, White Hart Lane, Highbury or Home Park.’

Michael Foot, *The Uncollected Michael Foot*

#### **Introduction**

Following Tony Blair’s victory in the Labour Party’s 1994 leadership election, Tony Benn watched the new leader’s speech, and reflected in his diary:

‘I watched Blair carefully, because I’ve never heard him make a general speech, and it was really quite radical... I think he’s frightened the life out of the Liberals. The Tories must be frightened in the South. He got a huge ovation. It was a good and radical speech and I have no complaint about it at all.’<sup>69</sup>

Twelve years later Blair addressed Labour’s annual conference for the final time as leader of the party, having signalled his intention to resign as party leader and prime minister the following summer. Benn’s reflections on this conference address read rather differently to his 1994 diary entry:

‘He [Blair] hectorated us and bullied us, and “change”, “change, change”, “got to change!”, “you’ve got to change!”, making us feel totally inadequate.’<sup>70</sup>

When Blair left office less than a year later, Benn noted he ‘didn’t mention any other minister, or anything to do with the Labour Party, anything to do with the Cabinet. It was a monarchical address, the abdication of King Tony’.<sup>71</sup> Nearly a decade in government had seen Blair’s popularity wane, both inside and outside of the Labour Party. From Benn’s perspective, policy differences – particularly on foreign affairs

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<sup>69</sup> T. Benn, *Free At Last! Diaries 1991-2001*, (London: Arrow Books, 2003), p.258.

<sup>70</sup> T. Benn, *More Time For Politics: Diaries 2001-2007*, (London: Hutchinson, 2007), p.331.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.366.



and the Iraq war – had turned Blair into a man with few friends.<sup>72</sup> Gordon Brown, while watching the 9/11 attacks unfold, told his aides that ‘while economics had dominated the previous decade, security and foreign policy.... would be front and centre in the coming one’.<sup>73</sup> While the 2008 financial crash and longer term trends of economic fragility would ultimately take over by the end of the noughties, in terms of Blair’s trajectory as Prime Minister, Brown was right. Alongside Blair’s focus on ‘system change’<sup>74</sup> in public services, his commitment to the United Kingdom’s diplomatic and military alliance with the United States came to define his premiership and consume both his time and political capital. Yet, while Benn was never a New Labour man (to say the least) and while Blair’s record as prime minister had soured any feelings of warmth Benn may have felt for a Labour colleague, what is particularly noteworthy for this study from the two Benn diary entries is what they say about Blair’s attitude and behaviour towards his own party, and the response he received from people like Benn.

In 1994 Blair was focused on the Labour Party because, as a newly elected opposition leader, that was his job. By 2007, his job was more complicated and far more demanding. Yet when he turned his attention to his party – and this had become rarer towards the end of his time as prime minister – he had stopped speaking its language. Assuming his party was now thinking and acting in a new way, Blair sought to entrench his policy agenda, rather than consolidate a political one. Blair had stopped advocating for a ‘project’ connected with the traditions and history of the Labour Party. What he – and, to be fair, the vast majority of Labour people – did not see was that the party was only a spell of opposition away from junking Blair’s politics and his (later) policies. He had ceased to engage with his party’s ethos, and this cost him and his successors. This narrative, from an engaged Blair versed in the competing traditions within Labour’s ethos, adopting strategies that were quite nuanced and sensitive to Labour’s traditions and beliefs, to a later Blair who disengaged, thinking (wrongly) that only doctrine mattered, is relatively absent from the existing literature.

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<sup>72</sup> Benn, *More Time For Politics*, p.346.

<sup>73</sup> G. Brown, *My Life, Our Times*, (London: The Bodley Head, 2017) p.248.

<sup>74</sup> T. Blair, *A Journey*, (London: Hutchinson, 2010), p.503.

This chapter has two objectives. The first is to provide a clearer theoretical basis for the concept of ethos, and to understand its role in both the actions of strategic actors and a strategic context. The second is to position this study within the existing literature, highlighting the ‘ethos gap’, and setting out how analysing ethos as a determinant of party change can affect our understanding of Labour’s modernisation. This thesis analyses how something *internal* to the Labour Party – ethos – interacts with both external and other internal factors. Labour’s modernisation period, from the aftermath of the 1983 election defeat, to Tony Blair’s electoral triumph in 1997 and beyond, has been much studied. Labour’s policy programme was transformed during this period, a process inseparable in the early years of modernisation from Neil Kinnock’s organisational reforms, and one which sped up as Kinnock progressed towards the 1992 election. Building on these reforms, and following John Smith’s brief tenure as leader before his sudden death, Blair went further in trimming and refining Labour’s prospectus. There are significant differences in academic interpretations of this policy change, both in its substance and in understanding the drivers behind it, but there is general agreement that policy was changed.

Subject to far less attention in academic studies is the role of Labour’s ethos. Neither its substance nor its role as a determinant of party change during Labour’s modernisation have been sufficiently explored. It has been suggested that in the 1990s, Labour’s ‘ethos was altered consciously to exclude its traditional members and styles of discourse’,<sup>75</sup> and that Tony Blair ‘produced a fundamental reordering’<sup>76</sup> of the party’s ethos. Yet what Labour’s ethos is – and was during the period in question – has not been adequately established. Scholars sensitive to the party’s internal habits and traditions, including Eric Shaw, have considered such internal factors to have affected, and aided, the modernisation process. As Shaw noted in relation to the Kinnock period, Labour people ‘do not act exclusively as individuals but as actors within an organisation with its own independently existing ethos, norms, customs and traditions’.<sup>77</sup> The party’s ethos – both its instinct to support its leader,

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<sup>75</sup> B. Brivati and R. Heffernan, ‘Introduction’ in B. Brivati and R. Heffernan (eds.), *The Labour Party: A Centenary History*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp.1-7, p.6.

<sup>76</sup> Chadwick and Heffernan, ‘Introduction’, p.1.

<sup>77</sup> E. Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979: Crisis and Transformation*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.164.

and a gradually accruing urge for electoral victory – were important, Shaw argued, in understanding how Kinnock worked *with* his party in order to change it.<sup>78</sup>

Yet Shaw also noted, in a comparatively short section on ethos, that his findings relied heavily on interviews,<sup>79</sup> (suggesting ‘something’ important was there, but hard to pin down) while his thoughts on the scope of ethos as a determinant of party change were limited to Labour’s tradition of loyalty to its leadership. Shaw recognised a leader (in Kinnock) motivated by factors outside of Labour Party committee rooms – factors *exogenous* to Labour as an organisation – and the crucial interaction with factors alive and well in constituency Labour parties throughout the land – factors *endogenous* to Labour as an organisation. Overall, the current academic literature on Labour’s modernisation period goes little further than that recognition. And where it does go further – as with Cronin’s work – ethos is presented as an assortment of baggage New Labour sought to dump, rather than as competing traditions which early New Labour sought to engage and interact with, utilising arguments found within the party’s heterodox tradition. The first part of this chapter significantly develops Drucker’s concept of ethos. Informed by more recent work on tradition, I unpack how Labour’s ethos – comprised of shared and competing traditions – is understood and debated within the party. The second part considers the ‘ethos gap’ in the existing literature and examines how filling it affects our understanding of Labour’s modernisation.

### **Clarifying terms**

Both the brevity and discursive nature of *Doctrine and Ethos* are, in some ways, what make Drucker’s work such a stimulating read. Yet they have also, perhaps, limited its application in contemporary political science. Drucker noted that Labour’s ethos included the ‘traditions, beliefs, characteristic procedures and feelings which help to animate the members of the party’,<sup>80</sup> but his concept of ethos has not been developed in literature interpreting the Labour Party. In Cronin’s work, he noted that ‘the vague... powerful political culture of the party’<sup>81</sup> was expressed most effectively by

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<sup>78</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.165.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>80</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> Cronin, *New Labour’s Pasts*, p.50.

Drucker, but the concept itself remains unclear in the literature. Similarly David Marquand, in his stimulating work on the party which I will return to later in this chapter, noted the importance of Drucker's insight,<sup>82</sup> but again left it undeveloped as an analytical tool. This section of this chapter will seek to clarify and significantly develop Drucker's original insight. First, I consider the plethora of terms which could be considered relevant to 'ethos', and explain my narrowing of terminology to 'traditions'. I then explore Drucker's insights into how traditions work within the Labour Party, and consider them alongside more contemporary debates regarding the role of tradition. I then explain this study's framework of shared and competing traditions, with individual and dominant interpretations, and how Labour Party people are socialised in the 'practical knowledge' of these traditions and beliefs.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of ethos is 'the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community manifested in its attitudes and aspirations'. This definition is pretty close to one used by Drucker when he wrote that 'by the ethos of the party I have in mind what an earlier age might have called the spirit of the party; its traditions and habits, its feel'.<sup>83</sup> Put another way, Drucker also argued the Labour Party 'has a life of its own'<sup>84</sup> and was not simply 'a vote-gathering machine'.<sup>85</sup> As Shaw wrote of Lewis Minkin's work, accepting Drucker's concept means understanding political actors and their actions as 'explicable only in terms of the social milieu they inhabit, their upbringing and their social experiences and relationships'.<sup>86</sup> Jobson made a similar point about Minkin, noting that 'in a similar manner to Drucker... [he has] paved the way for new interpretations of the [Labour] party's post-war trajectory that stressed the critical nature of the role that had been played by less visible underlying factors'.<sup>87</sup> Minkin is the most notable proponent of the role of 'norms' in Labour Party literature.

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<sup>82</sup> D. Marquand, *The Progressive Dilemma*, (London: Phoenix, 1999), p.221.

<sup>83</sup> H. Drucker, 'The influence of the trade unions on the ethos of the Labour Party', in B. Pimlott and C. Cook (eds.), *Trade Unions in British Politics: The First 250 Years*, (New York: Longman, 1991), pp.243-255, p.244.

<sup>84</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.vii.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> E. Shaw, 'Lewis Minkin and the party-unions link' in J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam, *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour politics and history*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.166-181, p.173.

<sup>87</sup> R. Jobson, *Nostalgia and the post-war Labour Party*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) p.19.

Minkin's understanding of the trade union-party dynamic was defined by:

'...patterns of inhibitions and unwritten "rules". I described how this was based on role playing, and a differentiation of functions and spheres of the industrial and the political. It was also based upon a core of fundamental values shared by the Labour Party and trade union leaderships. This framework enabled observers to see the party-union relationship in dramatically different terms... and it proved to be readily recognisable to the players.'<sup>88</sup>

All of this makes the definition of what, exactly, the Labour Party's own 'life' is unclear. The term ethos is often accompanied or replaced by other terms, including political culture, norms, customs, role-playing, rules or habits. To fully appreciate any effect ethos may have on the strategies of political actors, we must define it more clearly. This is not a simple task. Wickham-Jones has argued that while 'norms' – that is a standard or pattern of social behaviour – have a role in our understanding of Labour's political change, 'it is by no means clear... that customs, traditions and habits have played a primary role in Labour politics over the last two decades or so'.<sup>89</sup> Partly, this lack of clarity over the role played by norms is due to the number of terms falling under the umbrella of 'norms' – something Wickham-Jones also noted.<sup>90</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm provided a useful categorisation to narrow this terminology. He argued that some terms can have technical as much as ideological justifications.<sup>91</sup> For instance, 'customs' or 'habits' can be intertwined with 'traditions', but a distinction can be made 'between tradition... and convention or routine, which has no significant ritual or symbolic function as such'.<sup>92</sup> For example, it may be the custom or habit of Labour Party leaders to attend all trade union receptions held at the party's annual

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<sup>88</sup> L. Minkin, *Exits and Entrances: Political Research as a Creative Art*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 1997), p.271.

<sup>89</sup> M. Wickham-Jones, 'Lewis Minkin's Labours: The Developing Party-Trade Union Relationship', *Political Studies Review*, Vol.14, No.2, (May 2016), pp.175-188, p.180.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>91</sup> E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.1-14, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

conference. While attending these receptions, it may be a tradition for the leader to include in their speech a passage on the indivisibility of the party-union ‘link’ and to attack real or imagined arguments for severing such a link. The former – simply attending – has no real meaning in itself. The latter is invested with meaning and could, therefore, be labelled a tradition. Based on Drucker’s original definition, and informed by Hobsbawm’s argument regarding the difference between ‘routine’ and something invested with meaning, this study understands ethos as shared and competing traditions. These traditions incorporate both practices and beliefs. How we understand tradition (including the basis for its existence), its role in ‘socialising’ people within an institution and the extent to which actors can alter traditions is the next area of focus for this chapter.

## **Tradition**

Tradition, Mark Bevir has argued, is ‘a set of understandings someone acquires as an initial web of beliefs’.<sup>93</sup> Actors can ‘come to hold beliefs, and so act, only against the background of a social inheritance; but this inheritance does not limit the beliefs they later can go on to hold, or the actions they can go on to perform’.<sup>94</sup> As individuals inherit traditions, they interpret them and pass on their individual interpretations. This point is linked to Bevir’s discussion of how our understanding of traditions interacts with intentionality. He has argued that ‘individuals necessarily reach the beliefs they do against the background of a social tradition... [However] we do not have to give up intentionality to accept that individuals can neither reach the understandings they do nor make the utterances they do in isolation from society. Intentionalism is compatible with a belief that that the social context necessarily influences what people see, believe, and say’.<sup>95</sup>

There is a similar argument in Bevir’s later work with Rhodes. ‘Tradition is a starting point,’ they suggested, ‘... we think of tradition as an initial influence on people that colours their later actions only if their agency has not led them to change it’.<sup>96</sup> This point was reiterated by Bevir and Rhodes in more recent work, where they argued

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<sup>93</sup> M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.200.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>96</sup> M. Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.3.

that ‘people act against the backcloth of inherited traditions that influence them. But people can vary these traditions for reasons of their own in response to circumstances, so these traditions do not determine what they come to believe and do’.<sup>97</sup> On the subject of change, Bevir and Rhodes focused on ‘dilemmas’, defined as ‘any experience or idea that conflicts with someone’s beliefs, and so forces them to alter the beliefs they inherit as a tradition’.<sup>98</sup>

The concept of tradition is incredibly flexible in the work of Bevir and Rhodes. They are said to be ‘evolving, adaptable... they are sometimes resilient and enduring, and at other times ambivalent or contradictory in their core beliefs. Some parts are codified and rule-bound; others exist as a loosely connected constellation of ideas variously constructed by participants or observers’.<sup>99</sup> Such flexibility in defining tradition can lead to mixed outcomes. In an analysis of how civil servants interact with ‘Westminster traditions’, Bevir and Rhodes argued that civil servants ‘exist in, and are subordinate to, a legitimate political authority. So, there is a derivative character to their traditions. They work in formalized traditions of governance that are dependent and contingent on the political process and notions of proper decision making and accountability’.<sup>100</sup> This conclusion is suggestive of institutional traditions, resulting in ‘formalized’<sup>101</sup> traditions and ways of working. Similarly, civil servants also work within ‘administrative bureaucracies with strong norms, precepts and values’,<sup>102</sup> yet they also cultivate and preserve other traditions.<sup>103</sup>

An interesting example that Bevir and Rhodes used is of a Cabinet Secretary in the UK Civil Service who, in the midst of Whitehall reform and New Labour’s approach to governance, used his valedictory address to staff to ‘identify and preserve the virtues of the traditional civil service in the face of recent challenges...it represents a reinterpretation of administrative traditions... defending *their* understanding of *their* administrative traditions’.<sup>104</sup> This is a compelling example of competing traditions,

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<sup>97</sup> M. Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes, *The State as Cultural Practice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.197.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.158.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165.

where a political actor (albeit a ‘neutral’ one) seeks to argue the case for a longstanding tradition in the face of increasingly strong arguments for a competing tradition. However, the scope this actor appears to have to ‘reinvent’ or vary tradition seems limited. It is certainly the case that an actor, exercising agency, is seeking to *explain* their view of their institution, utilising traditions that compete with others. Yet the Cabinet Secretary is utilising traditions inherited from previous generations, not changing them. Putting forward the vision of an impartial, all-knowing civil service as a counter weight to political masters is not the ‘reinterpretation’<sup>105</sup> of a tradition, but the defence of an existing one.

The vagueness in the use of tradition by Bevir and Rhodes has been commented upon. Smith argued that ‘exactly what tradition is doing, what it is sustaining and what it is not, is difficult to see’,<sup>106</sup> in their work. Furthermore, ‘the causal relationship between traditions and beliefs is vague. Traditions exist but do not determine. They are strong in that they socialise, but weak in not preventing other forms of beliefs’.<sup>107</sup> Classical interpretivists, Smith wrote, are concerned with ‘how norms fix the way people act’.<sup>108</sup> Yet Bevir and Rhodes, ‘in ignoring the ways in which norms and institutions shape and, on occasions, determine (although always with the possibility of not determining) behaviour, are ignoring both power and social structures. When humans are placed within a web of power relations, actions and institutions may depend on beliefs, or beliefs may be a consequence of webs of power relations’.<sup>109</sup> And on the agency of a political actor to alter traditions, Smith concluded that classical interpretivism suggests that ‘although institutions are socially created, they are not subject to change as a consequence of the beliefs of most people’.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, Marsh responded to Bevir and Rhodes by arguing that ‘traditions (or a dominant tradition) will be inscribed in institutions (and processes), as well as in ideas, and, as such, will shape but not determine ideas. Consequently, I do not reify traditions. Rather, I suggest that there is a degree of path-dependency, not

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<sup>105</sup> Bevir and Rhodes, *The State as Cultural Practice*, p.165.

<sup>106</sup> M. J. Smith, ‘Re-centring British Government: Beliefs, Traditions and Dilemmas in Political Science’, *Political Studies Review*, Vol.6, No.2, (May 2008), pp.143-154, p.146.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*



path-determinacy; how much is an empirical question'.<sup>111</sup> In other words, past experience and traditions can affect a person's beliefs – and their judgement is dependent on their strategic context, which is itself informed by traditions. In this understanding, tradition does not determine or dictate a path, but nor does it allow for such flexibility that traditions can be easily reconstructed on the basis of an individual's ideas.

That tradition 'affects how agents interpret and respond to events'<sup>112</sup> is a point of agreement in much of the literature, and one that reinforces Drucker's central thesis in *Doctrine and Ethos*. As Diamond and Richards noted, 'the insight of interpretivist approaches is that in order to understand actions, practices and institutions, it is vital to grasp the beliefs and preferences of individual actors and the meanings that they ascribe to particular events'.<sup>113</sup> This is undoubtedly helpful in understanding Labour's ethos and how it influences a political actor's motivations and strategies. I agree with Bevir and Rhodes that actors 'necessarily come to hold the beliefs they do within a social context that influences them. To explain the beliefs of a particular individual, we have to appeal to an aggregate concept, such as tradition, that evokes this social context'.<sup>114</sup> Where the work of Bevir and Rhodes stirs controversy – and clashes with Drucker's concept of ethos – is in their insistence that 'traditions have no existence apart from in the contingent beliefs of particular individuals'<sup>115</sup> thus making traditions 'contingent, produced by the actions of individuals' with 'every strand of a tradition... in principle open to change'.<sup>116</sup>

Drucker undoubtedly considered meanings and traditions to exist independently of individual Labour Party people. Labour's ethos, Drucker argued, involved 'internalised'<sup>117</sup> traditions that endure. Unlike doctrine, they are not 'always open to challenge' or to modification 'if experience shows this to be necessary'.<sup>118</sup> In the sense that all meanings and traditions emerge from social contexts, Drucker believed

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<sup>111</sup> Marsh, 'What is at Stake?', p.737.

<sup>112</sup> Diamond and Richards, 'The Case for Theoretical and Methodological Pluralism', p.183.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.181.

<sup>114</sup> Bevir and Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance*, p.2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p.33.

<sup>117</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.21.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

Labour's ethos sprang from working class communities, and that despite substantial change in those communities and in the Labour Party, those traditions were enduring, and inscribed in the institution of the Labour Party – leading to a clash between the party's defensive ethos and the party's parliamentary group.<sup>119</sup> The enduring nature of Labour's competing traditions, including beliefs and practices from the party's roots in working class communities, suggests that Drucker was right. The concept of a 'dilemma' as articulated by Bevir and Rhodes has some applicability to competing traditions. An event or action can interact significantly with a dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos, questioning it, weakening the potency of some of the key arguments. I don't, however, believe this means Labour's ethos has changed. Rather, there has been a shift between competing traditions within Labour's ethos, affecting the role of ethos in an actor's strategic environment, loosening a constraint, or catalysing action.

My understanding of ethos is closer to that of Marsh, and to Hay's contention that 'institutionally situated actors [are] orienting themselves towards their institutional environment through a series of subjective and intersubjective understandings... and normative dispositions'.<sup>120</sup> In other words, the subjective (personal) and intersubjective (shared) aspects of the Labour Party's ethos are relevant to how Labour Party people behave. Both an actor's preferences, and therefore 'agency', alongside social institutions, and therefore 'structure', matter. Conscious actors see and engage with the normative aspects of an institution. They also have their own beliefs about those norms and traditions. Without reifying (as Marsh put it) traditions, but seeing them as relevant to our understanding of strategic actors and their strategic context, I see Labour Party people as acting in a way informed by the shared and competing traditions within Labour's ethos. This study argues for a dual understanding of Labour's ethos: an *individual* interpretation of the party's ethos and the *dominant* interpretation. The individual interpretation represents an actor's beliefs and preferences on the matter of Labour's competing traditions. The dominant interpretation represents what is considered by Labour Party people to be the prevailing narrative on those competing traditions, gaining additional resonance.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.111.

<sup>120</sup> C. Hay, 'Social Constructivism' in M. Bevir and R. A. W Rhodes, *Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp.99-112, p.105.

<sup>121</sup> Diamond and Richards, 'The Case for Theoretical and Methodological Pluralism', p.183.

This formulation seeks to remedy the grey area between institutional influence and an actor's interpretation of them. Both an individual interpretation and the dominant interpretation include shared practices and traditions which are relatively uncontroversial, as well as competing traditions, which are more controversial. With regard to an individual's interpretation, their views are still derived from Labour's ethos, as Marsh argued in relation to actors interpreting traditions, but being subject to the constraint of how 'those traditions are inscribed in institutions, processes and narratives'.<sup>122</sup> Neither a Labour actor's individual interpretation, nor the dominant one provide *the* explanation for a person's actions. Rather, as I noted in the Introduction to this study, ethos *can* shape an actor's chosen strategies. And as with the concepts of a strategic actor and a strategic context, the individual and dominant interpretations are relational and form a part of an actor's strategic calculations. This means actors can challenge dominant traditions, be reinforced by them, or be constrained, depending on the preferences of the actor and their strategic deliberations.

### **Inherited tradition**

A further pertinent point from Drucker, also relevant to recent debates on tradition, is on people becoming 'socialised'. Drucker saw Labour Party people inheriting traditions from previous generations, like Bevir and Rhodes. However, Drucker did not develop arguments as to how people become socialised, or how they experience Labour's competing traditions. He did make the distinction between doctrine as a debatable, paper-based set of ideas and ethos as a set of traditions arising from experience.<sup>123</sup> Doctrine could be adopted, altered and re-adopted, all with a paper trail and not in any way confined 'to those who have long been acquainted with it'.<sup>124</sup> In contrast, ethos was not 'open to recruitment by agreement'<sup>125</sup> in the same way. Labour people – through family and community – had a direct link to the lived experience of working class life, while 'intellectual members of the Labour movement' could 'seek to understand, and to be sympathetic to, the ethos of the

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<sup>122</sup> Marsh, Hall and Fawcett, 'Two Cheers for Interpretivism', p.341.

<sup>123</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, pp.8-10.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

workers'.<sup>126</sup> In understanding the process through which Labour's ethos is interpreted by Labour Party people, this study adopts Michael Oakeshott's articulation of 'technical' and 'practical' knowledge. 'Every human activity whatsoever, involves knowledge,' Oakeshott argued, 'and, universally, this knowledge is of two sorts, both of which are always involved in any actual activity.'<sup>127</sup> The first sort of knowledge Oakeshott called 'technical knowledge', where the knowledge is 'formulated into rules... [and where] its chief characteristic is that it is susceptible of precise formulation'.<sup>128</sup> The second sort of knowledge is 'practical', it 'exists only in use... the method by which it may be shared and becomes common knowledge is not the method of formulated doctrine'.<sup>129</sup>

The two forms of knowledge are 'distinguishable but inseparable',<sup>130</sup> and while 'technical knowledge can be learned from a book... practical knowledge can neither be taught nor learned, but only imparted and acquired... [and] acquired only by continuous contact with one who is perpetually practising it'.<sup>131</sup> Like Drucker, it's important to stress that Oakeshott's theory does not mean to suggest that doctrine, or technical knowledge, is for intellectuals, and that ethos, or practical knowledge, is for workers – and that the latter is a 'less demanding, less articulate' level of knowledge.<sup>132</sup> Far from it. As Oakeshott notes, both forms of knowledge are inseparable. The concept of practical knowledge, and Drucker's more limited thinking on how Labour's ethos is passed on, rely on experience within the Labour Party, regular contact with fellow Labour Party members, and the resultant socialisation into an institution inscribed with the shared and competing traditions of Labour's ethos.

This leads us to considering how Labour's political actors surmise Labour's dominant ethos. Neil Kinnock's process of party engagement, the ways in which he would interact with and reach a judgement on the dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos, and how he factored this in to his wider strategic context, illustrates this well. In a

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<sup>126</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.10.

<sup>127</sup> M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), p.12.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>132</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p. 11.

1993 Institute of Historical Research seminar, a paper given by Kinnock summarised his view of the 1983 Labour Party. ‘Labour was increasingly seen to be a party slipping towards impossibilism,’ Kinnock wrote, ‘succumbing to fads, riven by vicious divisions, speaking the language of sloganized dogma – and usually voicing it in the accents of menace. It was almost as if sections of the party measured the purity of their socialism by the distance which they could put between it and the minds of the British people. These characteristics... were not, of course, typical of the great majority of party members. But it is an inevitability of politics that the nature of a party is judged not so much by the modulated voice of the many as by the braying of the few.’<sup>133</sup> Here Kinnock noted a familiar observation, certainly among more contemporary leaders of the Labour Party, that a vocal minority can lead to the party as a whole being seen as a reflection of the few.

That Labour’s institutional structures, from local branches upwards, had people in positions of power who were reluctant to embrace change was a point Kinnock returned to. ‘I was aware from wide personal contact that there was a body of opinion in the Labour Party that, in the wake of the defeat of 1983, would either embrace change eagerly or – at worst – give it the benefit of the doubt,’ Kinnock noted. ‘That asset was not, however, readily available. Its supply was blocked to some extent by those who thought of themselves as guardians of the soul of Labour. Many of the people, sitting on General Committees and other decision-making bodies had armoured themselves against public opinion and changing realities and were constantly on the look-out for what they considered to be “deviation” ... Some could, as time passed, be persuaded by argument and they were. Others were going to have to be superseded by the more general realism of party members.’<sup>134</sup>

Gauging the dominant ethos of his party, and reaching judgements, was an ongoing process for Kinnock. He ‘began a series of regular meetings with leading trade unionists and dialogues with party sympathisers with particular specialist capabilities’ as well as ‘periodic regional meetings with ordinary members of the party... they were conducted as question and answer sessions and, although the attendances always

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<sup>133</sup> N. Kinnock, ‘Reforming the Labour Party’, *Contemporary Record*, Vol.8, No.3, (Winter 1994), pp.535-554, p.535.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.537.

ran into hundreds, none of the confidences that were frankly – and sometimes acrimoniously – exchanged in such meetings, over a period of nearly eight years, ever became public’.<sup>135</sup> In addition, Labour MPs ‘naturally, had to have attention. In some cases MPs would bring genuine matters of concern and we would talk them through – sometimes with effect. In other cases I would seek out members of the PLP for discussion, and meetings of that kind were usually more productive’.<sup>136</sup>

In an interview for this study, Kinnock expanded on these reflections, with particular pertinence for some of the arguments I have put forward in this chapter. Kinnock recognised that there were different interpretations within the Labour Party with regard to what he called the ‘social or organisation ethos’.<sup>137</sup> Within this, Kinnock argued, was a ‘split personality’, though split in a number of ways:

‘The split personality is a large number of people in the Labour Party, mainly rank and file, who recognise the absolute priority of winning. Their perception is substantially at local government level, because they witness and [are] enraged by the way in which Tory councils... inflicted unnecessary woe on their localities. In reaction against that, they organise, they work... they produce policies that are consistent with the general theme of Labour... and they manage, they whip, they have tight – sometimes oversight – group discipline, and they win... That is the body of the Labour Party, it is made up of people who want to win.

‘The other part of the split personality is people who either believe that it’s Labour’s natural right to rule, and if it wasn’t for the newspapers poisoning the minds of the proletariat, people would recognise that it is in their own individual, family and community interest to have a Labour government... the larger grouping understands the realities, but thinks that the function of Labour is to represent more than to manage or to organise... thirdly, there are the people who don’t really care much about power, they’d rather be right... faced with challenges many of them will develop pragmatism, will negotiate,

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<sup>135</sup> Kinnock, ‘Reforming the Labour Party’, p.539.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Lord Kinnock, interview by author, London, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

will concede, will strike deals, but left to their own devices, without being confronted, they're very happy to belong to a protest movement.'<sup>138</sup>

While inwardly pragmatic on policy, and armed with the primary objective of returning Labour to power, outwardly Kinnock appeared to sympathise with those committed to Labour's programme, and was reluctant to say publicly – at least early on in his leadership – that programmatic and organisational change was necessary. This caution was heavily due not only to the organisational strength of the Labour Left, but to Kinnock's perception of a party institutionally incapable of sudden change. 'When the party is demoralised,' Kinnock argued, 'especially in the wake of defeat... those who are idle... can be the voices of resentment, antagonism, protest, kick against the traces, poke the establishment in the eye with a sharp stick, can get a surge of support.'<sup>139</sup> This, Kinnock believed, had happened after Labour's 1979 defeat, and – as with the differentiation between technical and practical knowledge – Kinnock absorbed evidence of it over the years, from the drama of Labour's high politics and his place on the NEC, to his own constituency – where experienced party hands, in the group of Labour people Kinnock viewed as steeped in local government, discipline, and winning elections, expressed dismay.

'Any thinking person didn't need to be taught that, all the evidence was right before you... those years between 1980 and 1983, of anarchy and civil war, which was enjoyed by some, particularly the Bennites, that was exploited by ultra-Leftists... so I understood in about '81... in the wake of the Denis Healey/Benn contest... I sat on that stage and thought "you bloody idiot, why didn't you vote for Healey", [Kinnock abstained on the deputy leadership ballot] because it was a nail biter and at that juncture I thought Benn had won by a couple of per cent, happily he lost... in the wake of that, the following Friday was my monthly GC [General Committee], and I went out for a drink as I always did with my closest mates... real comrades, [they said] "what are we going to do, what are we going to do" ... I was on the NEC and I knew that the organisation was a shambles... I saw at first-hand how we couldn't sustain the broad church... [however] there was a big impediment [to change].

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<sup>138</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

Defeat didn't teach everyone the same lesson... [the Left] were substantially in control of the institutions of the party... this was a tanker that was going to have to be turned around in a very measured way... [otherwise] the tanker would have snapped in half.<sup>140</sup>

The conclusions Kinnock reached early on about political strategy were based on his judgement, and the judgements of those he trusted and could confide in. His perception of the party's ethos, which so preoccupied him, was not something written down, nor based on systematic analysis and a ready flow of information. Instead, Kinnock's strategic context was affected by his own interactions – from the 'high' to 'low' politics – and from intelligence fed to him across the country, from friends, Members of Parliament, party officers and others. The extent to which Kinnock's judgement was right is, of course, debatable. Kinnock perhaps knew better than most what Labour's members in the South Wales valleys made of the state of the party. His chief of staff, Charles Clarke, was steeped in the context of London Labour politics. Yet the extent to which elite actors – certainly at this point in time – knew what the dominant ethos of their party was came down to their perception, their judgement, and 'hard' evidence contributed by, for example, conference motions, votes, and subsequent defeats or victories.

To summarise, I am very conscious of Smith's view that, in the work of Bevir and Rhodes, 'the concept of tradition does too much work'.<sup>141</sup> It appears, simultaneously, as the meaning an actor gives to their actions, it explains their motivations (along with desire), it informs their beliefs but can be altered by those beliefs, and it contains a mixture of strong, weak, institutional and actor-centred traditions, many of which are left undefined. In this study I argue for an understanding of ethos as something comprised of shared and competing traditions. Actors hold certain beliefs about what Labour's ethos is which are derived from those traditions. Traditions can also become dominant within the institution, gaining greater salience and acting as a constraint or a resource, depending on an actor's individual interpretation. Labour's ethos – through this dual understanding – can shape an actor's ideas and actions.

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<sup>140</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>141</sup> Smith, 'Re-centring British Government', p.143.



However, I do not seek to privilege, as Smith says of the work of Bevir and Rhodes, traditions or beliefs above other causal explanations, including material, or other institutional and ideational factors. I consider the different narratives within Labour's traditions to be a separate and distinct determinant of party change,<sup>142</sup> albeit one interacting with other factors in an actor's strategic calculations. As Bale noted, 'any solution, certainly, has to reject from the outset the notion – commonplace, believe it or not, among academics but probably crazy to everyone else – that anyone seeking to explain something political should have to choose between a focus on ideas (the ideology that drives those involved and the policies they favour), a focus on interests (the material considerations that motivate them or at least those that fund and support them), or a focus on institutions (organisations, rules, and customary ways of doing things). Instead we have to appreciate that politics, including party politics, can only be understood not just by melding contextual and generic explanations but by focusing on the intersection, the interrelationship, and the reciprocal influence of ideas, interests and institutions'.<sup>143</sup> This section has sought to develop Drucker's work, providing a more robust definition of ethos, applicable to political analysis, and contributing to our understanding of political action in the way expressed by Bale. It is to the existing literature on the Labour Party, and how these factors have affected its political trajectory, that I now turn.

### **Interpreting Labour's modernisation**

How does Labour's ethos feature in explanatory strategies for understanding Labour's political trajectory? Overall, there is something of an 'ethos gap' in the existing literature, particularly when considering Labour's post-1979 period of conflict and transformation. Randall offered a classification for the 'how and why' of Labour's ideological trajectory over a number of decades: materialist; ideational; electoral; institutional; and syntheses.<sup>144</sup> There is much variety within all five – and

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<sup>142</sup> This argument, which considers such approaches to be 'compatible with positivist, empirical, behaviouralist and realist research... if the causal claims... are restricted to the effects of the different narratives upon people's behaviour' can be found in K. Dowding, *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science*, (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 24.

<sup>143</sup> Bale, *The Conservative Party*, p.13.

<sup>144</sup> N. Randall, 'Understanding Labour's ideological trajectory' in J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam, *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour politics and history*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.8-22, p.8.

they apply to the history of Labour's outlook, with many pre-dating the Kinnock and Blair periods. For Randall, materialist approaches included Marxist analyses of Labour's inbuilt (and highly limited) reformism, along with those predicated on the transformational nature of capitalism, which can be challenging but positive, and its consequences for political ideologies. Ideational strategies included what Shaw has called the 'theory of labourism',<sup>145</sup> encompassing both Marxist and social democratic interpretations, and with both contending that Labour's political project is tied to, and limited by, the defensiveness of the trade unions and the gradualness of Fabianism. At its heart, this ideational argument asserts that Labour's ideology lacks radicalism.<sup>146</sup>

From the Left, notably from Ralph Miliband, came the argument that Labour's reforms and objectives had 'never been conceived as part of a strategy for the creation of a fundamentally different kind of society'<sup>147</sup> with 'large socialist objectives' being only 'a very weak concern'.<sup>148</sup> Electoral strategies, and what other scholars have termed social democratic 'electoral constraints',<sup>149</sup> included Adam Przeworski's conclusion that 'once socialists had decided to struggle for political power and once they began to compete within the existing representative institutions, everything that followed was narrowly constrained'.<sup>150</sup> Institutional approaches considered the mode of interaction within the party, including its elite actors, while approaches which attempted a synthesis sought to combine some of the strategies above, alongside a consideration of the interaction between them in an actor's strategic context.

As Randall noted, there is a 'risk of oversimplification'<sup>151</sup> in such categorisation, and these groupings are not without their problems. For example, Randall's grouping together of institutional analysis positing leadership hegemony – such as the work of

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<sup>145</sup> Shaw, 'Labourism', in R. Plant, M. Beech and K. Kickson (eds.), *The Struggle for Labour's Soul: Understanding Labour's political thought since 1945*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.188-205, p.201.

<sup>146</sup> Defined in the OED as beliefs or actions of people advocating 'thorough or complete political or social reform'.

<sup>147</sup> R. Miliband, *Class War Conservatism and Other Essays*, (London: Verso, 2015), p.291.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> M. Wickham-Jones, 'From Reformism to Resignation and Remedialism? Labour's Trajectory Through British Politics', *Journal of Policy History*, Vol.15, No.1, (March 2003), pp.26-45, p.28.

<sup>150</sup> A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.240-241.

<sup>151</sup> Randall, 'Understanding Labour's ideological trajectory', p.8.

Robert Michels or Robert McKenzie, which I return to later in this chapter – along with biographies and autobiographies (Randall uses Brian Brivati’s biography of Hugh Gaitskell as one example) is troubling. Grouping the personalities and ideas of elite actors – like Gaitskell – alongside institutional factors overlooks the impact of ideas on an actor’s strategies, along with external factors that scholars often attempt to synthesise. Indeed, this is something Brivati does well when he positions Gaitskell within the ‘battle-lines of the 1950s’.<sup>152</sup> Overall, there is more synthesis than these five groupings imply. As Bale argued, ‘social scientists and their preferred ways of working are (thank goodness) rather more loosely coupled’.<sup>153</sup>

Randall offered a further insight which is relevant to the contribution the concept of ethos could make to our understanding of Labour’s political change. Having noted that questions over Labour’s trajectory required some separation between what shaped the ‘agenda’ for change and ‘the content of ideological changes thereafter’,<sup>154</sup> Randall argued: ‘Electoral imperatives may prompt reassessment of an existing ideological commitment but the substantive shaping of the new commitment may be better understood by reference to the institutional dynamics of the party.’<sup>155</sup> This is an important point. As with the approaches to explaining Labour’s century of political change, literature on Labour’s modernisation engages with Labour’s ‘structural and ideological scaffolding’.<sup>156</sup> That is: (i) the organisational basis on which the party exists, including its rules, bureaucracy and affiliates; and (ii) its ideology, typically understood to mean its doctrine and policy programme.

The ‘agenda’ is varied and much debated in the literature, including electoral pressures, ideological currents (Labour, Conservative and global), Labour’s social democratic – rather than socialist – heritage, and the personalities of those at the top. The party’s ethos is only rarely mentioned when considering factors which shape the agenda. The ‘outcome’ is consistently doctrinal and organisational change, with a move away from the Labour Left on both counts. Yet it is not common-place to see Randall’s concern over outcome-shaping (and the different factors that may be at

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<sup>152</sup> Brivati, *Gaitskell*, p.150.

<sup>153</sup> Bale, “‘All poke and no soak?’”, p.103.

<sup>154</sup> Randall, ‘Understanding Labour’s ideological trajectory’, p.19.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> D. Howell, *British Social Democracy: A Study in Development and Decay*, (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p.11.

play) analysed separately to pre-conceived agendas. References to ethos are present when looking at the outcome of modernisation, though these references are far from systematic, and do not provide any detail as to how or why Labour's ethos may have been 'altered' – as some claim. In terms of considering ethos as a factor in understanding a political outcome, the concept is nearly entirely absent – with some exceptions, as I discuss below.

Labour's ethos, I argue in this study, is a determinant of party change relevant both to the 'agenda' or motivation for change, and the 'content' or outcome of the change process. An actor's motivations can be affected both by their individual interpretation of Labour's ethos – for instance, the extent to which the party as a whole should be involved in the process of change – and their perception of the dominant ethos within the party, for instance, the extent to which a change might cause such unease as to threaten an actor's prioritisation of party unity and cohesion. Moving onwards to the outcome of political change processes, these factors remain relevant. An actor could have a change of heart, or pull back from the original motivations for change on the basis of their own beliefs that such an action risked going too far beyond the party's traditions. Similarly, an actor may perceive the party's dominant ethos as being resistant to their chosen strategy for change, and so amend their strategy accordingly.

Importantly, these evaluations and judgements are not made in isolation, nor are they made just once. Labour's ethos interacts with other determinants of party change – organisational factors or external political events, for example – which can affect how relevant Labour's ethos is in an actor's strategic calculations. This is incredibly dynamic, and political actors are evaluating their room for manoeuvre, their opportunities and limitations, all of the time. The party's dominant ethos, an actor may perceive, could appear to block off an initiative at any given point, but following its interaction with an external shock, or a significant organisational change, an actor reassesses and can come to a different judgement. Understood in this way, ethos is not simply 'the past' or a set of traditions that can be jettisoned, but a set of competing traditions directly relevant to an actor's strategies, interacting – like other determinants of party change – with other factors relevant to the actor.

The process I have described above is important in understanding how political change either does or does not happen. For example, Martin Smith rightly noted that, in Kinnock's first parliament as Labour leader, his 'problem' was that 'although he wanted change, he was constrained by both the party and his own past. Rather than changing policy, the manifesto was full of compromise and ambiguity'.<sup>157</sup> The nature of Kinnock's constraints can be more fully understood by an appreciation of Labour's ethos – both Kinnock's individual interpretation and the dominant interpretation. For in addition to his past, his record and his identity, Kinnock's own take on Labour's competing traditions was inwardly pragmatic and outwardly cautious. He prioritised unity and would not risk internal defeat. While organisationally he did not feel unassailable, equally important was his judgement about what the party could and could not 'take'. His judgement on this matter was subject to constant re-evaluation, by both Kinnock and his team, and as his perception of the party mood shifted in a pragmatic direction, so too did his strategy. The same can be said of Blair's judgements, though to a less extent than Kinnock's. This is complimentary to other accounts of Labour's political change, many of which focus on ideational agendas and outcomes.

Driver and Martell saw a line of argument 'drawn between those who see New Labour as marking *continuity* with revisionist social democratic politics and those who see it as having *accommodated* itself to the New Right'.<sup>158</sup> Their analysis suggested New Labour was post-Thatcherite in ideology, drawing 'on the Labour Party's social democratic traditions while modifying them so as to reflect the economic and social challenges confronting British society, the legacy of Thatcherism and the need to win elections'.<sup>159</sup> In terms of their consideration of the agenda for New Labour's change, Driver and Martell offered a convincing synthesis, yet there is little consideration of other factors that may have affected New Labour's outcomes. The stress was very firmly placed upon New Labour – even after two terms of office – being understood as existing within a 'hybrid'<sup>160</sup> social democratic tradition that was not 'radically new'.<sup>161</sup> Yet questions as to how New Labour's

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<sup>157</sup> M. J. Smith, 'The Labour Party in opposition', in M. J. Smith and J. Spear (eds.), *The Changing Labour Party*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.3-12, p.10.

<sup>158</sup> S. Driver and L. Martell, *New Labour*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p.3.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

approach evolved, and the attention the New Labour leadership paid to the party's ethos, were not attended to.

Considering the approach of Blair's predecessor, Smith argued that the changes during Neil Kinnock's tenure were 'not completely new but a continuation of a process initiated by Hugh Gaitskell... to modernise the party by identifying it as a national social democratic party'.<sup>162</sup> Here, external factors – principally electoral consideration – incentivised a return to the 'revisionist social democracy that dominated the Party from the 1950s to the 1970s'.<sup>163</sup> The internal factor was the presence of an ideological tradition within the Labour Party considered – by the Kinnock leadership, in this instance – to be the more appropriate posture to a party seeking to form a government. Smith, along with Michael Kenny, also offered a slightly more complex take on New Labour which concluded that, while 'the ethical socialist tradition has been mobilised in fairly conscious ways by [Blair's] Labour',<sup>164</sup> it was simultaneously 'a long way from social democracy' and 'clearly not neo liberal in any straightforward sense'.<sup>165</sup> All of these accounts posit change from the Labour programme of 1983, with the caveat that 'change' has involved some revisionist rediscovery. Yet, while Smith recognised the limitations placed upon Kinnock, overall there is only a limited appreciation of the effect of Labour's ethos, and its competing traditions, in ideational explanatory strategies for Labour's modernisation.

The acceptance of Thatcherism as a paradigmatic shift, rather than the rediscovery of social democracy, is posited most clearly in Heffernan's *New Labour and Thatcherism* where he argued that 'modernisation is... a metaphor for the politics of "catch-up", a reflection of a new political consensus, one informed not by post-war social democracy, but by Labour's accommodation to and adaption of Thatcherism's neo-liberal political agenda'.<sup>166</sup> The minds of Labour people were deprioritised in Heffernan's account. Indeed, he stressed that modernisation had been done to the

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<sup>162</sup> M. J. Smith, 'A Return to Revisionism? The Labour Party's Policy Review', in M. J. Smith and J. Spear (eds.), *The Changing Labour Party*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.13-28, pp.17-18.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>164</sup> M. Kenny and M. J. Smith, 'Interpreting New Labour: Constraints, Dilemmas and Political Agency' in A. Chadwick and R. Heffernan (eds.), *The New Labour Reader*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp.66-76, p.74.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>166</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.178.

Labour Party rather than the Labour Party having modernised itself. ‘Taken in the round,’ Heffernan argued, ‘Labour did not so much change or modernise itself as it was changed by the impact of events. In short, where Thatcherism has led, the Labour Party... followed.’<sup>167</sup> This was political change ‘wrought by events’,<sup>168</sup> with the main event being the common sense established by the ideational hegemony of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party. Heffernan did suggest that ‘a party’s propensity for change is coloured by its “genetic code”’: its historical background, past ideological associations, traditional identity and the various expectations voters and political commentators have’.<sup>169</sup> Yet, aside from a recognition that Kinnock left many policies ‘qualified rather than revised’<sup>170</sup> in his first parliament as leader, this set of ‘genetic code’ factors went relatively underexplored, with Heffernan’s central argument positing an uninhibited leadership marching to orders set by Thatcherism. The motives, in Heffernan’s account, were electoral and ideational. The outcome was driven by Thatcher’s ideological hegemony.

Reviewing Heffernan’s study, Desai suggested that while Heffernan argued ‘Labour capitulated to Thatcherism’<sup>171</sup> he had failed to explain why it did so. Heffernan did put forward points which seemingly relied, implicitly, on self-interest and rationality. For example, he noted Labour’s stance reflected ‘the Thatcherite political agenda. It is a form of accommodation to the prevailing orthodoxy... Labour counselled itself to embrace and work within the mood, aspirations and culture of Britain as it has become in the Thatcherite 1980s and the post-Thatcher 1990s’.<sup>172</sup> Such a statement raises questions. Was it the intellectual power of the ideas that meant Labour embraced them? Or were these ideas overwhelmingly popular, making them the only route to power? Heffernan did provide answers, more explicitly, on the basis of self-interest (in this case, to get elected) and rationality (in this case, the best way to get elected). ‘Labour’s gradual acknowledgment of an alteration in its electoral environment went hand in hand with the perception of a shift in the ideological

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<sup>167</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.66.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>171</sup> R. Desai, ‘Reviewed Work: New Labour and Thatcherism: Political Change in Britain by Richard Heffernan’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.95, No.3, (September 2001), pp.749-750, p.750.

<sup>172</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.27.

climate... the one reinforcing the other',<sup>173</sup> he noted. The 'politics of catch-up' theory attempted to bring together two things: an acceptance that parties alter their position to attract the median voter, along with an acceptance that parties can shape the preferences of voters. The crux of Heffernan's argument was that Labour accommodated to the views of voters *and* to the success of Thatcherism in having shaped the 'electoral environment',<sup>174</sup> rather than continuing with attempts to shape that environment themselves. Yet in both senses the motivations and main driver of outcomes for those 'catching up' – in this instance, Labour's modernising leaders – remains electoral rationality, not the political ideas themselves.

A more nuanced analysis from Colin Hay looked at the relationship between perceived economic reality and political ideas. Taking Anthony Downs' economic theory of democracy, where political parties and voters are assumed to act logically in an electoral market place, Hay argued that a Downsian approach could not explain Labour's modernisation, yet could describe it.<sup>175</sup> In other words, Labour's policy positions had converged with the Conservative Party's during its period of modernisation, from Kinnock's leadership onwards, but this convergence could not be explained by New Labour's acceptance of Downsian logic. Rather: 'It is not purely (perceived) electoral expediency that has dictated Labour's neo-liberal conversion and convergence. Along with almost all of the (former) social democratic parties of western Europe... New Labour now accepts that there is simply no alternative to neoliberalism in an era of heightened capital mobility and financial liberalisation – in short, in an era of globalisation.'<sup>176</sup> Yet, Hay did not argue for a deterministic economism, which would fail 'to acknowledge the political "authoring" of processes such as globalisation',<sup>177</sup> as well as the political choices that were open to the Labour Party. In this sense, his analysis posited far greater political agency than Heffernan – specifically, greater on the part of Labour people – in considering arguments around globalisation, and in embracing them. In addition, Hay noted that a crude rationality applied to political parties would preclude 'the possibility at a stroke

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<sup>173</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.99.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>175</sup> C. Hay, *The Political Economy of New Labour*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p.101.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.



that political parties might engage in a cost-benefit analysis of the price (in terms of political convictions, ethos and tradition) at which electoral victory is bought'.<sup>178</sup>

Andrew Hindmoor also injected agency and political creativity into his analysis of how New Labour 'constructed' the political space of 'the centre' through rhetoric, innovation, framing and leadership.<sup>179</sup> Hindmoor's argument differed significantly from the 'politics of catch-up' thesis. He noted that 'whilst there is no alternative to the political centre there are alternative political centres... The critique [of New Labour] is that New Labour embraced a post-Thatcherite consensus when it did not need to do so, when it could have sought to construct an alternative understanding of the centre. The defence is that it has constructed just such an alternative understanding'.<sup>180</sup> In relation to New Labour's acceptance and embrace of 'the centre' as a spatial political identity, Hindmoor argued that New Labour presented itself 'as a moderate party that has transcended the extremes of both the old Left and the new Right'.<sup>181</sup> Yet this presentation was based not on a simple move to the centre, but rather a construction of it. 'At any one time, the electorate may believe a particular policy to be at the political centre but this belief will be a constructed one',<sup>182</sup> Hindmoor noted.

Depending on where an analysis of Labour starts – with its organisational or ideological scaffolding – the 'how and why' of modernisation can be different, though not necessarily because of 'fundamental differences of interpretation'.<sup>183</sup> Hay has noted that 'were one to periodise Labour's transformation... in terms of the development of policy, one might end up with a rather different mapping of the modernisation process over time than if one were to periodise the same process with respect to the structure and governance of the party'.<sup>184</sup> This may seem obvious, but it is a point rarely made in the literature. To expand upon it, we can see Hay's point in studies that offer either an organisational focus, or a synthesis which addresses a range of motivations and outcomes affected by a number of factors. Meg Russell's

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<sup>178</sup> Hay, *The Political Economy of New Labour*, p.79.

<sup>179</sup> A. Hindmoor, *New Labour at the Centre*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.9-11.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38

<sup>183</sup> Hay, *Political Economy of New Labour*, p.19.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

*Building New Labour* presented the ‘far-reaching reform’<sup>185</sup> of Labour’s internal organisation during Labour’s modernisation. Russell questioned assumptions that Blair and New Labour marked a dramatic and undemocratic power grab through organisational and party structure reform, rightly noting that much change occurred under Kinnock and John Smith, Labour’s leader from 1992 to 1994. These changes were not without historical precedent either, certainly in practice. The assumption, Russell argued, ‘that Labour’s internal reform has resulted in a shift of power towards its leaders and away from its members... is thus found to be questionable at best’.<sup>186</sup> Organisationally, Russell argued for continuation between Kinnock and Blair, and indeed for an analysis of modernisation that took into account Labour’s mixed history with regard to internal democracy, and the absence of a halcyon participatory period. Absent the ideational starting point, and the role of Thatcherite ideological hegemony, this narrative of modernisation concludes that there was less internal upheaval than is often assumed.

Challenging this view somewhat, and addressing a wider range of motivations and outcomes, Minkin drew attention to the ‘distinctive character, mechanisms and development of Blair’s party management’.<sup>187</sup> By ‘party management’ Minkin did not mean a narrow definition of the form in which administration through institutional structures took – though that was a part of it – but a broader definition of management as being ‘the attempt to control problem-causing activities, issues and developments in order to ensure that outcomes were produced which the managers considered to be in the party’s best interests’.<sup>188</sup> Minkin’s approach examined not only changes to internal organisation, rules and structures, but *behaviour* and *practices*, in all manner of political circumstances, which sought to manage any given situation in the interests of Blair – or, at least, how actors perceived his interests. The differences between Blair and Kinnock are accentuated in this approach. The agenda of those around Blair, Brown and Peter Mandelson meant ‘any uncircumscribed powers could become a potential problem. Any problem not under control could be a media embarrassment. Any protracted consultation was an attrition of leadership

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<sup>185</sup> M. Russell, *Building New Labour: The Politics of Party Organisation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.1.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>187</sup> L. Minkin, *The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour’s Party Management*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p.1.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

energy. Any inhibitive traditional rules and customs were an obstacle to effective executive power'.<sup>189</sup> This led to a desire for constant change and the centralisation of control, which Minkin argued 'was at odds with much of the traditional Labour right's practical reformism, which appreciated the potential costs of change as much as the benefits and understood the wisdom of settling immediate difficult problems before you plunged into others'.<sup>190</sup> Minkin's work was both a complex and important contribution to the literature on Labour's modernisation. It clearly engaged with a broader range of motivations and factors affecting political outcomes, all painstakingly explained through a rich, detailed account of the actors involved, and their evolving strategic considerations.

Using Minkin's management frame – albeit one broadly defined – it is possible to interpret Labour's modernisation in highly distinct phases, with Blair's leadership bringing a distinctive style, and delivering outcomes shaped by both different motivations (in comparison to his predecessors) and internal restraints. Eric Shaw considered Minkin's study to be one which focused on 'the intersection between institutions, culture and power... [with] institutions as constituted by formal rules and procedures, routines, norms and conventions, and political action arising from the interplay between strategic calculation and institutional opportunities and restraints',<sup>191</sup> and this is broadly the approach Shaw himself took to analysing Kinnock's period as leader. Shaw defined Kinnock's motivations, described the strategies Kinnock employed, and analysed how outcomes were affected by a number of factors, including the identities of Labour Party people. Shaw set out Kinnock's motivations for change as being the 'triple crisis'<sup>192</sup> of ideological collapse (during the Wilson/Callaghan government),<sup>193</sup> a breakdown in leadership-supporting internal party democracy,<sup>194</sup> and Labour's 'electoral crisis' of consecutive defeats.<sup>195</sup> Kinnock's strategy was presented as double-phased: the first parliament laid the necessary basis for party change through 'tighter central control'.<sup>196</sup> Until such

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<sup>189</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.75.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>191</sup> E. Shaw, 'Understanding Labour Party Management under Tony Blair', *Political Studies Review*, Vol.14, No.2, (May 2016), pp.153-162, p.154.

<sup>192</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.200.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.203.

changes were embedded, and until Labour people were ready for greater programmatic change, Kinnock's first parliament failed to significantly alter the party's offer to the electorate. Shaw concluded that 'in order to avoid antagonising opinion within the Party, policy shifts were often surreptitiously introduced – which greatly dulled the impact on a sceptical public, since messages which are not congruent with existing perceptions need to be openly and insistently proclaimed to have any effect'.<sup>197</sup>

Kinnock's second parliament marked a shift, with the Policy Review process being more systematic, and the arrival of what Shaw termed 'post-revisionism', with more modest aims – compared to 'traditional' Keynesian social democracy – of 'abating social distress, extending individual opportunity and incremental improvements to the public services'.<sup>198</sup> Writing prior to Blair's period as leader of the opposition, Shaw's account did not draw conclusions on what could be termed 'different modernisations', though in later work – which I return to later in this study – he did comment on the limitations of Kinnock's project. Shaw's work specifically on New Labour focused on Labour's social democratic tradition, concluding that while New Labour retained a commitment to social justice – one half of the tradition – its commitment to fraternity and cooperation had been jettisoned. 'The values of competition, individual self-assertion and "entrepreneurialism", and not "fellowship, co-operation and service" are those that New Labour extols'.<sup>199</sup> In selecting Gaitskell's attempt at defining Labour's creed, and suggesting it constituted a 'succinct and accurate description of Labour's "soul"',<sup>200</sup> Shaw ultimately reached the same conclusion as Brivati when he noted that 'Gaitskell embodied a strand of British politics now extinct'.<sup>201</sup>

From the Left, and rooted in the Milibandian perspective, Panitch and Leys presented New Labour within the historical frame of social democracy being caught in the dilemma of seeking to transform society while simultaneously managing it, having accepted the democratic conventions of the modern state. They argued: 'The internal

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<sup>197</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.206.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>199</sup> E. Shaw, *Losing Labour's Soul? New Labour and the Blair Government 1997-2007*, (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.206-207.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>201</sup> Brivati, *Gaitskell*, p.xvii.

life of the social democratic parties had undergone a serious decline as a result of their integration into the institutions of “managed capitalism”. When the socialist vision gives way to the pragmatic management of capitalism, there is little scope or need for a party-based “counter-hegemonic” community.’<sup>202</sup> Yet there is much more to their argument which posits great agency on the part of Blair, along with an attempt at explaining how different interpretations of Labour’s ethos affected New Labour’s motivations and reforms. On the latter point regarding ethos, they argued: ‘[Labour’s ethos] contained a great deal that was archaic, formalistic and anti-intellectual; but it also comprised some of the most egalitarian, humanistic, internationalist and brave elements of progressive British culture. Previous party leaders had been influenced by this ethos to different degrees: none was as untouched by it as Tony Blair... he operated in a milieu with a different ethos, that of professional politics based on higher education, management skills, and the culture of the communications industry. Some... more or less openly despised that of the old labour movement.’<sup>203</sup>

While beginning from a different conception of Labour and its place in British politics, such arguments sit alongside Minkin’s in terms of the New Labour leadership’s approach to politics. Similarly, such a position invests Blair with great agency. His election as leader marked a ‘radical break with Labour’s past,’ Panitch and Leys argued, ‘New Labour’s big idea was to accept definitively that global capitalism, and the political power of global capital, was a permanent fact of life, so that socialism, if it still meant anything at all, was a set of values that should guide policy *under* capitalism, nothing more’.<sup>204</sup>

Bale’s work on the Labour Party advocated analysis which combined empirical knowledge with ‘analytical theses on the nature of the Labour Party... [where] all those writing in this tradition stress the need to approach the Labour [Party] less as a party pure and simple and more as a political culture’.<sup>205</sup> Bale used Drucker’s definition of ethos as his definition of political culture,<sup>206</sup> and placed his own book on

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<sup>202</sup> L. Panitch and C. Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, (London: Verso, 2001), p.6.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>205</sup> Bale, *Sacred Cows*, p.4.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

the party ‘firmly in such an approach’,<sup>207</sup> alongside Minkin and David Marquand. In exploring ‘why the British Left had been such an abject historical failure’,<sup>208</sup> Marquand posited the need for an electoral alliance between liberals and social democrats along with an ‘alignment of ideas’.<sup>209</sup> Ideas matter in Marquand’s work, and motivations and outcomes are undoubtedly shaped, he argued, by ideological preferences. More important for this study, however, is Marquand’s argument that ethos, though ‘hard to catch on paper’ nevertheless ‘provides the better guide to the party’s behaviour’.<sup>210</sup> This recognition led Marquand to conclude that Labour’s ethos, and a Labour person’s interpretation of and interaction with it, were critical to the process of modernisation, both in motivation and outcome.

Marquand’s analysis of Kinnock, in particular, is a good example of this approach:

‘The resilience of Labour’s ethos also provides a large part of the explanation for Kinnock’s victories over the Left. In a sense true of surprisingly few of his predecessors, Labour ethos was *his* ethos... The myths and symbols of Labourism, which he manipulated with such artistry, were his myths and symbols... As never before in this century, the Labour movement, the Labour culture, the values and practices which made up the Labour ethos, and the institutions which embodied those values and practices, were under attack [from Thatcherism] ... Labour people saw this and, like Kinnock, drew the conclusion that the pursuit of electoral success should trump ideology. But if the resilience of the party’s ethos was an asset, it was also a handicap.’<sup>211</sup>

As a ‘handicap’, Labour’s ethos made it difficult for the party ‘to respond sensitively and imaginatively to the new moods and new demands... it stood in the way of an open, responsive and pluralist politics appropriate to an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous culture’.<sup>212</sup> This adoption of ethos as a determinant of party change is

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<sup>207</sup> Bale, *Sacred Cows*, p.4.

<sup>208</sup> P. Diamond, ‘The Progressive Dilemmas of British Social Democracy: Political Economy After New Labour’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol.15, No.1, (August 2012), pp.89-106, p.90.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>210</sup> Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, p.221.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p.223.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p.224.

an important part of the literature on Labour's modernisation, and one I seek to build on with this study. Marquand fleshed out important considerations for party change in his analysis, including how the ethos of the party – and an individual's interpretation of it – can both enable and frustrate different political strategies for change. He noted that symbols and myths can be utilised by political actors, but, as with Bale's work, ethos was presented here as more than something 'floating or sitting on top of practice or behaviour', instead 'they are seen to be part of it'.<sup>213</sup> Ethos emerges, then, as a factor that should be treated like other, more widely used ideological determinants – such as doctrinal traditions.

Marquand's take on how Labour needed to change, post-Kinnock, 'had more to do with culture and mentality than with policy or programme'.<sup>214</sup> It had to 'abandon tribalism, to give up the dream of single-party hegemony and to practise a politics of pluralism'.<sup>215</sup> Yet, oddly following his rich understanding of Kinnock's interpretation of Labour's ethos, Marquand was rather light on what Blair made of it, what his own interpretation was, and how that impacted upon New Labour's trajectory. While doctrinally New Labour was 'not, in any obvious sense, social-democratic or social-liberal',<sup>216</sup> Marquand argued it remained similar to 'Old Labour': 'The Labour tribe had moved into new ideological territory, but it was still the same old tribe with the same old culture. It hunted new prey in new ways, but performed the same war dances and carried the same totems.'<sup>217</sup> This is a starkly contrasting conclusion to that of Panitch and Leys, though echoes Bale's conclusion that, on welfare policy in his study, New Labour appeared to follow a well-established Labour Party practice of sending 'signals of good faith to those forces that caused previous Labour governments so many problems... one does not have to buy into the far-left critique of Labourism to suggest that the Labour Party under Tony Blair is not so much *sui generis* as reverting perhaps to type'.<sup>218</sup>

Such an argument was highlighted by Diamond as one of three general narratives on New Labour. In addition to the accommodation with Thatcherism (which I addressed

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<sup>213</sup> Bale, *Sacred Cows*, p.12.

<sup>214</sup> Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, p.232.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p.x.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Bale, *Sacred Cows*, p.viii.

earlier in this chapter) and Labour being a site of paradoxes and overlapping ideational discourses, there is the view that Labour ‘has always been moderate, pragmatic and reformist in government. New Labour was hardly an exception, pursuing programmes which ensured that financial stability and a growing economy would generate budget surpluses to be used for redistributive objectives’.<sup>219</sup> Yet while I agree this is a recognisable tradition within Labour’s ethos, Marquand’s analysis of New Labour and Tony Blair overlooked the competing traditions that exist, and how these can affect an actor’s motives and the outcome of political change. One can see continuity in Labour’s ethos, and in an actor’s engagement with it, but unlike with Marquand’s analysis of Kinnock, his description of Blair’s early leadership fell back on a purely institutional understanding of ethos, understood as a ‘drag’ on progress.

Broadly, such a stance can also be seen in Cronin’s work, though he also concluded that New Labour sought to ditch the ‘Old’ traditions. As I noted earlier, Cronin suggested the leadership of New Labour undertook ‘a kind of *Kulturkampf* aimed at displacing the party’s inherited political culture’ resulting in the Blair and Brown teams mounting ‘a frontal assault on the party’s traditions. In so doing the modernisers took considerable risks’.<sup>220</sup> To support this argument, Cronin noted that ‘Blair as party leader would repeatedly reiterate his sceptical stance toward the party’s past and towards the myths of both the left and the right. Characteristically, he remained decidedly unwilling to embrace fully even the most celebrated moment in the party’s mythic history... the Labour victory in 1945’.<sup>221</sup> Yet, while Blair did argue for a greater appreciation of the liberal roots of the welfare state introduced by the postwar Labour government, I don’t believe Blair – certainly the early Blair – was unwilling to embrace the 1945 government, nor many of Labour’s traditions. Indeed, what has become something of a Labour Party adage was expressed repeatedly by Blair as Leader of the Opposition and as Prime Minister: ‘The 1945 Labour government was the greatest peacetime government this century.’<sup>222</sup> The 1945 government had a ‘remarkable record’, its leaders ‘were statesman of enormous and

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<sup>219</sup> Diamond, ‘Political Economy After New Labour’, p.94.

<sup>220</sup> Cronin, *New Labour’s Pasts*, p.4.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>222</sup> T. Blair, ‘Foreword’ in G. Goodman (eds.), *The State of the Nation: The Political Legacy of Aneurin Bevan*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1997), pp.11-13, p.12.



enduring stature’, it ‘shaped the political agenda for a generation’ and ‘not to be forgotten, it won the hearts and minds of millions of voters’.<sup>223</sup>

Selectivity in historical assessment, which Blair and New Labour were steeped in, should not be confused with an unwillingness to embrace the party’s ‘myths’ and traditions. If there is a myth of the 1945 Labour government, Blair furthered it, albeit to a lesser extent than others. I think Cronin was right to argue that Labour’s dominant ethos is one ‘reluctant to abandon the goals and the rhetoric bequeathed by its past. It was a party long on loyalty, rich in traditional lore, weak on theory and determined to achieve and maintain a recognition not only of its claims to represent “the people” but of the inherent social worth of the particular interests, and values, it sought to represent’.<sup>224</sup> However, to argue that Blair – as Leader of the Opposition – mounted a frontal assault on these kinds of practices and traditions is to, perhaps, read too much into the personal motivations of some of New Labour’s leading lights – who were undoubtedly dismissive of many of these practices – and to read too little into both their chosen strategies and to political outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

As Shaw noted in his study of the Kinnock modernisation period, ‘rational choice theories that analyse political parties as aggregates of individuals pursuing their own goals fail to appreciate that the behaviour of their members is also shaped by organisational culture’.<sup>225</sup> This insight has been insufficiently recognised and realised in literature on Labour’s modernisation.<sup>226</sup> Why Labour’s modernising trajectory followed the particular route that it did – linear in some ways, zig-zagging in others – is not satisfactorily explained by either an avowed acceptance of a New Right paradigm nor a coldly electoral acceptance of a different social reality. Undoubtedly, as Kavanagh has argued, these factors are relevant to explaining Labour’s modernisation. ‘Changes in social structure... [and] the decline of manufacturing and globalisation of capital markets meant that parties of the left had to rethink their role,’

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<sup>223</sup> Blair, ‘Foreword’ in Goodman, *The State of the Nation*, p.12.

<sup>224</sup> Cronin, *New Labour’s Pasts*, p.48.

<sup>225</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.164.

<sup>226</sup> A notable exception to this is the work of P. Syed and P. Whiteley, which I turn to in greater detail in the next chapter.

while ‘the political choices and skills of Blair and Brown were also important’.<sup>227</sup> But to see these in isolation from their interaction with Labour’s ethos – including the choices of Blair and Brown – is to ignore a factor which shapes both the agenda for, and outcome of change.

In terms of the narratives around Blair, Brown and New Labour, the absence of ethos as a determinant of party change has led to two omissions. The first is the political strategy which the ‘modernisers’ adopted upon taking over the leadership of the party. Far from ignoring the party’s ethos – or even seeking to destroy it – this study argues that New Labour in opposition often worked within it. A focus in the literature ‘on action rather than abstraction, reflecting New Labour’s typically pragmatic view that “what matters is what works”’<sup>228</sup> is, perhaps, indicative of the New Labour Government, post-2001, which appeared to be (at times) ideologically unanchored. But it is not the lesson today’s ‘modernisers’ should take from Blair’s period as a leader on the way up. Second, and linked to the first point, is that in overlooking Blair’s strategies in opposition, one misses out on a very different characterisation of Blair as a leader. It has been said that there is ‘no New Labour, only *New Labours*’.<sup>229</sup> This study argues for seeing different phases of Blair and a distinct New Labour strategy in opposition with regard to the party and its ethos.

This chapter has argued for an understanding of ‘ethos’ as shared and competing traditions, comprised of beliefs and practices. Ethos, based on Drucker’s concept but significantly adapted, is considered to be a distinct determinant of party change. It is not my objective, however, to reify ethos or traditions above other factors, whether they be ideational, material or institutional. Exploring the existing literature, this chapter has argued that both the presence and effect of Labour’s ethos is relatively absent from analysis of Labour’s modernisation. The next chapter presents what this study considers to be the substance of Labour’s ethos, before exploring – through case studies in subsequent chapters – how different interpretations of Labour’s ethos, both individual and dominant, shaped Labour’s modernisation.

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<sup>227</sup> D. Kavanagh, ‘Reading and misreading Old Labour’ in A. Seldon and K. Hickson, *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.321-334, p.322.

<sup>228</sup> Diamond, ‘Political Economy After New Labour’, p.91.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 2

### Fault lines: different interpretations of Labour's ethos

‘There were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented.’

W. Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*

‘This Moses was in no position furiously to break the tablets of the law when, on descending from Sinai, he found his followers worshipping the golden bull. On the contrary he was compelled to write worship of the golden bull into his script.’

Edmund Dell, *A Strange Eventful History*

### **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the substance of the competing traditions within Labour's ethos. Conflicts and tensions were mentioned in early reviews of Drucker's work, between the party's 'working class ethos' and its 'revisionist and parliamentary'<sup>230</sup> elements, and between its parliamentary and non-parliamentary wings.<sup>231</sup> Yet there is much more in Drucker's *Doctrine and Ethos* which this study draws upon, building a distinctive analytical approach to analysing the actions of Labour Party people. From Drucker's original insight, one can see the controversial and disruptive nature of competing and conflicting traditions. These enduring debates exist around what I call fault lines – divisive issues where differences of opinion exist, and with consequences for the direction Labour takes and the choices of its actors.

There are four key fault lines considered here: debates surrounding Party Objects, with Labour being a party in need of a creed while simultaneously being antagonised by 'doctrinaires' (the fault line named 'Objects'); controversy over emblematic and totemic policies, with their emblematic nature being defended by some and challenged by others (Emblems); the enduring factional warfare over internal democracy and who makes decisions within the Labour Party (Decisions); and the near-constant dispute between those Labour Party people who accuse their colleagues

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<sup>230</sup> Cain, 'Reviewed Work: Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party by H. M. Drucker', p.840.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

and comrades of unrealistic idealism, versus those who level accusations of power without principle (Outsiders). This chapter roots the study's fault line framework in Labour's history, showing the enduring nature of the competing traditions which Drucker explored, or simply inferred. It presents a more systematic explanation of the content of Labour's ethos, taking each fault line in turn. This provides the basis for understanding how political actors comprehend their party's ethos, and how the competing traditions within it affect their actions. First, though, it's important to address more recent observations of the validity of Drucker's analysis – written and published in the late 1970s – for a more contemporary, more middle-class Labour Party.

### **Different types of Labour Party people**

In their study of the rise and fall of the SDP, Crewe and King noted that, of those who broke from Labour, most 'had not been all that tightly bound to it in the first place. Most of the defectors were MPs who happened to be Labour, rather than pillars of the labour movement who happened also to be MPs'.<sup>232</sup> This is a familiar description, and one often offered up by different Labour Party people – 'I was born into this party' or 'I chose this party' – as to their 'origins' as a Labour Party person. Drucker's 1979 book, and his concept of ethos, is one firmly based on the idea that Labour's ethos emanates from the British working class, the trade unions and communities closely connected to that movement.<sup>233</sup> Again, broadly two types of Labour Party people appear in Drucker's thoughts: those who have a lived experience of the ethos of the organised working class, and those from other classes who seek to understand it, but can never relate to it in quite the same way.

In their 2002 study looking at the views and associated activities of Labour Party members, Syed and Whiteley noted that while Drucker's work suggested a 'working-class, trade unionist culture... [that] is very much the culture of the past. A contemporary study would not draw a similar conclusion. At its grassroots the Labour

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<sup>232</sup> I. Crewe and A. King, *SDP: The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.114.

<sup>233</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.9.

Party is now neither a working-class nor a trade union party'.<sup>234</sup> Syed and Whiteley concluded that the 'party must have been recruiting large numbers of the middle class in the mid-1990s',<sup>235</sup> though they also noted that middle-class upsurges had been reported in the 1960s and 1970s, and that sufficient demographic data on the party membership for the pre-1990 period did not exist.<sup>236</sup> Their data was clear, though, that the Labour membership in 1997 was less trade unionist.<sup>237</sup> Syed and Whiteley were clearly right to revisit Drucker's position that Labour's ethos arises from the experience of the British working class, one of exploitation<sup>238</sup> and the gradual building up of defensive institutions against both private capital and the state.<sup>239</sup> Most obviously this claim seems questionable at the point when Syed and Whiteley were researching – and when two thirds of Labour Party members were not in a trade union.<sup>240</sup> Yet there is also some confusion as to what Drucker meant about working class experience. On the one hand, as McKibbin noted, 'the Edwardian Labour Party was overwhelmingly working-class in its social origins; it was one of the few European working-class parties where there was an almost exact social identity between its leadership and those likely to support it. Nothing suggests that middle-class influence was important in its rank and file, and the parliamentary party was wholly working class'.<sup>241</sup> This would reinforce one understanding of Drucker's argument – that Labour, from its origins, was overwhelmingly rooted in the organised working-class and its people.

Yet elsewhere McKibbin noted that, following the adoption of Clause IV in 1918, Labour began to follow two strategies: 'One was to be unambiguously a party of the working class – to protect its interests and institutions before anything else. The other was to be a party of the useful classes, people of goodwill who by their productive efforts served the wider interests of society.'<sup>242</sup> Such a dual approach meant that, from the very beginning, Labour brought together representatives of the organised

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<sup>234</sup> P. Syed and P. Whiteley, *New Labour's Grassroots: The Transformation of the Labour Party Membership*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.37.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.9.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

<sup>240</sup> Syed and Whiteley, *New Labour's Grassroots*, p.37.

<sup>241</sup> McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p.33.

<sup>242</sup> R. McKibbin, *Parties and People, England 1914-1951*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.50.

working class alongside ‘idealists’, intellectuals and committed socialist activists. Drucker argued that ‘the party allows middle-class intellectuals (of both right and left) to give voice to its ideas, but there can be little doubt as to whose ideas we hear’.<sup>243</sup> However, in the case of Clause IV of the party’s constitution, the ideas of middle class recruits were heard, while trade unionists accepted a compromise. Drucker also suggested that Labour’s ethos ‘incorporates sets of values which spring from the experience of the British working class’.<sup>244</sup> Such language – ‘spring from’ – is more suggestive of values emanating from Labour’s working-class heartlands (heartlands which, for the most part, Labour continues to represent into the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and subsequently adopted, interpreted and then inscribed into the institution of the Labour Party. *Being* working class may not be open to recruitment, but being *socialised into an institution* inscribed with the values and traditions of working class communities is quite possible. Indeed, while the membership demographics in the Labour Party have undoubtedly changed, as they have in the constituencies voting for Labour MPs, the party remains rooted, through the constituency link, to ‘Labour’s heartlands’. In this sense, Drucker’s insights are not necessarily less pertinent simply because there are fewer trade union members in its membership ranks.

Tony Blair provided a snapshot of both his constituency experience and his wider Labour Party experience in his memoir: ‘I would visit the Dun Cow pub in Sedgefield Village or the working men’s club. People were friendly but also respectful of the fact I was out for a pint or two and to relax... we [Blair’s friends and associates from Sedgefield Constituency Labour Party] would chat, go through the constituency problems, and I would take their temperature on the big issues of the day... Sedgefield was a “northern working-class” constituency, except that when you scratched even a little beneath the surface, the definitions didn’t quite fit... They drank beer; they also drank wine. They went to the chippy; they also went to restaurants... This was a different Britain, and one in which I felt at home.’<sup>245</sup> Here, Blair perceived a ‘traditional’ Labour seat evolving, not fitting the ‘stereotype’ he imagined or deciphered from the media, yet still rooted in the traditions of the organised working class. That this perception reaffirmed his personal political stance

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<sup>243</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.11.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>245</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, pp.134-135.

– that of a Labour Party out-of-touch with a newer, upwardly mobile working class – is perhaps not coincidental. Blair, in part, undoubtedly set about finding what he was looking for. Yet Sedgefield remained, for Blair the Labour MP and eventually party leader and Prime Minister, a connection to the values of Labour’s heartlands, and an experience of ‘practical’ knowledge and socialisation in particular traditions.

In terms of Labour Party politics, Blair learnt early lessons in how political actors should speak and act, and the role Labour Party people were expected to play – particularly politicians. For example, the early Blair was critical of Tony Benn – ‘he was in love with his role as idealist, as standard bearer, as the man of principle against the unprincipled careerist MPs... he was the preacher, not the general’<sup>246</sup> – but also awestruck by Benn’s capacity to speak. ‘I sat enraptured,’ he wrote, recollected a Benn speech, ‘absolutely captivated and inspired.’<sup>247</sup> He was socialised, therefore, not in the traditions of speaking hard truths to a party out of power, but of ‘speaking the language’. ‘There is no point,’ Blair wrote, ‘in being right about an organisation’s failings if you have lost the ability to persuade it of them. You have to speak the language in order to change the terms of the debate conducted in that language.’<sup>248</sup> This was language steeped in the principles of loyalty, solidarity, and forging connections with working class communities along with their shared traditions and histories.

This is all very much a part of Drucker’s original thesis. A wrong-headed attempt to ‘speak frankly’ (which I return to in a later chapter) resulted, in Blair’s words, in an audience of ‘faces grimacing as if a thousand lemons had been forced down their throats’.<sup>249</sup> Such a conclusion – one of continued relevance for Drucker’s original insights – is reinforced by the enduring nature of Labour’s competing traditions, from the period this study analyses to the present day. Drucker’s delineation of Labour’s ideology between doctrine and ethos remains, therefore, critical to our understanding of how and why Labour follows particular political trajectories. Despite significant shifts in the ‘type’ of person joining the Labour Party, the continued existence of fault

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<sup>246</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, pp.36-37.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

lines in the party's ethos – such as debates over party democracy – suggests that its traditions endure.

### **Fault lines in Labour's ethos**

Throughout *Doctrine and Ethos*, Drucker referenced tensions and points of disagreement within the Labour Party. He argued that there existed within Labour's ethos a suspicion of parliament and government alongside an avowed acceptance of parliamentary sovereignty.<sup>250</sup> That is to say that Labour's ethos contains a tradition which questions, foundationally, whether parliamentary democracy enables a gradual shift to socialism or instead blocks the radical movement necessary to bring it about. Simultaneously there is the more classically liberal tradition, one that believes in the parliamentary model not only for the purposes of representation, but for the powers it holds to bring about social improvement. On the one hand, Drucker noted that Labour was 'a very respectable party',<sup>251</sup> accepting the norms and democratic traditions of Britain. On the other, he suggested that some Labour people caution ideological and organisational suffocation from an 'establishment', as with Tony Benn's arguments that 'ministers become the servants rather than the masters of the machinery'.<sup>252</sup>

Closely linked to the place of parliamentary democracy in Labour's ethos are claims of 'oppositionism', a tendency that values being out of office. 'It is not surprising,' Drucker argued, 'that we have in the Parliamentary Labour Party the last great defenders of parliamentary democracy. No other system offers such a prominent role to those who merely criticise and attack.'<sup>253</sup> Prioritising parliament as the place to condemn and to campaign, then, means that for a 'very large section of the party the most comfortable place to be is on the Opposition front bench'.<sup>254</sup> Further, this oppositional 'organisational glue' means that, for Labour's unity of purpose, 'it has a real stake... in remaining out'.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.4.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> T. Benn, *Arguments for Democracy*, (London: Penguin, 1982), p.219.

<sup>253</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.95

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p.37.



Suspicion of the system, and of Labour people who then enter the system, emanates from what Drucker called ‘an outsiders’ ideology’,<sup>256</sup> one that dictates the need for a strategy for managing the strains of parliamentary democracy. This can be seen in what Drucker called manifestoism:<sup>257</sup> an attempt to bind all of the Labour Party to doctrine agreed by conference, and to bind the instruments of the state to the democratic will of the Labour movement, should it be elected. A failure of manifestoism – due to its unworkable nature, which I return to below and in Chapter 5 – is the generation of perennial accusations of betrayal. Failure to implement an aspect of the manifesto results in the placement of ‘all the blame for the failure on the minister or Ministry concerned. The Minister is said to have betrayed the movement’.<sup>258</sup> For Labour, Britain’s democratic institutions and practices are at the centre of disagreements and retellings of the party’s past.

The same applies to the nature of Labour’s objectives and strategies. Labour’s working class ethos has led to a ‘defensive’ character,<sup>259</sup> yet alongside attitudes of practicability and gradualism is a sense that Labour is, too, at the centre of a struggle. Labour’s ethos contains within it a shared project, of sorts, in the negation of exploitation – and the struggle between the labouring classes and capital.<sup>260</sup> Labour is distinguished from the Conservative Party in its pre-occupation with change and with purpose: how to refashion and reformulate ideas, or assiduously defend others, in order to amend society. This less generous view of Labour’s opponents sees a pre-occupation with defending existing institutions and structures that are already powerful. It’s an all-together less frantic politics. It isn’t a ‘struggle’. Edmund Dell encapsulates this part of Labour’s mindset well when he says: ‘The Labour Party was the party of hope, the Conservative Party that of management.’<sup>261</sup> This is not, however, an uncomplicated debate. The idea of Labour’s forward-thinking progressivism in contrast to conservatism being ‘backward-looking’,<sup>262</sup> it has been

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<sup>256</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.92.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>261</sup> E. Dell, *A Strange Eventful History*, (London: HaperCollins, 2000), p.317.

<sup>262</sup> Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition*, p.19.

recently argued, is in itself ‘progressive, seeing time as a linear construct along which we must either progress or make a futile attempt to retreat’.<sup>263</sup>

Regardless, among Labour people the form ‘the struggle’ should take is another tension in Labour’s ethos. The existence of competing, and indeed conflicting traditions within Labour’s ethos – in addition to the shared practices I noted in the introduction – springs from Drucker’s work. Yet what emerges is a collection of contradictions, dilemmas and paradoxes presented in an unsystematic way. Drucker did not explicitly draw out these competing traditions, nor did he expand upon them and consider their impact on Labour’s political trajectory over time. His stimulating work, therefore, invites an approach which draws out core themes and turns them into more systematic fault lines – divides within the party which help us understand conflict and change. My analysis of Drucker’s work draws out four key themes, which this chapter will now expand upon, categorising the tensions as fault lines.

#### *Fault line 1: Objects - clarifying Labour’s aims and values*

Drucker’s appraisal of Labour’s theoretical basis was a negative one. ‘The Labour Party’s ideology,’ he argued, ‘does not contain a sufficiently coherent theory of the state or of our politics.’<sup>264</sup> Furthermore, Labour had ‘signally failed... to argue out what is meant by “achieving socialism”, and hence it has no guide for its representatives once they are in office’.<sup>265</sup> This is a point made by other experienced observers and analysts of the Labour Party, who have noted Labour’s status as ‘a party of values, but often not of ideas’.<sup>266</sup> Drucker argued for more analysis and consideration of Labour ‘ministers’ lack of a theoretical vocabulary in which satisfactorily to pursue their socialism and to explain their actions in this pursuit to their own activists’.<sup>267</sup> Drucker did not argue that Labour’s problem was a mismatch of workers and their ethos, and intellectuals and their doctrines.<sup>268</sup> Instead, where Gramsci wrote that ‘all men are intellectuals... but not all men have in society the

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<sup>263</sup> Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition*, p.20.

<sup>264</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.91.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> K. Hickson, M. Beech and R. Plant, ‘Introduction’, in R. Plant, M. Beech and K. Hickson, *The Struggle for Labour’s Soul*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.1-4, p.1.

<sup>267</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.91.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p.11.

function of intellectuals’,<sup>269</sup> Drucker posited that all people are intellectuals, but within the Labour Party they are subject to a ‘constraining’<sup>270</sup> ethos which limits that function. This constrains what Drucker viewed as the need for ‘redefinition’.<sup>271</sup>

This is not easily solvable, leading to a fault line in the party’s ethos between those who prioritise ideological clarity – typically through amended Party Objects found in the party constitution – and those who deem such activity to be divisive, unnecessary and out of kilter with the dominant ethos of the Labour Party. Commenting on Hugh Gaitskell’s failure to rewrite Clause IV, Drucker noted that Labour’s leaders must maintain an ideology which guides its view of socialism at the same time as maintaining ‘an ethos which keeps its activists at their task’.<sup>272</sup> Gaitskell and his followers, according to Drucker, pretended ‘the second... does not exist’.<sup>273</sup> According to Drucker, Labour is a party in need of a doctrine while simultaneously being antagonised by ‘doctrinaires’.<sup>274</sup> The dilemma posed to leaders by this fault line emerges repeatedly in Drucker’s work. Labour’s ‘catholicity’, we are told, is a ‘sign of strength’.<sup>275</sup> To ask ‘what is the “real socialism” in the ideology is to ask the wrong question; it is also to demonstrate an intolerant temperament, a temperament out of harmony with the ethos of the party’.<sup>276</sup> Yet without such questions, ‘the thinness of the [Labour] ideology’<sup>277</sup> becomes an inhibitor to progressive change.

Socialism, that ‘volatile creed which embraces the ideas and nostrums of prophets so dissimilar as Marx and Ruskin, Keir Hardie and Chairman Mao, Stalin and G. Orwell’,<sup>278</sup> was one of the driving forces of the political dynamism, extremism and volatility seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The power of ideas, Tony Judt argued, meant ‘the twentieth century was the century of the intellectual’.<sup>279</sup> Yet not in the Labour Party. As R. H. Tawney noted, ‘unlike some of the continental versions of Socialism, it [Labour’s] was not poured into doctrinal moulds prepared, when the

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<sup>269</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2003), p.9.

<sup>270</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.11.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>278</sup> W. H. Greenleaf, *The Ideological Heritage*, (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), pp.349-350.

<sup>279</sup> T. Judt, *Reappraisals*, (New York: Penguin, 2008), p.12.

industrial revolution was still young, by political theorists... It developed as the product of a fusion between the experience of an already vigorous trade unionism and the work of organisations and individuals, like the Fabian Society and the Webbs, engaged in the empirical *terre-à-terre* investigation of capitalist diseases and the remedies for them'.<sup>280</sup> This fusion bequeathed an uncertain ideological inheritance, where different interpretations of the party's purpose result in varying levels of priority given to doctrinal debate. As Desai argued, the conditional allegiance of intellectuals to Labour was matched 'by a conditional welcome on the part of the trade-unionist and working class Labour Party. Labour's origins had been empirical and undoctinaire'.<sup>281</sup>

For the century that Labour's 'creed' has featured in its constitution, two episodes are synonymous with controversy over Party Objects, under which the original Clause IV, part 'd' was presented. The first is Gaitskell's doomed attempt at altering these objects in the period 1959-60. The second is Tony Blair's successful reform of Clause IV, and the presentation of the party's revised 'Aims and Values' in the months following his election as party leader in 1994. Political scientists and historians have analysed both the doctrinal connections between these two events, the contrasting political contexts of the time, the party's attachment to 'traditions' and 'myth', and the ideological differences between Gaitskell and Blair. Yet academic work hasn't considered why some Labour people prioritise reform of Party Objects, while others – still committed to change more broadly – shy away from it. And where attempts at doctrinal connections over decades have proven challenging to draw, similarities and differences in relation to ethos are overlooked.

Building on Drucker's approach, this study will argue that a fault line within Labour's ethos means some Labour people prioritise revising statements of aims and values – to reinforce a vision for the party – while others consider such activity to be relatively unimportant in the political race of policy decisions and day-to-day victories and defeats. On the latter, this should not be taken to mean or imply that some Labour Party people do not believe in anything. Indeed, those who deprioritise internal ideological struggle often believe strongly in unity. They believe very

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<sup>280</sup> R. H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964), p.169.

<sup>281</sup> Desai, *Intellectuals and the Labour Party*, p.52.

strongly in values and in notions like ‘fairness’. It is somewhat paradoxical that, as Orwell put it in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, one can be ‘socialist in a vehement but ill-defined way’.<sup>282</sup> Orwell had in mind those like an ‘ardent Nonconformist who had transferred his allegiance from God to Marx, and in doing so had got mixed up with a gang of *vers libre* poets’.<sup>283</sup> Yet the point stands not just for ‘muddled’ socialists, or those wrestling with strands of political philosophy (like equality) which have been debated for centuries, but also for those who ‘opt-out’ of debates on Party Objects, preferring the vagaries of Labour’s ‘practical socialism’. In addition, as Drucker noted, those who deprioritise theoretical revision consider such activity to be potentially divisive. Connected to these interpretations is a greater willingness among the former (those who prioritise revision) to challenge Labour’s doctrinal traditions, as well as to posit the significance of ideological clarity for both a party’s sense of purpose and its political identity. In a speech in Nottingham making the case for revision of the party’s constitution, Gaitskell argued that Labour’s aims and values were not ‘meaningless phrases about which it is fruitless to argue... it is not mere theology’.<sup>284</sup> In Gaitskell’s sights were not fellow doctrinaires on the other side of the argument, but Labour people who did not think courting the controversy was a worthwhile endeavour. This is an example of the competing narratives associated with this fault line.

In terms of my focus on Party Objects, I have consciously sought to more clearly define this fault line for the purposes of analysis. As Charlotte Riley has argued, ‘principles are nebulous and hard to locate historically’,<sup>285</sup> and this study does not attempt to analyse whether Labour people are principled or unprincipled, or to categorise people as socialist theoreticians or as being entirely unanchored to ideology. A focus on deciding whether or not to engage with Labour’s Party Objects offers a more consistent guide to differing views on the prioritisation of ideological clarification. Labour’s creed has featured in its constitution since 1918. It has been at the centre of ideological confrontation and offers a suitable basis for comparison, while allowing one to observe the different approaches to party change. As Roy

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<sup>282</sup> G. Orwell, *The Complete Novels of George Orwell*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p.794.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> H. Gaitskell, Speech in Nottingham, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1960, University College London Special Collections.

<sup>285</sup> C. Riley, ‘Harold Wilson: The Unprincipled Prime Minister?’ Edited by Andrew S. Crines and Kevin Hickson’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.28, No.1, (March 2017), pp.154-155, p.155.

Hattersley noted of the *Aims & Values* process, which this study analyses, ‘the chance to construct the “ideological framework”, about which Tony Crosland and I had talked so often, was too good to miss. It was not until later that I realised... Neil [Kinnock] was less an ideologue than party manager’.<sup>286</sup> On this basis I develop a typology for analysing the relative prioritisation given to Party Objects, which I use in Chapter 3. This typology presents three potential strategies for actions which seek to engage with the party’s creed: ‘substitution’, advocating the replacement of Labour’s existing creed with something different; ‘addition’, adding to existing political thought while simultaneously reaffirming existing objects; and ‘addition with silent substitution’, a blend of the two, giving greater prominence to the new addition to Labour’s creed.<sup>287</sup>

*Fault line 2: Emblems - deeply-rooted policies symbolic of Labour’s identity*

Connected to the absence of a coherent, formal creed to guide Labour’s politics, Drucker contended that there are some Labour Party policies which play a role in ‘solidifying the ethos of the party’.<sup>288</sup> Drucker was referring to nationalisation, which through its manifestation in the original Clause IV became a symbol for Labour people that ‘the party remains true to its ethos’.<sup>289</sup> Gaitskell found to his cost just how strong such an attachment could become. To Drucker, Clause IV wasn’t only a symbol, it meant the party held ‘true to its past, true to what its originators wanted it to be: *for* labour and *against* capital’.<sup>290</sup> In other words, it was distinctive and connected to a person’s socialist faith. For this fault line I am using the word ‘emblem’, defined in the OED as a ‘heraldic device or symbolic object as a distinctive badge of a nation, organization, or family’ and ‘serving as a symbol of a particular quality or concept’. Many policies can be ‘symbols’ in the sense of politicians looking for a ‘symbolic’ policy to represent a particular narrative or policy

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<sup>286</sup> R. Hattersley, *Who Goes Home?*, (London: Abacus, 2003), p.292.

<sup>287</sup> The inspiration for this typology— substitution, addition and addition with silent substitution — comes from a passage of Dell’s history of the Labour Party. In a discussion of Harold Wilson’s early leadership style, Dell argued that ‘logic might suggest that before filling socialism with a new content, it should be emptied of the old. But Wilson had no intention of opening wounds barely healed. He would add to socialism, not subtract from it. It would be found later that subtraction was the main object of the addition, but sufficient unto the day’. Dell, *Strange Eventful History*, p.309.

<sup>288</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.86.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

thrust – for example, a banker’s bonus tax to evidence a response to the financial crash. In choosing the word ‘emblem’, and referring to a policy’s emblematic *and* symbolic quality, I am seeking greater meaning than can be inferred from the word ‘symbol’. An emblem, understood here, is a distinctive thing – in this case, a policy – which symbolizes identity and is connected to a mission or cause.

Other themes from Drucker’s work, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, are relevant here. Some policies connect with the idea of Labour’s *struggle*. They can also come to represent an idealised image of both past and future. Tudor Jones has used the term ‘political myth’ in his study of Clause IV and the party’s commitment to public ownership. Political myth, in Jones’ words, meant ‘a dominant, inspirational idea that motivates a political group, galvanizing its thought and actions’.<sup>291</sup> He expanded: ‘This emotional, non-rational essence of myths carries with it, therefore, the implication that they are fundamentally matters of faith. Indeed, this is the source of their strength.’<sup>292</sup> As well as the emotional strength and inspirational nature of the idea, Jones noted the interlocking nature of myth with an account of the past and a related vision of the future. ‘A political myth,’ he argued, ‘has two distinct dimensions. Looking back, it develops an account of the past; looking forward, it projects a vision of the future.’<sup>293</sup> Jones did not see the word ‘myth’ as suggestive of fantasy or unreality.<sup>294</sup> Indeed, he noted the work of Henry Tudor which depicts myth as always involving ‘a narrative of events in dramatic form’<sup>295</sup> while also offering a ‘complete reversal of a certain state of affairs *within* the world’.<sup>296</sup> In seeking to offer a more general definition, Tudor wrote:

‘A political myth, as I understand it, is one which tells the story of a political society. In many cases, it is the story of a political society that existed or was created in the past and which must now be restored or preserved. In other cases, it concerns a political society destined to be created in the future, and it is told for the purpose of encouraging men to hasten its advent....’

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<sup>291</sup> T. Jones, *Remaking the Labour Party, From Gaitskell to Blair*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p.vii.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> T. Jones, ‘Taking Genesis out of the Bible: Hugh Gaitskell, Clause IV and Labour’s socialist myth’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol.11, No.2, (1997), pp.1-23, p.18.

<sup>295</sup> H. Tudor, *Political Myth*, (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.137.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

‘Like all other myths, a political myth explains the circumstances of those to whom it is addressed. It renders their experience more coherent; it helps them understand the world in which they live. And it does so by enabling them to see their present condition as an episode in an ongoing drama... it may help strengthen the solidarity of the group in the face of a major challenge.’<sup>297</sup>

Labour’s use of its past can be a powerful tool in internal debates and external presentation, as was noted earlier in this study. Jobson and Wickham-Jones have noted how the party’s attachment to nostalgia can ‘involve the mobilisation of visual representations and symbols, the use of traditions and rituals as well as appeals to norms and rules’.<sup>298</sup> Jobson has argued that nostalgia – sentimental longing for the past – can provide ‘social, political and economic guidance’<sup>299</sup> to a political party. This insight is very relevant to understanding how particular policies come to represent a Labour person’s socialist faith. An attachment to emblems involves a powerful retelling of both the Labour Party’s and Britain’s pasts. In the case of public ownership, the germ of the policy – while much disputed – is contained in the party’s constitution, forged at a moment where the labour movement had an opportunity to challenge the forces of capital through parliamentary representation. The policy’s ‘heyday’ is often considered to be the first majority Labour Government, where Attlee’s administration built institutions of the welfare state and sought to nationalise selected industries. It is inextricably tied, therefore, to the party’s origins and creed (the source of Harold Wilson’s ‘taking genesis out of the bible’ comment) and to achievements which Labour people are particularly proud. These measures were achieved – importantly for Labour people – in the face of opposition from the Conservative enemy. Following the post-war Labour government, public ownership also became highly relevant to factionalism, between the Gaitskellites, the Bevanites, and their heirs.

This leads me to the typology I use in this study to categorise a policy as emblematic within the Labour Party. Such policies fulfil four criteria: a strong socialist heritage, meaning the policy touches upon traditionally strong socialist themes, connected to

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<sup>297</sup> Tudor, *Political Myth*, pp.138-139.

<sup>298</sup> R. Jobson and M. Wickham-Jones, ‘Gripped by the past: Nostalgia and the 2010 Labour Party Leadership Contest’, *British Politics*, Vol.5, No.4, (December 2010), pp.525-548, p.527.

<sup>299</sup> Jobson, *Nostalgia*, p.5.



an element or elements of the party's origins; a stark contrast with the Conservatives, meaning the policy creates a clear dividing line between Labour and their main opposition; an adhesive quality, meaning that – owing to evidence of significant support for the policy in the Labour Party – the policy has the potential to unite Labour people, even if it is on the basis that those opposed to the policy fear that changing it would create division. It becomes part of the party's 'glue', something that can be particularly important when other parts of the party's programme or organisation are undergoing changes; and finally relevance to factionalism, meaning the policy is connected to groups of Labour people who identify in opposition to one another. I apply this typology to nuclear weapons policy in Chapter 4. These characteristics combine to make a policy both symbolic and emblematic, and are at the centre of this fault line in Labour's ethos: between Labour people who accept that some of the party's policies are symbolic and untouchable, and those who see such attachments as either an ideological shortcoming or an obstacle to 'common sense' pragmatism.

### *Fault line 3: Decisions - the parliamentary party and internal democracy*

As I noted earlier, the double problem of concern with democratic control<sup>300</sup> on the one hand, and the (some would perceive) dilemma of principles and power on the other, led the Labour Party to conceive of what Drucker called 'manifestoism', a practice that 'is about representation first of all and only secondarily, and indirectly, about governing'.<sup>301</sup> The reason for the resort to manifestoism is, according to Drucker, the absence of a guiding political theory, a fault line I explained above. Manifestoism's undoing is its fundamental clash with parliamentary democracy, and the fact that Cabinet government perceives and engages the political world in a fundamentally different way to 'how it appears to the majority of delegates at party conferences'.<sup>302</sup> Manifestos are, in Drucker's view, a blunt instrument with often vague formulations. However, he suggests some sympathy for the motivation behind

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<sup>300</sup> When I talk of leadership control of policymaking, instead of consultation with party members, I am arguing that – very broadly – this approach is antagonistic to participatory democracy within the Labour Party (i.e. directly involving party members) and more in line with representative democracy (where the leadership represents party members), two broad types identified in: D. Held, *Models of Democracy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p.4.

<sup>301</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.92.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

such an approach, noting a history of ‘barely trusted elected leaders’<sup>303</sup> and decrying the absence of accountability to the party’s annual conference – something ‘badly lacking... and what a high price the party pays for it’.<sup>304</sup>

While Robert McKenzie’s classic *British Political Parties* was mildly scolded by Drucker for an under appreciation of Labour’s ideology, both authors arrived at similar conclusions as to how leadership power within a party is exercised. McKenzie’s landmark study concluded, from a detailed historical critique of assumptions fed by Conservative and Labour Party narratives, that neither was controlled by their extra-parliamentary parts, nor did party leaders wilfully ignore their supporters inside and outside of parliament. Instead, party leaderships exercised final authority so long as they retain the confidence of their parliamentary party. The ‘views of their organized supporters outside Parliament must inevitably be taken into account’,<sup>305</sup> but this is more akin to the presence of ‘a highly organized pressure group with a special channel of communication’.<sup>306</sup> If the question is whether or not the leaderships of political parties – even those who proclaim themselves to be democratic, as the Labour Party does – ultimately wield the greater authority, McKenzie arrived at the same answer as Robert Michels who, in his ‘oligarchy’ thesis, noted the ‘high degree of independence’<sup>307</sup> political leaders have.

Yet McKenzie’s conclusion centred on the British system of cabinet government and parliamentary democracy. All the while parties accept this system, McKenzie argued, power will unfailingly gravitate to those in cabinet making decisions, with the support (if they can hold it) of their colleagues in parliament.<sup>308</sup> This leads to the difference between Michels and McKenzie on the role of democracy in parties and parties in a democracy.

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<sup>303</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.93.

<sup>304</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.93. Tony Benn also often spoke about Labour’s leadership ignoring the movement. ‘The parliamentary leadership, or the right of the Labour Party, have never been much bothered if policy resolutions they dislike have been passed at Conference. They knew they could be neglected.’ T. Benn, ‘an interview with Eric Hobsbawm’, in M. Jacques and F. Mulhern (eds.), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, (London: Verso, 1981), pp.75-99, p.92.

<sup>305</sup> R. McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, (London: Mercury Books, 1964), p.635.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p.642.

<sup>307</sup> R. Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), p.172.

<sup>308</sup> McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, p.635.

As McKenzie noted:

‘Michels appeared to assume that a “democratic” political party ought ideally to be under the direction and control of its mass membership... [but this] never proves feasible in practice because of the operation of his law of oligarchy. But in the British context there is another reason of greater importance: the conventions of the parliamentary system... require that Members of Parliament, and therefore parliamentary parties also, must hold themselves responsible solely to the electorate and not to the mass organisation of their supporters outside Parliament... The mass organizations may be permitted to play some part... but if they attempted to arrogate to themselves a determining influence with respect to policy or leadership they would be cutting across the chain of responsibility from Cabinet, to Parliament, to electorate.’<sup>309</sup>

Drucker arrived at much the same place, noting that when the party ‘spends much of its time and energy electing governments... it cannot complain if its ministers then govern. To deny these ministers this right would require reopening the entire question of whether a socialist movement has any business forming a political party to contest parliamentary seats’.<sup>310</sup> The difference between the two lies in Drucker’s appreciation of ideology (something he believes should be better developed and understood by Labour people) and his arguments regarding the importance of Labour governments moving towards goals that Labour people share – issues McKenzie did not address in his study. Both McKenzie and Drucker were disdainful of suggestions that activists could ‘control’ political parties and both evidence Labour’s survivability as a party that can live with its own democratic contradictions. In a later essay, published in 1982, McKenzie took issue with Clement Attlee’s proclamation that ‘the Labour Party Conference lays down the policy of the Party, and issues instructions which must be carried out... The Labour Party Conference is in fact a parliament of the movement’.<sup>311</sup> McKenzie viewed this as part of a misleading pattern on the left of

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<sup>309</sup> McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, pp.644-645.

<sup>310</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.98.

<sup>311</sup> C. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.93.

grouping political parties and trade unions as if they ‘constituted a single species of social aggregate’.<sup>312</sup>

While trade unions – rightly, in McKenzie’s view – are there to aggregate the views of their mass membership and represent them, as one, to employers and other concentrations of power, political parties are there to sustain ‘political leaders who offer themselves as potential governors’<sup>313</sup> of a polity far wider than their party. Yet, while McKenzie viewed the Attlee position as unworkable intra-party democratic purity, it does something of a disservice to Attlee’s observations of the Labour constitution. Later in the same book chapter as that quoted by McKenzie, Attlee argued that ‘action’ in parliament is a matter for the PLP, which can ‘decide on the application of Party policy’, meaning ‘in its own sphere the Parliamentary Party is supreme’.<sup>314</sup> What ‘action’ is, how stretchable ‘application’ of policy can be, and the use of the word ‘supreme’ all demonstrate the opacity of Labour’s intra-party democracy, even in the mind of a famous proponent.

McKenzie concluded his study with a nod of agreement<sup>315</sup> to Joseph Schumpeter’s analysis of classical democracy and his competing theory of competition for political leadership. Schumpeter critiqued ‘classical’<sup>316</sup> accounts of democracy by questioning how the ‘will of the people’<sup>317</sup> can be disaggregated from disagreement and irrationality among an electorate, and how, therefore, political decisions can be vested in the people. Instead, Schumpeter offered a theory ‘truer to life’ in seeing ‘the role of the people... [as] to produce a government’<sup>318</sup> with the definition of the democratic method as the ‘institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples’ vote’.<sup>319</sup> To McKenzie, this helped substantiate the argument that ‘initiative in the formulation of policy cannot possibly come primarily from the several millions

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<sup>312</sup> R. McKenzie, ‘Power in the Labour Party: the issue of intra-party democracy’, in D. Kavanagh (eds.), *The Politics of the Labour Party*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp.191-201, p.195.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Attlee, *Labour Party*, p.109.

<sup>315</sup> McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, p.646.

<sup>316</sup> J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), p.269.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., p.250.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p.269.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

of party supporters or from the electorate as a whole'.<sup>320</sup> Instead they elect a team, who while needing their support to get elected, must themselves be the drivers of political decision-making. Schumpeter's model recognised 'the vital fact of leadership' instead of attributing an 'unrealistic degree of initiative [to electors] which practically amounted to ignoring leadership'.<sup>321</sup> This is a good definition of one interpretation of this fault line in Labour's ethos – the interpretation which posits the leadership role of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The other key interpretation regards Labour MPs as more akin to delegates of the Labour movement, elected to parliament to implement the party's manifesto and to respect the will of the party's annual conference.

#### *Fault line 4: Outsiders - 'expressive' and 'instrumental' politics*

Drucker argued that there existed within Labour an oppositional tendency – in other words a disposition which valued protest, and in Drucker's mind meant that, institutionally, Labour had a stake in remaining out of government.<sup>322</sup> Yet, with ambitions to govern Britain, and with Labour people experiencing terms in office and feeling pride in governing achievements, any hint of 'oppositionism' can be seen as crass, indulgent and destructive. Labour's politicians have utilised these competing traditions in their political strategies and arguments, concretising a construction that sees Labour people regularly accused of being incapable of putting principles into practice, either because they have no principles or because they have no strategy for putting them into practice. Tony Crosland argued that within the Labour party were people 'who would remain in opposition for thirty years rather than risk one tittle of his doctrinal purity'.<sup>323</sup> Richard Crossman suggested that a different kind of Labour person becomes 'obsessed by electoral considerations and succumbs to the temptations to jettison its radical policies for the sake of office'.<sup>324</sup>

Naturally, both expressed their belief in a blend of governing competence and principled radicalism, while maintaining an opposition to a more extreme position

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<sup>320</sup> McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, p.646.

<sup>321</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p.270.

<sup>322</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.96.

<sup>323</sup> A. Crosland, *Can Labour Win?*, (London: Fabian Society, 1960), p.2.

<sup>324</sup> R. Crossman, *Labour in the Affluent Society*, (London: Fabian Society, 1960), pp.4-5.

that only believes in one of them. As Shaw noted, this is a ‘perennial feature’<sup>325</sup> of Labour Party conflicts – both between Right and Left and between Labour’s leaders and its activists. In the case of the former, the conflict is doctrinal and strategic: how much to compromise on principles and at what pace to proceed. In the case of Labour’s leaders and activists, Shaw argued its leaders have ‘their eyes fixed both on the immediate burdens of government and on winning the next election’, while activists ‘fear that in the process party ideals may be sacrificed’.<sup>326</sup> Dennis Kavanagh has argued that, out of government, Labour ‘developed an opposition mentality, a liking for “revolutionary socialism”’, while ‘in government the restraints of the situation and exposure to other viewpoints sometimes meant that policy priorities shifted’.<sup>327</sup>

Similarly, Marquand argued two broad positions from the Labour Right and the Labour Left were evident: that the Right believed that all that was necessary ‘was to play the parliamentary game by the familiar rules, to fight elections at the appropriate times in the approved manner, and by the display of statesmanship and moderation to win over a sufficient proportion of the floating vote to gain a parliamentary majority’.<sup>328</sup> The Left, too, believed in parliamentary democracy, but wanted ‘a more aggressive, and above all a morally more intransigent, form of parliamentarism’<sup>329</sup> which Marquand judged was ‘justified... where it failed was in clothing that demand in marxist phrases, the logic of which contradicted the logic of the demand itself’.<sup>330</sup> Underlying these practices are real dilemmas that have long been subject to both academic and political analysis of the Labour Party, and of social democratic politics more generally. Recent work has argued that for social democratic parties across the board, ‘the tension between principles and pragmatism... is of particular resonance’.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> E. Shaw, ‘The Labour Party’ in A. Seldon and K. Hickson, *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.261-284, p.260.

<sup>326</sup> Shaw, ‘The Labour Party’, p.260.

<sup>327</sup> D. Kavanagh, ‘Introduction’, in D. Kavanagh (eds.), *The Politics of the Labour Party*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp.1-7, p.4.

<sup>328</sup> Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, p.113.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> P. Kennedy and R. Manwaring, ‘The Dilemmas of Social Democracy’, in R. Manwaring and P. Kennedy, *Why the Left Loses*, (Bristol: Polity Press, 2018), pp.203-218, p.204.

Max Weber, in his lecture 'Politics as a Vocation', argued that 'the ethics of intention and the ethics of responsibility are not diametrically opposed, but complementary: together they make the true man, the man who can have the vocation of politics'.<sup>332</sup> Further, he argued that 'politics is a matter of boring down strongly and slowly through hard boards with passion and judgement together. It is perfectly true, and confirmed by all historical experience, that the possible cannot be achieved without continually reaching out towards that which is impossible in this world'.<sup>333</sup> It is from Weber's distinction of 'intention' and 'responsibility', and his advocacy for a blend, that Parkin arrived at his analysis of expressive and instrumental politics – something he saw as core tension of Labour Party politics.<sup>334</sup> 'The tensions between these two political orientations', Parkin argued, 'has been at the root of many of the conflicts within the Labour Party from its foundation until modern times.'<sup>335</sup> Roy Jenkins is put forward as one example by Parkin. Jenkins, writing during the Clause IV controversy under Gaitskell's leadership, took aim at what he called 'the inherent defeatism of the left',<sup>336</sup> arguing:

'The will to power has always been much stronger in the Conservative Party. There it is something to be pursued at almost any cost. The Labour Party has quite rightly had a different order of priorities, but its danger is that of going too far in the other direction and thinking that it is unsocialist and even immoral to desire power. One effect of the election result [the 1959 defeat] was to encourage that aspect of the party's outlook which has always both expected and accepted defeat.'<sup>337</sup>

The risk, Jenkins argued, was of a party committed to parliamentary politics, but ashamed of seeking power. This argument has not only been advanced by the Labour Right. Harold Wilson, according to Dennis Kavanagh, 'suspected it [Labour] had developed an opposition-minded mentality'.<sup>338</sup> Counter arguments, typically from the

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<sup>332</sup> M. Weber, *Selections in Translation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.224.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, p.225.

<sup>334</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p.35.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> R. Jenkins, 'British Labour Divided', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.38, No.1, (January 1959), pp.487-496, p.494.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> D. Kavanagh, '1966: An Opportunity Squandered' in A. S. Crines and K. Hickson (eds.), *Harold Wilson: Unprincipled Prime Minister?*, (London: Biteback, 2016), pp.39-56, p.52.

Left of the party, posited the risk of a party committed to socialism, but ashamed of its own beliefs. Eric Heffer, writing nearly three decades later, but also after consecutive election defeats, warned:

‘[The media] will... claim that Labour’s policies are full-blooded socialist, even when they have been watered down. If these claims will be made anyway, what point is there in trimming our policies in a vain attempt to suit the opinion polls and the media? ... We have no need to be ashamed of our beliefs.’<sup>339</sup>

Parkin is not alone in having used the language of ‘expressive’ and ‘instrumental’ in considering Labour Party politics. The philosopher Charles Taylor also drew a contrast between socialists who present an ‘expressivist critique of capitalist society’ and those who adopt a style more akin to ‘utilitarians who had discovered the superior efficacy of collective instruments’,<sup>340</sup> a description commented upon favourably by Bernard Williams.<sup>341</sup> In a similar way to my understanding of the fault lines within Labour’s ethos, and the positions Labour Party people take, Taylor saw a ‘spectrum within socialism... in that some have been far more concerned with one goal than the other’.<sup>342</sup> Taylor offered William Morris as an example of someone more inclined towards an ‘expressive’ orientation, evoked by Morris’ biographer as an approach focusing on ‘social agitation and education’.<sup>343</sup>

I noted earlier that the expressive and instrumentalist traditions within Labour are often furthered in adversarial debates, where each side seeks to define the other negatively. In reality, I think there is some exaggeration in these claims, and that – as Parkin noted – most people adopt a blend. However, I do believe there are competing traditions within Labour’s ethos which have a more expressive, or a more instrumental interpretation of this fault line. Those with an identity closer to expressive Labour politics put an emphasis on longstanding political philosophy, are defensive of the party’s historic identity and – where possible – seek contemporary

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<sup>339</sup> E. Heffer, *Labour’s Future: Socialist or SDP Mark 2?*, (London: Verso, 1986), p.9.

<sup>340</sup> C. Taylor, ‘Socialism and Weltanschauung’, in L. Kolakowski and S. Hampshire, *The Socialist Idea: a reappraisal*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp.45-58, p.53.

<sup>341</sup> B. Williams, *Essays and Reviews, 1959-2002*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), p.106.

<sup>342</sup> Taylor, ‘Socialism and Weltanschauung’, p.53.

<sup>343</sup> F. MacCarthy, *William Morris, A Life for Our Time*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p.493.



connection with it. They stress the scale and necessity of transformation in government and they advocate for extra-parliamentary activity, considered to be complimentary to electoral activity. Instrumental Labour politics has an emphasis on the *kind* of values that must be endorsed to achieve power. It includes a stress on the status of being a ‘natural party of government’, which is often prioritised in argument before policy and ideals-based language. It includes a focus upon reaching beyond Labour’s class-based politics and on reassessing the party’s trade union relationship.

Jobson’s work on nostalgia is also relevant here. Nostalgia, when connected to a group, can lead to ‘nostalgia identity’, something ‘dependent on the relative generational stability of a collective identity, the passing down of nostalgic memories from generation to generation and the ability of a nostalgia-identity to adapt to, incorporate or repeal contestations’.<sup>344</sup> This can be utilised by Labour’s politicians. Indeed, it’s an important part of Labour’s expressive tradition and one Labour’s political actors must engage with. As Jobson has argued, those who seek to ‘reorient Labour... must, firstly, engage with the significant relationship that the party holds with its past’.<sup>345</sup> Jobson’s conclusion that Blair, despite his criticisms of nostalgia, ‘seemed to exhibit an understanding of the way in which the past could be mobilised’<sup>346</sup> to legitimise his party reforms is, I think, correct and an important example of how Labour’s expressive traditions can be invoked by actors with a more instrumental orientation.

### **Applying the fault line framework**

The final part of this chapter engages with an issue flagged by Drucker in *Doctrine and Ethos*: that the effect of ethos was difficult to identify with precision, in contrast to doctrinal traditions which can be traced and analysed through the resolutions and policy documents debated within the party.<sup>347</sup> This study flips Drucker’s conclusion on its head. I contend that it is possible to take the same sources which Drucker listed and use them to analyse the impact of Labour’s ethos. For example, the fault line about Party Objects can be analysed by immersion in a process which considered

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<sup>344</sup> Jobson, *Nostalgia*, p.7.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189.

<sup>347</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.11.

altering them. Such immersion uses many of the same sources – documents, resolutions, conference debates – though adds further sources. These include archival material to analyse paths considered, but not taken (often documented in drafts and memorandums), and through interviews to understand an actor’s strategic calculations. This study takes each fault line individually (though interactivity between them is discussed throughout) and analyses the effect of Labour’s competing traditions using a case study from the period 1983-1997.

My case selection followed three stages: identifying the type of practice or action being studied when examining a fault line (for example, for ‘Objects’, activity that significantly engaged with Labour’s Party Objects); selecting cases from Labour’s opposition years (1983 to 1997) where relevant activity occurred; and then finally choosing one case for each fault line. In addition to the type of activity considered, case selection also required consistency in the actors involved. As this study seeks to understand the effect of Labour’s ethos on the party’s political trajectory, I have focused on the actions of elite actors – principally the party leadership and their close advisors and allies – as those who most readily and regularly affect that trajectory. As Labour had three leadership teams during this period, I identified cases across the four fault lines from all three leadership stints. To trace the effect of ethos, such elite actor activity also had to be accessible to a researcher – in other words, cases needed to have enough potential research material accessible through public documents, archives or from interviewing those involved. Table 2 includes cases meeting the criteria across those years.

**Table 2: Potential cases**

<b>Fault line</b>	<b>Potential cases</b>
<b>Objects</b>	<p>The <i>Aims &amp; Values</i> process under Neil Kinnock</p> <p>John Smith’s engagement with Clause IV</p> <p>Tony Blair’s rewriting of Clause IV</p>

<p><b>Emblems</b></p>	<p>Public ownership and nationalisation policy during Kinnock's leadership.</p> <p>Unilateral nuclear disarmament during Kinnock's leadership</p> <p>National Health Service policy during Blair's leadership</p>
<p><b>Decisions</b></p>	<p>The Policy Review process during Kinnock's leadership</p> <p>One member, one vote (OMOV) during John Smith's leadership</p> <p>The promise not to raise income taxes during Blair's leadership</p> <p>The decision to make the Bank of England independent during Blair's leadership</p>
<p><b>Outsiders</b></p>	<p>Kinnock's campaign for the 1983 Labour leadership election.</p> <p>Kinnock's strategy and rhetoric during the Miners' Strike, 1984-85.</p> <p>The Commission on Social Justice, during John Smith's leadership.</p> <p>Blair's campaign for the 1994 Labour leadership election.</p>

Analysing the effect of ethos requires interpretation of an actor's motivations and strategic considerations when taking political decisions and when speaking (in both private and public). With that in mind, the third and final stage of case selection involved choosing one *principal* case to analyse each fault line. Focusing on one case allowed for this study to go sufficiently in-depth: seeking to unearth the motivations, objectives and strategies of those elite actors around a given activity. This required not only a thorough understanding of the context, but a high level of detail in tracking

the actions of the actors involved. As well as selecting one case for each fault line, I also wanted to understand any differences, should they exist, between different Labour leaders – not only to show the existence of different individual interpretations and perceptions of the dominant interpretation, but to understand how and why those different interpretations of Labour’s ethos affected the trajectory of Labour’s modernisation. In other words, to what extent were there different periods of modernisation, and different kinds of ‘moderniser’?

This raised the question of which leaders to analyse over the four fault lines. My decision was to select two cases from the Kinnock period, and two from the Blair period – drawing contrasts within those analyses between each other and with John Smith’s leadership. I judged this to be a better approach to comprehending differences in modernisation, and to draw both contrasts and similarities between the Kinnock and Blair strategies. As previous studies have noted, Smith’s tenure was ‘all too brief’.<sup>348</sup> Smith was a towering figure during Kinnock’s leadership, and his political legacy continued to affect the strategic contexts of both Blair and Brown. Yet, due to his sudden death, his leadership forever remained only a beginning. While we know Smith had planned a supplement to Clause IV,<sup>349</sup> and had reacted with anger to Jack Straw’s proposal to rewrite the infamous clause,<sup>350</sup> we do not know how his engagement with Labour’s Party Objects could have concluded. Nor do we know how Smith would have responded to the final report of the Commission on Social Justice, which Blair launched in October 1994 nearly six months after Smith died. Both of these cases are, therefore, incomplete.

Within the Kinnock and Blair periods, there remain a number of potential cases, raising the question as to whether the findings of this study would have been different had different cases been selected. There are two relevant points here. First, in relation to the *effect* of ethos, I judge all of the cases to offer consistency in terms of ethos having the *potential* to shape the motivations of the actors involved and the outcomes of the cases. This is based on this study’s argument that all Labour Party people are

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<sup>348</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.224.

<sup>349</sup> Driver and Martell, *New Labour*, p.37.

<sup>350</sup> J. Straw, *Last Man Standing*, (London: Macmillan: 2012), p.190.

socialised in the shared and competing traditions within Labour's ethos, meaning they have a view on the four key fault lines which the possible cases engage with.

Secondly, and importantly, this does not mean the outcomes themselves would be the same in every case. Such consistency would, in effect, disprove one of the central thrusts of this study: that different Labour people have different interpretations of the party's ethos, thereby having the potential to affect their motivations and decision-making in different ways. For example, analysing Neil Kinnock's approach to engaging with Labour's Party Objects would (and does in the next chapter) show the effect of Kinnock's interpretation of Labour's ethos and his perception of the dominant ethos at the time. Similarly, analysing Blair's approach to changing Clause IV would also help us understand the effect of *his* interpretation of Labour's ethos. Yet, both cases saw different outcomes: in the case of the former, change was limited; in the latter, Blair achieved his full reform. In part, this was down to interpretations of the party's ethos.

Where consistency of outcome *is* important is in case selection *within* a fault line for the *same* actor. Here my approach was to select cases that were not 'one-offs' but part of a consistent interpretation of Labour's ethos which can be seen in other cases. As an example of these considerations, take Fault line 3: Decisions. In opposition, New Labour was notoriously risk-averse in making policy. The 1997 manifesto was slim, and much of it – including the constitutional programme – had been inherited. Yet a small number of important policy decisions were made, all of which showed the same interpretation of Labour's ethos when it comes to decision-making. An important policy decision made during this period was to not increase rates of income tax, nor to waver from Conservative spending plans for two years. The decision was made in a secretive way between Blair and Brown, with even Blair and his closest aides not knowing about Brown's intention regarding the timing of the announcement until the night before.<sup>351</sup> The same can be said of the policy on a utilities windfall tax<sup>352</sup> and on the decision – considered now to be of great importance – to make the Bank of England independent.

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<sup>351</sup> A. Campbell, *The Alistair Campbell Diaries, Volume One, Prelude to Power, 1994-1997*, (London: Hutchinson, 2010), p.617.

<sup>352</sup> Brown, *My Life, Our Times*, p.106.

In each instance important policy measures were decided upon by Blair, Brown and their aides. Their approach is demonstrative of an interpretation of Labour's ethos which believes policymaking is a matter for the leadership of the party, particularly when close to an election and on matters of economic and political importance. Table 3 shows my final case selection.

**Table 3: Case selection**

<b>Fault line</b>	<b>Case study</b>
<b>Objects</b>	Aims & Values (1986-1988)
<b>Emblems</b>	Unilateral nuclear disarmament (1983-1989)
<b>Decisions</b>	Bank of England independence (1995-1997)
<b>Outsiders</b>	Blair leadership campaign (1994)

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the substance of the four key fault lines in Labour's ethos. The four fault lines are controversial issues where divergent narratives exist as to the beliefs and practices Labour Party people should adhere to. These differences are significant. They are connected to a Labour Party person's understanding of what it is to be a Labour Party member, activist and politician. They represent competing traditions within Labour's ethos, giving rise to aspects of the movement's pluralism (there is much doctrinal pluralism too) as well as to divisive episodes in the party's past.

As I noted earlier, an actor's beliefs, derived from Labour's competing traditions, represent their individual interpretation of the party's ethos, including on these contentious points. The dominant interpretation represents the beliefs which are considered to be the prevailing narrative. This chapter has also explained the case

selection for the chapters which follow, including why this study omits – as a focus of a case study chapter – John Smith’s leadership period, and how I have checked for consistency in seeking to show how distinct interpretations of Labour’s ethos affect an actor’s choices. The next chapter takes the first fault line, that of Party Objects, and focuses on how Kinnock’s individual interpretation of Labour’s ethos, and his perception of the dominant interpretation of the time, affected a project of ideological clarification known as *Aims & Values*.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Objects: Labour's Aims & Values under Kinnock**

‘Between the myopic attitude of the purely “practical man” and that of the “intellectual”, who sees society merely in terms of ideas, lies a fertile terrain ready to be cultivated by all who are prepared to recognise that political intentions are secular, always limited, but nevertheless frequently dynamic.’

Nye Bevan, *In Place of Fear*

‘Those who effect a revolution ought to know wither they are leading the world. They have need of a social theory – and in point of fact the more thorough-going apostles of movement always have such a theory.’

L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*

‘As Europeans go, the English are not intellectual. They have a horror of abstract thought, they feel no need for any philosophy or systemic “world view”. Nor is this because they are “practical”, as they are so fond of claiming for themselves.’

George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*

## **Introduction**

The question ‘what is the big idea’ would rankle John Smith, according to one of his former aides. ‘Isn’t it a really big idea to lift pensioners out of poverty? To say no children should live in poverty?’<sup>353</sup> Smith asked during one of the periods where this question was floated by his colleagues and others. Smith was regarded as ‘a man of ruthlessly sharp intelligence’ who ‘favoured “playing the long game”, that is a calm and measured approach to rebuilding support for Labour’.<sup>354</sup> He was dismissive, however, of ideological moves which could antagonise one section or another of the party, reacting angrily to attempts to open up debates about Clause IV and suspicious of one ‘big idea’ trumping Labour’s pragmatic head and its social justice heart. The same is said of another former Labour Leader, Jim Callaghan, who Roy Hattersley recollected ‘would say about ideas, “what we need to do is obvious, you don’t need to have theory”’.<sup>355</sup> Some Labour people, however, disagree, leading to a fault line in

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<sup>353</sup> D. Boffey, ‘Yvette Cooper: It’s not enough to be angry – you have to be able to change things’, *The Observer*, 9 August 2015, accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/aug/08/yvette-cooper-interview-labour-party-strong-extreme>.

<sup>354</sup> E. Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), p.192.

<sup>355</sup> Lord Hattersley, interview by author, London, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2017.



Labour's ethos. Some posit the importance of ideological clarity to reinforce a 'vision' for the party – and what some Labour politicians refer to as the 'basis of socialist theory'.<sup>356</sup> Others consider such activity to be relatively unimportant in the political race of policy decisions and day-to-day victories and defeats, in addition to being potentially divisive. This is not a fault line between 'intellectuals' and 'non-intellectuals', but between those who see the merit in a Labour tradition of 'clarity about the framework of values and principles within which and against which our politics is conducted'<sup>357</sup> and those who put greater emphasis on the policies and programmes that readily spring from Labour's shared values. The latter position, in relation to Party Objects, lends itself to a strategy of non-engagement.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand how the competing traditions within Labour's ethos – in this case, regarding the fault line 'Objects' – affected the strategic calculations of the actors involved in a process called *Aims & Values*. It looks at how individual interpretations held by decision-makers, and how perceptions of the dominant interpretation within the party, affected the strategies and actions of the actors involved. The *Aims & Values* process took place in the years 1986-1988 under Neil Kinnock's leadership, culminating in the publication of the document *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values*. I argue this reform process was affected by the leader's own interpretation of the party's ethos, one he perceived as being widely shared by the Labour movement at the time: that ideological renewal through alterations to Party Objects (or something close) was divisive, and something that had to be managed carefully. This interpretation contributed to a conscious decision, taken as part of the leadership's wider strategy, to give greater priority to organisational and policy change and to avoid a confrontation over Party Objects.

Such an approach, Shaw has noted, limited the extent of Labour's transformation. While Thatcherites had always grasped 'the importance of carefully thought-out ideological formulae and idioms in the bid to forge a new common sense' Labour under Kinnock 'had never grasped this'.<sup>358</sup> While on policy change, the Policy

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<sup>356</sup> Brown and Wright, 'Introduction', p.15.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>358</sup> E. Shaw, 'Retrieving or re-imagining the past? The case of 'Old Labour', 1979-94', in J. Davis and R. McWilliam (eds.), *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp.25-43, p.28.

Review process oversaw extensive changes, this chapter argues that its precursor process – *Aims & Values* – was a limited restatement of the party’s mission, leading to eventual criticism of ‘opinion survey-driven’ policy change rather than being based on an ‘analysis of society and a vision of the future’.<sup>359</sup> This differentiates the Kinnock period of modernisation in a significant way from the New Labour period which followed, one where Tony Blair did, during his period as Leader of the Opposition, prioritise revision of the party’s aims and values. Applying this study’s typology of possible strategies for engagement with Party Objects – ‘substitution’, which advocates the replacement of Labour’s existing creed with something different; ‘addition’, which adds and simultaneously reaffirms what currently exists; and ‘addition with silent substitution’, a blend of the two, which advocates giving greater prominence to newer additions to the party’s creed, yet without reaffirming what existed beforehand – I explain how and why Kinnock consciously opted for a strategy of addition. The story of *Aims & Values* is of a process initiated unwillingly and of a more ambitious approach to change abandoned. This chapter reveals a leader reluctant to prioritise debate about overarching political thought at a time when his pragmatism was considered to be politically expedient.

### **Controversy over Party Objects**

For the earlier part of the 20th century, what became known simply as ‘Clause IV’ was the Labour party’s creed – in so much as it was the sole ideological statement in the party’s constitution.<sup>360</sup> It was a compromise. It sought to give Labour’s theoretical socialists a degree of ideological certainty, while retaining ambiguity for the more liberally minded or non-doctrinal Labour people. Yet the perception of Clause IV evolved, becoming an object of socialist loyalty through the Labour Left’s commitment to common ownership, and aligning with Labour people who were happy existing within the vagaries of Clause IV socialism. As I noted earlier, to Drucker, Clause IV wasn’t merely a symbol. ‘The special position of Clause IV,’ he

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<sup>359</sup> Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, p.201.

<sup>360</sup> ‘(d) To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best attainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service.’ Reproduced in G.D.H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1948), p.72.

wrote, 'is that it is a statement of principle which has policy implications and yet one which ensures that the party remains true to its ethos.'<sup>361</sup>

This position, if not the doctrine contained within the Clause itself, came under a sustained assault by Hugh Gaitskell following Labour's 1959 election defeat. Douglas Jay's infamous *Forward* article argued: 'The myth that we intended to "nationalise" anything and everything was very powerful in this election... we must destroy this myth decisively; otherwise we may never win again.'<sup>362</sup> Jay focused on two arguments. The first was that the party's position on common ownership was anything but clear, leading to misinterpretation among the electorate and the emergence of a myth. The second point, and something used by opponents of change to evidence cynicism, was the electoral imperative – that if Labour appeared to be for nationalising everything, it would win nothing. Jay's solution was ideological restatement.<sup>363</sup> Reflecting on Gaitskell's eventual attempt to amend Clause IV, Jay suggested he considered the plan unwise: 'It was the very fact of laying hands on the Creed itself, not the suggested re-wording, which outraged the fundamentalists.'<sup>364</sup> Adding to the creed, even publishing clarifications to the creed, was one thing – that could evidence pluralism, giving everyone something to believe. Seeking to *replace* what everyone believed, and substitute it for something else, was quite another. In other words, the act of revising itself was seen as divisive, even setting aside the actual content of any revision.

Gaitskell's view – one which he eventually retreated from – valued ideological renewal and invested it with sufficient importance to take a risk with party unity. He argued:

'It has also been said that we should not get involved in a "theological" argument, because it merely gives rise to fruitless discussion without really mattering at all. For my part, I cannot agree that the Constitution is or should be a collection of meaningless phrases about which it is fruitless to argue. The statement of our aims does matter. It is not mere theology. And here I must

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<sup>361</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.38.

<sup>362</sup> D. Jay, *Change and Fortune, A Political Record*, (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.273.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p.275.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, p.277.

add that I have been surprised by the attitude of others who say in private that the Constitution is hopelessly out of date and they don't really believe in it but in public urge us not to touch it because to do so might be controversial.'<sup>365</sup>

On the choice between unity and discordant debate, Gaitskell opted for debate: 'There are some who argue that, whatever the merits of the case, we must not proceed because there is disagreement about it in the Party. This puts a veto on making any change at any time unless we are all agreed on it at the start. I can think of nothing more fatal to the future of the Party. Certainly internal discord is bad and unity is desirable. But it must be real unity and it must not be achieved at the cost of permanent stagnation.'<sup>366</sup>

Yet Gaitskell's appetite for 'substitution', fatally for his attempt, was not shared even by some of his allies. Tudor Jones has argued that Gaitskell also failed to appreciate Clause IV's 'deeper significance as an expression of Labour's socialist myth',<sup>367</sup> including antagonising trade unionists who – regardless of their views on policy – valued tradition and its symbolic importance.<sup>368</sup> Gaitskell's interpretation of Labour's ethos and the party's mission, when it came to altering its political direction, was not shared by the majority of Labour people, and his strategy was rejected across the spectrum. Following the convulsions of 1960, Labour returned to a silent truce, at least on Clause IV. Yet the result of Gaitskell's efforts had been 'an unsatisfactory and provisional settlement, concealing deep differences over the nature and future extent of public ownership, as well as over the essential meaning and purpose of democratic socialism. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that bitter policy and doctrinal conflicts resurfaced within the party during the 1970s and early 1980s'.<sup>369</sup>

By the time Kinnock was elected to the Labour leadership, changing the party's organisational structures and its policies were at the top of his agenda. Revisiting the battle over Party Objects was not. While Kinnock did not perceive Clause IV to be representative of the ideology of most Labour people, and considered it a meaningless

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<sup>365</sup> Gaitskell, Speech in Nottingham.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Jones, 'Taking Genesis out of the Bible', p.17.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p.19.

anachronism, he did not have an appetite for a modernising ‘substitution’ strategy. In their avowedly partisan appraisal of the Kinnock leadership period, Heffernan and Marqusee present the *Aims & Values* process as a ‘typical Kinnock’ project, with the leader ‘raising the stakes at every turn’ and aiming to convince the media that he ‘was surreptitiously dropping Clause Four socialism’.<sup>370</sup> While they accept this ‘was a far cry from the kind of ideological confrontation Hugh Gaitskell had courted’,<sup>371</sup> Kinnock’s actions were portrayed as clinical, and his strategy as clear-sighted. The analysis I present in this chapter disagrees with these conclusions. Kinnock sought to avoid confrontation over reform of Party Objects. He displayed hesitancy, and eventually pulled back from the suggestion that the leadership should seek to disavow the party’s existing creed.

### **The Kinnock leadership: ‘If we give up what we believe, everything is gone.’**

Kinnock had been elected as the candidate of the ‘soft’ Left, beating the Labour Right’s Roy Hattersley after the convulsions of the disintegrating Callaghan government, Michael Foot’s troubled leadership, and the emergence of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The MP for Islwyn beat Hattersley comfortably across Labour’s electoral college – the PLP, constituency parties and trade unions – winning 71% of the total votes.<sup>372</sup> Kinnock regarded the absence of Tony Benn (who had lost his seat in the 1983 general election defeat after a productive, tumultuous period as a standard bearer for the Labour Left) as something which affected his mandate as Leader. Kinnock did not see the leadership result as a rejection of Bennism, because Benn had been unable to stand following the loss of his seat. Nor did Kinnock see it as a rejection (from the selectorate) of Labour’s 1983 programme and the Labour Left’s certainty of its socialist platform. Indeed, Kinnock’s message during the 1983 leadership election was typified by language pressing the need ‘to win support for its [Labour’s] policies – to educate, persuade and convert’.<sup>373</sup> The new Leader believed his mandate was ‘for change, but it was also a mandate for affirmation. I was the Left

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<sup>370</sup> R. Heffernan and M. Marqusee, *Defeat From the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock’s Labour Party*, (London: Verso, 1992), p.102.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> H. Harmer, *The Longman Companion to the Labour Party, 1900-1998*, (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), p.7.

<sup>373</sup> M. Westlake, *Kinnock: The Biography*, (London: Little, Brown, 2001), p.226.

candidate. People had an interpretation of that which was only partly true. Benn's candidature would have made it possible for me to be much more direct'.<sup>374</sup>

In the judgements of Kinnock and his team, principally his chief of staff, Charles Clarke, the impediments to being 'direct' were many. The organisational strength of Labour people to the Left of Kinnock was identified as a persistent challenge, along with the threat of continued organisational infiltration from 'Militant' – the Trotskyist group seeking 'the recruitment of the vanguard'<sup>375</sup> through Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs). The burning and then exploding confrontation between Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was another challenge, one that would have troubled any Labour Leader, though one particularly difficult for Kinnock. He came from a mining family, represented mining communities, yet had absolute contempt for Arthur Scargill and his strategy.<sup>376</sup> In particular, Kinnock judged the strike to have so dominated the minds of Labour people that, when it came to political change and debate within the party about its purpose:

'Nobody's listening... it utterly preoccupied the thinking and action of the whole Labour movement. The miners and the communities themselves, the fundraising, the frustration with Scargill, the unreserved sympathy for the miners... the hatred for Thatcher because of the encroachment on civil liberties... there were things about the miners' strike that moved them [Labour people] and enraged them... so taking policy issues head on in those circumstances ensured failure partly because people's attitude was, literally, "God if we give up what we believe, everything is gone".'<sup>377</sup>

This assessment of the miners' strike is an important indicator of Kinnock's perception of the mood of the Labour movement as a whole – focused, firmly, on the attack on mining communities and the importance of solidarity in the face of the assault. In terms of the party's ethos, Kinnock perceived a movement uncomfortable with any alteration connected with the party's other traditions, particularly (and

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<sup>374</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>375</sup> M. Crick, *Militant*, (London: Biteback, 2016), p.76.

<sup>376</sup> Charles Clarke, interview by author, Cambridge, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016.

<sup>377</sup> Kinnock, interview.

somewhat paradoxically, one could argue) in the face of the New Right's ideological zeal. Hattersley's recollection of this period is similar. He noted that 'the miners, on strike for a year, were the tragedy that haunted us day after day'.<sup>378</sup> Linked to Kinnock's perception of the wider movement was his own interpretation of Labour's ethos. Charles Clarke considered Kinnock to be a representative of 'authentic Labour' and that his ability to modernise the Labour Party owed much to the fact 'he came from the organised working class'.<sup>379</sup> Marquand has argued of Kinnock that 'the tribal language of "our people", which can so easily sound false or patronising, came naturally to him because they *were* his people'.<sup>380</sup> Kinnock began his tenure conscious, perhaps more so than previous leaders, of the centrality of solidarity to the Labour movement – a movement which perceived itself as besieged by Thatcherism. In Marquand's analysis, this gave Kinnock an opportunity. Thatcherism was so unpopular with the rank and file, he argues, that when convinced of their electoral unpopularity, policy changes would be accepted by the party as a necessity to defeat Thatcher.<sup>381</sup>

However, on issues where Kinnock perceived the party's dominant ethos to be on collision course with a given strategy – in this instance, a reluctance to revise the party's creed – Kinnock stepped back from potential confrontation with his party. Kinnock's view of his political inheritance, and of his reluctance to risk internal defeat attests to this early hesitancy in altering Labour's direction:

'What Charles and I knew was, from the outset, that any sudden efforts to change policy would crash, this was a tanker that was going to have to be turned around in a very measured way. What I never said was with icebergs all around and in the middle of a force ten gale. The tanker would have snapped in half, there's no doubt about that, and we had that proved. The first effort at one-member, one-vote was 1984. We lost by 153,000 in conference, which is a small defeat, but a savage bloody defeat. That evening I said to Charles "we will never take any major change to conference again, on

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<sup>378</sup> Hattersley, *Who Goes Home?*, p.270.

<sup>379</sup> Clarke, interview.

<sup>380</sup> Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, p.223.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

anything, without being bloody sure we were going to win". And we never did.'<sup>382</sup>

This was what Clarke called a 'judgement call about the culture of the party'.<sup>383</sup> This decision, informed by considerations of the party's ethos, led to a cautious strategy of 'addition' when it came to the party's aims and values, stressing what Kinnock saw as the priority areas of concern for Labour and informed by values that unite Labour people, but not explicitly revising Labour's creed. Setting out this approach in a 1985 autumn lecture to the Fabian Society, Kinnock argued the party required 'a shift in attitudes and presentation, not a change in principles' to 'join-up' the instincts of the upwardly mobile, 'modern working classes'<sup>384</sup> with the policies of the Labour Party. This had to be communicated to the Labour Party and movement more widely through a message that focused on a changing world and the need to progress with the times.<sup>385</sup> It was not, at least explicitly, an approach which posited the need for a change in Labour's core aims and values. Instead, Kinnock sought to promote a socialism with the explicit aim of enhancing the cohesion and unity of the Labour Party.

In his Fabian lecture, Kinnock argued for the interdependence of freedom and collectivism. He stressed the need to defend this from 'the stale vanguardism of the ultra-left and from the atavistic and timid premise of social democracy'.<sup>386</sup> The political context of Kinnock's words are important here. Quite separate from any doctrinal critique of the 'ultra-left' or of 'social democracy' was Kinnock's existential concern to attack both 'Militant' and the rise of the SDP-Liberal Alliance. 'Militant' was threatening his attempts to modernise Labour's image, while the SDP-Liberal Alliance was threatening, albeit to a lesser extent than under Michael Foot's leadership, Labour's position as Britain's main opposition party. His rhetoric was less about theoretical disputes, and more about securing the future of Labour's tradition as a moderate, democratic socialist and electorally competitive political entity. Repeating the need for a change in image, not of ideational or doctrinal renewal, the

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<sup>382</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>383</sup> Clarke, interview.

<sup>384</sup> N. Kinnock, *The Future of Socialism*, (London: Fabian Society, 1986), p.2.

<sup>385</sup> Clarke, interview.

<sup>386</sup> Kinnock, *Future of Socialism*, p.1.



1985 Fabian lecture argued for a move away from the ‘re-examination’ of ideology and towards the ‘strategy, attitudes and style’<sup>387</sup> of socialist politics. It is in these areas, Kinnock argued in his lecture, where constant adjustment was required – arguments more compatible with an approach that leaves Party Objects alone, and focuses more on management and day-to-day politics. Kinnock recognised too that Labour’s tradition was one that had shunned ‘rigid, codified, or disciplined theories characteristic of European continental socialism’.<sup>388</sup> Instead, Kinnock saw Labour’s socialism as ‘a tapestry’ with the ‘thread that runs through the weave... above all a deep concern with fellowship and fraternity; with community and participation’.<sup>389</sup> In a section on equality, Kinnock again asserted that ‘the problem is not with our objectives but with the institutions and patterns of provision, produced by past policies’, which he deemed ‘insufficient, inconsistent and uncoordinated’.<sup>390</sup>

Kinnock also put forward what he considered to be a key difference between socialism and social democracy – which, while read in light of the SDP-Alliance threat, had harsh words for 1950s Labour revisionism. Suggesting that values such as equality could belong to differing political philosophies, Kinnock contended that socialism’s uniqueness lay in its ‘economic and social analysis... [of] the structural economic and social problems of capitalism, and the commitment to radical but realistic methods and objectives’.<sup>391</sup> Social democracy, Kinnock argued, ‘knows nothing of this’.<sup>392</sup> Indeed, he accused 1950s social democrats of ‘complacency’ when they ‘misused’<sup>393</sup> a period of good economic times with social amelioration. With his words now targeting those who left the Labour fold, Kinnock characterised this view as for some, ‘a sad descent to lower common denominators with conservatism. For others it was merely the public expression of their private contempt for a democratic socialist movement which had given them everything they possessed’.<sup>394</sup> Kinnock concluded the 1985 lecture with a tribute to his interpretation of socialism, of Fabianism, and of the role of theoretical debate in Labour politics.

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<sup>387</sup> Kinnock, *Future of Socialism*, p.2.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

‘Freedom, justice and equality are meaningless as abstractions,’<sup>395</sup> he argued. They could only be ‘translated into living reality through the interaction of men, women and children in the everyday world... Diagnosis and prescription is only the starting point. The next two years will prove, as the Webbs might have said themselves, that “there is no substitute for hard work”. We must revive our faith and energy in that public process of education which worked in 1945’.<sup>396</sup>

Kinnock’s imagery was of grafting to educate the people in the principles of socialism rather than of revising the party’s creed. Undoubtedly this lecture was an intervention in the long debate regarding the role of ideas in the Labour Party, yet this lecture was one of the more anti-theoretical moments, positing a Webbian (though less theoretical than much of early Fabianism) focus on ‘practical policies’ and practice, rather than reform or clarification of Labour’s ideological framework. The 1945 government was used by Kinnock as a symbol of what socialist ‘education’ could achieve. Yet, through an analysis of both Kinnock’s words and his context, the lecture must be seen as a reaction, albeit one complimentary to Kinnock’s own interpretation of Labour’s ethos.

Kinnock’s ‘traditional’ socialism is what he himself called a ‘third way’<sup>397</sup>, attempting to escape two political philosophies that had given more radical alternatives a bad name: ‘complacent’ social democracy that sought to bargain with capitalism; and Trotskyite ultra-leftists. In expressing this interpretation, Kinnock was setting himself against the arguments for persistent, even constant restatements of Labour’s political philosophy, albeit within his reformist frame of pragmatism, and voter-friendly policies. In what he assessed to be a politically dangerous, even existential period for the Labour Party, he also showed a keen attention to the importance of myth and an appreciation of Labour’s hostility to debates about altering the party’s creed and clarifying its objectives.

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<sup>395</sup> Kinnock, *Future of Socialism*, p.12.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

## Starting to ‘backfill’: moves towards a statement of principles

By 1985, ‘a clear soft-Left current’<sup>398</sup> had emerged in the Labour Party. As Kinnock’s first parliament entered its second half, the Bennite Left had weakened and the trade unions were moving towards their more familiar role as a centre-right, leadership-supporting block.<sup>399</sup> Kinnock had jettisoned some of what he considered to be Labour’s misguided and unpopular policies, including the party’s opposition to membership of the European Economic Community and ‘right-to-buy’ council house sales. Yet this period also marked unease among Labour people about the party’s direction and vision. David Blunkett, who wouldn’t be elected to parliament till 1987 but who had a seat on the NEC during this period, recalled:

‘We were busy shovelling out all the things we thought were an impediment, but we weren’t back-filling with things that we thought were the vision of the future.’<sup>400</sup>

Shaw has written that in this first parliament, Kinnock paid ‘due regard to those values and ideological tenets which helped cement the party’,<sup>401</sup> yet seeking unity and the avoidance of conflict had stymied the process of modernisation.<sup>402</sup> He also judged Kinnock’s first parliament as important for ‘laying the groundwork for the Policy Review’<sup>403</sup> and not simply a period that focused on presentation and campaign agility. While I agree with this conclusion, the attempt to clarify the party’s aims and values towards the end of the first parliament, involving the political theorist (and Blunkett’s former university tutor) Bernard Crick, has not been sufficiently factored in to analysis of Kinnock’s period as leader. Here, the process of modernisation was stymied not only by Kinnock’s cautious party management strategy, but also the leader’s own interpretation of the divisive potential of debating the party’s objectives. In April and May 1986, Crick corresponded with Clarke regarding a document of

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<sup>398</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.39.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>400</sup> Lord Blunkett, interview by author, London, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

<sup>401</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.51.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

‘ideals, principles, values’ with a view to releasing it publicly as a ‘leaflet’.<sup>404</sup> Crick had followed a structure provided by Geoff Bish, the then head of the party’s policy unit.

The strategy behind the planned document, as outlined in Crick’s letter to Clarke, was to provide a coherent theoretical basis for the ‘soft-Left’. Crick noted:

‘The more I thought about it, the more I concluded that the real audience to read such a thing are [sic] the party itself; so that there is on record an answer to what we think the mainstream is, to release many of the Left centre from the belief that we, yes, have to be tactical (for a bit) but the real ideas are to be found far leftwards.’<sup>405</sup>

Crick’s argument was very much reminiscent of the revisionist challenge in the 1950s and the silent truce that followed Gaitskell’s death. As Susan Crosland recalled from a conversation between Hattersley and Tony Crosland, the then Foreign Secretary argued ‘we have got to keep making the point that the far Left are not the only people who can claim a socialist theory while the rest of us are thought to be mere pragmatists and administrators’.<sup>406</sup> The same thrust can be seen in Crick’s language – that all the while Labour people believe the ‘moderates’ are ideologically empty and the Labour Left ideationally confident, any modernisation in the party will be seen as tactical, rather than ideational. Any moderate project’s relative longevity, therefore, is open to question, along with its legitimacy in socialist thought more generally. The argument deployed by Crick in this 1986 letter is, unsurprisingly, consistent with a fuller treatment on the significance of theory in his 1984 Fabian pamphlet *Socialist Values and Time*. ‘We need thought, thinking and re-thinking, reviewing and re-forming old thoughts as well as forming new, quite as much as we need research groups on policies – perhaps at the moment more,’<sup>407</sup> Crick argued. ‘Theory will guide what policies and priorities to select.’<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Bernard Crick to Charles Clarke, April 1986, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> S. Crosland, *Tony Crosland*, (London: Coronet, 1983), p.390.

<sup>407</sup> B. Crick, *Socialist Values and Time*, (London: Fabian Society, 1984), p.1.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., p.9.

Crick had in his sights two ‘schools of thought’ in socialism that ‘seem unwilling to discuss what values we should hold, and often seek to avoid talk of values at all’<sup>409</sup> – these were ‘determinist Marxism and managerial pragmatism’.<sup>410</sup> The former was considered uninterested in talk of ‘values’ because of an acceptance of ideology being a product of the dominant economic paradigm. The latter, the managerial pragmatists, were subject to a fuller treatment by Crick. Here pragmatists and ‘social democrats’ would ‘make a cult of being purely practical and of accepting the present system, if administered with decency and humanity’.<sup>411</sup> Crick used Harold Wilson, as others have done, as an example of this kind of interpretation of Labour’s ethos, accusing Wilson of having no interest in ‘theories, doctrines or values of any kind’.<sup>412</sup> While others have noted Wilson’s prioritisation of both party and state ‘management’,<sup>413</sup> Crick’s attack on the absence of any interest in socialist theory went much further. Another revisionist tussle also featured in Crick’s letter, namely the strategic judgement of how far any restatement should challenge Labour’s 1918 creed. Crick noted:

‘I will send about a dozen “great quotes”, ranging from William Morris through Tawney, Bevan to the Leader’s recent speeches on aims and values and including Clause 4 in toto, [sic] which I see as being “boxed” in a pamphlet, possibly with pictures, as part of the design [Crick’s own emphasis] of the leaflet, not as part of the text’.<sup>414</sup>

Crick’s recommendation, ultimately, stood the test of time – as this chapter will later reveal. Yet what is important here is while Crick was advocating a clear restatement of Labour’s aims and values, coming from an interpretation of Labour’s ethos that valued clearer aims and objectives for the party, he was also mindful of the party’s traditions. He was, at this early stage, already envisaging a compromise with interpretations of Labour’s ethos that are either uncomfortable or uninterested in such work, and suspicious of ‘attacks’ against the party’s identity. One must also be

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<sup>409</sup> Crick, *Socialist Values and Time*, p.12.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> K. Hickson, ‘Wilson and British Socialism’, in A. S. Crines and K. Hickson (eds.), *Harold Wilson: Unprincipled Prime Minister?*, (London: Biteback, 2016), pp.3-19, p.8.

<sup>414</sup> Bernard Crick to Charles Clarke, April 1986.

mindful of Crick's audience. He was working, albeit voluntarily, for a Leader who was approaching party change cautiously and incrementally, and who had made it clear he did not believe in ditching the parts of Labour's creed associated with its economic and social analysis. As the only part of Labour's constitution that did associate with this analysis was Clause IV, its centrality remained a key feature of any theoretical position.

In a second letter, Crick included a tidied-up version of his 'values and goals' document. Pitched as a 'simple restatement of our values and goals',<sup>415</sup> Crick's paper followed a very similar argument and structure to his earlier Fabian tract. It argued that policies 'must be informed by values not merely by practicality and expediency, otherwise policy dwindles'.<sup>416</sup> Doctrinally, Crick's paper was cautious. It reaffirmed Clause IV as a commitment with words 'chosen carefully' and posited a goal of elected officials having the 'final decision about control of the means or production, distribution and exchange'.<sup>417</sup> Occasional nods to a mixed economy – 'competition has its place'<sup>418</sup> – were overwhelmed by statements arguing for 'public control in the public interest of all forms of economic activity which affect the public interest'.<sup>419</sup> This was not Kinnock's view of Clause IV, nor of the future for Labour's political economy. He had long-considered it 'vague' and drafted to say 'absolutely bugger all'.<sup>420</sup> Understanding this apparent contradiction – Kinnock's lack of belief in Clause IV, but deciding to leave it untouched – requires an appreciation of the role of the party's ethos in the leader's strategic context. In short, ethos trumped his doctrinal objection. Kinnock's individual interpretation, coupled with his perception of the dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos at that time, meant that he considered clarification around Labour's Party Objects a risk to party harmony, a risk to his own stature as leader (because of the danger of a wounding defeat) and an unnecessary exercise when considered alongside his organisational and policy-focused priorities.

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<sup>415</sup> Bernard Crick, 'Our Values and Our Goals, Second Draft', May 1986, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5, p.1.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

<sup>420</sup> Kinnock, interview.

While Crick noted in a second letter to Clarke that he had been unable to work on a ‘press release version’,<sup>421</sup> a lack of assent from Kinnock was also addressed in the letter. ‘Will do over next weekend,’ Crick wrote, ‘if [Crick’s emphasis] I get a confirming signal from you that Neil thinks this a good enough-for-the-moment version on which to proceed.’<sup>422</sup> As Hughes and Wintour have noted, ‘Kinnock rejected them all [the papers] as too abstract and wordy. None of the offerings chimed with his sense of Labour’s main purpose’.<sup>423</sup> That the Crick project did not proceed was also partly down to the lack of support for a document written by Crick in the Labour hierarchy. Peter Mandelson, then Labour’s director of communications, did not support the Crick paper.<sup>424</sup> Patricia Hewitt recalled that there was ‘not much’<sup>425</sup> interest from Kinnock’s office in the submissions coming in from Crick, notably because of the strategic imperative of organisational reform and the construction of a modern campaigns infrastructure.<sup>426</sup> As Kinnock had indicated in his 1985 Fabian lecture, theoretical renewal was not his priority. In private, as the party increasingly geared up for a more professional approach to the 1987 election, the exercise to renew Labour’s aims and values was seen as unwanted and unnecessary.

### **Failing to proclaim our purpose**

In the January of 1987, prior to the general election, Labour’s Deputy Leader and then Shadow Chancellor, Roy Hattersley, published his book *Choose Freedom*. There were two broad thrusts to Hattersley’s text. First, to defend Labour against charges of being illiberal, arguing for the necessity of equality to bring about true liberty, and second to pursue an argument *with* his party:

‘We have failed to proclaim our purpose and describe our destiny largely because of intellectual reticence – the lack of self-confidence which prevented

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<sup>421</sup> Bernard Crick to Charles Clarke, May 1986, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> C. Hughes and P. Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt, The New Model Party*, (London: Fourth Estate, 1990), p.65.

<sup>424</sup> Lord Mandelson, interview by author, London, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

<sup>425</sup> Patricia Hewitt, interview by author, London, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

us from moving liberty out of our opponents' ground by insisting that their definition of that ideal condition is prejudiced, and perverse.'<sup>427</sup>

Having considered Crosland a mentor and leader in socialist thought, for some observers Hattersley's aim appeared to be 'to don the master's mantle in the late 1980s'.<sup>428</sup> *Choose Freedom* was partly a eulogy to Crosland, taking a conversation between the two men – which included the then Foreign Secretary's credo of 'the pursuit of equality and the protection of freedom'<sup>429</sup> – as its ideological launch pad. It took aim at Clause IV for being 'the most inadequate... shibboleth'<sup>430</sup> which the party as a whole no longer believed, while decrying those 'powerful voices [who] have always insisted that to define the philosophical framework within which its policies could be assembled would only lead to trouble'.<sup>431</sup> The dual audiences targeted here were both those committed to Clause IV as an approximation of economic socialism and those Labour people who simply have little time for 'theology'.

In a brief interplay with Thatcherism, Hattersley also set out the basis for his agreement that the new Conservative administration represented the end of consensus.<sup>432</sup> However, for this moment, Labour's tradition of being openly cautious about ideological clarity left it highly vulnerable to irrelevance in an ideological conflict.

'For the first eighty years of its existence, it was possible for the Labour Party to stumble along unencumbered by ideology, openly sceptical of ideas... But pragmatism is no longer enough. The old coalition of objectives, which shared aims without worrying about motives, has disappeared for ever. To become, once more, the dominant force in British politics, Labour has to win converts to the philosophy of socialism.'<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> R. Hattersley, *Choose Freedom, The Future of Democratic Socialism*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1987), pp.22-23.

<sup>428</sup> M. Stewart, 'Hattersley's Specifics', *London Review of Books*, Vol.9, No.6, (19<sup>th</sup> March 1987), pp.14-15, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n06/michael-stewart/hattersleys-specifics>.

<sup>429</sup> Hattersley, *Choose Freedom*, p.254.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xvii.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.



This argument stood in stark contrast to the approach Kinnock had taken in his Fabian lecture in 1985, which held the practical implementation of Labour's ideology to be the problem. Peter Mandelson reflected that Hattersley wanted to be seen as Labour's 'philosopher king',<sup>434</sup> putting down on paper – at long last – what a modern Labour Party should stand for. In many ways, Kinnock shared the interpretation of Labour, expressed by Sidney Webb, that more important than a theory or programme was 'the spirit underlying the programme, that spirit which gives any party its soul'.<sup>435</sup> While acknowledging and sharing in that spirit, Hattersley believed it was subject to misrepresentation by both friend and foe – and the remedy was theoretical clarity, subject to permanent revision. Reflecting on Crosland's worldview, Hattersley noted:

'The simple doctrine of Croslandism, revisionism, that we should have a set of basic principles and we should continue to revise them, not just one revision, but continual revision, was anathema to the Labour Party. "We believed it all our lives, why should we change now".'<sup>436</sup>

The timing of *Choose Freedom* became a source of regret to Hattersley. Anxious to publish his book prior to the 1987 election, in the hope that 'it might influence policy for the election. Of course it didn't',<sup>437</sup> *Choose Freedom* could not act as both a reflection and a call to action following defeat. Yet its core argument was set for a rebirth.

### **'Second-rate reasons': Labour's Statement of Aims & Values**

While Kinnock did not share Hattersley's interpretation of Labour's ethos when it came to theoretical work, a project to restate Labour's purpose recommenced following the 1987 election defeat. While Labour's campaign apparatus drew many plaudits following the 1987 campaign, Kinnock and his team believed that the party's policies needed a radical overhaul to shift the electoral dial. The main vehicle for this

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<sup>434</sup> Mandelson, interview.

<sup>435</sup> S. Webb, *The New Constitution of the Labour Party, Labour Party Leaflet No. 1*, (London: Labour Party, 1918), p.4.

<sup>436</sup> Hattersley, interview.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

became the Policy Review, yet prior to any substantive rethinking on policy being unveiled, the *Aims & Values* process got underway, stimulated by Crick and Blunkett. Hattersley himself, while committed to the tradition of restatement and revision, had rarely pushed the topic with Kinnock: ‘I was writing articles for the Guardian and the Observer about it... in a sense I was caught up in the practicalities,’<sup>438</sup> he reflected. Instead, the process of writing the document which would become *Aims & Values* got underway for the purposes of political management.

According to Hattersley, while Kinnock and his team did not believe in prioritising such a process, they wanted to own it if such a process was inevitable.

‘Neil and I thought about revising Clause IV, but then decided it was too much of a struggle. Nobody took any notice of it anyway... We then heard that David Blunkett and [Bernard] Crick were preparing something for the National Executive [NEC]. We decided the only way we could frustrate them was getting ours in first. So *Aims & Values* was written for very, very typical Labour Party second-rate reasons.’<sup>439</sup>

On the leader’s personal commitment to the process, his then Deputy did not pick up much enthusiasm: ‘Neil was committed to not having a paper written by Blunkett... that was it. I don’t know whether Neil believed in a theoretical basis for our party or not. In a sense he had one, in a very archaic, very old-fashioned sort of way. But he wouldn’t verbalise it, he wouldn’t describe it.’<sup>440</sup>

Kinnock asked Hattersley to write a version, primarily because of Hattersley’s recent *Choose Freedom* and Kinnock’s view that Hattersley was a good writer.<sup>441</sup> When Hattersley said all the leader should expect was a precis of *Choose Freedom*, Kinnock replied that was exactly what he wanted.<sup>442</sup> In addition to Hattersley’s ability to turn around a document quickly, Kinnock’s office also foresaw a useful additional piece of political management in keeping Hattersley happy and meeting his request for

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<sup>438</sup> Hattersley, interview.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Clarke, interview.

<sup>442</sup> Hattersley, interview.

more theoretical substance. ‘I always remember *Aims & Values* as being something that Roy Hattersley wanted to do,’<sup>443</sup> Patricia Hewitt, then Kinnock’s press chief, recalled. Hewitt described the process as having two main goals: first, reassuring the party that the policy change to come did not mean ditching Labour’s values; second, ‘keeping Roy happy’.<sup>444</sup> Hattersley’s recollection is very similar, noting: ‘They did it very kindly because they felt they owed me something.’<sup>445</sup>

The Blunkett and Crick paper which provoked this activity relied a great deal on the latter’s previous submissions to Kinnock and Clarke. Prior to its substance, the document – now titled *The Labour Party’s Values and Aims: An Unofficial Statement* – carried a foreword clarifying its purpose. Blunkett and Crick claimed:

‘Any rethinking of policy, and presentation of it to the public and the party also needs a reasoned statement of our values and aims. We decided to try our hands at putting together such a statement... we have attempted a synthesis and a summary, a restatement with modern examples, but not a new statement of principles... our aims and values are, we believe, a widely shared common ground – if all too rarely made explicit. Democratic socialism in Britain has a clear and distinctive doctrine which needs stating.’<sup>446</sup>

As with Crick’s earlier paper, it followed a reform strategy of ‘addition’ – not seeking, therefore, to ‘substitute’ an existing creed for a new one, but adding to the party’s canon of aims, values and principles. It attempted to refocus on more contemporary themes, while balancing Labour’s competing traditions. It reaffirmed Clause IV, though interpreting its vagueness as a deliberate ambiguity to foster pluralism and diversity in forms of ‘social ownership’.<sup>447</sup> It sought to reject ‘revolutionary socialism’ but favoured ‘revolutionary change’,<sup>448</sup> though through gradual economic and social reform. The document displayed one new element, showing the effects of Blunkett’s co-authoring: a significant amount of material on

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<sup>443</sup> Hewitt, interview.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Hattersley, interview.

<sup>446</sup> David Blunkett and Bernard Crick, ‘The Labour Party’s Values and Aims: An Unofficial Statement’, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5, p.1.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p.2.

local democracy, devolution and citizen participation, which Blunkett had emphasised as leader of Sheffield Council. ‘Community is also about participation... localities and regions, like ethnic and religious communities, will exercise their freedom in different ways,’ the document read. ‘A democratic socialist state will lay down national minimum standards and guidelines, but it will cheerfully allow, indeed encourage, local discretion and variations.’<sup>449</sup>

Showing some overlap with Hattersley, Blunkett and Crick also argued:

‘Sometimes it might have been better if at least we [Labour] had been more explicit about our basic aims and values. For we have a common ground of ideals which are often overlooked or understated because they seem so obvious and because they are found less often in books than in the beliefs and behaviour of ordinary party members, indeed in the whole experience and ethos of the Labour movement.’<sup>450</sup>

Blunkett and Crick assessed Labour as being cohesive on values, yet interpreted Labour’s dominant ethos as one comfortable with Labour Party people finding what *they* wanted to find in its aims and objectives. In other words, it showed a perception of Labour’s dominant ethos as one where Labour people display a lack of interest in clarifying the party’s formal creed. Blunkett and Crick argued from an interpretation of Labour’s ethos which was more assertive about debating Party Objects and in favour of greater clarity – through a published restatement of aims and values – of what theoretical basis informs Labour’s policies, something shared with Hattersley. The difference, at this early stage of the *Aims & Values* process, lay between the Blunkett and Crick strategy of ‘addition’, and the Hattersley position – suggested in *Choose Freedom* and from an initial agreement between Kinnock and his deputy – of something closer to ‘addition with silent substitution’. Another decision-maker at the top of the party furthered a strategy more clearly of ‘substitution’. Peter Mandelson, according to Hattersley, ‘wanted a Bad Godesberg-style rejection of extremism. I

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<sup>449</sup> Blunkett and Crick, ‘The Labour Party’s Values and Aims: An Unofficial Statement’, p.19.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

reminded him that Bad Godesberg rejected Marxism, we never needed to reject Marxism because we hadn't been a Marxist party'.<sup>451</sup>

The Bad Godesberg Programme of the German Social Democrats (SPD) – the ‘most famous ‘revisionist’ manifesto of social democracy’ in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>452</sup> – was the SPD’s response to successive election defeats and the associated ideological ‘baggage’ revisionists believed the party was dragging around. The SPD’s new programme dropped mentions of nationalization, accepted the market and, in Sassoon’s words, delivered ‘the symbolic representation of the abandonment of socialism as an “end state”’.<sup>453</sup> In the minds of some in the Labour Party during the electoral nadir of the 1980s, including Hattersley, Bad Godesberg had been a clear shedding of unpopular ideological elements.<sup>454</sup> Mandelson included a copy of the Bad Godesberg programme in correspondence with Patricia Hewitt about the policy review process<sup>455</sup> and wanted a statement of revisionist intent.<sup>456</sup> While Mandelson knew that, were such a revisionist statement put forward, ‘people would contest it, and contest it hard’,<sup>457</sup> he remained a critic of the *Aims & Values* process underway. He reflected:

‘It wasn’t coming out right. It wasn’t sufficiently original. It wasn’t sufficiently different. It wasn’t sufficiently clear.’<sup>458</sup>

As Hughes and Wintour have noted, after Hattersley picked up the pen for *Aims & Values*, ‘Kinnock and his deputy exchanged endless alternative drafts. The party leader changed little of substance: most of his additions were subsequently erased, as were Hattersley’s more prolix bouts of self-indulgence’.<sup>459</sup> Yet an analysis of the drafts shows something else: a document with far starker language about the weakness of Labour’s existing creed, the risk of (sometimes wilful)

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<sup>451</sup> Hattersley, interview.

<sup>452</sup> D. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years Of Socialism*, (London: Fontana, 1997), p.249.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Hattersley, *Choose Freedom*, p.175.

<sup>455</sup> Peter Mandelson to Patricia Hewitt, 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5.

<sup>456</sup> Mandelson, interview.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.69.

miscomprehension of the party's constitution, and the need for ideological restatement. This language was gradually removed as the document went forward. The *Aims & Values* process moved from a strategy of 'addition with silent substitution' to one of purely 'addition', reaffirming Party Objects and language to avoid confrontation. This was the strategic role Kinnock played, not wanting to antagonise Labour people who were committed to the party's traditions, yet at that moment were expected to accept significant programmatic change through the Policy Review.

Kinnock's role in this regard has been commented on critically. Kinnock's biographer Martin Westlake, for example, suggests that it was 'symptomatic that the one opportunity Kinnock had to set out his vision of Britain's socialist future he chose to delegate to a leading figure of the old social democratic right'.<sup>460</sup> Kinnock, so the argument goes, was not an intellectual. Indeed, he was aware that some accused him of being, in his words, 'intellectually lazy'.<sup>461</sup> This study presents a different picture. While acknowledging Kinnock's preoccupation with party unity, the story here is of a leader who had thought about Labour's theoretical basis and concluded that Labour's socialism did not require such debates, indeed he thought they could undermine the cohesiveness of a movement already jolted and twisted by different shocks. The somewhat paradoxical conclusion is of a leader who engaged to urge disengagement. In other words, it's not that he didn't care, or had no views – he did. Instead, Kinnock's strong view, as expressed in his lecture to the Fabian Society in the first parliament, was of a Labour ideological tapestry that didn't have an easy label, and more importantly should not have one thrust upon it. This was a significant part of Kinnock's interpretation of Labour's ethos, and it affected greatly this period of theoretical re-examination. As Hughes and Wintour have noted, 'Kinnock... believed that politics was not so much visionary utterance, as a matter of what you could win, today and tomorrow'.<sup>462</sup>

An analysis of the early drafts for Kinnock's introduction to *Aims & Values* reveals a document that initially argued: (i) the absence of a guiding statement of theory, aims

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<sup>460</sup> Westlake, *Kinnock*, p.433.

<sup>461</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>462</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.74.

and values was a problem for the Labour Party and; (ii) an additional statement of aims and values, silent on Labour's existing constitutional creed and omitting language from the constitution and other earlier publications, would help clarify the party's intentions in the eyes of the public. While the introduction from the leader printed in the published version of *Democratic Socialist Aims & Values* was only four short paragraphs, earlier drafts were far more substantial. One such introduction began:

'I have always felt that the absence of a Statement of Aims & Values was a disadvantage for the Labour Party. It meant that our enemies could misrepresent what we stood for, and our members and friends were forced to fall back too often on sentimental and often selective versions of history. It has inhibited our confidence and our campaigning.'<sup>463</sup>

In a slightly longer draft version of the introduction, a similar passage was present, with some corrections by hand (included in the below):

'The absence of a Statement of Aims & Values has always been a disadvantage for the Labour Party. It meant that our enemies could misrepresent what we stood for. Our members and friends were forced to fall back too often on sentimental and often selective versions of history. The publication by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee of this Statement of Aims & Values corrects that omission.'<sup>464</sup>

Yet in the copy of this longer draft in Kinnock's papers, the content is scored through with a pen and replaced with the line 'we are democratic socialists' before proceeding to the aspirations of the Labour movement which, when the document eventually saw the light of day, was the format for Kinnock's short introduction.<sup>465</sup> The drafts of Kinnock's introduction also contained a more developed message on Labour's political economy. The published introduction from Kinnock does not mention

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<sup>463</sup> Neil Kinnock, draft introduction prior to full paper of *Aims & Values*, 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5.

<sup>464</sup> Neil Kinnock, draft introduction prior to full paper of *Aims & Values*.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

markets, alluding only to a state ‘under the feet of the people, not over their heads’.<sup>466</sup> An earlier draft included the phrase ‘markets where they can: governments where they must’,<sup>467</sup> which bears a strong resemblance to the Bad Godesberg language of ‘planning where necessary, the market whenever possible’.<sup>468</sup> During the drafting process, there was clear back and forth on market language. A letter from Patricia Hewitt read: ‘As you asked, I’ve redone the Introduction to embrace upward mobility. I’ve also reinstated material on ‘the market’ – partly because Aims & Values itself isn’t really satisfactory on the economy.’<sup>469</sup> Much of the substance of these introductions survived into March 1988, the month prior to the National Executive Committee meeting to approve *Aims & Values*.

In both Kinnock’s speech to be delivered to the Parliamentary Labour Party, and in the accompanying press notice, the argument that an absence of such a statement was a problem, including for Labour people falling back ‘on sentimentality’, was retained.<sup>470</sup> However, the language on markets was longer and less clear than the Bad Godesberg-style statement highlighted above. At an earlier meeting of the Shadow Cabinet and NEC, ‘John Smith, Bryan Gould and Robin Cook all said the document was too enthusiastic about the advantages of the market’.<sup>471</sup> Kinnock’s speech, therefore, put forward a statement which has been criticised as ‘typically vacuous’.<sup>472</sup> He argued:

‘In essence it [Aims & Values] says that no socialist sensibly proposes that markets are abolished any more than any socialist holds that markets should be absolute. The question is therefore what do we do [NK’s emphasis] about markets. And the answer is... from some areas (health, education, social security, for example) we seek to exclude the market... in other areas, we seek to establish social ownership, varying from complete public ownership to

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<sup>466</sup> N. Kinnock, *Democratic Socialist Aims & Values*, (London: The Labour Party, 1988), p.2.

<sup>467</sup> Neil Kinnock, draft introduction prior to full paper of *Aims & Values*.

<sup>468</sup> P. Diamond, ‘Permanent reformism: the social democratic challenge of the future?’ in *Where Now For European Social Democracy?* (London: Policy Network, 2004), pp.31-39 p.32.

<sup>469</sup> Patricia Hewitt to Neil Kinnock, 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5

<sup>470</sup> Neil Kinnock, Statement to PLP and accompanying press release, 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/5.

<sup>471</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.70.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74.



public share participation... in other areas we want to subject the market to regulation and control.’<sup>473</sup>

Pithy it was not. Kinnock’s penchant for more words rather than fewer was a factor here, as was the surprise opposition on market language from those close to Kinnock and Hattersley. So too was Kinnock’s clear view that what could be described as a ‘clarifying’ or a ‘focusing’ of Labour’s political economy would ignore the complexities of Labour’s thought. Complexity continued to be added as the leadership pursued its strategy of taking everyone possible along with the document – though, according to the then General Secretary of the party, Larry Whitty, the *Aims & Values* process was already failing to stimulate much debate. Whitty wrote to Kinnock in mid-March, noting:

‘We have now reached the deadline for comments on the Document. I have only just received one from the NEC (from Ken Livingstone) which has been sent across to your office. We have also received one from Eric Heffer following the PLP meeting. I had anticipated more... This poor response concerns me. Expressions of view at the NEC/Shadow Cabinet meeting, at the PLP meeting, up and down the Regional Conferences, and informally from affiliated unions do not seem able to be transferred onto paper! There is undoubtedly unease at aspects of the draft as it stood.’<sup>474</sup>

The absence of significant engagement through written responses left Whitty to interpret the mood of the party at large, noting there had been ‘no consultation on the document’ and leading him to call for an expression of the ‘market issue’ that was ‘more acceptable to the party’.<sup>475</sup> This was the first sign of a lack of engagement and interest in the *Aims & Values* process in the party, including the parliamentary party, alongside the perception of those in leadership roles that too much change would adversely affect the movement mood. One explanation put forward on this was the apparent lack of controversy. As Hughes and Wintour noted, ‘politics is most exciting when it appears innovatory. Anyone who leaps up and down shouting “we think

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<sup>473</sup> Neil Kinnock, Statement to PLP and accompanying press release.

<sup>474</sup> Larry Whitty to Neil Kinnock, 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK, 2/2/5.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

markets are sometimes good, sometimes bad, on the one hand efficient, on the other hand not”, is hardly likely to excite much attention’.<sup>476</sup> By the very nature of Kinnock’s strategy of seeking to accommodate, and to take people along with the document, signs of success would include MPs allocating very little time to thinking about it. Yet it also speaks to differing interpretations of Labour’s ethos. To Hattersley, even moderate engagement with Labour’s political economy was deserving of attention. Yet to others, restatements of the party’s political economy, even when tinkering, did not engender much emotion.

### **An act of sabotage**

The April NEC meeting to discuss *Aims & Values* was notable for a move which led to the inclusion of Clause IV of Labour’s constitution in the document, brought about by ‘the Left group on the NEC [who] proposed at the end of the meeting that the words of Clause IV... should also be included in the text’.<sup>477</sup> Mandelson later reflected: ‘Dennis [Skinner] proposed this... Neil looked at me with a face of horror ... we both knew it was an intended act of sabotage. Neil tried to find an immediate reason why we shouldn’t do it.’<sup>478</sup> Mandelson wrote a note to Kinnock during the meeting saying that he must resist the move at all costs, and ‘wincing’<sup>479</sup> when Kinnock agreed to include Clause IV in the publication. Mandelson omitted Clause IV from the copy of *Aims & Values* distributed to the media,<sup>480</sup> and the clause eventually appeared on the inside cover of the final document,<sup>481</sup> though one might add it took up considerably more space than Kinnock’s slimmed down introduction. Alongside more nuanced market language, arguing that ‘it is not possible to lay down any strict and simple rule which governs the way in which the output of the mixed economy be distributed’,<sup>482</sup> the inclusion of Clause IV acted as an early warning signal that *Aims & Values* would fail to shift the dial towards ideological renewal.

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<sup>476</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.74.

<sup>477</sup> P. Mandelson, ‘The Unstarted Revolution’ in D. Kavanagh (eds.), *Philip Gould: An Unfinished Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.62-77, p.73.

<sup>478</sup> Mandelson, interview.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Mandelson, ‘The Unstarted Revolution’, p 73.

<sup>481</sup> Labour Party, *Democratic Socialist Aims & Values*, (London: The Labour Party, 1988)

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., p.10.

As with the General Secretary's early warnings about a lack of engagement, Hattersley reflected that the party was:

'Blasé about it... Conference Arrangements Committee allocated forty minutes for debate on it all, twenty minutes from me, twenty minutes' discussion. Neil and I didn't believe that was long enough and begged them to do more. They agreed to one hour. In fact, debate collapsed after twenty-five minutes, my twenty minutes and two speakers... went down at party conference like a lead balloon... Frankly nobody ever heard of it again... it was disappointing to me, not because I had written it, but because I thought it was essential to the Labour Party's success.'<sup>483</sup>

Dell has commented on the 'tranquil surface of traditional party philosophy'<sup>484</sup> being entirely unaffected by *Aims & Values*. Like Gaitskell's *Labour's Aims*, 'there was nothing in it that would give it a shelf life of even a few years. The electorate seemed to want rather stronger evidence of a real transformation in Labour than a statement of the meandering thoughts of a passing leader'.<sup>485</sup> In Hattersley's address to Labour's 1988 Annual Conference, which voted to approve *Aims and Values* on a card vote by 5,086,000 for to 1,072,000 against,<sup>486</sup> the deputy leader presented a strategy of addition. While arguing that a debate on the principles of democratic socialism was 'a rare event in the history of Labour Party conferences',<sup>487</sup> he went on to affirm that he believed 'absolutely and without qualification that we will not build a more equal society until we extend and expand social ownership in this country; but social ownership not in one form, but in all its many and varied forms as stipulated and expressed in the full clause IV of our constitution'.<sup>488</sup> Some 'shibboleths', as evidenced by this speech, were still useful to unite the conference hall and generate some applause.

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<sup>483</sup> Hattersley, interview.

<sup>484</sup> Dell, *Strange Eventful History*, p.507.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1988*, (London: The Labour Party, 1988), p.15.

<sup>487</sup> R. Hattersley, Speech to 1988 Labour Party Conference, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1988*, (London: The Labour Party, 1988), p.14.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., p.15.

A strategy of addition, this chapter's analysis suggests, was not Kinnock's only option. An alternative strategy, one of substitution or – to a lesser extent – addition with silent substitution, would have challenged what successive leaders have perceived as the dominant ethos of the party: one comfortable with the vagaries of Clause IV socialism, and one both unused to and suspicious of leadership-initiated debates about the party's aims and values. It was this approach that was pursued by both Gaitskell and Blair. With regard to the latter, Blair 'seized the opportunities provided by the political defeats of the 1980s and accompanying social change to orchestrate a break with many of the traditions particular to Labour... in many ways he is challenging the ethos and traditions of the party in a way no previous leader has attempted'.<sup>489</sup> While I agree with Kenny and Smith that Blair and Gaitskell existed in a 'different ideological universe'<sup>490</sup> in matters of doctrine, in terms of their interpretations of the party's ethos the leaders were much closer. Both leaders believed altering Labour's Party Objects was integral to changing how people saw the Labour Party, both externally (voters, opposing political parties) and internally (communicating to party members that *their* party had changed). In doing so, both leaders were prepared 'to extend the boundaries of modernisation beyond all that was formerly sacred within his own party'.<sup>491</sup> If Blair was far from 'Gaitskell writ large'<sup>492</sup> in doctrine, in terms of ethos, their interpretations of what it was to be Labour were far closer.

Such differences in intent and motivation do not, of course, fully explain the outcomes of these engagements with Labour's Party Objects. While Gaitskell and Blair began with a strategy of substitution, and the clear intent to alter their party's aims and values, only the latter succeeded. Gaitskell did not prepare the ground for his challenge to Clause IV, and his attempt – while doctrinally nuanced on the matter of public ownership – was seen as part of a revisionist plot. Some Labour people who did not ardently oppose Gaitskell still believed his attempt was foolhardy, representing the view that 'any squabble over "theology" should have been avoided by silence in opposition until the same ends could be attained, still silently, in practice

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<sup>489</sup> M. Kenny and M. J. Smith, 'Discourses of modernisation: Gaitskell, Blair and the reform of Clause IV', *British Elections and Parties Review*, Vol.7, No.1, (1997), pp. 110-126, p.125.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, p.124.

<sup>491</sup> Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell*, p.xiii.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*

after coming into power'.<sup>493</sup> The outcome Gaitskell was forced to accept was one of 'addition'; a document which 'reaffirms, amplifies and clarifies Party Objects'<sup>494</sup> following the reprinting of the original Clause IV at the beginning of the paper. Blair's attempt was made in more favourable circumstances, and with a less outwardly antagonistic aura. At the time, 'the Left was marginalised and leaderless, the unions were greatly weakened'<sup>495</sup> and much policy change had occurred under Kinnock.

With the Kinnock approach, Hattersley began the process of *Aims & Values* with the goal of addition with silent substitution, something Kinnock went along with for a while, but then gradually moved away from. Even prior to the NEC meeting which introduced the original Clause IV into the document, Kinnock had stepped back from the arguments that substantiate either substitution, or addition with silent substitution. Language was finessed to the point of vacuity. Arguments positing the importance of ideological clarity, juxtaposed with the existing weakness of Clause IV, were dropped. And language suggestive of an attack on tradition, nostalgia and sentimentality was removed. Mandelson's efforts to communicate *Aims & Values* – minus, and contrary to the NEC's decision, the original Clause IV – were unlikely to have succeeded with or without Kinnock's concession. Kinnock's strategic context – the picture he had in his mind of the ideational, institutional and environmental factors affecting his position – was not as favourable as Blair's. The shock to the Labour Party of the 1992 defeat was yet to occur, and Kinnock's political capital was being expended on policy change, having centralised much of the policy-making machinery in his first parliament. Yet differences in both motivation and in interpretations of the party's ethos were significant in seeing Labour's Party Objects remain unchanged for a further six years.

## **Conclusion**

In Heffernan's account of the origins of New Labour, the period from 1987-1994 is considered to be one of 'transformation'.<sup>496</sup> On the basis of Kinnock's confrontations

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<sup>493</sup> P. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.333.

<sup>494</sup> Labour Party, *Labour's Aims*, (London: The Labour Party, 1960).

<sup>495</sup> Kenny and Smith, 'Discourses of modernisation', p.111.

<sup>496</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.83.

with the Militant Tendency, Heffernan concluded that Kinnock ‘appeared to relish taking on the various sacred cows of the Left’.<sup>497</sup> Yet this judgement is coupled with a description of Kinnock, particularly during his first parliament, as a leader ‘reluctant to go where the party may not follow’.<sup>498</sup> Considering a Labour person’s behaviour in the context of Labour’s ethos provides a fuller picture of Kinnock’s leadership. Kinnock did not relish slaying sacred cows when he believed doing so risked a clash with what he perceived to be the party’s dominant ethos. This chapter’s analysis of the *Aims & Values* process shows a leader who did not prioritise reform of Party Objects for this reason, alongside his own view that Clause IV socialism was vague – bordering on meaningless – but solidifying for his party.

Kinnock decided that at a time when he was asking his party to accept significant doctrinal change through the Policy Review, he had to work with, rather than against his party’s ethos. Returning to Drucker’s dilemma on Party Objects, where ‘any ideology which attaches to an organisation has to face two ways. It must guide policy by posing a concept of what the party is about, and it must provide the party with an ethos which keeps its activists at their task’,<sup>499</sup> Kinnock’s response was to leave Party Objects undisturbed. Instead, he prioritised the organisational imperative ‘to hang together, not to clarify the [party’s] concepts’.<sup>500</sup> Kinnock emerges, therefore, as a figure less inclined to challenge the party’s dominant ethos, and holding an individual interpretation which sought to avoid strife. Despite Kinnock’s lack of belief in Clause IV, his individual interpretation of the party’s ethos, coupled with his perception of the dominant interpretation, meant that he judged reform of Party Objects to be an unnecessary risk: unnecessary because of his prioritisation of organisational and policy change; and a risk because of its divisive potential. This frustrated the efforts of others – who held a different view – to affect Labour’s modernisation and clarify Labour’s objectives.

While Kinnock’s Policy Review process oversaw extensive changes, this chapter has argued that its precursor process – *Aims & Values* – was a limited restatement of the party’s mission. In terms of doctrinal change, I agree that the post-1987 Policy

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<sup>497</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.76.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>499</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.30.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

Review process ‘represented a much more systematic effort to resolve the ideological crisis of revisionist social democracy’.<sup>501</sup> However, the Policy Review was just that – a review of policy – rather than a broader, theoretical revision sitting within a recognisably different intellectual project. Considered in this way, Kinnock’s process of renewal appears less systematic than some analysis focusing on the Policy Review suggests.

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<sup>501</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.206.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Emblems: unilateralism as ‘deep religion’ in Kinnock’s Labour Party**

“If Socialists desert the arena of morals the Conservatives may seek to occupy the forsaken territory.”

Michael Foot, *Another Heart and Other Pulses*

“They say that we have got to have Trident... because human nature is such that if you do not have a big stick to hit back with then you will get hit. I will tell you this about human nature; if it really is as the Tories say it is... there is not going to be any human nature left – because there will be no human beings left.”

Neil Kinnock, 1983 Labour Party Conference Speech, Brighton

“I am very worried about the press speculation ... I don’t believe a word of it.”

David Blunkett, letter to Neil Kinnock, 1989

“Unconditional abandonment of nuclear weapons by Britain would, at best, mean that the possibility of securing reductions by others was severely limited... I do not believe – as a matter of reality, not of pessimism – that the Labour Party could get a mandate to govern with a policy of unconditional unilateral nuclear disarmament.”

Neil Kinnock, letter to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1989

## **Introduction**

In his memoir, Denis Healey recounted a story from a visit to Allerton Bywater colliery, outside Leeds, during the 1983 general election campaign. ‘Again and again’, Healey recalled, ‘I was lectured by these Yorkshire miners, who were militant followers of Arthur Scargill on industrial issues, that neither they nor the voters would put up with unilateral nuclear disarmament.’<sup>502</sup> Like many senior Labour politicians, Healey believed that ‘our defence policy certainly cost us the votes of many traditional Labour supporters’,<sup>503</sup> as Labour crashed to defeat. While the true extent of any electoral damage from Labour’s defence policy was much debated at the time, it is undeniable that Labour people, from the very top to those in local parties throughout the land, believed unilateral nuclear disarmament was an electoral liability. Despite this, those same Labour people struggled to change this policy. The perception of Labour Party people’s deep commitment to unilateralism, and its

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<sup>502</sup> D. Healey, *The Time of My Life*, (London: Penguin, 1990), p.500.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, p.501.



emblematic and symbolic status in the party, greatly affected the Labour leadership's direction in this policy area throughout the 1980s and the early period of Labour's modernisation.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how individual interpretations of the party's ethos, and the dominant interpretation, affected the strategic calculations of the actors responsible for devising Labour's policy on nuclear weapons. The question this chapter seeks to answer is why, when so many policies come and go, do others engender such strong feelings and a sense of attachment, tantamount to faith, in the Labour Party? And how does the emblematic status of a policy affect a political actor's strategic calculations? In this chapter I present a typology of policy characteristics to help answer the first question. The characteristics are: a strong socialist heritage; a stark contrast with the Conservative opposition; an adhesive quality which can bind Labour people together; and relevance to internal factionalism. In relation to the second, this chapter shows how 'emblems' can appear unchangeable, significantly affecting an actor's strategy, but that their interaction with the external environment, and the agency of political actors, can provide an opportunity for change.

Neil Kinnock's perception was of strong support from some at the top of the party, to most at the bottom, for unilateralism. It was perceived as so deeply rooted in the party's psyche as to make it incredibly difficult to change. In Shaw's words, 'an attempt to discard it would have probably incited mass rebellion',<sup>504</sup> such was the strength of feeling in the mid-1980s. This was reinforced by Kinnock's own long-standing commitment to unilateralism. The policy had become a powerful symbol within Labour's ranks, and one which generated great loyalty and fervour: in short, it had become an emblem for Labour Party people and for their distinctive identity in a tumultuous domestic and global political period. This chapter explains how a leader holding a different interpretation of Labour's ethos to that they perceived movement-wide – in this case, Kinnock's pragmatism versus what he perceived to be his party's dogmatism – managed Labour's competing traditions, and achieved change in the process.

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<sup>504</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1945*, p.178.

On matters related to Labour's political economy, a number of academic studies have portrayed a path towards acceptance of the market economy, moves away from public ownership,<sup>505</sup> and greater care given to the prioritisation of public spending commitments. Viewing Kinnock's changes to the Labour Party as a whole, the first parliament was undoubtedly a slower, more cautious beginning. And on matters more clearly linked to reform of Party Objects, as the previous chapter argued, Kinnock's approach prioritised unity over transformation throughout his tenure. Yet, on economic policy, Kinnock's path to a more market-friendly destination was relatively linear. In other areas, including the party's fractious stance over the European Community, or on the sale of council houses, Kinnock moved swiftly to change Labour's policy in his first parliament. On the party's nuclear weapons policy, however, Kinnock's journey was more complicated. Despite the recognition that 'defence could never be a vote-winner'<sup>506</sup> and a campaign prior to the 1987 election to reassure the electorate that Labour believed in 'stronger defence',<sup>507</sup> the party's commitment to unilateral disarmament remained strong until the late 1980s – in some ways, even less ambiguous than Michael Foot and Denis Healey's compromise for the 1983 general election.

### **Definitions: Unilateralism and multilateralism**

While the 1980s policy of unilateral disarmament has been described as a symbol, the temporal nature of Labour's nuclear weapons policy is important to note, not least for clarity about what it was the Labour Party was attached to. Labour's 1980s 'unilateralism' – which will be referenced a great deal in what follows – was very similar to Hugh Gaitskell's policy from 1960 onwards, referred to as being multilateralist.<sup>508</sup>

Labour's policy in 1983, outlined by Michael Foot, was as follows:

'Britain at the United Nations should reverse the decision of the previous December and agree to a freeze on the production, deployment and testing of

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<sup>505</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.51.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>508</sup> Brivati, *Gaitskell*, p.373.

nuclear weapons, and to a comprehensive test ban... as another first step, we should make clear our refusal to site Cruise missiles on our soil... in addition, we should cancel the Trident programme. These steps were to be the immediate ones, but others would follow soon – steps towards a change in NATO's strategy, towards accepting the doctrine of no first use of nuclear weapons, towards finding ways in which no-nuclear zones could be established in Europe, towards the inclusion, as the negotiations proceeded, of Britain's Polaris force in the nuclear disarmament negotiations – in which Britain should participate.'<sup>509</sup>

In 1959, Labour's stated policy rejected unilateralism, and built on the important bond between 'Mr Gaitskell and Mr Bevan' who had 'both emphasised... the next Labour Government must be free, in view of facts which are not available to a party in opposition, either to modify or to reject altogether the nuclear strategy and the defence priorities which it will inherit'.<sup>510</sup> This was based on the view that there was 'not the slightest evidence that, if we were to take this step [unilateralism], it would induce America or Russia to follow suit' while any moves to abandon nuclear bases in Britain 'would be tantamount to a British withdrawal from NATO'.<sup>511</sup> However, a year later, the future of Britain's nuclear weapons policy was in question. Harold Macmillan's Conservative Government announced the cancellation of Blue Streak, the British, land-based missile delivery system which was the basis for Britain's strategic deterrent.<sup>512</sup> While this cancellation did not remove Britain's nuclear capability – it retained airborne bombers – the cancellation reopened the necessity, or otherwise, of an 'independent nuclear deterrent', or in other words, a missile system capable of striking another nuclear power's mainland.

With Gaitskell having never believed 'in the independent nuclear deterrent as a matter of principle',<sup>513</sup> the Labour leadership accepted that Britain 'should cease the attempt to remain an independent nuclear power, since this neither strengthens the

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<sup>509</sup> M. Foot, *Another Heart and Other Pulses*, (London: Collins, 1984), p.69.

<sup>510</sup> Labour Party and Trades Union Congress, *Disarmament and Nuclear War, The Next Step*, (London: The Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1959), p.6.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>512</sup> D. Keohane, *Security in British Politics, 1945-99*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.141.

<sup>513</sup> Brivati, *Gaitskell*, p.351.

alliance nor is it now a sensible use of our limited resources'.<sup>514</sup> The document which contained this position – *Policy for Peace* – agreed on the mantra of 'no first use' by the West of nuclear weapons, and sought the banning of nuclear weapons everywhere, while committing Britain to membership of a nuclear-armed NATO.<sup>515</sup> It was accepted as Labour Party policy by the 1961 annual conference. While both positions contain an element of fudge – Foot was silent on what would happen to the Polaris missile system if talks ceased to exist, while Gaitskell's position was silent on existing nuclear weapons – both were, in programmatic terms, quite similar. The difference between the two is, rather obviously, the context of the time. Both terms have, like public ownership, often been relative within the Labour Party in the sense that while two Labour people could be in favour of unilaterally eradicating Britain's own nuclear weapons, a Labour person could be 'more' or 'less' unilateralist depending on their position on NATO, or U.S. naval bases in the UK.

With Blue Streak abandoned, and Gaitskell's long-held concern over the economic case for Britain to develop or purchase a missile system, the closest position Gaitskell felt he could take to the Conservatives was to remain in a U.S./NATO nuclear force. This led to the characterisation of, 'in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the core participants in the British nuclear weapon debate... [being] the left-wing anti-nuclear movement on the one side and the Labour leadership along with the Conservative government on the other'.<sup>516</sup> Foot's policy was, unlike Gaitskell's, in stark contrast to Margaret Thatcher's policy of updating an established U.S. missile delivery programme which had been long-shared with the U.K. Similarly, the context of NATO was also markedly different. Gaitskell was confronting what he perceived as the 'neutralism' of the peace movement – though, as discussed later in the chapter, this was far from accepted within that movement – and Britain's place as an ally of the United States and a partner in a U.S.-led alliance in opposition to Soviet aggression.

By the 1980s, Labour's 'unilateralism' accepted NATO membership, focusing on reform from within. Therefore, the 'unilateralism' referred to throughout much of this

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<sup>514</sup> Labour Party, *Policy for Peace*, (London: The Labour Party, 1961), p.2.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Keohane, *Security*, p.156.

chapter refers to the 1980s unilateralism which Kinnock inherited and endorsed. That was the pre-eminence (in policy terms) of the UK taking two crucial unilateral (that is, taken by Britain without the conditionality of a multi-nuclear state commitment) steps: a) the eradication of a British independent nuclear deterrent, which in the 1980s was the submarine-launched Polaris system, to be succeeded by the Trident system; b) the removal of U.S intermediate range missiles from Britain, known as Cruise missiles. The use of the term ‘multilateralism’ refers to the policy Kinnock eventually adopted, and which had been previously promoted by Labour people from the first Attlee Government onwards: that Labour believed in a non-nuclear world, but that depended on an international process of eradication achieved through diplomacy, which unilateral action would undermine.

### **Emblems: what makes a policy so distinctive and deeply-rooted?**

Table 4 presents the typology for an emblematic policy which I introduced in Chapter 2. Unilateralism spoke to Labour’s traditions of peace, if not pacifism, and a moral or ethical socialism. It also connected to retellings of Labour’s past, for instance in Labour people’s sense of the party’s historic relationships with other countries, such as the United States and the Soviet Union. There was a strong dividing line with the opposition around nuclear weapons policy, approaching some of the central cleavages between Conservative neo-liberalism and Labour’s democratic socialism.

Unilateralism had been, meanwhile, an incredibly factional policy area, with the capacity to divide and to bind, depending on the make-up of the parliamentary party in particular.

**Table 4: Emblematic policy typology**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<b>Socialist heritage</b>	Debates around the policy touch on strong socialist themes, such as economic power, democracy and morality. These debates also relate to the history of the Left, including its historic allegiances.
<b>Stark contrast with Conservatives</b>	The policy represents a stark contrast with opposition parties and ideologies. Yet that stark contrast, when considering the views of those rejecting a particular policy, can also be considered damaging – both electorally and strategically.
<b>Adhesive quality</b>	Both proponents of the policy, and more neutral Labour people, believe that changing such a policy would lead to division. While other things may be changing, this particular policy has the capacity to bind factions together. Importantly, this requires evidence of substantial support in the Labour Party.
<b>Relevance to internal factionalism</b>	The policy speaks to narratives regarding the record of Labour governments, and the identity of different factions within the Labour movement. This interacts with another key fault line in Labour’s ethos: Outsiders.

## CND'ers and the characteristics of emblems

Before turning to Kinnock's own journey in detail, a short consideration of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) – an organisation Kinnock had been closely associated with – can add to our understanding of the role 'emblems' play as an expression of political identity. Established in 1958,<sup>517</sup> CND rapidly gathered momentum in the context of atmospheric nuclear tests by Britain, the U.S and Russia and the development and build-up of nuclear weapons in Europe. It called for Britain to immediately renounce the production and use of nuclear weapons, and in 1960 agreed that Britain should withdraw from NATO.<sup>518</sup> The nature of CND as a pluralist, mass campaign presented both the promise of change and the threat of division and incoherence. As Taylor and Pritchard noted, for the majority of the movement 'political considerations... were not the main motivating force', with activists instead attracted to a message presented in 'clear, simple, urgent and couched in straight-forwardly moral terms'.<sup>519</sup> In particular, a tension between political engagement and moral protest revealed itself in the CND's links to the Labour Party.

The CND connection with the Labour Party was unsurprising. Frank Parkin's survey data of CND marchers found half of adult respondents to be members of a political organisation or party, predominantly the Labour Party.<sup>520</sup> CND'ers coalesced around ideological viewpoints often found on the Left, including critiques of capitalism and arguments in favour of constitutional and democratic reform, making CND membership not necessarily dependent on detailed analyses of 'the Bomb' but on an 'individual's ideological position generally'<sup>521</sup> – evidenced by the involvement of, for example, New Left intellectuals who diverged from some CND'ers on defence policy. Figures from the Labour Left were involved with the organisation from its very beginning, notably Michael Foot.<sup>522</sup> Membership of CND remained a feature of political life for a substantial number of Labour people, with Syed and Whitely

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<sup>517</sup> K. Hudson, *CND: Now More Than Ever, The Story of a Peace Movement*, (London: Vision, 2005), p.44.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>519</sup> R. Taylor and C. Pritchard, *The Protest Makers, The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-1965 Twenty Years On*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), p.36.

<sup>520</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p.16.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>522</sup> M. Foot, *Dr Strangelove, I Presume*, (London: Gollancz, 1999), p.69.

recording 18.9% of Labour members surveyed in 1989/90 as CND'ers,<sup>523</sup> a far greater proportion than Labour people in the various socialist societies or specialist groups. The CND agreed early on in its existence – in the late 1950s – to seek to affect the Labour Party's policy on nuclear weapons, as well as working on public knowledge and building a wider campaign. With 'most of its [the campaign's] upholders... drawn from the Labour Party',<sup>524</sup> both committed and persuadable connections could be found on the Labour Left. How significant the CND was to Labour's own political course is a matter of debate – and one that this study does not attempt to engage with. Suffice to say there is disagreement. Frank Cousins, the unilateralist-backing general secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU), once told the philosopher and CND'er Bertrand Russell 'that it did not matter one way or the other'<sup>525</sup> what Russell said. It was union votes which switched Labour's policy at the Scarborough Conference of 1960 from Gaitskell's 'multilateralism' to unilateralism. Yet other Labour people, like Michael Foot, have noted how the CND changed 'the political atmosphere world-wide and not merely in isolated Britain'.<sup>526</sup>

In relation to the party's socialist heritage and drawing a contrast with the Conservatives – two characteristics of emblematic policies – CND lacked a comprehensive ideology. Instead, it offered a 'focus of opposition to the "Establishment" by concentrating on a single major issue which could be presented as a straightforward choice between good and evil'.<sup>527</sup> In the wake of widespread disenchantment on the Left with Soviet communism, this sat well both among the wider Left and with Labour people. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Labour Party lacked a comprehensive creed too, and often embraced moralistic causes. Indeed, the existence of emblematic policies within Labour's ethos can be partly explained by ideological ambiguity, leaving Labour people to find the true cause of Labour's socialism in particular policies. With the CND campaign, Labour people had an opportunity to be 'expressive'<sup>528</sup> in their politics – an important tradition within Labour's ethos, and analysed more fully in Chapter 6 – which Parkin

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<sup>523</sup> P. Syed and P. Whiteley, *Labour's Grass Roots*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.92.

<sup>524</sup> B. Russell, *Autobiography*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p.577.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, p.583.

<sup>526</sup> Foot, *Dr Strangelove*, p.68.

<sup>527</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p.56.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.



argued saw ‘protest against the Bomb... as an expression of protest against other more fundamental ills of society, even though this connection was not always explicitly made’.<sup>529</sup> This also spoke to a contrast with Conservatism, not just on the basis of nuclear weapons policy, but as a political outlook more generally. The lack of intellectual coherence, however, caused friction with other parts of the British Left, notably the New Left, which I touch upon below.

Another feature of emblems, and a topic of debate in work on the CND, is the relevance of the organisation to factionalism within Labour. Parkin argued that CND’s relevance to Labour Party people in the 1957 to 1961 period was on the basis of its utility in the fight between the Labour Left, which sought collaboration with CND, and the Gaitskellite revisionist tendency. Much to the chagrin of non-Labour CND’ers, Parkin noted, the Labour Left saw the anti-NATO, nuclear free campaign as ‘not merely the case for ridding the country of the Bomb, but for ridding the party of Gaitskell’.<sup>530</sup> Parkin attributes the switch of union votes in favour of the CND position to the appetite to attack Gaitskell, and notes how both the subsequent multilateralist victory at the 1961 Labour Conference and the waning enthusiasm for unilateralism in the years that followed can be accounted for by Gaitskell’s death. ‘With the closing of the gulf between Left and Right, and a leadership more sensitive to the traditional values of the rank and file, the discontents which had provided the footholds for unilateralism insider the party were suddenly smoothed away,’<sup>531</sup> he concluded. On the relationship between the CND and the Labour Left, Taylor and Pritchard challenged Parkin’s argument, placing greater emphasis on ideological connections over factional motivations. Here, ‘the Labour Left’s opposition to Gaitskell... [was] intensified by his reaction to CND’s policy and activity on perfectly genuine ideological grounds’.<sup>532</sup>

Finally, some of those associated with the New Left sought to furnish the CND with a fuller, more complex worldview. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, Stuart Hall argued for a ‘programmatic approach’ which would enable the peace movement ‘*to confront directly* [original emphasis] the decisions which political and military

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<sup>529</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p.58.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> Taylor and Pritchard, *The Protest Makers*, p.59.

establishments make'.<sup>533</sup> Hall set out a multi-stage set of aims,<sup>534</sup> encouraged the continuation of 'the political struggle'<sup>535</sup> in the Labour Party and around the world, and argued for a more holistic approach to setting out an 'independent foreign policy' which *could* involve a number of unilateral steps, including the UK abandoning nuclear weapons, but not limited to that aim.<sup>536</sup> 'While we stand on the side-lines waving our slogans hopefully,' Hall argued, 'with the best will in the world, the nuclear parade is passing us by.'<sup>537</sup> As Foot noted, what was required was 'a new kind of politics... to bring it [the bomb] under control'.<sup>538</sup> Greater complexity, however, carried the risk of sacrificing the simple, moral cause the CND (and Labour unilateralists) had long been associated with. Such complexity opened the door to more nuanced debates, all highly affected by the international political context. Both types of argument, the moral certainty and the 'new kind of politics' arguments, formed a part of Kinnock's policy inheritance as Leader of the Labour Party.

### **Kinnock's inheritance**

Throughout Labour's post-war history, both the veil of secrecy and the apparent lack of public confidence in arguing for multilateralism caused suspicion within the Labour Party, particularly on the Labour Left. Labour's commitment to nuclear weapons, and to an internationally-agreed, or multilateral disarmament policy, was agreed at a meeting of Ministers on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1947. The first majority Labour Government agreed to undertake research and development of atomic weapons,<sup>539</sup> keeping the budget under departmental spending, and the development programme secret. The then Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was recorded as having said:

'In his view it was important that we should press on with the study of all aspects of atomic energy. We could not afford to acquiesce in an American monopoly of this new development. Other countries also might well develop atomic weapons. Unless therefore an effective international system could be

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<sup>533</sup> S. Hall, *Selected Political Writings*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p.76.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.76-79.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>538</sup> Foot, *Dr Strangelove*, p.68.

<sup>539</sup> P. Hennessy, *Cabinets and the Bomb*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.58.

developed after which the production and use of the weapon would be prohibited, we must develop it ourselves.’<sup>540</sup>

The ‘pride of leading ministers in the Labour Government [which] made them reluctant to be overwhelmingly dependent on, and thereby subject to, Washington’,<sup>541</sup> also played a role, while the secrecy of the decision meant multilateralists ‘lacked... the legitimacy of a choice generated by the normal process of decision-making involving public debate in the party’.<sup>542</sup> Multilateralists could not begin to foster a sense of mission, so important to the Labour Party, when the movement was unaware of its policy. By the time Labour returned to office nearly two decades later, Britain had an agreement with the U.S to buy the technology for its submarine-based Polaris missile system. The manufacture of the submarines was underway, and while Wilson had committed to a review of this agreement, the new Labour Government continued with it – albeit building four ‘boats’ instead of five.<sup>543</sup> The arguments from the multilateralists were very similar to Bevin’s, with Labour’s then Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, noting:

‘One reason why I decided we should after all keep Polaris, was that there was little chance of influencing McNamara’s [U.S Secretary of Defence] nuclear strategy if we had renounced nuclear weapons ourselves... I did not think it was wise to entrust the future of the human race to the mathematicians in the Pentagon.’<sup>544</sup>

All of this leant an air of ‘business-as-usual’ to Labour’s multilateralists, despite the tumult experienced under Gaitskell’s leadership. The case was pragmatic, and showed continuity with previous governments, whatever their colour. By contrast, the Labour Left worked up the case for unilateralism along socialist themes. Tony Benn’s *Arguments for Socialism* and *Arguments for Democracy*, published between 1979 and 1981, showed a reaction against Labour’s past. Benn argued that nuclear arms were ‘eroding our domestic democracy and liberty in a fundamental way without a shot

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<sup>540</sup> Hennessy, *Cabinets and the Bomb*, p.57.

<sup>541</sup> Keohane, *Security*, p.137.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>543</sup> Healey, *Time of My Life*, p.304.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, p.307.

being fired',<sup>545</sup> and noted that Britain had 'developed nuclear weapons secretly without parliamentary knowledge or approval'.<sup>546</sup> Benn was not only making a point about Britain's early development of nuclear weapons, but also providing a contrast with the most recent Labour Government – where the then Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, had authorised the 'Chevaline' programme to enhance Britain's Polaris missile system without disclosing it; indeed, it took the Conservative Government to make that action public.<sup>547</sup>

The election of Ronald Reagan in the United States, the deployment to Britain of U.S Cruise missiles, and the British Government's decision to replace the Polaris missile system with the Trident missile system reopened the public debate on nuclear weapons policy in Britain, and re-energised both the peace movement and Labour's unilateralists. Writing in 1981, Lawrence Freedman noted that, having been rejected by the main opposition parties, 'resented by the military and with slight support in the opinion polls, Trident is now looking remarkably friendless'.<sup>548</sup> In relation to Cruise, 'the Labour Party had found the embrace of the anti-nuclear movement irresistible, and was tempted to exploit the evident popular hostility towards hosting American nuclear bases'.<sup>549</sup> However, he also noted that public hostility 'did not extend to unilateral *British* nuclear disarmament and this became the Opposition's Achilles' heel, to the point where for most of the 1980s the 'defence' issue in British politics was the future of the country's nuclear deterrent'.<sup>550</sup>

The 1983 election, and to a lesser extent the 1987 election, saw the Labour Party put a stark contrast on nuclear weapons policy directly into Britain's electoral contest. During the 1983 campaign, Michael Foot spoke regularly and extensively on nuclear weapons policy. He was intensely irritated by the Thatcher government's insistence that Britain would have a say over the use of Cruise, instead arguing the deployment merely brought Britain and Europe into the chosen battlegrounds of the super-powers.

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<sup>545</sup> Benn, *Arguments for Democracy*, p.86.

<sup>546</sup> T. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, (London: Penguin, 1981), p.86.

<sup>547</sup> Keohane, *Labour's Defence Policy*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp.30-31.

<sup>548</sup> L. Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence, 1979-98*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p.105.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

He argued:

‘They’re going to be controlled by, in the control of, the President of the United States. Even if the dual key, so-called, were obtained, we would still be opposed to their deployment here, but it is a matter of major significance that this question has been concealed from the British public. We think it ought to be brought out in the open; those missiles will be under the control of President Reagan.’<sup>551</sup>

However, while Foot personally believed Britain should unilaterally disarm, he showed flexibility in public statements to preserve unity with his Deputy, and stalwart of Labour’s nuclear debates, Denis Healey. This was a fudge that Benn had seen coming, noting in his diary in 1982 that ‘the thing will rumble on and create terrible difficulties’.<sup>552</sup> Following news reports about a split in the leadership over the future of Polaris – the US, submarine-launched missile system purchased by Britain in the 60s – Foot and Healey discussed a clarifying statement which emphasised Labour’s position of what Foot called ‘step-by-step’<sup>553</sup> action to disarm. While committing to the cancellation of Trident (the replacement for Polaris due in little over a decade) and a refusal to host Cruise, the statement read:

‘Labour will put Britain’s Polaris force into the nuclear arms talks at Geneva, so that Britain can take its proper seat at the negotiating table. Nuclear arms negotiations are too important to be left to President Reagan and Mr Andropov. Our aim at the talks will be to reduce nuclear arms *on all sides* [Foot’s emphasis]. Phasing out our Polaris force will be part of that process. We will, after consultation, move to the removal of existing nuclear bases... we want to see NATO’s defence strategy shifted entirely away from the idea of using nuclear weapons first.’<sup>554</sup>

When asked whether Britain would still have Polaris were Foot to be Prime Minister, the Labour Leader stuck closely to the line, answering ‘no... we will have carried

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<sup>551</sup> Foot, *Another Heart*, p.199.

<sup>552</sup> T. Benn, *The End of an Era, Diaries 1980-90*, (London: Hutchinson, 1992), p.244.

<sup>553</sup> Foot, *Another Heart*, p.69.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

through the negotiations',<sup>555</sup> leaving open to interpretation whether Polaris would remain for its lifetime if something-for-something negotiations failed. As Healey noted, this fudge meant he and Foot 'were continually asked what we would do if Russia refused such an agreement [something-for-something]. Michael and I had agreed to answer that this would be a new situation, to be considered if and when it arose. There was no chance of getting away with such a formula when the manifesto also committed us to unilateralism'.<sup>556</sup> Foot bargained with Healey because he knew too well how factional nuclear weapons policy in the Labour Party could be. Prior to 1960, the Bevanite faction had fractured on the topic of nuclear weapons, leading Foot and Nye Bevan to, at one point, come to blows.<sup>557</sup> Factionalism partly defined Labour's nuclear policy in the late 50s and early 60s (as noted above in relation to Gaitskell and CND). During the early 1980s it was a factional issue too, pitching the Bennite Left against the Healey Right, and leaving the Foot Left and the emerging 'soft Left' holding a unilateralist line. By the 1983 election, the multilateralist Right which hadn't left the Labour fold showed itself willing to adapt for the sake of party unity. While undoubtedly the views of Healey meant that Foot's unilateralism had to bend, it was clear which side had shown the greatest flexibility.

Fudge withstanding, the contrast with the Thatcher/Reagan axis was clear and became a core part of the 'choice' between Labour and the Conservatives, a choice closely linked to the identity of the two parties in the minds of Labour people: monetarism vs investment and social amelioration; investment in nuclear arms vs disarmament and a commitment to global talks. This contrast helped to bind the Left, it spoke to a very different world view, and had intellectual roots that gave great prominence to nuclear weapons as a social and economic system. Indeed, when looking for such confidence in multilateralism during this period, it can be found only in those multilateralists who left the Labour fold. As Roy Jenkins observed of his successor as Leader of the SDP, David Owen, 'Owen set off on a course which led to the destruction of a successful Alliance... Owen was not merely an anti-unilateralist... he was something of a nuclear fetishist... constantly looking for moles of nuclear weakness in the eyes of his colleagues'.<sup>558</sup> Such dogmatic multilateralism

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<sup>555</sup> Foot, *Another Heart*, p.199.

<sup>556</sup> Healey, *Time of My Life*, p.500.

<sup>557</sup> K. O. Morgan, *Michael Foot: A Life*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), p.177.

<sup>558</sup> R. Jenkins, *A Life at the Centre*, (London: Papermac, 1994), p.589.

clashed with Labour's ethos. Indeed, Labour's multilateralists had acquiesced on the issue of Britain's deterrent, rather than forming a powerful counter argument, such was the strength of unilateralism as an emblem. Those in favour of multilateralism had not fostered an emblem, they had instead demonstrated a belief in the pragmatic tradition within Labour's ethos of adopting policies based on their perceived advantages alone.

### **Kinnock and unilateralism**

Unilateralism offered a unifying organisational glue for Neil Kinnock when he became leader – a useful tool when he foresaw strife in other areas. The strength of Kinnock's own moral objections, coupled with his suspicion and hostility to increased US armament in Europe, was mirrored in the views of Labour's members. The former Prime Minister and Labour Leader, Jim Callaghan, had been denounced at Labour's 1983 Conference for having criticised the party's nuclear weapons policy in an election cycle. Callaghan spoke from the platform in response, arguing fiercely for a multilateralist policy, and calling out what he believed was the 'fundamental mistake... [of] believing that by going on marches and passing resolutions without any attempt to try to tell the British people what the consequences were... you lost millions of votes'.<sup>559</sup> Shouts rang around the hall, emphasising the continued relevance of the policy to the factional disputes between Labour's Left and Right, as well as debates about the 'betrayal' of previous Labour Governments in the wider movement – multilateralism was associated with the increasingly bleak view of the Wilson and Callaghan years. To many Labour people, the Reagan/Thatcher nuclear axis continued to represent something which had to be opposed – and the rough treatment meted out to Kinnock personally (by both) only added to this frame.

Indications of the movement's attachment to unilateralism can be found in some survey work from the time, which I discuss below. In addition, analysis of annual conference decisions can provide a useful barometer for the 'big debates' being had within the party. Table 5 presents data from an analysis of conference decisions on nuclear weapons policy from 1979 to 1989 – the period of direct relevance to

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<sup>559</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1983*, (London: The Labour Party, 1983), p.161.

Kinnock's leadership, encompassing his inheritance, decision-making context and final policy destination. Conference decisions which mentioned nuclear weapons, as recorded in Annual Conference Reports, were analysed and then categorised into 'unilateralist', 'multilateralist' and 'other'. This analysis inevitably involved some judgement, and I note any ambiguities in the notes for Table 5. The analysis shows that Labour's Annual Conference recorded 44 decisions on nuclear weapons policy – with the nuclear issue a consistently busy area of debate every year from 1980 to 1989 (the 1979 conference focused on the immediate record of the previous Labour Government and the election defeat). This was also the case from the mid-50s to the end of the 60s, studied by Minkin, who recorded disarmament, public ownership, the Common Market and Vietnam as being 'emotive' conference topics.<sup>560</sup> Conference support for unilateralist and multilateralist measures preceded Michael Foot's leadership, yet success for multilateralist arguments ended from 1981-1988. Following Foot's election, and continuing into Kinnock's first and second parliaments, annual conference consistently supported unilateralist composites and resolutions, with 14 carried between 1980 and 1988. In the same period 3 multilateralist composites and resolutions were put forward and lost.

However, while the moral objection to Britain's nuclear weapons did unite the majority of delegates, one issue consistently resulted in unilateralist motions being defeated: the inclusion of NATO withdrawal. The vast majority of Labour's parliamentary leaders – and, as shown by this analysis, conference delegates – did not support a policy of neutralism in the 1980s, nor of actions being taken to obstruct the Alliance's non-nuclear, conventional methods of warfare preparation. As with the divisions in CND, the impact of broader, more developed foreign policy arguments that took nuclear weapons issues quite some distance from the safer realm of morality had less of an impact with Labour people. Labour's unilateralism was predominantly a moral and ethical expression, with the political track focusing on a contrast between Labour's disarmament versus Thatcher and Reagan's escalation – but not neutralism. Survey work asking for the views of Labour's members during Kinnock's tenure is

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<sup>560</sup> L. Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference*, (Allen Lane: London, 1978), p.149.



**Table 5: Conference decisions on nuclear weapons policy**

*Labour Party Annual Conferences 1979-1984. Sources: Labour Party Annual Conference Reports, 1979-1984.*

Conference	No. of decisions	NEC statement approval	Unilateralist carried <sup>561</sup>	Unilateralist lost	Multilateralist carried	Multilateralist lost	Other carried	Other lost
1979	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1980	5	0	2	1* <sup>562</sup>	2	0	0	0
1981	5	1	1	1*	0	1	1	0
1982	4	0	2	1*	0	0	1	0
1983	5	1	2	1 <sup>563</sup>	0	1	0	0
1984	3	1	1	1 <sup>564</sup>	0	0	0	0

<sup>561</sup> Categorising each composite and resolution inevitably involves some judgements. Any composite or resolution which stated support for ‘unilateral’ disarmament, or reaffirmed and added to previous decisions / Labour’s policies supporting unilateral disarmament was selected.

<sup>562</sup> \* denotes composite or resolution which included NATO withdrawal – a policy not supported by Labour’s unilateralist leaders – or, in the case of one composite in 1987 – hostile language towards NATO.

<sup>563</sup> Included a commitment to nationalise the arms industry.

<sup>564</sup> Included a commitment to expel US military bases, without the specificity of US ‘nuclear bases’.

**Table 5 (cont.)***Labour Party Annual Conferences 1985-1989. Sources: Labour Party Annual Conference Reports, 1985-1989.*

Conference	No. of decisions	NEC statement approval	Unilateralist carried	Unilateralist lost	Multilateralist carried	Multilateralist lost	Other carried	Other lost
1985	5	1	1	2*	0	0	1	0
1986	5	1	1	2*	0	0	1	0
1987	5	0	2 <sup>565</sup>	2*	0	0	0	1 <sup>566</sup>
1988	3	0	2	0	0	1 <sup>567</sup>	0	0
1989	4	1	0	1*	1	0	1 <sup>568</sup>	0

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<sup>565</sup> One composite explicitly endorsed unilateralism, one reaffirmed commitment to 'Labour's non-nuclear defence policy'. This was a slightly softer language formulation.

<sup>566</sup> Called for a referendum on nuclear weapons.

<sup>567</sup> Composite was ambiguous, but included a final paragraph calling for reflection and review as to how best to achieve world disarmament. It was opposed by unilateralists and the platform was defeated.

<sup>568</sup> Called for reductions in defence spending.

broadly in line with the conference analysis presented here. 1991 survey data shows majority support (both 72%) for the statements ‘Britain should have nothing to do with nuclear weapons’ and ‘Britain should continue in NATO’.<sup>569</sup> Similarly, data from 1986 shows majority support for Britain unilaterally renouncing nuclear weapons, but disagreement in two constituencies over whether Labour should withdraw from NATO.<sup>570</sup>

### **Kinnock’s struggle over nuclear weapons**

In the view of Ben Pimlott, Neil Kinnock had made his way within Labour ‘on the basis of a sixth sense for the Labour Movement’s sensibilities, an instinct for its values and a keen judgement of its byzantine procedures’.<sup>571</sup> Such a grasp of the party’s dominant ethos, and its competing traditions, this argument suggests, meant Kinnock was truly a man for the moment. He could reform the party at a pace it was comfortable with, a pace that did not risk significant splits within the party mainstream. Others have taken a dimmer view of Kinnock as a power-grabber, thin-skinned, forcing through an agenda he may or may not have believed. Kinnock, according to this position, was a man who with ‘ease... changed his mind on virtually every major political question of the last quarter of a century’.<sup>572</sup> Owing to its focus on Kinnock’s understanding of the party’s ethos, his own interpretation of it, and how these things affected his political judgement, this study is closer to the Pimlott conclusion. The next part of this chapter will explore Kinnock’s recognition of policies becoming emblems – akin to articles of faith, in his view – though it was not an interpretation he held himself. It will then analyse the impact this had on his approach to Labour’s policy on nuclear weapons, coupled with his personal and long-standing commitment to unilateralism and a nuclear-free strategy. Finally, this chapter will then draw conclusions about the strategy Kinnock and his team employed to move Labour’s policy from unilateralism to multilateralism, including how Kinnock’s approach was affected by his understanding of Labour’s ethos.

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<sup>569</sup> Syed and Whiteley, *Labour’s Grass Roots*, p.54.

<sup>570</sup> P. Syed, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987), pp.71-72.

<sup>571</sup> B. Pimlott, *Frustrate Their Knavish Tricks*, (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p.133.

<sup>572</sup> Heffernan and Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory*, p.105.

As the previous chapter noted, Kinnock's interpretation of his mandate was a fine balance between change and continuity. This understanding owed much to his own background and political identity, coming from the Left and having been a rebel on the backbenches before coming to prominence on the frontbenches. In addition, the absence of Tony Benn from the 1983 leadership contest – following Benn's defeat in Bristol at the 1983 general election – left Kinnock conscious, still, of the power of Bennery and its programme – including on nuclear weapons. Kinnock noted: 'By Benn not being there it was difficult to show that the Party had rejected Bennery. In the election [had Benn stood] I could then have been much more direct and assertive about the policy changes we had to make.'<sup>573</sup>

However, Kinnock's view is that, even had Benn stood, he would not have attempted to challenge the party's policy on unilateral nuclear disarmament. 'I don't think I would have done unilateral disarmament,' Kinnock recollected, 'because that was deep religion.'<sup>574</sup> Previously Kinnock has also noted that, of the modernisation process, 'most challenging... were policies with particularly deep roots that were, in themselves, benchmarks of political disposition within the Labour Party. Chief amongst those policies was, of course, the whole issue of defence and nuclear weapons'.<sup>575</sup> These are interesting recollections from Kinnock. First, and more briefly, there is some debate around whether Kinnock wanted to move away from unilateralism in his first parliament as Leader. Some have indicated that, in his first years as Leader, Kinnock wanted 'a new accommodation with the Labour Party's Atlanticist right wing'<sup>576</sup> on defence issues, and that by the time of the second parliament aides were surprised that on ditching unilateralism they found 'they were knocking on an open door'.<sup>577</sup> Other accounts suggest Labour 'fought the 1987 election on a defence policy [unilateralism] in which Neil Kinnock no longer wholly believed'.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Kinnock, 'Reforming the Labour Party', p.540

<sup>576</sup> Heffernan and Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory*, p.237.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., p.245.

<sup>578</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.104.

As the analysis that follows in this chapter will reveal, this study falls closer to the latter, though stressing the word ‘wholly’. Kinnock was not in favour of renouncing unilateralism when he became Leader, for strategic and party management reasons. Documents from Kinnock’s leadership campaign, including correspondence and memorandums from allies, show how he was advised that ‘unilateralism must be held to unequivocally’,<sup>579</sup> and in letters and policy pitches to union colleagues and MPs, Kinnock presented a clearer unilateralism than had ultimately emerged in 1983. Policies, he wrote, ‘must involve cancelling Trident, banning Cruise missiles and other US nuclear weapons based in Britain, withdrawing our arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons and phasing out Polaris, demanding an equivalent Soviet response as already indicated in the Andropov proposals [the offer to Foot and Healey to destroy an equivalent number of weapons from the Soviet armoury]’.<sup>580</sup> The second, more pressing point in relation to emblematic policies, is Kinnock’s language around unilateralism being *deep religion*.

The use of religious metaphors and associated terms are not uncommon among Labour people. A common phrase about the Labour coalition is that it is a ‘broad church’, Labour people have argued they are ‘inspired by Methodism more than Marxism’,<sup>581</sup> and suggested Labour’s socialism ‘combined its therapeutic properties with many of the characteristics of religion’.<sup>582</sup> Roy Hattersley, Labour’s Deputy Leader during Kinnock’s tenure, recalls how, with Labour, ‘it’s like things in the Church... things which are part of the past, part of the history which you can’t touch even though you don’t believe them anymore’.<sup>583</sup> Kinnock saw unilateralism as being in this vein. In an interview for this study, Kinnock said:

‘What we [Kinnock and his team] understood the difficulty was, is, that policy adopted through struggle, and achieved, and retained for some years take on a quasi-religious significance...

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<sup>579</sup> Nigel Stanley and Peter Hain to Neil Kinnock, Robin Cook and Charles Clarke, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/1/12.

<sup>580</sup> Neil Kinnock Campaign ‘summary of views’ document, July 1983, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/1/9.

<sup>581</sup> A. Johnson, ‘Why Labour should end the madness and elect Yvette Cooper’, *The Guardian*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2015, accessed 4 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/04/labour-yvette-cooper-jeremy-corbyn-alan-johnson>.

<sup>582</sup> Dell, *Strange Eventful History*, p.15.

<sup>583</sup> Hattersley, interview.

‘Changing our policy on nuclear disarmament was an uprooting of canonical belief... that’s the difficulty.’<sup>584</sup>

In Kinnock’s mind, this made the process of policy change on nuclear weapons necessarily gradual, with attempts – often through tweaks in language – to pursue the same principles, but through different policies and strategies that didn’t cause a revolt among the believers. The core ‘believers’, in Kinnock’s mind, didn’t necessarily mean the rank and file, and the movement as a whole.

Continuing the religious imagery, he noted:

‘Like all religions, it has got priests, high priests and priests, and then it’s got the flock....’

‘Positions had been taken by the high priests and couldn’t be relinquished without acknowledging, or seeming to concede that they’d been wrong before.’<sup>585</sup>

While Kinnock could himself be understood as one of these ‘high priests’, having to concede that a past policy needed to be changed (though not, necessarily, conceding it was wrong), his own interpretation of this fault line – rather than his comprehension of the dominant ethos of the time – was of the need for pragmatism. ‘Your convictions must be very, very shallow if you can’t compromise,’ he noted. ‘If compromise is good enough for Bevan, it’s good enough for me.’<sup>586</sup> How did this affect Kinnock’s approach to nuclear weapons policy? His own interpretation owed more to compromise and realism than to the significance of emblems. If one considers the frame of ‘ends and means’ in relation to ideological objectives and policies, Kinnock’s position saw policies (whether unilateral measures or multilateral talks) as means to an end (a nuclear-free world) rather than unilateralism being an end in itself. An electoral imperative for policy change could – and did – provide a motivation for reform, but it did not directly lead to an outcome.

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<sup>584</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

Instead, Kinnock balanced this motivation with others, including party unity, the level of commitment to a policy (including his own), the external environment, and internal processes that had to be respected. Kinnock believed the party's ethos necessitated a process that treated the Labour Party, certainly in his first parliament as Leader, as a movement that needed to be persuaded, not cajoled. Both he and Charles Clarke simply did not believe in any attempt to bypass the party or to rely on Kinnock diverging from the wider movement.<sup>587</sup> The 'head' of Kinnock had to be attached to the 'body' of Labour. Kinnock's interpretation of the party's ethos more widely, including the prevailing ethos of the time, was of Labour people committed to emblematic policies, seriously limiting scope for compromise and change. He was not alone in this view. The Party's then International Officer, Mike Gapes, called unilateralism a 'quasi-religious totem'.<sup>588</sup>

This understanding of the effect of ethos is not the only explanation for the difficulties Kinnock – and other Leaders – found when trying to reform the party policy platform. Organisationally, as was noted in the previous chapter, Kinnock did not feel secure nor guaranteed to win close votes on party change. As leader, he did not feel unassailable. And the external context, during the deployment of cruise missiles and the antagonisms between East and West, provided evidence *in support* (Kinnock felt) of his long held commitment to disarmament. However, as this chapter argues, the party's ethos was highly relevant to Kinnock's strategic calculations. Ethos is particularly pertinent when considering the place of the Kinnock leadership in the 'politics of catch-up' thesis during Labour's modernisation. While it has been argued 'the period 1982-8 were the years'<sup>589</sup> of Thatcherism's political advance, and Thatcher's policy on nuclear weapons was one of rearmament and encouragement for U.S steeliness, the first Kinnock parliament actually saw the removal of some ambiguities in Labour's unilateralism, for instance the full commitment to decommissioning Polaris. In other words, Kinnock's first parliament drew a starker contrast with the Thatcherite 'consensus' on nuclear weapons – a divergence – rather than gravitating towards this centre – a convergence. In part, this was because of the potency of the policy within the party.

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<sup>587</sup> Clarke, interview.

<sup>588</sup> Mike Gapes MP, interview by author, London, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

<sup>589</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.16.

## A strategy to convince

In his 1984 Labour Party Conference speech, Kinnock drew attention to what he considered to be a list of Conservative failures, in which he included: ‘This was the year in which Cruise arrived. This was the year in which the cost of Trident soared past £12,000 million.’<sup>590</sup> Kinnock was well aware that ‘nuclear defence policy had become both sign and symbol that not all the Left’s gains of the previous years had yet been forfeited’.<sup>591</sup> The retention of unilateralism was seen as important for holding the party together, and crucially helped to foster ‘a disposition in much of the soft-Left to give him [Kinnock] the benefit of the doubt’<sup>592</sup> in his wider leadership strategy. Undoubtedly, Kinnock’s first parliament was an uncomfortable one on the issue of nuclear weapons, just as it had been for Michael Foot and Denis Healey in the previous parliament. Heffernan and Marqusee noted Kinnock was attempting to ‘square a circle’ with ‘the balance of political forces inside the Party... [making it] impossible to jettison the non-nuclear defence policy; yet the Party leadership was convinced it was an electoral liability’.<sup>593</sup> This leads them to the conclusion that Kinnock ‘was convinced that the unilateral abandonment of nuclear weapons would never be tolerated by the British establishment. It was fear of confronting that establishment... that prevented Labour from ever launching the real campaign on defence for which conference kept asking’.<sup>594</sup>

This study takes a different view. Undoubtedly certain figures that could be included in the ‘establishment’ hated Labour’s policy. Yet it was not so much fear as a realisation of the difficulty in escaping the frame of unilateral surrender that defined the early Kinnock leadership. Both Kinnock and the party apparatus knew they would be sticking with a unilateralist policy at the next general election. To limit the damage the policy was perceived to cause, and to seek to persuade, the leadership adopted a dual strategy: a proactive defence campaign which sought to reposition a non-nuclear strategy as logical and strong, following on from headline attack on Cruise missiles earlier in the parliament; and weakening the moral imperative, in favour of a more

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<sup>590</sup> N. Kinnock, *Thorns & Roses, Speeches 1983-1991*, (London: Hutchinson, 1992), p.60.

<sup>591</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.40.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>593</sup> Heffernan and Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory*, p.241.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*



pragmatic case based on the diplomatic and military context, by the time of the party's manifesto in 1987. Gapes saw the early Kinnock strategy as one that 'tried very hard to get somewhere with the policy that we had'.<sup>595</sup> As with Foot before him, Kinnock was a candidate from the Left, with a commitment to unilateralism, coupled with a clear desire to unify Labour's soft Left and moderate centre. Both had had reputations as firebrands, both believed in the soul of the Bevanite Left. Yet, unlike Foot, Kinnock represented a clear determination to be less collegiate with the Hard Left (though Foot had overseen NEC inquiries into Militant), as well as adopting an openly 'modern' outlook, introducing Labour to the kinds of organisational and political methods usually associated with the Conservative machine.

On unilateralism, this thirst for a more modern, presidential style included a strategy that was less avowedly moralistic, and more empirical. Coupled with a determination to *contest* the nuclear issue with the Conservatives, this strategy in the first parliament would prove hugely important when Kinnock entered his second. Kinnock thus began to strip away some of the Foot-style moralism, while taking the fight to the Conservatives on tactics for disarmament, including their bilateral and multilateral views. This first parliament saw Kinnock committed to unilateralism, yet with a strategy that also began to gradually dilute its potency within the party. From a campaigning perspective, the view of some Labour candidates was of continuity from 1983, though with more practicality thrown in. In 1983, the party had adopted:

'a moral high ground... do we have cruise missiles, do we have Trident missiles, you can't possibly want to buy your council house can you?'<sup>596</sup>

Following Kinnock's election, campaigning on the issue remained prominent – 'we put a leaflet out... with a fist breaking a Trident missile'<sup>597</sup> – yet with language that attempted to move Labour more towards stronger conventional defences. 'Labour and socialists throughout Europe believe it's possible – and vital – that we call off the nuclear arms race, and start to build sensible defences based on conventional weapons,' literature for the 1984 European election read. 'Most British people support

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<sup>595</sup> Gapes, interview.

<sup>596</sup> David Hanson MP, interview by author, London, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

us. Every new missile just makes Europe a sitting duck as the super-powers square up for confrontation.’<sup>598</sup> In November 1985, Kinnock’s leadership team – Clarke, Hewitt and Mandelson – began discussing the substance and output for a defence campaign. The context for this move was talk in the party and the movement that such a campaign would never happen, despite it being one ‘the Party had been demanding for so long’.<sup>599</sup> In a memo from Hewitt to Clarke and Mandelson, Kinnock’s Press Secretary wrote:

‘The fact is that we have to get across the message about our defence and nuclear disarmament policies – during the election campaign and in the two years or so before it starts. We need to consider how [Hewitt’s emphasis] we do that – and this note makes some suggestions – but whether we do it cannot be in doubt.’<sup>600</sup>

The campaign strategy was typical of the Kinnock team’s focus on modern and effective communications – rather than a campaign pack and some posters, the strategy sought to educate the party, motivated by the 1983 election performance: ‘It was quite clear at the last election that many party members simply did not know the arguments... They could turn up on the doorstep wearing a CND badge, but had no idea how to answer the challenge of increasingly worried voters.’<sup>601</sup>

The solution was a question-and-answer sheet, with ward-level political education sessions, and the suggestion of a party political broadcast (PPB) to communicate the party’s policy.<sup>602</sup> Materials were to be slim and to-the-point, while the involvement of Kinnock in contesting the battleground was also set out at this stage. For example, the need to sell Labour’s policy to a U.S audience in preparation for ‘the Tories and the Libs/SDP to whip up anti-Labour statements from American leaders’.<sup>603</sup> Overall, there was little sign of Kinnock’s team trying to run and hide from the unilateralist

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<sup>598</sup> David Hanson election literature, 1984 European Parliament election, provided by David Hanson MP.

<sup>599</sup> Heffernan and Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory*, p.239.

<sup>600</sup> Patricia Hewitt to Peter Mandelson and Charles Clarke, memorandum, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1985, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/1/66.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

policy. Instead, ‘making progress on one of our essential election tasks’<sup>604</sup> was stressed, and work was done to try and win seats at the next election through boosts to domestic defence spending, rather than nuclear investment.<sup>605</sup> Labour’s language during this period contrasted the Conservatives ‘running down real defence’<sup>606</sup> with Labour’s approach of investment in conventional weapons rather than in developing Trident.<sup>607</sup> This approach was echoed in Kinnock’s words, when he told the 1986 Labour Party Conference:

‘I hold it to be self-evident that it is the first duty of any government to ensure the security of the country over which it governs... Meeting that obligation requires that we defend ourselves effectively by land, sea, and air and that we participate properly in the Alliance of which we are full and firm members... It is now plainly the case that, by pursuing a nuclear-dependent defence policy, the present government is diminishing the conventional defence of our country.’<sup>608</sup>

Kinnock still noted the catastrophic destructive potential of nuclear weapons, as Labour’s unilateralists long had, to evoke emotion and commitment. Yet this language too was shaped to project, where possible, a more conventional ‘strength’ from the Labour Party, rather than the rhetoric of ‘peace’. Following assurances to his audience, at home and abroad, that non-nuclear U.S assets and bases would be welcome in Britain, Kinnock approached the end of his speech with this section:

‘It must mean that people face that fact of the existence of weapons of obliteration and how we control, reduce and abolish... squarely and honestly. I face those questions as the leader of this party... I tell you in no casual spirit, no bravado, that like most of my fellow citizens I would if necessary fight and die, fight and lay down my life for my country and what it stands for. I would

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<sup>604</sup> Hewitt to Mandelson and Clarke, memorandum.

<sup>605</sup> Labour Party Policy Directorate, ‘Defence and the General Election’ paper, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 3/2/36.

<sup>606</sup> Labour Party Election Briefing Book, June 1987, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 3/2/36.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> Kinnock, *Thornes and Roses*, p.117.

fight and die for my country, but I tell you I would never let my country die for me.’<sup>609</sup>

As the 1987 election approached, neither Kinnock, his team, nor other senior party figures were in any doubt that the policy of unilateralism had the potential to be electorally costly. Indeed, they were told in January 1987 that following the ‘Modern Britain’ campaign, there had been a significant jump in the number of people polled *disagreeing* with a non-nuclear strategy for Britain. The polling memo noted that ‘the politically volatile C2s (skilled working class) have swung considerably on this issue over the past few months, with the current figures of 36% agreeing [with a non-nuclear policy], 57% disagreeing replacing September’s of 48% agree, 42% disagree’.<sup>610</sup>

Yet Kinnock stood firm, knowing that change could not be foisted upon Labour. A note from a meeting between Kinnock and Healey – then Shadow Foreign Secretary – two months later reveals the ongoing concern senior figures had about Labour’s policy. According to the note of the meeting, Healey suggested to Kinnock ‘the party should drop its commitment to the removal of Cruise missiles from Britain, on the grounds that this Labour pledge jeopardises the zero-option talks’.<sup>611</sup> The so-called ‘zero option’ involved the removal of intermediate-range missiles from Europe, and following the 1986 Reykjavik summit between Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev this option had been revived, culminating in the 1987 INF Treaty.<sup>612</sup> In other words, Healey was appealing for Labour to drop a clear-cut, unilateral commitment in favour of allowing a bilateral process between the U.S and the Soviet Union to come to pass. Healey added that he thought ‘90% of the party would breathe a sigh of relief if we dropped the commitment to get rid of Cruise missiles’.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Kinnock, *Thornes and Roses*, p.120.

<sup>610</sup> Bob Worcester, Brian Gosschalk, MORI to the Labour Party Polling Committee, memorandum, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1987, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/1/97.

<sup>611</sup> Notes of discussion between Denis Healey and Neil Kinnock, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1987, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/14.

<sup>612</sup> ‘Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), 1987’, *U.S Department of State briefing*, accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/rd/104266.htm>.

<sup>613</sup> Notes of discussion between Healey and Kinnock.

Kinnock responded ‘that he did not agree with Denis’s view of the attitude of the party, or with the view that Labour’s policy on Cruise was, in any respect, an inhibition to the INF talks’.<sup>614</sup> However, the note does say that Kinnock and Healey agreed ‘we should express our delight with the progress that had been made in the INF talks and our view that if a speedy superpower agreement secured withdrawal that was a very satisfactory way to proceed’,<sup>615</sup> thereby suggesting Labour could hold off from demanding the immediate withdrawal of Cruise if it appeared an agreement was possible. Healey’s version of this claims he ‘took advantage of the impending agreement to persuade Neil Kinnock that the Cruise missiles should be removed from Britain as part of the INF, rather than unilaterally’.<sup>616</sup> In the manifesto, this was indeed where Labour ended up – with some conditionality. While noting Labour’s strong support for the INF talks, the manifesto read:

‘We naturally, therefore, want to assist that process in every way possible. If, however, it should fail we shall, after consultation, inform the Americans that we wish them to remove their cruise missiles and other nuclear weapons from Britain.’<sup>617</sup>

This was the only real move away from unilateralism in the manifesto. The commitment to decommission Polaris was clearer than the Foot and Healey statements from 1983. At the 1986 Annual Conference contributions from the platform applauded the absence of 1983’s ‘divisions and disunity’ and one of ‘the most radical policies this party has ever presented to the British electorate’.<sup>618</sup> Healey believed this left Labour, once again, with the ‘uneasy amalgam between dogmatic unilateralism and a commitment to support the alliance [NATO] while seeking multilateral disarmament’.<sup>619</sup> Labour’s defeat at the 1987 election was not, certainly not unanimously within Labour circles, put down to a weak defence policy. While Kinnock had been left in little doubt about how the policy landed – both at home, and crucially abroad in the U.S – he had fought on the platform of unilateralism and

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<sup>614</sup> Notes of discussion between Healey and Kinnock.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> Healey, *Time of My Life*, p.534.

<sup>617</sup> Labour Party, *Britain Will Win*, (London: The Labour Party, 1987) p.16.

<sup>618</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1986*, (London: Labour Party, 1986), p.103.

<sup>619</sup> Healey, *Time of My Life*, p.533.

pursued the arguments with his typical blend of energy and rhetorical flourish, with positioning mindful of the ever-changing diplomatic and military context.

Yet post-Reykjavik, with the INF talks and the increasing confidence in Gorbachev's leadership, the thawing of the Cold War coincided with the jettisoning of Labour's moral imperative on nuclear weapons. Its replacement with an argument largely based on the efficient use of military resources, and a far greater commitment to super-power talks, meant policy presentation that was far more context-specific. At the time of the 1987 election, Polaris was nearing its natural end and Trident had not yet been delivered. By the time of the 1992 general election, Trident submarines would be coming into operation and the money would have been spent. Super-power talks would have progressed, with the potential for further moves. Some of the socialist arguments for unilateralism, which I noted earlier, were largely removed from Labour's messaging. As the race slowed, and Reagan's early aggression receded into the past, the contrast offered by unilateralism weakened. Kinnock's moves from the soft Left to the moderate centre also lessened the factional relevance of unilateralism. His willingness to have contested the issue showed a clear difference with the secrecy and habit of ignoring the party, shown by multilateralists in the past. The conditions were right for Kinnock, if he so wanted, to begin efforts to change the policy *with* the party, following a traditional, bureaucratic, rules-based approach to policymaking.

### **The journey to multilateralism**

Following the 1987 defeat, Kinnock was buoyed by the news that Tom Sawyer, of the National Union of Public Employees, was in favour of a root-and-branch review of Labour's policies. The Policy Review process that followed covered every policy area, including nuclear weapons. Mike Gapes, who as the party's lead on international policy felt unsure where Kinnock would land after 1987, believed: 'He was grappling with the issue, he was trying to move it, he knew what he had to do, but he was going to determine his own style of doing it, and it was all about managing the party and keeping it together.'<sup>620</sup> Kinnock and his office steered the Policy Review carefully, and controlled many aspects of it tightly. Secretaries to the various Policy Review

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<sup>620</sup> Gapes, interview.

Groups (PRGs) were based in Kinnock's office. They compiled reports as the review passed through phases, with Kinnock reading, annotating and amending them. However, while it was undoubtedly gripped by the Labour leadership, the process had the potential to wriggle out of their control, particularly when it came to controversial issues where big personalities had long-held views.

On the composition of the 'Britain in the World' PRG, Kinnock reflected: 'Ron Todd... irreducible as a unilateralist, was definitely on the defence and foreign affairs [group]. All I had to ensure was, that at the end of the review group there's a good chance he'll be in the minority.'<sup>621</sup> As with Kinnock's overall strategy, now four years in, the process could not – in his view – be rushed. Policies would not be imposed by the Leader without the review process having made them official: 'Inch by inch, slowly, slowly, moving the party,'<sup>622</sup> Gapes recollected. The International Officer authored a note for Kinnock and his team soon after the 1987 defeat with thoughts that were 'essentially my own',<sup>623</sup> though seeking some response from the leader on where Labour's policy on nuclear weapons should go next. Gapes' tone was diplomatic, noting that Labour's policy had not been 'in all aspects (Polaris) an asset'.<sup>624</sup> His paper pointed out that very soon the world would have changed, with Cruise missiles departed, talks for potential cuts in warheads progressing, and Trident nearing completion.<sup>625</sup> In other words, some unilateral options would be off the table and no savings from Trident to spend on other defence equipment would be possible.

Gapes also offered some strategic options, arguing that a non-nuclear defence policy could continue, albeit with disarmament seen not as a principle but as a tactic, and offered in the context of multilateral and bilateral negotiations.<sup>626</sup> Most importantly, this would mean accepting that – if negotiations to remove Trident were not successful – 'we will keep it and continue it in service if the negotiations should fall. Are we prepared to grasp this nettle?'<sup>627</sup> In a memo from Charles Clarke to the

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<sup>621</sup> Kinnock, interview.

<sup>622</sup> Gapes, interview.

<sup>623</sup> Mike Gapes, 'The Future Shape of Labour's Defence Policy', Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/14.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

convenors of the PRG, the Leader's Office set out a clear view for a slower start when it came to the nuclear issue. Clarke wrote:

'I would suggest that we target our Defence work for the 1989 Labour Party Conference, and for the 1989 trade union conferences which precede that. It will not be feasible to make a real assessment about the potential effectiveness of multilateral progress until after the Reagan/Gorbachev summit in Moscow on START [arms reduction talks] and until after the election in November 1988 of the next U.S President.'<sup>628</sup>

This the group agreed to,<sup>629</sup> though the internal battleground over the policy was not suspended. As noted in the analysis of annual conference decisions (Table 5, above), unilateralist composites were successful at the 1988 conference, while a rather more ambiguously worded multilateralist effort (calling for reflection on how best to achieve world disarmament) was defeated. Kinnock, meanwhile, 'blew a hole in their decision not to open up any debate on defence inside the party during the first phase of the policy review',<sup>630</sup> through a lunch with *The Independent* implying change for Labour on nuclear weapons.<sup>631</sup> A further interview, on *This Week, Next Week*, saw Kinnock say that Labour's policy 'doesn't have to be something for nothing – the fact is now that it can be something for something. Now I say that now, even before the first paragraph of a strategic arms reduction treaty has been drawn up'.<sup>632</sup> As Hughes and Wintour note, the question of whether decommissioning Trident was absolutely conditional was not asked in the interview,<sup>633</sup> meaning the words 'something for something' could simply refer to a bilateral arrangement where British disarmament saw a reciprocal reduction in weaponry by the Soviet Union – an offer that had been made to Labour Party delegations in Moscow for many years.

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<sup>628</sup> Charles Clarke to Tony Clarke and Gerald Kaufman, memorandum, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/8.

<sup>629</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.108.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>632</sup> Neil Kinnock interview with Vivian White, transcript, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/18.

<sup>633</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.87.



However, in the context of the leadership challenge from Eric Heffer and Tony Benn (albeit one the Leader's Office was untroubled by, confident of a comfortable victory),<sup>634</sup> and following concerns and attacks from the Left, Kinnock wobbled. A letter from David Blunkett to Kinnock, dated 13<sup>th</sup> May 1988, read:

'I am very worried about the press speculation and the impact it's having in the Party. I don't believe a word of it, and have spent much time in many meetings saying that the one thing I was sure about is our commitment to a non-nuclear strategy in a non-nuclear world... To be quite frank, I have heard of leading right wing multilateralists saying exactly what *The Independent* newspaper was saying last Tuesday.'<sup>635</sup>

A month later, Blunkett issued a further press release (and sent a copy to Kinnock) noting that abandoning a non-nuclear defence policy would 'fly in the face of current events' and that "“something for nothing” does not equal existing Labour Party policy'.<sup>636</sup> 'If an unnecessary and devastating split in the Party is to be avoided, the Leader needs to make it clear that his words were not an abandonment of his long-standing commitment on which so many of his allies have placed their trust',<sup>637</sup> he added. To Blunkett, the glue of unilateralism still held the party together, while the softer tones from the U.S and the Soviet Union were seen as making unilateralism easier to sell. Kinnock, troubled by the coverage and the response, duly swallowed his words in a further interview with *The Independent*.<sup>638</sup> This 'wobble' can be seen in two ways, both of which have some truth. Firstly, and as will be seen in the remainder of this chapter, doubts from Kinnock over the presentation of Labour's moves towards multilateralism were to be expected – principally because of his long-standing commitment to the eradication, without conditions, of nuclear weapons, his identity as a man of the Left, and his priority of unity. Secondly, those working around Kinnock considered it a tactic of his to venture beyond his usual – and closely

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<sup>634</sup> Clarke, interview.

<sup>635</sup> David Blunkett to Neil Kinnock, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/20.

<sup>636</sup> David Blunkett to Neil Kinnock, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1988, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/20.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.90.

guarded – rhetoric to test the response. ‘He would push things out, and see what the reaction would be,’<sup>639</sup> Gapes noted.

On a matter so delicate, as the nuclear deterrent was, it was a risky tactic that could occasionally blow up in Kinnock’s face. Around the same time as *The Independent* furore, Hugo Young recorded some notes from a Kinnock visit to the Guardian on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1988. When Kinnock was quizzed on defence, Young recorded the following from Kinnock: ‘He virtually said there would be no change in policy. Noted that the scene was changing fast, and was quite interested in the [Peter] Preston suggestion that he should say nothing until just before the election... Re the British deterrent, he specifically rejected my suggestion that Labour would simply put Trident into SALT.’<sup>640</sup>

Yet, the rhetoric from Kinnock, and the Labour Party hierarchy more generally, including the executive, had been changing in important ways for some time. Part of the strength of the unilateralist cause was the call to action that it represented. While multilateralism seemed passive, waiting for talks that never seemed to succeed, unilateralism was a jolt to the system, a way of advancing Labour’s mission to a more peaceful world through its own actions. Crucial to moving the party on was presenting multilateralism in a similar vein, and Kinnock knew he had to press the advantage that Gorbachev and the optimism of the Cold War thaw provided him with. Prior to the 1987 general election, the NEC had agreed a statement in response to disarmament proposals from Gorbachev, noting its belief ‘that these proposals are extremely important and significant’.<sup>641</sup>

Following a meeting in November 1987 between the U.S and the Soviet Union, Gerald Kaufman spoke of the ‘best news for humankind for nearly half a century’<sup>642</sup> with the two super powers agreeing to weapon reductions. ‘This decision transforms

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<sup>639</sup> Gapes, interview.

<sup>640</sup> H. Young, *The Hugo Young Papers*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p.278.

<sup>641</sup> NEC, Labour Party press release, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1986, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/14.

<sup>642</sup> Gerald Kaufman, Labour Party Press Release, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1987, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/18.

the history of arms control and the prospects for it,<sup>643</sup> he added. Following the signing of the INF Treaty, Kinnock made the following statement:

‘It is a good deal between the super powers and a good day for the human race. Indeed, the only bleak aspect is that resulting from Mrs Thatcher’s obvious intention to replace land-based intermediate missiles with sea and airborne missiles, so nullifying the fine efforts made by the US and Soviet negotiators. This is an agreement on which to build. Mrs Thatcher thinks it’s an agreement to bypass. She is wrong and events and the impetus for continued nuclear disarmament will prove it.’<sup>644</sup>

This statement acted as a useful guide for Kinnock’s approach to questioning unilateralism as an emblem, and in boosting multilateralism. A contrast is still drawn with the opposition, with Kinnock noting his willingness to embrace talks to disarm, and Thatcher’s apparent indifference. The reference to the INF being a ‘good day for the human race’ was – in addition to being true if one wanted to see the removal of land-based nuclear missiles from Europe – a rhetorical flourish to demonstrate the opportunities and potential of further multilateral talks. Success in the U.S-Soviet context meant Kinnock could begin to knock down the factional walls that separated Labour into disarmers and armourers – because if the U.S and the Soviet Union could be disarmers through talks, why couldn’t Britain too? Following a meeting with Gorbachev in April 1989, shortly before the NEC meetings to decide upon the content of the Policy Review reports, Kinnock reiterated these messages, placing particular emphasis on the change Gorbachev represented:

‘Mr Gorbachev made it clear... that Mrs Thatcher still holds to the argument of the permanency of nuclear weapons. His view is that even though the world is changing, her stance isn’t... He clearly believes that governments need to participate more vigorously in the process of disarmament, and particularly in

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<sup>643</sup> Kaufman, Labour Party Press Release.

<sup>644</sup> Office of Neil Kinnock, press release, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1987, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/18.

relation to the questions of tactical nuclear weapons. Naturally I concurred with that view.’<sup>645</sup>

While Kinnock emphasised the new opportunities of U.S-Soviet détente, the administration of the Soviet Union helped in other ways too. While Kaufman’s management of the ‘Britain in the World’ PRG was notorious for secrecy, one higher profile event was a visit to Moscow, where the review group met with senior Soviet officials. Gapes recollected a breakthrough moment:

‘[The] most important essence of it was our visit to Moscow... we met some top people... this General said that the Soviets would prefer that Britain put its weapons into multilateral negotiations rather than act unilaterally. Gerald’s light lit up and [he] seized on this.’<sup>646</sup>

Following this, Kaufman ‘chose the centre of Red Square in mid-afternoon to give his final briefing to the travelling British press. Surrounded by curious and bemused Russian passers-by, Kaufman buried Labour’s unilateralism a few yards from Lenin’s tomb’.<sup>647</sup> This combination – Gorbachev’s leadership and the new Soviet position – was a powerful proposition in challenging unilateralism. It gave the leadership what could be considered to be more ‘socialist’ arguments: a modernising socialist leader in the Soviet Union showing what a different world could look like, along with a diplomatic change from a country seen as less antagonistic to Labour and its objectives, in contrast to the United States. Kaufman noted the importance of this moment in his speech presenting the review’s report at the 1989 Annual Conference:

‘The Soviet deputy foreign minister, their nuclear disarmament expert, stated his government’s view. He said “we want all five nuclear powers to work out the machinery of nuclear disarmament” ...Our Soviet hosts said that Labour would be good partners in disarmament.’<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Office of Neil Kinnock, press release, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1989, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/20.

<sup>646</sup> Gapes, interview.

<sup>647</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.113.

<sup>648</sup> G. Kaufman, Speech to Labour Party Conference 1989, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1989*, (London: Labour Party, 1989), p.29.

Kaufman had been utilising the changing context in the Soviet Union for some time, having stressed earlier in the Policy Review process to the 1988 Annual Conference:

‘In a few weeks, I will be going to Moscow on behalf of this party, I know I shall have the support of this conference and of this party in telling the Soviet leadership that Labour is committed to a non-nuclear Britain. But can I also tell the Soviet leadership that Labour wants to work for a non-nuclear world?’<sup>649</sup>

A planned visit to the United States got a brief, passing mention. Further submissions to the PRG from former officials and advisors also proved helpful. The Fabian Society published the tract *Working for Common Security*, which reinforced many of the messages from the leadership, and sought to reframe Labour’s nuclear debate as one about the best way to achieve a non-nuclear defence policy. The paper argued that far from requiring a breach in Labour’s beliefs, multilateral success meant the tide was ‘turning in favour of non-nuclear defence as both the morality and practicality of nuclear deterrence is increasingly questioned’.<sup>650</sup> While the paper suggested that ‘the point of principle – our rejection of nuclear weapons – is not an issue’,<sup>651</sup> this remained a rhetorical debating point, and a weakness for the multilateralist case. For while the promise of multilateralism was stronger, unsuccessful talks remained a possibility, meaning Britain would be retaining nuclear weapons, presumably pending further discussions over the years.

It was this point that marked the only significant concession Kaufman and Kinnock made. Kaufman’s draft PRG document committed Labour to some independent steps, including a policy of ‘no first use’ and the cancellation of the fourth Trident submarine. On the future of the British deterrent, three Trident submarines – which would be nearly completed in the early 90s – would remain, and along with Polaris (reaching the end of its life) would be placed into international nuclear disarmament

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<sup>649</sup> Kaufman, Speech to Labour Party Conference 1988, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1988*, (London: Labour Party, 1988), p.127.

<sup>650</sup> N. Butler, L. Scott, D. Ward and J. Worthington, *Working for Common Security*, (London: Fabian Society, 1989), p.13.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*

negotiations.<sup>652</sup> There was no unconditional disarmament, nor, crucially, was there a mention of bilateral measures which had been offered by the Soviet Union and accepted as Labour policy in previous elections. The ‘reaction of the soft Left’,<sup>653</sup> principally Robin Cook, meant that Kinnock could not be certain of a comfortable vote.<sup>654</sup> Following a meeting between the two men, Cook made a deal with Kinnock that revived a bilateral option,<sup>655</sup> where negotiations with the Soviet Union could result in a reciprocal deal, though leaving the super-power’s arsenal relatively intact.

The final draft included the following concession:

‘If the beginning of START 2 [the name given to U.S-Soviet negotiations] is subject to long delay, and there is good reason to believe that these negotiations will not make the progress we will require, a Labour government will reserve the option of initiating direct negotiations with the Soviet Union and/or with others in order to bring about the elimination of that capacity by negotiated and verifiable agreements.’<sup>656</sup>

This was an important concession, though with Kaufman’s strong view gained from Moscow that the Soviet Union was more interested in multilateral involvement from Britain, it could be argued the chances of it were less than likely. Todd, the TGWU’s staunch unilateralist, rejected the report in a letter to Larry Whitty, suggesting it wasn’t seen as particularly relevant to unilateralists.<sup>657</sup> Hughes and Wintour, writing in 1990, noted the amendment ‘may well return to plague Kinnock’ as the Leader clearly ‘remained sympathetic to the possibility of a bilateral fallback’.<sup>658</sup> Ultimately, Labour’s defeat in 1992 made this a moot point, while the party’s manifesto didn’t mention the policy change, nor Labour’s deterrent policy in any great detail.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Labour Party, *Britain in the World*, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/40.

<sup>653</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, p.119.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>656</sup> Labour Party, *Britain in the World* (galley proofs), Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 2/2/41.

<sup>657</sup> Ron Todd to Larry Whitty, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1989, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/20.

<sup>658</sup> Hughes and Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, pp.126-127.

<sup>659</sup> Labour Party, *It’s Time To Get Britain Working Again*, (London, The Labour Party, 1992), p.27.

Kinnock, at times, remained torn on the presentation of the policy. In trying to reinforce the message that Labour had jettisoned unilateralism, Mandelson led on the recording of a party political broadcast (PPB) with Kinnock being interviewed on the topic. However, after the first recording session, Mandelson considered the material unusable and enlisted a new interviewer to get clearer lines from Kinnock. Mandelson noted:

‘The most difficult thing of the whole policy review was on unilateralism....

‘He [Kinnock] always wanted to do it without anyone noticing that he was doing it, and if they noticed that he was doing it that he wouldn’t be blamed for it, and that if he was blamed for it that it wouldn’t trigger Armageddon.’<sup>660</sup>

Yet, in correspondence with the then head of the CND, Bruce Kent, Kinnock was clear in his motivation for the move, on both the weakness of unilateralism in policy terms and the electoral imperative. He argued that the new opportunities that existed for global disarmament had to be developed by states in a multilateral, rather than a unilateral way. On Labour’s chances of being elected on any other policy platform, Kinnock said he did ‘not believe – as a matter of reality, not of pessimism – that the Labour Party could get a mandate to govern with a policy of unconditional unilateral nuclear disarmament’.<sup>661</sup> Just as Kinnock’s arguments for unilateralism in the first parliament had been increasingly empirical, rather than moral, the thrust of his support for multilateralism displayed pragmatism when it came to policy. Not only would Labour not be elected, in Kinnock’s view, with the 1983 or 1987 policy position, it wouldn’t be the most effective in seeking to capitalise on the opportunity he detected.

Returning to the characteristics of an emblematic policy, Table 6 shows the presence, and relative strength and weakness of the unilateralist and multilateralist cases in 1983 when considering the external context. All four characteristics of an emblematic policy were present for unilateralism in 1983, and all could be considered ‘strong’,

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<sup>660</sup> Mandelson, interview.

<sup>661</sup> Neil Kinnock to Bruce Kent, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1989, Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Neil Kinnock, KNNK 5/20.

while multilateralism had only a weak presence for ‘relevance to factionalism’ – that being the Shadow Cabinet presence of Healey and other experienced former Ministers who had previously fought elections on the basis of a nuclear deterrent. Table 6 also shows the transformation by the time of the 1989 policy review. Unilateralist arguments retained the four characteristics, yet on both its relevance to factionalism and its adhesive quality, it was far weaker.

**Table 6: Unilateralism and multilateralism characteristics<sup>662</sup>**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Strength (1983)</b> <b>P=present, S=strong,</b> <b>W=weak</b>	<b>Strength (1989)</b> <b>P=present, S=strong,</b> <b>W=weak</b>
<b>Socialist arguments</b>	Unilateralism: P, S Multilateralism: W	Unilateralism: P, S Multilateralism: P, S
<b>Stark contrast with opposition</b>	Unilateralism: P, S Multilateralism: W	Unilateralism: P, S Multilateralism: P, S
<b>Relevance to factionalism</b>	Unilateralism: P, S Multilateralism: P, W	Unilateralism: P, W Multilateralism: P, S
<b>Adhesive quality</b>	Unilateralism: P, S Multilateralism: W	Unilateralism: P, W Multilateralism: P, S

Most importantly, multilateralism shows a strong presence across all four characteristics, as follows:

- **Socialist arguments:** multilateralism was no longer presented as anti-democratic, shrouded in the secrecy that had previously dogged it. With the

<sup>662</sup> The style of this table – ‘present’, ‘strong’ etc. – is adapted from a style found in C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.21.



context of Gorbachev's leadership, and the relevance of his modernisation project in the Soviet Union, there were stronger arguments for a multilateral route to peace, rather than a previous multilateralist reliance on the United States. The perception of how Gorbachev and the Soviet Union were seen within the Labour Party – in a contest with the United States, the more 'peaceful' – was seen as important by Kinnock and his leadership team, providing authenticity for the new policy. These changes in the external political context were hugely significant to Kinnock's successful strategy.

- Stark contrast with opposition: Kinnock had assiduously built a loyal opposition case against Thatcher and nuclear weapons from his first months as leader. Crucially, that strategy remained when he began making multilateral arguments. A stark contrast with Thatcher/Reagan was drawn by Kinnock in the first parliament, while in the second a Kinnock/Gorbachev vs Thatcher frame was attempted, moving the debate on to multilateral disarmers and unilateral armourers.
- Relevance to factionalism: Both the smaller size of the committed unilateralist group, and Kinnock's own journey from unilateralist to multilateralist, confused the factional presentation of Labour's nuclear debate. In a way, Kinnock created the semblance of a return to the Bevan-Gaitskell détente, with a man of the Left making the argument for multilateralism.
- Adhesive quality: Kinnock's personal journey from unilateralism to multilateralism created a pressure to be loyal. The clear 'unifier' by 1989 was to support Kinnock's project of renewal as Labour approached the next election, while his victory over the Militant tendency, and the weakness of Bennery and the Hard Left, meant to back Kinnock was to back the majority.

## **Conclusion**

Labour's path to multilateralism was a disjointed one. The policy journey was of a clarified unilateralism after Kinnock's first parliament, shorn of ambiguity and the concessions Foot made to Healey. In the second parliament, a policy of multilateralism was achieved, though with significant bumps along the way. Such a journey fails to support a theory of purely electoral rationalism. The second

parliament speaks more to the electoral imperative, but the first does not. And while Labour's renewal pre-1992 had a clear electoral *motive*, the policy outcome and process were driven and affected by other factors – among them, the interaction between Labour's ethos and the external political context. Kinnock provided a lead in terms of arguments and language, but only when he felt the party's ties to unilateralism were ready to be cut. He arrived at a pragmatic stance earlier than his public position suggested, and earlier than he believed his party could manage. Yet he held back from any swift changes because of his perception of the dominant ethos of the time, one which valued unilateralism as an emblematic policy. How a more Gaitskell-like, radical revisionist stance would have fared is an interesting question, though one that only invites speculation.

Kinnock's successful policy transformation, as this analysis has shown, was heavily reliant on a double context: Gorbachev's leadership in regard to the Cold War, and Kinnock's journey from committed unilateralist to multilateralist. The challenge of multilateralism to unilateralism's emblematic policy characteristics was fleeting, though strong enough to become accepted wisdom during the New Labour years. The strong socialist arguments, and a stark contrast with the opposition – created by Kinnock and his team around multilateralism – were still mirrored in 1989 by the same strengths in unilateralism, except in the case of the latter they were far less reliant on context.

This study now moves into the New Labour years. As with this chapter, which has shown the strategies Kinnock employed to balance and manage different interpretations of Labour's ethos, the next chapter will consider how Tony Blair and Gordon Brown balanced competing traditions within Labour's ethos with regard to decision-making. Both believed in freedom and autonomy for the leadership to make policy decisions, yet both were also keenly aware of a dominant interpretation which valued participation.

## Chapter 5

### Decisions: New Labour policymaking and Bank of England independence

‘I cannot tell you how much I... hate these people. They are stupid and they are malevolent. They beg me to go to their conference and then they stitch me up, and then they will get all hurt and pathetic when I say what I think... I have no option but to go up there and blow them out of the water’  
Tony Blair ahead of a T&G conference, quoted in Alistair Campbell’s Diaries, *Prelude to Power*

‘When in difficulties, the party faithful – about who he is a less than devoted admirer – are summoned to hear the message, not to state their views.’  
Stuart Hall, *Selected Political Writings*

‘Labour was more like a cult than a party. If you were to progress in it, you had to speak the language and press the right buttons... Even I had to learn to do it – not that well, I may say – but without doing some of it, you got nowhere.’  
Tony Blair, *A Journey*

### **Introduction**

‘I knew I could never get a policy change through the party’s usual policymaking machinery – certainly at that time,’ Tony Blair remarked about Labour’s stance on a united Ireland. ‘So I’m afraid I just popped up one morning on the Today programme not long after becoming leader and announced we would henceforth have a new policy.’<sup>663</sup> Labour’s ethos contains within it the fault line I call ‘Decisions’ – and the existence of two distinct and competing traditions. Should Labour’s MPs in Westminster be given the space to take policy and strategy decisions independently of the wider Labour Party, or should these decisions be more participatory? For Blair and New Labour, the answer was the leadership of the parliamentary party – firmly, and clearly. Blair’s stance on policymaking was antithetical to any direct collaboration with the Labour party and movement. Blair’s approach to policymaking was to narrow down the pool of consultees and decision-makers.

While much work has been done in studying both the functionality and reforms of Labour’s constitutional arrangements, there has been less of a focus on ‘the way in

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<sup>663</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.159.

which people orient themselves to political action and to their notion of what constitutes acceptable and appropriate behaviour'.<sup>664</sup> This, according to Shaw, is what is most distinctive about Minkin's *The Blair Supremacy*. This chapter attempts to build on Minkin's approach, notably 'the causal significance'<sup>665</sup> he assigns to the shared habits and traditions within an organisation.<sup>666</sup> It seeks to understand the intent behind leadership control in policymaking – in others words, the interpretation of Labour's ethos held by those at the top of New Labour that influenced such agency in the first place. As with previous chapters, it will consider how individual interpretations of the party's ethos, and perceptions of the dominant party ethos, affected the strategic calculations and actions of political actors – in this case, those at the very top of New Labour.

Leadership hegemony in terms of policy making and the taking of strategic decisions was built upon Blair's mandate as party leader; a mandate enhanced by Blair's successful rewriting of Clause IV and the strong likelihood that Blair would soon become Prime Minister. Blair's personal domination was very nearly complete during this opposition period, with the notable exception of the influence of the then Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown. Those at the top of New Labour believed that the Labour movement as a whole was tired of losing, and that Blair's victory at the 1997 election seemed inevitable. This sense of inevitability leant Blair and Brown the authority of soon-to-be heads of a government. A team who would – if unhindered by unforeseen disruption – comfortably return Labour to power. In exercising this control, Blair and Brown focused on flexibility in policy prescription – in other words, avoiding comprehensive, published plans.

Yet, certainly during New Labour's opposition years, Blair and Brown also adopted a more nuanced stance to Labour's traditions than is often understood. This included experimenting with membership votes on New Labour's policy platform – following the successful Clause IV ballot – and a political and rhetorical strategy which, wherever possible, avoided outright confrontation with their own movement. Decision-making autonomy coupled with conference amelioration – in addition to

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<sup>664</sup> Shaw, 'Understanding Labour Party Management', p.154.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Shaw, *Losing Labour's Soul?*, p.37.

other rhetorical platforms – is a familiar Labour leadership strategy. This is a point of difference with Minkin. I argue that Blair and Brown’s early supremacy was based on a strategy that, where they deemed it electorally manageable, did not provoke outright conflict with the wider party. While membership plebiscites offered very limited participation in decision-making – say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to this document – these tasks were undertaken to create both news and a mandate. The leadership invested time and resources in these processes, culminating in the *Road to the Manifesto* project. The New Labour high command wholeheartedly believed in leadership autonomy when it came to high-level policy and political decision-making, but this was not an unprecedented view inside the Labour party. As Russell has noted, ‘there was no golden age in which Labour was controlled by its members’.<sup>667</sup> New Labour’s belief in leadership autonomy, balanced with attempts at internal legitimation, represented a longstanding tradition within Labour’s ethos. A stress on serious efforts at legitimation – however flawed – is an important line of argument throughout this chapter and the next.

The case study for this chapter is the decision taken by New Labour to make the Bank of England independent in its operational powers over interest rates. The analysis of this decision, which forms the majority of this chapter, is based on interviews with decision-makers, private policy papers from the time, speeches and public policy documents, along with published diaries and memoirs. Interestingly, while this policy decision has been described as historic, and became a leitmotif for New Labour’s early radicalism in government, the decision-making process up to 1997 is relatively understudied, particularly in analysing *how* the policy was formulated and the way in which the decision was taken: one of the biggest changes to Britain’s macroeconomic framework in the recent past, delivered nearly immediately after polling day, yet absent from the party’s manifesto and formulated over a number of years by a small group of Labour politicians and advisors. This focus means I do not attempt to situate Bank independence within a wider analysis of New Labour’s political economy, nor seek to analyse the role of other factors relevant to why Bank independence became Labour’s policy. One could explore the arguments of inevitability put forward by Blair and Brown in relation to globalisation, and the place of Bank independence in a

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<sup>667</sup> Russell, *Building New Labour*, p.283.

global trend towards greater autonomy for central banks. However, much of this work already exists. This chapter – in keeping with the study’s theme – seeks to explore the effect of both an individual interpretation of Labour’s ethos, and the dominant interpretation, on the strategic calculations of the actors involved.

### **A party subordinate**

‘Asserting New Labour’s differentiation from Old Labour,’ Minkin wrote, ‘involved making clear that the party was now subordinate.’<sup>668</sup> Minkin described the New Labour top team – Blair, Brown, Mandelson, Philip Gould and other close aides – as perceiving a party saddled with anachronistic habits that necessitated ‘greater freedom of behaviour by those who would change it’.<sup>669</sup> Blair’s predecessors had faced the ‘intractable problem’<sup>670</sup> of intra-party democracy: in other words the extent to which decisions taken by the Labour Party, including on policy, were ‘democratic’, formed on the basis of ‘consultation’ or even originating as ‘instructions’ from the party’s annual conference. A number of former Leaders, including Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson, had – in different ways, and with different motives – either threatened, contravened, overturned or ignored policy preferences produced by Labour’s democratic machinery.

However, Minkin argued the New Labour period marked something different. Blair and the self-described New Labour ‘cadre’<sup>671</sup> delivered ‘an unprecedented build-up of the role of Leader... there was a lack of reverence for party traditions and rules of different kinds, and there were new objectives and behaviour which would have been regarded as out of bounds to the older generation’.<sup>672</sup> This older generation included those who Blair immediately followed: John Smith and Neil Kinnock. Blair and Brown, Minkin claimed, ‘dominated the policy process’ in a ‘determined’ and sometimes ‘most cavalier’<sup>673</sup> way.

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<sup>668</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.267.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

<sup>670</sup> McKenzie, ‘Power in the Labour Party’, p.191.

<sup>671</sup> Jonathan Powell, interview by author, London, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

<sup>672</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.136.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, p.277.

While Minkin noted some policy examples, briefly, in his analysis of Blair and Brown's early domination of the party – for example, the reformulation of Labour's commitment to a National Minimum Wage through a Low Pay Commission,<sup>674</sup> as well as the pledge not to increase both the basic and top rate of income tax<sup>675</sup> – his study focused more on the systemic and cultural change brought about by New Labour over its lengthy period in power, with a focus on party management. This chapter will focus more clearly on policy change – how the policy of operational independence for the Bank of England was formulated, developed, finalised and decided upon, and importantly who was involved. In analysing this process, this chapter uses Minkin's observations as a starting point: that New Labour saw the rest of the party as subordinate; that New Labour's leaders acted with great freedom in policy formulation and decision-making; and that those at the top of the party showed a lack of reverence for party traditions and rules.

When I argue that those at the top of New Labour believed in leadership control of policymaking, instead of consultation with party members, I am arguing that – very broadly – this approach was antagonistic to participatory democracy within the Labour Party (i.e. directly involving party members) and more in line with representative democracy (where the leadership represents party members), two broad types identified in David Held's *Models of Democracy*.<sup>676</sup> Throughout this chapter I also engage with concepts and frameworks from Drucker, McKenzie and Schumpeter – work which I covered in Chapter 2. In relation to Drucker, principally this involves the term 'manifestoism': an attempt to 'control an executive – a Labour Cabinet, for example – and make it responsive to the ideas and wishes of the party... it is about representation first of all and only secondarily, and indirectly, about governing'.<sup>677</sup>

### **Trim, be flexible: policy mission**

This section discusses New Labour's approach to policymaking in relation to Drucker's arguments about loyalty, and to his concept of 'manifestoism'. First, it

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<sup>674</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.284.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, p.286.

<sup>676</sup> Held, *Models of Democracy*, p.4.

<sup>677</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.92.

outlines a perception at the top of New Labour that the leadership would encounter minimal opposition to the changes it sought. This was based on the leadership's judgement that the party as a whole was desperate to return to power and believed that Blair – and his style of politics – was likely to move in to Number 10. This point is connected to Drucker's argument that loyalty to the Leader 'overwhelms'<sup>678</sup> other concerns within the Labour Party, and is supported by testimony from trade union leaders and party debates at the time: both of which suggest the perception of New Labour's leaders was an accurate one. Second, this section will consider Blair and Brown's policy approach in the context of manifestoism – something that previous Labour leaders have both fought against and, on occasion, accepted and then ignored.

I argue here that Blair chose a different path. He did not so much disregard manifestoism as sequester it. In other words, he took ownership of the perennial problem – a gap developing between what the party wants and 'authorises', and what the leadership wants and does – then sought legitimation through high-profile membership ballots and events on what *he* was offering. In so doing Blair achieved a mandate from Labour's membership for a policy platform that did the opposite of what Drucker argued manifestoism was for: rather than committing a future Labour Government to a comprehensive programme partly authored by activists, a core of specific commitments authored by Blair and Brown were endorsed. Such an approach provided flexibility for New Labour's small group of policymakers. Yet, ultimately, it failed to transcend manifestoism and its inherent weaknesses. The flexibility of a minimal, deliverable 'offer' meant that, without further such processes, a gap could re-emerge between the membership's objectives and the leadership's direction once the original policies were delivered.

Taking leadership power as the starting point, McKenzie argued 'it cannot be stressed too strongly that the leader of each of the great parties is either Prime Minister or a potential Prime Minister... it is this fact, not the internal mechanisms of the party, which is the governing influence in determining the role the leader plays'.<sup>679</sup> Those at the top of New Labour – by that I mean Blair, Brown, Mandelson and senior advisors

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<sup>678</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.12.

<sup>679</sup> McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, p.300.



– had a perception very similar to this conclusion from McKenzie. As with previous chapters in this study, leadership perception is vital in understanding the agency of political actors. As has been shown, Kinnock’s perception was, at times, of a party that had to move gradually and through consultative processes – albeit ones increasingly managed by the leadership. On policy matters, Kinnock perceived certain policies as immovable, based on the dominant ethos of the time.

Those at the top of New Labour were less hesitant, in part because of the changes already undertaken by Kinnock, but also (more importantly) by the defeats Kinnock had suffered, particularly in 1992. The New Labour leadership perceived a movement desperate to win power, and one traumatised by Kinnock’s second defeat. While this perception did not lead to the conclusion that the wider party would abandon Labour’s principles, it did suggest the movement could withstand more reform. Gould – New Labour’s trusted pollster and advisor – recalled Blair telling him it was time he ‘gave the party some electric shock treatment’.<sup>680</sup> While this eye-catching phrase is quite far from the way Blair behaved – as I aim to show in this chapter and the next – it does portray a sense that Blair himself, along with his close group of colleagues, believed they had the opportunity to shape the Labour Party into their chosen project. Ed Balls, who arrived as an advisor to Gordon Brown in 1994, had a similar perception. He recollected:

‘The party [in 1994] is so desperate to be elected that Tony Blair wins [the 1994 Labour leadership contest] comfortably... The deal was these guys are going to have their go.’<sup>681</sup>

When considering how New Labour arrived at policy, Balls noted both the perception of freedom and the conscious decision to provide reassurance to the party that – at least in the run-up to 1997 – not everything was about to change.

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<sup>680</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.213.

<sup>681</sup> Ed Balls, interview by author, London, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Balls noted:

‘There were aspects they [trade unions and activists] didn’t like... but in the end, the reality was that Blair and Brown were in charge, they had mandates... and in the end conference was not going to support them against us... we were not thinking... about internal constraints.

‘The Blair strategy in that period was... nuanced... health was an absolute reassurance issue [for the party]. The deliberate strategy was there was no rocking the boat on health.’<sup>682</sup>

For Balls, this perception that the party was desperate to win was reinforced by the overwhelming belief that Blair and New Labour were going to win. That the unions and the wider party saw New Labour as being ‘clearly ahead in the polls’ and thought ‘we’re not going to cause trouble, were going to back them... we’re backing these guys because they’re going to win’.<sup>683</sup> Minkin’s study emphasises that, of course, this perception did not remove the requirement for political management – that is the work, often undertaken by advisors close to Blair and Brown, to smooth the passage of change through persuasion, debate, argument, and the management of the bureaucracy in ways advantageous to the leader’s wishes. Yet, as David Miliband, Blair’s head of policy from before and following the 1997 election, recollected, this perception at the top of New Labour was there, and it was considered to be an enabler of New Labour’s strategy: ‘The hunger to win, the skills [of organisers] was important.’<sup>684</sup>

Sally Morgan, Blair’s political secretary in Downing Street, and prior to government an advisor to him on party management, had an identical perception to that of Balls. ‘They’d [the party] reached a stage of “we’ll do anything it takes to win”,’ she noted, while arguing Blair also believed in a strategy that did ‘try and bring them [the party] with us, particularly in the early days’.<sup>685</sup> This perception was based on indications

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<sup>682</sup> Balls, interview, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

<sup>683</sup> Ed Balls, interview by author, London, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>684</sup> David Miliband, interview by author, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

<sup>685</sup> Baroness Morgan, interview by author, London, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

from the wider party and movement – including the trade unions – that after Blair’s reforms to Clause IV, there was a prevailing mood outside of Westminster ‘not to do anything that would rock the boat’.<sup>686</sup>

As I noted above, and as the next chapter will analyse in more detail, both the extent of how far this leadership freedom was exercised, and the efficacy of the leadership operation itself, are both subject to caveats. Blair exercised his freedom with a degree of caution, chastened by moments in his political life where he had experienced a clash with the traditions of Labour people. At a speaking commitment as a local MP following the 1983 election defeat, Blair spoke frankly of his belief that ‘Labour had lost touch’ and couldn’t rely on lessons from previous generations.<sup>687</sup> Following a poor reception to his remarks, a grilling from fellow Labour MP Dennis Skinner, and attendees ‘scurrying past me like I was diseased’,<sup>688</sup> Blair learnt a lesson: that unless you ‘speak the language [of the party]’<sup>689</sup> you are irrelevant to the conversation.

Blair’s consciousness of the Labour movement’s language and traditions is evident in remarks made as leader between 1994 and 1997. While he believed in the need for bluntness in his interaction with the wider party and the movement to evidence change with the electorate in the country, this bluntness was more often than not balanced with a commitment to the party’s long-held relationships, or nostalgia for the party’s past. For example, in Blair’s speech to the GMB trade union conference in 1995, he argued: ‘I was elected on a platform of change and modernisation. People ask me when I will draw a line under reform. When can we say that it’s done with. The answer is never.’<sup>690</sup> Yet a paragraph later, Blair recalled the union relationship of old, providing ‘ballast’:

‘People say that trade unions provide the ballast for the Party. They are the solid number of people with real work experience, living in the real world able

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<sup>686</sup> Jack Dromey MP, interview by author, London, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<sup>687</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.45.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>690</sup> T. Blair, Speech to the GMB Conference, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1995, p.10.

to keep the Party in touch. That is often true. We don't want a narrow London based group of intellectual activists running the party.'<sup>691</sup>

The diaries of Blair's media guru, Alistair Campbell, attest to a tug and pull in Blair's rhetoric to the party – a tension far from 'electric shock treatment'. Two days before the GMB speech, Campbell's diary records Blair wanted to make a 'big speech that made some waves on the theme of TB taking New Labour to the unions'.<sup>692</sup> On the day of the speech, Campbell wrote that Blair 'took out some of the more aggressive lines'.<sup>693</sup> In the three short years of New Labour in opposition, the perception from those at the top of New Labour was undoubtedly of considerable leadership power which could – and should – be used and tested. Blair was willing to take risks and to 'take the party on'.<sup>694</sup>

Yet, in considering a Labour person's understanding of the party's ethos as whole, including the dominant ethos of the time, regardless of Blair's perception of his power, his exercise of it up to 1997 was more nuanced than has been suggested by the modernising clique, particularly in the early glut of memoirs and political tracts. Blair's language when talking to the party – language, it must be remembered, being one of the few tools a leader of the opposition has to shape party and public opinion – shows a balancing of Labour's competing traditions. This was Blair at a time when he would still use the word 'socialist'. Hindmoor has noted Blair's journey from self-identification as centre-left, to centre-left and centre, to centre, to moderate centre.<sup>695</sup> From 1994 to his departure as Labour leader and prime minister in 2007, there was not one Blair in policy, rhetoric and strategy, there were different Blairs.

A final point in relation to leadership power involves the efficacy of the Blair operation. The tensions at the top of New Labour – which partly consumed the party midway through Blair's second term – were present from day one and affected both Blair's freedom and day-to-day impact. These tensions – some of which were caused by Blair's management style, others by the temperaments of the actors involved –

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<sup>691</sup> Blair, Speech to the GMB Conference.

<sup>692</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.215.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, p.216.

<sup>694</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.210.

<sup>695</sup> Hindmoor, *New Labour at the Centre*, pp.1-2.

debilitated the leadership operation. The first tension was Blair's tendency to reduce the pool of people affecting policy and taking meaningful decisions. From the Shadow Cabinet, which in opposition remained subject to PLP-election, Blair narrowed the scope of influence to a meeting of 'the Big Guns': Blair, Deputy Leader John Prescott, Brown, Shadow Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, and Campbell.<sup>696</sup> In Blair's mind this group was narrowed and altered even further, with Blair, Brown, Mandelson and Campbell being the group who Blair believed would win or lose the election for Labour.<sup>697</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this concentration of power by Blair was not popular with those who found their influence diluted. Brown's welfare-to-work proposals – dubbed 'workfare' by opponents from the Left – was announced publicly without Prescott or Cook being consulted, sparking fury.<sup>698</sup> Blair rewrote policy statements in front of the responsible Shadow Cabinet members who had negotiated them.<sup>699</sup> The tensions between senior figures would sometimes exasperate Blair;<sup>700</sup> tensions between Blair and Brown, between Brown and Mandelson, between Brown and Prescott, between Mandelson and Prescott, and between Brown and Cook. While Blair's management style caused political management problems, the tension more limiting to the power of the leader was that between Blair and Brown.

David Miliband 'complained [Blair] had effectively given him [Brown] a veto on policy'<sup>701</sup> as well as extending Brown's reach to campaign strategy. Brown would talk Blair through his intentions, though, 'as often happened between them, Gordon most likely hung up [the phone] thinking everything was squared off, while Tony most likely hung up not entirely sure what Gordon was on about'.<sup>702</sup> Brown's power remains subject to some dispute, not least from Blair himself who rejects the narrative that Brown set the direction of economic policy in government.<sup>703</sup> While this study doesn't extend to Labour's period in office, the three years of New Labour in

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<sup>696</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.91.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, p.313.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, p.404.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>702</sup> E. Balls, *Speaking Out*, (London: Hutchinson, 2016), p.139.

<sup>703</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.115.

opposition reveal a relationship that saw Brown invested with significant freedom to develop policy. However, he remained – certainly at this point - respectful of Blair’s mandate to deliver his own priorities.

Moving from the power of the leader to Drucker’s concept of manifestoism, and how Blair sequestered it, Gould recalls what Blair understood to be Labour’s ‘head and body problem’: ‘That Labour’s head, represented by him and other modernising leaders, believed one thing, but its body, represented by the party, appeared to believe another.’<sup>704</sup> The concern which led to this analysis stemmed not from party management, according to Gould, but from fears the public were not entirely sold on Labour’s change. Gould noted he was ‘certain that the only way we could persuade the electorate that Labour as a political party had really changed was to take our manifesto to the party and ballot them on it’.<sup>705</sup> This led to the *Road to the Manifesto* process, where a draft manifesto was put to a membership vote, and where Blair addressed meetings of Labour members and supporters across the country. The consequences for manifestoism were profound. New Labour’s policy objective was for coherence based upon a minimal offer, with a clear mandate both from the party and the public that was deliverable. Not only did this objective transform the concept of manifestoism, it also failed to transcend the weaknesses for the wider party and the relationship between the leadership and the members identified by Drucker, leading to the conclusion that Blair sequestered manifestoism.

Drucker’s concept of manifestoism was based on three core features: sovereignty within the party of the annual conference; a leadership responsive to the ideas and wishes of the party; and an ability to control Labour’s leaders. Its weaknesses were also threefold: manifesto wording left to the interpretation of Labour cabinets; no enforcement mechanism for accountability; and the inevitable failure to meet high expectations of members. The *Road to the Manifesto* process, while utilising policy documents that had been put before Labour’s annual conference, diluted the conference’s power by moving towards direct democracy, rather than consideration by delegates. Aside from whether or not this was a democratic step for Labour, it

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<sup>704</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.258.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*

significantly altered what Drucker understood as manifestoism. The policy document that sprang from *Road to the Manifesto*, called *New Life for Britain*,<sup>706</sup> was written largely by Blair himself,<sup>707</sup> working from a draft by Robin Cook and David Miliband.<sup>708</sup> The lack of consultation was a topic of complaint in the parliamentary party and amongst people in leadership positions. For example, Campbell's write-up of a leadership meeting recorded complaints from Prescott:

'TB said it was important all members of the Shadow Cabinet felt involved. JP [Prescott] said yes, the media would inflame divisions, but what is wrong is our procedures and they have to be got right. He said there had to be more collective decision-making. TB said there could always be improved consultation but it should never excuse indiscipline. This is about professionalism. JP returned to his theme. This forum doesn't work, we don't meet enough, we don't discuss things. This was meant to be a check on policymaking and it hasn't worked. We exist because we do represent different views, and ours are not taken into account. There is no real forum for discussion. TB said if people think it is tough now, they should wait for government. JP asked if the Road to the Manifesto process was going to lead to policy changes and TB said straight out – yes.'<sup>709</sup>

As a control mechanism, the *Road to the Manifesto* process flipped manifestoism on its head. A document drawn up by Blair and his team was subject to a yes or no approval process, without amendment. The mechanism for policy assent, in this particular stage, was therefore a leadership controlling what a membership could approve, rather than the other way around. It was, in David Miliband's words, to create 'a focus for the media on our policy agenda, in contrast to the out-of-steam government, some excitement for the party, which was waiting for the election to be called, and a mandate and roadmap for the election campaign and our work in government'.<sup>710</sup> As a process, the weaknesses of *Road to the Manifesto* in relation to leadership accountability were very similar to those for manifestoism: the policy

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<sup>706</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.261.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, pp.447-448.

<sup>710</sup> Miliband, interview.

content was reasonably vague, open to interpretation, and with a process of party reform underway, accountability on policy was in question. The vagueness stemmed from a lack of detail – a conscious decision by the New Labour leadership, taken for two reasons.

The first was that, despite many years of opposition, the figures at the top of New Labour did not have a fully-formed, detailed policy platform because of their short time in control of the party machinery. Second, a strategic bonus (in the view of Blair and Brown) of a lack of detail and a slim policy offer was the absence of multiple sticks with which the Conservative Party could hit New Labour with. Blair's policy mission, assigned to David Miliband, was 'to do bomb disposal'<sup>711</sup> of policies that could lose Labour a general election, while setting out 'a forward agenda for what we'd actually do in government'.<sup>712</sup> This forward agenda, certainly in the minds of Blair and Brown, was of a certainty in direction that was more instinctive than instructive. Blair's conclusion on New Labour's policy preparedness was that on 'policy direction we were pretty firm and clear... the details, we were lacking'.<sup>713</sup>

While neither this study, nor this chapter, seeks to make a contribution to more biographical studies of Blair, it is worth noting here two relevant aspects of his approach to policy and political strategy, and how they changed through his years as prime minister. Patricia Hewitt, who at the time of Blair's election as leader was working on the Social Justice Commission, hosted by the IPPR thinktank, recollected a briefing session for Blair where she outlined the commission's various policy proposals. 'Some things you've got, and I'm sure he [Blair] used the phrase "New Labour", [are] "100% New Labour" ...', Hewitt noted. 'Something else he said "it's only about 75 or 80%, feels a bit old fashioned". Then he said "repayable student fees" he said "oh, that's sort of about 150%, that feels like a bit of a stretch"'.<sup>714</sup>

Blair's focus was on political positioning, showing New Labour had changed through initiatives like the new Clause IV, and engaging with policy to further evidence that

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<sup>711</sup> Miliband, interview.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

<sup>713</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.105.

<sup>714</sup> Hewitt, interview.



change. It was later, following two terms as prime minister, where Blair, feeling he had won on political positioning, moved towards policy detail, which Powell felt was a switch to policy-heavy and positioning light.<sup>715</sup> This policy ‘instinct’ from Blair had some immediate presentational difficulties – for example the narrative that New Labour was ‘spin’. The second aspect to Blair’s character, again attested to by many of those who worked closely with him during this period, was that Blair lacked political tribalism – in other words that he was not tribally Labour. This, on the one hand, ‘spurred him on’<sup>716</sup> to undertake changes in the Labour Party without any personal commitment to some of Labour’s traditions. That being said, Blair was very aware of the dominant ethos that surrounded him. And he did not ignore it, as I have noted above. Mandelson was one of the figures close to Blair who argued, particularly in the early days of New Labour, that changes must not be done in a way ‘that would make it impossible to bring the party with you’.<sup>717</sup>

Blair didn’t consider *Road to the Manifesto* to be a long-term solution to the head and body problem. As Drucker noted, Labour’s past showed the party had ‘rather more trouble changing from opposition to ministry’<sup>718</sup> than manifestoism suggests should occur.<sup>719</sup> This, Blair agreed with. Of particular concern to him was the tendency for ‘increasing disillusionment with the government from the party... [to] quickly communicate... itself to the public’.<sup>720</sup> Nowhere does he note the importance of party democracy, nor suggest sympathy with membership involvement or power, instead stressing ‘a managed process that required long debate and discussion in policy groups’.<sup>721</sup> Organisationally, Blair’s *Partnership in Power* reforms (delivered after the 1997 general election) sought to make policy discussions between the parliamentary party and the wider movement more discursive. Yet the result remained a position of dominance for the frontbench. Meg Russell’s study of Labour’s organisational reforms concludes: ‘Labour Party members retain important sanctions, whilst leaders remain largely in control.’<sup>722</sup>

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<sup>715</sup> Powell, interview.

<sup>716</sup> Mandelson, interview.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

<sup>718</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, p.97.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.101.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>722</sup> Russell, *Building New Labour*, p.283.

The deficiencies of manifestoism were recognised by New Labour as a tradition which had plagued the party's Ministers, sowing discord rather than binding the party together. Blair's response was to tie the wider party to a slimmed-down policy prospectus, restating the changes made to the Labour Party as much as stating the need for change in the country. This form of direct democracy sequestered manifestoism as a concept, with leadership control of what the party could approve, prior to longer-term reform aimed at a more discursive process with the party. Overall, while passing up the opportunity for a detailed plan for government, this process gifted Blair and Brown a large degree of flexibility. Yet, it also failed to truly transcend the weaknesses built into manifestoism, leading some to observe that 'New Labour is not the political agenda of either the entire national or the Parliamentary Labour Party'.<sup>723</sup> Rather it belonged to 'Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, their respective advisers'.<sup>724</sup> Meanwhile, the leadership worked to 'develop the orientation for policy across a range of issues'<sup>725</sup> knowing that, at least publicly, the job of presenting a policy platform to the party and the public was mostly complete. One of these policy areas – with the aim of establishing a policy direction that was 'plainly New Labour'<sup>726</sup> – was central bank independence.

### **No more boom and bust: policy formulation**

Independence for the Bank is progeny-in-dispute among New Labour's high command. Yet the intellectual origin of the policy – certainly in terms of substance within New Labour – sits with Ed Balls. While a leader writer for the Financial Times, Balls wrote a pamphlet for the Fabian Society which blended Euroscepticism and support for central bank independence as the basis for balanced growth and stable inflation. There was a contemporary and more long-term context for Balls' paper. Though he had been working on it during the summer of 1992,<sup>727</sup> it was subsequently edited and published following Black Wednesday and Britain's exit from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). This debacle, the relative political consensus that

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<sup>723</sup> M. Beech, 'New Labour' in R. Plant, M. Beech and K. Hickson, *The Struggle for Labour's Soul*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.86-102, p.86.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

<sup>725</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.89.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

<sup>727</sup> Balls, *Speaking Out*, p.145.

lay behind it, and perceptions of the inevitability of European monetary union following the Maastricht Treaty provided the contemporary context. Britain had joined the ERM in 1990 in an effort to control high rates of inflation, and remaining in the mechanism had become a test of strength for the Conservative Government. Balls had disagreed with the decision to join the ERM – a point of difference between himself and the Labour frontbench at the time, including John Smith and Gordon Brown. In addition to criticisms of the way ERM entry was delivered by the Conservatives – overvaluing the pound, leading to higher interest rates to attract money – Balls’ Fabian pamphlet argued against both re-entry to the ERM and to monetary union in Europe (both in the short term) on the basis that the costs to the British economy would be ‘prohibitively high’.<sup>728</sup> This early outing of, if not Euroscepticism, then certainly scepticism of the euro, is noted in Balls’ memoir. ‘Witnessing the ignominy of Black Wednesday and Britain’s exit from the Exchange Rate Mechanism,’ Balls wrote, ‘I was already convinced that any attempt by Britain to join the single currency would end equally badly. As far as I was concerned, the euro was economically and politically misconceived.’<sup>729</sup> In the absence, then, of confidence in European mechanisms to help solve Britain’s inflation proneness, Balls’ pamphlet needed to offer something else.

Having studied at Harvard under Larry Summers, Balls was well-versed in the arguments around central bank independence. A paper from Summers and Alberto Alesina had evidenced that ‘the monetary discipline associated with central bank independence reduces the level and variability of inflation’.<sup>730</sup> The Harvard connection – the importance of which Balls attests to in much of his early policy thinking<sup>731</sup> – provided the longer term context for Balls’ pamphlet. He used an earlier version of the Alesina and Summers paper to build the argument for Britain undertaking some form of central bank independence, and would return to Summer’s thinking over the development of the policy – for example, what became the ‘symmetrical inflation target’ (that deviations below a target are treated as seriously

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<sup>728</sup> E. Balls, *Euro-Monetarism: Why Britain Was Ensnared and How It Should Escape*, (London: Fabian Society, 1992), p.11.

<sup>729</sup> Balls, *Speaking Out*, p.156.

<sup>730</sup> A. Alesina and L. Summers, ‘Central Bank Independence and Macroeconomic Performance: Some Comparative Evidence’, *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking*, Vol.25, No.2, (May 1993), pp.151-162, p.159.

<sup>731</sup> Balls, interview, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

as deviations above).<sup>732</sup> Central to Balls' thesis was a message of economic discipline that would – following his appointment to Brown's team in 1994 – become embedded in New Labour's policy message. While attacking the use of monetary policy under the Conservative Government, Balls broadened his argument to encompass what would become (in the early days of New Labour) the 'Old Labour-style' demand management that could also be damaging. Balls argued:

'Active macroeconomic management – lower interest rates and higher public investment – is necessary and desirable when economies are stuck in recession and confidence is low... Yet active demand management can only be pursued in short sharp doses when the economy is depressed. Old-style Keynesianism, pursued for too long, simply leads to high and rising inflation, unwieldy fiscal deficits and finally damaging recessions. This is the stuff of which boom-bust cycles are made.'<sup>733</sup>

Turning to the political problems behind the economic levers, Balls identified both the inherent short-termism in political decision-making, as well as the renowned secrecy of the Treasury and Britain's institutions. He wrote:

'If politicians and civil servants control interest rates the temptation to manipulate the economy for short-term electoral advantage is likely to result in higher inflation and more variable inflation with no long-term return in terms of higher growth or lower unemployment... [the] degree of centralised and unaccountable executive and bureaucratic power over economic policy is inefficient and out of date. Successful developed economies – including left of centre governments such as Australia – have realised that an independent central bank, charged to deliver low and stable inflation, is a better way to achieve macroeconomic stability.'<sup>734</sup>

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<sup>732</sup> E. Balls and G. O'Donnell, *Reforming Britain's Economic and Financial Policy*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.83.

<sup>733</sup> Balls, *Euro-monetarism*, p.16.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*

Addressing a more substantive plan for the Bank of England, and to the advantages of such a policy for Labour, Balls first caveated the meaning of independence. He was at pains to point out that while the month-by-month process of decision-making on interest rates should be removed from Whitehall, policy ambition and associated targets would remain in political hands, with stronger accountability mechanisms for the Bank to shine a light on the economic rationale for interest rate decisions. Four reforms were suggested by Balls at this stage. First, diversification of the Bank's decision-making bodies – its court – with representatives from 'industry and trade unions as well as the City'.<sup>735</sup> Second, as with the United States Federal Reserve (the Fed), the Bank's Governor would be 'required to testify regularly to House of Commons committees'.<sup>736</sup> Third, the Bank's mandate to control monetary operations 'would be dependent on the continued support of parliament', with the House of Commons able to 'over-ride a decision by the Bank in extreme circumstances'.<sup>737</sup> The Bank would need 'to reflect the parliamentary and public consensus about the desirable long-term rate of inflation'.<sup>738</sup> Fourth and finally, the Bank would lose responsibility for City supervision, focusing instead on macroeconomic stability.<sup>739</sup> Having already argued for the positive economic effects of independence, Balls noted what he considered to be the electoral advantage for Labour: credibility.

'This would strengthen the hand of a Labour government. Freed from debilitating market doubts about the government's anti-inflationary resolve, a Labour chancellor would be free to concentrate on the many other aspects of policy, including fiscal policy, which are much more important in determining whether the UK can build and sustain an economic recovery.'<sup>740</sup>

The four parts of Balls' plan, as set out in his 1992 pamphlet, survived (with additional measures and some alteration) to form a large part of the New Labour government's macroeconomic framework. So too did the political arguments he set out, both to differentiate from 'Old Labour' and to provide political cover and

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<sup>735</sup> Balls, *Euro-monetarism*, p 17.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.*

economic credibility in place of market doubts about a Labour chancellor. Both Blair and Brown consistently pushed differentiation with the economics of the 1970s in opposition, while post-independence the importance of avoiding conflict between a Labour chancellor and the Bank has been attested to by Brown. ‘Every single month the newspapers would have been setting up the meeting [on interest rates] as the Bank establishment against a Labour chancellor,’<sup>741</sup> Brown has argued. ‘No matter what you tried to do... it would have been incredibly difficult to avoid... the suggestion that there was always a tug of war between a Labour chancellor and the governor of the Bank of England.’<sup>742</sup> This distrust Brown foresaw was based on many years of suspicion in Labour’s ranks of Bank secrecy and Conservatism. Denis Healey, Labour’s Chancellor from 1974-1979, recollected that some in the Bank of England ‘still attempted to maintain the cabalistic secrecy of its most famous Governor, Montague Norman’.<sup>743</sup> He expanded: ‘In Britain relations between the Governor of the Bank of England and Labour Governments have sometimes been very bad, especially when, as in the case of Lord Cromer, the Governor was a committed Conservative.’<sup>744</sup> Lord Cromer’s governorship, during Harold Wilson’s first period as Prime Minister, was notoriously fraught.

Balls was not, of course, working in a political vacuum. In the same year as his pamphlet was published, the former Conservative Chancellor Nigel Lawson published a memoir outlining his own past attempts to push for the Bank’s independence. Lawson believed in a maximal approach to either government supremacy or Bank independence,<sup>745</sup> rather than the hazy arrangement that had existed for decades. As Peter Hennessy has argued, while the Attlee Government, with Hugh Dalton as Chancellor, had nationalised the bank, this move was ‘symbolic, almost cathartic... for both the labour movement and the City, a truce if you like – a nominal shift of power to the state; in practice, business-as-usual’.<sup>746</sup> In Lawson’s view, aside from interest rate decision-making, ‘the Bank had considerable discretion’.<sup>747</sup> Lawson’s

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<sup>741</sup> G. Brown, Speech to Bank of England ‘20 Years On Conference’, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

<sup>743</sup> Healey, *Time Of My Life*, p.374.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid., p.375.

<sup>745</sup> N. Lawson, *The View From No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical*, (London: Corgi Books, 1993), p.83.

<sup>746</sup> P. Hennessy, *Never Again*, (London: Penguin, 2006), p.204.

<sup>747</sup> Lawson, *View from No. 11*, p.83.

proposals to make this relationship clearer, with independence for the Bank, was fiercely opposed by Margaret Thatcher, and so never saw the light of day in parliament. Thatcher's autobiography noted:

‘My reaction [to Lawson's proposal] was dismissive... I did not believe, as Nigel argued, that it would boost the credibility of the fight against inflation. In fact, as I minuted, ‘it would be seen as an abdication by the Chancellor when he was at his most vulnerable’... I do not believe that changing well-tried institutional arrangements generally provides solutions to underlying political problems... He [Lawson] wanted to pass the responsibility for them to something – or someone – else.’<sup>748</sup>

While consecutive Conservative governments could not agree on a policy of independence – Chancellor Norman Lamont also raised it – the idea did not disappear from political debate. Privately, the Treasury worked up further options following the ratification of Maastricht<sup>749</sup> – which required states to make their central banks more independent prior to the proposed monetary union. Lamont did institute some reforms (which I discuss further below in relation to Labour's policy development), including an inflation target, the publication of an inflation report, and the formalising of meetings between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank.<sup>750</sup> The House of Commons Treasury Select Committee, chaired by the then Labour MP Giles Radice, recommended Bank independence at the end of December 1993 (only one Labour member opposed the committee's report – Diane Abbott, who also opposed independence when the New Labour government introduced its legislation).<sup>751</sup>

The origin of Labour's policy, based on Balls' paper, was a paradox of resilient detail and argument (in terms of survival from Balls' initial work through to government policy) alongside low political salience and a lack of direct engagement from senior Labour politicians. While undoubtedly the issue was alive in Westminster and in Whitehall, it lacked committed supporters. Reform of the Bank – through the inflation

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<sup>748</sup> M.Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, (London: HarperCollins, 1993), pp.706-707.

<sup>749</sup> S. Patel, ‘An Independent Bank of England: The Political Process in Historical Perspective’ in *Public Policy and Administration*, Vol. 23, No.1, (January 2008), pp.27-41, p.31.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>751</sup> Hansard, 11 June 1997, Column 1055.

target and monthly reports – was settling in. Brown recalled how, at the time, ‘there was a lot more openness in the making of monetary policy decisions... I felt under no pressure... none of us felt under any pressure to make the Bank of England independent, we did not feel we had a political imperative to do it’.<sup>752</sup> However, while revealing very little publicly, Balls continued to develop and press the arguments for Bank independence. ‘I must have seemed a bit obsessive about my plan,’<sup>753</sup> Balls has noted, yet, following his formal recruitment by Brown in 1994, a fairly swift decision was taken to make it Labour policy, albeit secretly.

### **Different kinds of ‘independence’: policy development**

It is in the development of Labour’s policy for Bank independence that both the supremacy of the leadership, and the tensions between Blair and Brown, are evident. While the origins of a policy idea often come from one source, or from a small group of people, the development and delivery of independence for the Bank of England never left a tiny group of decision-makers. The plan drawn up by Balls and Brown was not in Labour’s manifesto, had not been debated or considered by Labour’s annual conference, had not been considered by Labour’s members as part of the *Road to the Manifesto* process, nor discussed with the party’s executive or Cabinet (Shadow or otherwise). Following Balls formally entering the Labour fold, Brown’s new advisor wrote a paper advocating independence for the Bank in Spring 1995, a point attested to by Campbell, who recorded in his diary that Balls ‘did a good presentation on Bank of England independence’.<sup>754</sup> Balls noted that at this meeting there was no decision about whether to go ahead with the policy, and in his view Blair didn’t engage a great deal with the presentation.<sup>755</sup>

Blair’s recollection, in his memoir, conflicts with this, writing: ‘In May 1995, we had the first of a series of discussions, internally in the office, about Bank of England independence. I was already firmly of the view we should do it.’<sup>756</sup> There is little of note about the policy in Campbell’s diary until two and half months’ later, when

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<sup>752</sup> Brown, Speech to Bank of England ‘20 Years On Conference’.

<sup>753</sup> Balls, *Speaking Out*, p.147.

<sup>754</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.158.

<sup>755</sup> Ed Balls, interview by author, London, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

<sup>756</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.89.



Blair's press aide wrote that he and Blair 'discussed the need for a proper plan and strategy re the Bank of England. He was sure independence was the answer'.<sup>757</sup> This reflection came a few days before Brown was scheduled to make his first – and last before the election – substantive remarks about central bank independence, something that concerned Campbell because of competition for economic news headlines: 'My concern,' Campbell recorded in his diary, 'was that GB [Gordon Brown] was making a speech on Wednesday in which he was putting forward new ideas likely to be seen as leading us to an independent Bank of England. It was full of newsworthy material likely to dwarf anything TB had to say. TB said there was an easy way to get him to drop the announcements, namely warn him there could be an outcry in the party.'<sup>758</sup> Furthermore, Gould's recollection is of an idea pressed by Brown and Balls at the all-day meeting in March 1995: 'The most noticeable policy insight of the day was that Gordon Brown and his team were keen, even at that early stage, for a degree of independence for the Bank of England. Ed Balls... presented these plans to the meeting at great length.'<sup>759</sup> Gould does not mention a contribution from Blair, though he does note John Prescott was not invited to the meeting – something he was later 'furious'<sup>760</sup> about.

Prior to and following Balls' presentation to Blair and the leadership team, Brown's team were preparing the arguments for central bank independence, alongside wider options to build Labour's macroeconomic framework. This culminated in a month of economic policy activity, with three speeches by Brown and one by Blair in May 1995. In a draft policy note on 'The Macroeconomic Framework', policy detail and contributions to Labour's political strategy that built on much of Balls' 1992 framework were aired. These arguments had a caveat, that much of it did not 'demand public action now or even before the election, or... for complete candour',<sup>761</sup> though the paper did note 'some further shift on policy will be needed sooner rather than later'.<sup>762</sup> The paper's covering note set out five arguments for Labour saying more on

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<sup>757</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.200.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202.

<sup>759</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.221.

<sup>760</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.221. John Prescott also concurs with this in his memoir, see J. Prescott and H. Davies, *Prezza, My Story: Pulling No Punches*, (London: HEADLINE REVIEW, 2008) p.198.

<sup>761</sup> 'The Macroeconomic Framework', draft private paper, February 1995.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*

its macroeconomic framework: that while Labour had a poll lead on economic competence, more detail was needed to avoid the impression Labour would be less tough on inflation than the Conservatives; the media were focused on the macroeconomic framework; there were media accusations Labour were being too evasive; that it was important to signal to the City that Labour could alter the relationship between the Bank and the Treasury, despite perceived institutional opposition; and that European integration, going forward, required more independence for central banks.<sup>763</sup>

A central argument in the paper was for Labour to be clear that, while reform could well be on the agenda, it would not replicate versions of independence that were often assumed to be templates for reform. To follow New Zealand, which handed decision-making to the bank governor, or to look towards the German Bundesbank, which had independence of policy objectives as well as operational tools, needed to be ruled out, the paper argued.<sup>764</sup> This would mean Labour rejected templates of independence ‘in favour of a new division of responsibility with operational control over interest rates being passed to a re-structured and accountable Bank of England which is charged with pursuing government determined targets’.<sup>765</sup> Familiar arguments were put for why such a move would be politically advantageous to Labour. It would boost the anti-inflationary credibility of an incoming Labour government and it would allow Labour politicians to keep a critical distance – if necessary – from BoE operational decisions.<sup>766</sup> Importantly, the task for the Bank would be to achieve the government’s inflation target and growth over the medium-term, meaning the Bank ‘will not be required to run short-term risks’.<sup>767</sup>

Brown’s speech – the second of three economic speeches in May 1995 and the one that concerned Campbell because its newsworthy lines – was also titled ‘Labour’s Macroeconomic Framework’. The early part of Brown’s speech included the dual critique of Old Labour and Conservative monetarism – as noted above in Balls’ 1992

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<sup>763</sup> ‘The Macroeconomic Framework’, draft private paper.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

pamphlet – as well as language to stress Labour’s anti-inflationary commitment.

Brown argued:

‘The challenge is to transcend the old divisions between Keynesians and Monetarists and to recognise that strong and sustained growth and low inflation are necessary responsibilities of government. Inflation is an enemy of the poor, the pensioner and the middle income family... That is why the war on inflation is a Labour war.’<sup>768</sup>

In building the case for Bank independence, Brown argued that the ‘essential insight’<sup>769</sup> from Labour’s approach was an understanding of the role for, and the limits of, government.<sup>770</sup> Short-termism in the UK economy was being driven, Brown argued, by the narrow political considerations of governments. Changing this required ‘a careful assessment of the relationship between the government and the Bank of England as well as reform of the Bank to ensure greater accountability’.<sup>771</sup> Brown’s criticism of the policy context he would inherit was threefold: that it still lacked transparency; that it was overly personalised, focused only on the Chancellor and the Governor – the ‘Ken and Eddie show’ as it then was between Chancellor Ken Clarke and Governor Eddie George; and that decision-making had not been placed in an ‘explicitly medium-term framework’.<sup>772</sup> Brown’s speech then accepted the logic of his team’s analysis: that to criticise the current context meant either reversing the recent changes or reforming it further.

Brown set out three reforms that explicitly engaged with the recent Treasury and Bank changes, followed by three more significant reforms to the Bank’s structure, governance and accountability mechanisms. On the swift tweaks envisaged to the existing protocols, Brown argued for meetings between the chancellor and governor to be timetabled a year in advance; for interest rate decisions to be announced immediately after meetings; and for post-meeting information, such as the inflation

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<sup>768</sup> G. Brown, ‘Labour’s Macroeconomic Framework’, Speech to the Labour Finance and Industry Group, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1995.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid.

<sup>770</sup> Ibid.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

report, to be published quickly.<sup>773</sup> On the more structural changes to the Bank, Brown first proposed the establishment of a Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to ‘decide on the advice to be given to the government on monetary policy’.<sup>774</sup> Crucially, this reform ruled out an all-powerful governor of the Bank should Labour take office. Instead the MPC would comprise 6 members in addition to the governor and deputy governor. Second, Brown suggested the Bank’s Court – responsible for the strategic governance of the Bank – should have an expanded membership to reflect a wider range of interests from ‘the city, both sides of industry and the regions’.<sup>775</sup> Third, reforms to the Bank’s accountability mechanisms would mean more regular scrutiny of the governor before Select Committees as well as independent reviews of the Bank’s inflation reports.<sup>776</sup> While Brown summed up these reforms as positive and significant in improving the credibility of monetary policymaking, the remainder of his speech gave a carefully-worded assessment of the benefits of central bank independence, should Labour wish to go further.

In establishing Labour’s aim of removing ‘the suspicion that short-term party political considerations are influencing the setting of interest rates’,<sup>777</sup> Brown set out two options: establish clear rules to guide policymaking that are agreed and followed irrespective of the decision-maker; or considering ‘whether the operational role of the Bank of England should be extended beyond its current advisory role in monetary policymaking’.<sup>778</sup> Brown ruled out the first on the basis of ‘international evidence’<sup>779</sup> and then set out about setting the limits to the second. As Labour’s private policy work had suggested, Brown ruled out regimes of independence which he considered as going too far.

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<sup>773</sup> Brown, ‘Labour’s Macroeconomic Framework’.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid.

While being attracted to the ‘internal democracy of decision-making in the Bundesbank and the way in which government sets targets for the bank to pursue in New Zealand’,<sup>780</sup> he argued:

‘I do not, however, believe that any of these models would be acceptable for wholesale adoption in the UK. The Bundesbank does not have an inflation target set by government. I reject this model of target independence. The Bank of New Zealand personalises its decision-making process. We are not in the business of depoliticising interest rate decision-making only to personalise it in one, independent governor. This is a form of independence I reject.’<sup>781</sup>

Brown then both signalled what Labour’s future policy would be, while also appearing to suggest it would not be an early reform of the next Labour Government. First, he stated that Labour would ensure the government continued to set the inflation target and control fiscal policy, but did not say it would retain the final say on the operational powers – interest rate setting – in order to meet that target.<sup>782</sup> Brown then concluded with language which suggested, regardless of his views, any reform would need to be in the context of the Bank’s record following a strengthened advisor role:

‘The debate on future operational arrangements will continue. But, as I have said, it is time now to strengthen the Bank’s advisory role. Internal reforms at the Bank of England must therefore take place and the Bank must demonstrate a successful track record in its advice... And we must observe the Bank’s track record of advice in the future – in particular in predicting inflation.’<sup>783</sup>

Balls later reflected that Brown had ‘dipped his toe in the water’ with a ‘fairly dry speech at the Labour Finance & Industry Group’ that suggested Labour would ‘*consider* [EB’s emphasis] the case for independence once we had seen the track record of the new reformed institution’.<sup>784</sup> Yet, as Campbell had feared, there was media interest in this toe-dipping. A write-up of the speech in *The Independent* noted

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<sup>780</sup> Brown, ‘Labour’s Macroeconomic Framework’.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

<sup>784</sup> Balls, *Speaking Out*, p.147.

that Brown had ‘proposed that interest-rate advice – and possibly decisions – should be agreed by an eight-person monetary policy committee appointed by the Government’.<sup>785</sup> While noting the speech was a ‘careful balancing act’ and ‘cautious’, the report considered the speech ‘important’ and noted that Brown had signalled ‘his willingness to hand over decisions on interest rates to the Bank... provided it were reformed’ and evidenced a good track record of advice.<sup>786</sup>

Five days later, Blair reiterated Brown’s messaging on the Bank in his Mais Lecture at City University, though with a more cautious tone:

‘Germany’s economic record and the potential role of the Bundesbank demands attention... we have to design an institutional arrangement that fits Britain, and it may use the best practice from a number of countries. Our objective is clear. This is to reform the Bank of England so that it can carry out its increasingly important functions in an open and more accountable manner. Gordon Brown spelt out a series of reforms last week. We will then watch the track record of the Bank before deciding what, if any, further steps should be taken towards greater operational responsibility for the Bank in interest rate policy.’<sup>787</sup>

### **‘Completed and filed’: policy decision-making**

Labour’s commitments on paper, as well as the testimony of those involved in economic policy-making, attests to a divergence, in 1995, between the policy commitment to Bank independence and the politics of this commitment – particularly how it should be communicated and delivered. The commitment was strengthened and the decision was taken that Bank independence was the right policy, yet the timing and presentation of the decision was debated upon and ultimately left unsettled until shortly before polling day. In the summer following Brown’s speech on Labour’s macroeconomic framework, Brown’s team worked on the economic policy

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<sup>785</sup> J. Rentoul, ‘Labour offers Bank a degree of independence’, *The Independent*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1995, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-offers-bank-a-degree-of-independence-1619939.html>.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid.

<sup>787</sup> T. Blair, ‘The Mais Lecture’, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1995.

commission paper – to be considered by Labour’s 1995 conference – and on communicating Labour’s economic message – something Blair’s team were anxious about in the run-up to the 1997 election. This anxiety stemmed from two problems Blair and his aides saw in Brown’s operation.

First, the animosity they perceived to be held by Brown and his team regarding Mandelson and his election team at Labour’s headquarters in Millbank Tower, a short distance from Westminster Palace. According to Mandelson, ‘Gordon remained often unwilling to engage with, sometimes even to communicate with, me or key players at Millbank. Almost every decision was a struggle’.<sup>788</sup> Second, Blair was concerned Labour lacked a clear and concise message on the economy. In 1996 he worried that, on tax, Labour was ‘getting a reputation we had been trying to shelve’, while Brown similarly derided Blair’s interest in the ‘stakeholder economy’,<sup>789</sup> which Blair had set out in a speech in Singapore, indicating a willingness to reform business governance ‘towards a version of the company as a community or partnership in which each employee has a stake, and where the company’s responsibilities are more clearly delineated’.<sup>790</sup> Both Brown and Balls saw this as a distraction.

In an economic briefing provided to the PLP in August 1995, Brown and his Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the MP Andrew Smith, argued that Labour’s ‘real difference’ with the Tories on the economy amounted to ‘job-generating investment and employment measures’ and ‘measures for fairness – e.g. the minimum wage and fair tax’.<sup>791</sup> In a lengthy briefing of economic data, policy and campaign messages, the policy announcements and nods to independence from Brown’s macroeconomic framework speech were minimised or excluded entirely. There was one rather vague bullet point noting Labour’s commitment to ‘reforming the conduct of monetary policy, with a more representative Bank of England’.<sup>792</sup> The economic policy document taken to Labour’s conference in 1995, *A New Economic Future for Britain*,

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<sup>788</sup> P. Mandelson, *The Third Man*, (London: HarperPress, 2010), p.208.

<sup>789</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.456.

<sup>790</sup> T. Blair, *New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), p.295.

<sup>791</sup> Gordon Brown and Andrew Smith to the PLP, ‘Economic Briefing’, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1995, LSE Library Archives, SHORE/16/94.

<sup>792</sup> Labour Party, ‘Tory economic failure and Labour’s way forward’, August 1995, LSE Library Archives, SHORE/16/94.

used Brown's May speech as the basis for its macroeconomic framework section – though it did not include the sections of both Brown's and Blair's speeches which engaged with the need for further reform in the medium-term, informed both by the Bank's record and the experience of independent central banks, like the Bundesbank.

The section on the Bank of England reintroduced Brown's speech commitments on a new MPC, though the document was silent on what a future role for that committee could be when it came to monetary policy decision-making. It stated: 'The Bank of England will need to be restructured in order that it can carry out its functions in an open and accountable manner... We are attracted by the option of establishing a new monetary policy committee, overseen by a more representative court... Labour will consult further on these proposals.'<sup>793</sup>

While the document did pursue Labour's criticisms of both the short-termist, political pressure on interest rates, as well as what Brown and Balls saw as the deficiencies of the Conservative accountability reforms, it did not ask the party to consider further reforms, nor offer to consult on the kinds of issues Brown and Blair raised in relation to different models of central bank independence. Later in 1995, a further contribution to New Labour's policy agenda, in the form of a book by Mandelson and Roger Liddle, also touched upon the issue of Bank independence. What Campbell referred to in his diaries as 'Peter's bloody book'<sup>794</sup> had caused consternation among the 'Big Guns' owing to concern over Mandelson's influence extending from electoral strategy to policy. Brown – following a newspaper publishing a synopsis of the book – wanted Mandelson to 'rewrite the book and take out anything difficult for the party'.<sup>795</sup>

Mandelson recollected:

'Gordon also read the manuscript. His main objection was to our including an idea, originating with him and Ed Balls, that we had been discussing with Tony for some time: giving the Bank of England independent control over setting interest rates We took that out [of the book] too.'<sup>796</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> Labour Party, *A New Economic Future for Britain*, (London: The Labour Party, 1995), p.15.

<sup>794</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.342.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>796</sup> Mandelson, *Third Man*, p.195.



A section on Labour's macroeconomic framework in what became *The Blair Revolution*, published in 1996 (and later revised), restated the language from Labour's 1995 conference policy document, with the addition of a sentence based on Blair's Mais Lecture: 'Any further steps to strengthen the Bank's independence would depend on the success of these arrangements.'<sup>797</sup> Following Brown's 1995 speech foray into central bank independence, much of the rest of the year saw Labour's economic policy team actively hold back from pushing the idea. Yet, according to Brown, his mind was made up in 1995 that independence was the right thing to do. In a speech to the Bank of England's conference marking 20 years since its operational independence, Brown noted:

'I went away in 1995 for a series of days reading all of the literature that Ed [Balls] had brought together for me, with what was an embryonic plan to make the Bank of England independent... I was reading about the short-termism in British economic policy. This short-termism that characterised British economic policy was what I was targeting, and we had to overturn the orthodoxy, the orthodoxy was fiscal and monetary policy were best conducted by one agency together, in other words the Treasury, Bank of England independence would be a diversion from your primary objectives – full employment and high levels of economic growth – and I turned it on its head, and said high levels of economic growth and full employment are not possible unless we have economic stability and we cannot have economic stability if we cannot take the long-term view and simply be governed by the short-termism of the Treasury making interest rate decisions primarily for political reasons. And that was the basis on which we made the decision...

'The objectives [for the Bank] I wanted to be exactly the same as the Fed ... low inflation and high levels of employment and growth. Therefore, we also had to have a symmetrical inflation target because we had to send out a signal that we were as worried about deflation as about inflation, and our

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<sup>797</sup> Mandelson and Liddle, *The Blair Revolution*, p.80.

symmetrical inflation target, which we had decided by 1995 was the right thing to do, had to be pro-growth.’<sup>798</sup>

Brown added: ‘This was the model we agreed – Ed and I – in 1995, and I do pay tribute to the original thinking that he brought to bear on this.’<sup>799</sup> The statement made by Brown on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1997 – announcing operational independence for the Bank of England – provided an opportunity for the chancellor to enjoy ‘the element of coup de theatre in springing this announcement on a surprised world’.<sup>800</sup> Yet, while surprised journalists had to be briefed by Balls after the press conference about exactly what Brown’s statement meant, his words revealed the importance of 1995 for Labour’s thinking and decision points. Brown told the collected journalists and the Treasury: ‘In a speech in May 1995 and subsequently in our 1995 policy document, *A New Economic Future for Britain*, I set out my view of the proper roles of the Government and the Bank of England in economic policy... as I have repeatedly made clear since 1995, we will only build a fully credible framework for monetary policy if the long-term needs of the economy, not short-term political considerations, guide monetary decision-making.’<sup>801</sup>

Brown’s language, and the substance of his policy announcement, were consistent with the policy development Labour had conducted in 1995, as well as with Balls’ earlier thinking from 1992. In his book on the 2008 financial crisis, Brown says as much: ‘The original plan, written by Ed, remained intact.’<sup>802</sup> The chancellor used the term ‘operational responsibility for setting interest rates’, rather than ‘central bank independence’, as Labour’s earlier policy papers had argued. Broadly, the MPC composition and the changes to the Court were consistent. While the symmetric inflation target – referred to earlier in this chapter – was not included in the statement, this was not ditched, but merely held back until the following month. While legislation had to be drafted, debated and agreed by Parliament – necessitating detail which had to be drawn up by civil servants – the letter to the Bank Governor, drafted

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<sup>798</sup> Brown, Speech to Bank of England ‘20 Years On Conference’.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

<sup>800</sup> W. Keegan, *The Prudence of Mr Gordon Brown*, (Chichester: Wiley, 2004), p.156.

<sup>801</sup> HM Treasury, ‘Statement by the Chancellor on the central economic objectives of the new government’, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1997.

<sup>802</sup> G. Brown, *Beyond the Crash*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p.76.

by Balls and delivered to the Treasury by Brown, and the substance of the press conference were based on work and decisions that had been taken many months earlier. As Brown reflected in his memoir: ‘Long before we came into government, his [Ed Balls’] plan had been written, rewritten, reviewed, finessed, tested to destruction, completed and filed.’<sup>803</sup>

The timing was far more of a surprise, though with the policy development completed, Balls and Brown were ready to go with an announcement when they desired. Brown took the decision to proceed immediately after the general election, informing Balls and Blair a few days before polling day in 1997. The timing of the announcement is, rather more famously than the story of the development of the policy, a further example of the supremacy Blair and Brown exercised over policy-making. The civil service, eagerly trying to integrate the new prime minister and his team into Whitehall’s ways of working, were shocked by the swiftness of the decision.

Brown recollected:

‘The civil service were absolutely right, it was totally unconventional, we should have gone through the proper procedures, we should have had committees, we should have had cabinet decisions, we should have had cabinet sub committees looking at the intricate details of the proposals, but I thought – and I think I was right – that you cannot do this properly without having a fresh start and it had to happen immediately. I met Tony on the Saturday morning, I think his words were “fine”, so he agreed we go ahead – of course this was the start of sofa government because I actually met him in his house, in Islington, and I was sitting on a sofa while I explained to him what we wanted to do... so on the Tuesday we went ahead.’<sup>804</sup>

As this chapter has argued that both Blair and Brown shared an interpretation of Labour’s ethos that its leadership should be the drivers of political decision-making, it

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<sup>803</sup> Brown, *My Life, Our Times*, p.116.

<sup>804</sup> Brown, Speech to Bank of England ‘20 Years On Conference’.

is important at this point to rule out one potential reason for secrecy in policy development, and surprise in presentation: the views of the Labour Party more widely – in this case, concerns about internal opposition to the policy. Brown has noted that Bank independence ‘wasn’t in our manifesto, we had no party people asking us to do it... the decision we made was not because of political pressures, it was because we thought it was in the right interests of Britain’.<sup>805</sup> Here Brown is noting the absence of a ‘bottom-up’ aspect to the policy: it did not come from the party, and it did not have consent – through debate, amendment or authorisation – from the party. Were Brown and Balls, or Blair, concerned there would be opposition to its ‘top-down’ imposition on the party?

While possible, I do not judge this to be the case. Brown’s own characterisation of Labour’s historical position was being ‘generally throughout its history violently opposed to independence of the Bank of England’,<sup>806</sup> noting the tying of the currency to gold reserves in the 1920s, the fall of the Labour Government in 1931, and Harold Wilson’s tensions with the Bank, referred to earlier in this chapter. Writing prior to the 1997 election, Shaw noted that any measures giving the Bank further independence would be ‘signalling that it is prepared to endorse the Bank’s order of priorities, in which full employment comes a long way behind price stability’.<sup>807</sup> Ken Livingstone reflected that the decision ‘would favour the financial sector and undermine the country’s manufacturing base’,<sup>808</sup> while arguing that Brown announced the policy quickly because he ‘knew there would be strong opposition... so they announced it the day before Labour MPs met for the first time’.<sup>809</sup> Many of the left-wing Campaign Group of Labour MPs were opposed to Bank independence.

However, the rationale for not announcing the policy – in the minds of Balls and Brown – had nothing to do with the Labour Party’s internal debates. Indeed, on one occasion, Blair suggested to Campbell it could be announced if it was electorally advantageous against the Conservatives.<sup>810</sup> And the reality of the opposition from the

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<sup>805</sup> Brown, Speech to Bank of England ‘20 Years On Conference’.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1945*, p.227.

<sup>808</sup> K. Livingstone, *You Can’t Say That*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p.365.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid., p.366.

<sup>810</sup> Campbell, *Prelude to Power*, p.626.

Labour Left was mild, with no Labour MPs voting against Bank independence following the 1997 election owing to the Campaign Group's view that an insubstantial number of MPs would rebel and there was low public understanding of the issue.<sup>811</sup> Following Brown's speech and Labour's economic policy document, debates at the 1995 Labour Party Conference didn't mention Bank independence, with conference composites focusing on the minimum wage, pensions, nationalisation and trade union laws.<sup>812</sup> Instead, it entirely came down to the strategic views of Brown, Balls and – on this particular policy – to a lesser extent Blair.

According to Balls, both he and Brown believed the issue would be contentious in the national political debate, with opposition from the Conservatives, as well as institutional resistance – so, electorally, there was a downside risk. A second electoral point added to this caution – neither Brown nor Balls thought Labour needed Bank independence to cut-through on the economy. Balls noted:

'If in the year before the general election we were really in trouble over the economy and our commitment to stability, we might have decided, Gordon might have gone to Tony and said "I think we should say something more about this". But actually the calculation in that period was that on the one hand we didn't need to do that because we were already doing pretty well on stability, and toughness relative to the Tories. And secondly, there was the danger that Bank independence would have been seen as being risky and deflationary, therefore why rock the boat? And I think we had a pretty clear idea, before the election, the Tories were opposed to it. So if we had said we will make the Bank independent, our concern was the Tories would say "aha! This is how they're going to jack up interest rates and destroy your mortgages". So there was a good reason why it happened the day after the election. We were right that it would have been contentious.'<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>811</sup> P. Cowley, *Revolts and Rebellions: Parliamentary Voting Under Blair*, (London: Politico's, 2002), p.36.

<sup>812</sup> Labour Party, *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1995*, (London: The Labour Party, 1995), p.51.

<sup>813</sup> Balls, interview, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

Brown's recollection reinforces Balls' point about mortgages. Announcing Bank independence, would, according to Brown, have 'politicised interest rates'.<sup>814</sup> It was well-reported in the build-up to the 1997 election that the then chancellor, Ken Clarke, was choosing to ignore the Bank's advice to raise interest rates.<sup>815</sup> An announcement from Labour that Bank governor Eddie George would be given free rein to change interest rates was, therefore, tantamount to a commitment to raise them. 'Our pre-election silence was caution for a purpose,'<sup>816</sup> Brown argued in his memoir. Yet it is not entirely clear that caution over Conservative attacks on interest rate raises should disbar consultation within the Labour Party over the future direction of monetary policy, including independent central banks. Brown had, after all, suggested in his 1995 speech that the 'debate' on models of operational independence would continue. But Labour didn't have one. Forms of dialogue and debate within the party, for example on the minimum wage, existed, all the while managing not to pre-empt the actions of a future Labour Government. While concerns over the electoral impact of Bank independence were valid, and part of the mix of uncertainty surrounding such a significant policy, it is not at all clear that such concerns debarred more participatory policy development.

These uncertainties meant that, from 1995-1997, the timing of when to go for Bank independence was never clear to Brown and Balls. As Brown noted, 'we had the plans, we had known it was the right thing to do, but it was not clear to us throughout the previous two years what the right timing should be'.<sup>817</sup> The clarity from Brown just a few days before polling day both surprised and pleased Balls: 'Regardless of the timing, just the fact that Gordon seemed to have made his mind up was significant... I'd always expected him to be more equivocal on the risks, but this was him at his decisive best.'<sup>818</sup> It is clear considerations of what the party wanted were not a factor in the timing of the Bank announcement, nor in the development of the policy. Furthermore, when the decision was finally taken is symptomatic not of any organisational limitations on Brown or Balls, but rather that their political analysis

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<sup>814</sup> Brown, Speech to Bank of England '20 Years On Conference'.

<sup>815</sup> S. Fay, 'What comes after the Ken and Eddie Show?', *The Independent*, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1997, accessed 17th November 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/what-comes-after-the-ken-and-eddie-show-1278965.html>

<sup>816</sup> Brown, *My Life, Our Times*, p.116.

<sup>817</sup> Brown, Speech to Bank of England '20 Years On Conference'.

<sup>818</sup> Balls, *Speaking Out*, p.139.

and instincts guided when things happened. Their strategic context was overwhelmingly about the electoral contest with the Conservative Party, and Labour's likely success or failure when it made it to government. Managing the tradition of democratic participation involved, for Blair and Brown, both legitimation on their terms and an ameliorative rhetorical strategy.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to Minkin's observations regarding the subordination of the wider party, and the far-reaching freedom of decision-making for the leadership, the decision to make the Bank of England operationally independent supports his central claims. 'Traditional' party decision-making structures were bypassed – indeed, on Bank independence, any structure was bypassed entirely as the policy was neither voted upon by the membership as part of the *Road to the Manifesto*, nor agreed by the party's 'Clause V' meeting which considers Labour's manifesto. Interestingly, Balls did not attend the Clause V meeting in 1997,<sup>819</sup> while David Miliband – the leader's head of policy and the man who authored the 1997 manifesto text – couldn't recollect whether he attended or not.<sup>820</sup> Individual interpretations of Labour's ethos, held by New Labour's senior figures, contained a clear belief in leadership autonomy. In relation to the dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos at the time, it is important – once again – to consider how Labour's ethos interacted with the external political environment and the extent to which New Labour's leadership perceived a difference of opinion in the party.

There was a perception – a powerful and persistent one – held by those at the top of New Labour that they had licence to act with significant autonomy. This stemmed from two important insights: that the party was desperate to win and that the party thought Blair would win. Following Blair's successful amendment to Clause IV in 1995, his authority was further enhanced. Trade union leaders who had expressed disquiet at the change to the constitution accepted that Blair had a mandate, meaning there was near unanimity across the trade union section of the movement that Blair

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<sup>819</sup> Balls, interview, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>820</sup> Miliband, interview.

and Brown needed to be supported into power.<sup>821</sup> If one reflects on the changed strategic context from Kinnock to Blair, and the different judgements of the two leaders, stark differences are apparent. Kinnock did believe he had a mandate for change, particularly after the 1987 election, but this was balanced by his perception of a party that had to move gradually. Kinnock judged a party that had to be changed gradually, in keeping – where possible – with the dominant interpretation of the party’s ethos. Blair judged a party that was sick and tired of losing, giving him greater autonomy. Both perceptions were based on indications from union leaders and other readers of the party’s ethos, yet both remained judgements. Had they reached different judgements, and regardless of party structures or the electoral climate, Kinnock could have chosen to pursue further and faster changes, while Blair could have pursued slower, more gradual reform.

Yet, while these differences are both important and stark, this chapter has argued a point of difference with Minkin, though one he occasionally alluded to in *The Blair Supremacy*:<sup>822</sup> that the Blair of 1994-1997 retained some similarities with Kinnock and past Labour leaders. As opposition leader, Blair spoke to his party as a man seeking to persuade. As this chapter has sought to show, Blair reconsidered instances where he may have confronted his party more directly. He recognised the ‘head and body’ problem when it came to the legitimacy of policy. Party member plebiscites – for a short time – seemed to have replaced activist sovereignty, and Blair and Brown were selective about which policies to commit to, and potentially argue over, in opposition. Their beliefs and strategies were not, therefore, unusual within the competing traditions of Labour’s ethos. Autonomy was balanced with attempts at conciliation. This changed over time. Powell’s observation that Blair prioritised winning the battle for positioning and then, thinking he had won it, moved on to a policy legacy<sup>823</sup> suggests a leader who thought he had changed his party’s outlook, and so disengaged. Prior to this, in Blair’s words, he did ‘some of it’.<sup>824</sup> ‘It’ being speaking the language of the party and learning how to ‘press the right buttons’.<sup>825</sup> The next chapter examines this further.

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<sup>821</sup> Dromey, interview.

<sup>822</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.119.

<sup>823</sup> Powell, interview.

<sup>824</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.89.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter 6

### Outsiders: Tony Blair's expressive and instrumental leadership blend

'They argue Labour should drop its socialism, or at least say little about it, and then we can win government. Yes, we might win, but we would no longer be a socialist party, we would be a Social Democratic Party Mark 2.'

E. Heffer, *Labour's Future*

'It has to be conceded that conservatives suffer from a singular disadvantage... lacking any obvious aim in politics, they lack any offering with which to stir up the enthusiasm of the crowd. They are concerned solely with the task of government.'

R. Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*

'As long as there are people whose political commitment is motivated by a profound sense of discontent and distress over the iniquities of contemporary societies... then these people will keep alive the ideals which have characterised all left-wing movements for over a century.'

N. Bobbio, *Left and Right*

### **Introduction**

As Tony Blair reminded party members in 2006, 'there's only one tradition I hated: losing'.<sup>826</sup> Recollecting Drucker's observation that, within Labour's ideology, there existed an oppositionist tendency, one can see the tradition within Labour's ethos which Blair also had in mind. Philip Gould recollected Blair's impatience with opposition politics: 'He paced around the room and wouldn't sit down. He could not have made his intentions more clear [sic]. "Past Labour leaders lost because they compromised," he said. "I will never compromise. I would rather be beaten and leave politics than bend to the party. I am going to take the party on."' <sup>827</sup> The message, privately and sometimes publicly, was unrelenting from New Labour: that you can't change anything in politics unless you win, and you can't win unless you change your politics. This, in New Labour's outlook, was in sharp contrast to 'the oppositionist left'.<sup>828</sup> It was an endorsement of 'instrumental' politics – that 'primarily concerned

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<sup>826</sup> T. Blair, Speech to 2006 Labour Party Annual Conference, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>827</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.210.

<sup>828</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.130.

with the attainment of power to bring about desired ends, even if this means some compromise of principles'.<sup>829</sup> While there is some truth in this analysis of early New Labour (this study is focused on the pre-government period), the central conclusion of this chapter is that Blair did compromise with his party and its expressive tendency – though this strategy did not last.

When past membership surveys have shown Labour people are more likely to join the party for expressive purposes (to give expression to their ideals) rather than for instrumental purposes (because they believe they *need* a Labour government),<sup>830</sup> it is not so obvious that a leader's strategy should be to stress, purely and above all else, the instrumental nature of their politics. After all, as Whiteley noted, party members are 'interested in symbolic or rhetorical issues, and a party leader who pays due deference to this has a wide scope for pursuing policies opposed by Conference'.<sup>831</sup> In other words, recognition of expressive politics may enable action which is focused on instrumental outcomes. It isn't, therefore, necessarily an example of where 'Labour leaders were constrained by the party's constitution and ethos',<sup>832</sup> for skilful use of symbolism can liberate a leader.

It also has the capacity to both legitimise and embed a political project, and if that project is focused on political change – for instance, significant policy change – a greater sense of expressive Labour politics may be necessary if that change is going to be anything other than fleeting. Indeed, a failure to do so can lead to a dispiriting experience for members. As Black pointed out in his study of Labour in the 1950s, 'the more ideological and missionary temper of many members was frustrated by the limited time afforded for political education, discussions of policy, theory or "political" resolutions. Local parties were often "electoralist" (oriented to winning elections to the exclusion of other activities) more by default than intent'.<sup>833</sup> To keep

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<sup>829</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p.34.

<sup>830</sup> P. Whiteley, 'The Decline of Labour's Local Party Membership and Electoral Base, 1945-79' in D. Kavanagh (eds.), *The Politics of the Labour Party*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp.111-134, p.120.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid.

<sup>832</sup> D. Kavanagh, 'The Blair Premiership', in A. Seldon (eds.), *Blair's Britain, 1997-2007*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.3-15, p.4.

<sup>833</sup> Black, *Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, p.47.

members motivated for ‘electoralist’ purposes, one must also provide the fuel for missionary temper.

In the previous chapter I noted that Blair often wrestled with a private impatience: the Blair who railed against his party and movement, and the Blair who would then step back from an ‘uncompromising’ message. While Blair did not prioritise non-confrontational unity in the style of Neil Kinnock, there is a danger that in listening to New Labour’s elite actors defining their legacy, and in only analysing the later Blair years, our understanding of how political change came about in opposition is skewed by years of government. This chapter seeks to posit the temporal nature of New Labour, in this instance, treating Blair’s opposition period and early years in power as a distinct phase of Blair’s and New Labour’s internal political strategy. It also seeks to present a clearer balance of Blair’s relationship with Labour’s more expressive outlook – one often confused by his willingness both to challenge Labour’s traditions and to ‘pay heed to its established shibboleths’.<sup>834</sup> In short, there was more ‘taking the party with us’ during Blair’s opposition years, in political and rhetorical strategy, than the New Labour leadership team have since suggested and Blair’s critics have claimed.

Utilising speeches and press notices from Blair’s leadership campaign,<sup>835</sup> this chapter reveals a political and rhetorical strategy from Blair which blended expressive and instrumental political approaches – something Parkin rightly noted that most political activity seeks to achieve.<sup>836</sup> Aware of the suspicion of succumbing to MacDonaldism – that of ‘being captured by the conventional wisdom, establishment opinion, civil service advisers, or of being browbeaten by a hostile press, the City or the International Monetary Fund’<sup>837</sup> – Blair’s political and rhetorical strategy were crafted to prevent accusations of selling out.<sup>838</sup> It has been recently claimed that, from 1994

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<sup>834</sup> R. Heffernan, ‘Tony Blair as Labour Party Leader’, in A. Seldon (eds.), *Blair’s Britain, 1997-2007*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.143-163, p.151.

<sup>835</sup> Thank you to John Rentoul, Chief Political Commentator for the Independent, and Visiting Professor at King’s College, London for access to these documents from his work as a journalist and biographer of Tony Blair.

<sup>836</sup> Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, p.34.

<sup>837</sup> P. Shore, *Leading the Left*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), p.5.

<sup>838</sup> MacDonald’s own inglorious reputation within Labour is a selective retelling, ignoring his intellectual contribution to British socialism. This contribution is well summarised in B. Barker,

onwards, Blair presented ‘a conservative vision of modernity with a populist rhetoric that disavowed even the mildest version of social democracy’.<sup>839</sup> The analysis that follows, focusing on the period 1994-1997, would suggest this claim is wide of the mark. However, while this study ends its analysis when New Labour entered government, I do discuss how this approach changed during Blair’s tenure in the Conclusion of this study. In particular, I highlight Blair’s final conference speech as Labour leader where attention to the party’s ethos – and its more expressive tendency – appears to have been forgotten, with consequences for those who followed Blair and Gordon Brown in leading Labour.

In his analysis of New Labour, Hindmoor discussed the role of rhetoric in shaping the ‘centre’ and in persuading voters of an argument. ‘Politicians who start a speech with a blanket denunciation of their audience and of its audience’s beliefs will be unpersuasive,’<sup>840</sup> he argued. Turning to Blair’s early mission to change his party, Hindmoor continued:

‘[When] Blair sought to persuade those in the party he had just been elected to lead that Labour needed to change, he did not do so by arguing, in public at least, that the party needed to be entirely reconstituted... Rhetoric is path-dependent. The beliefs an audience has today are not necessarily those it will have tomorrow. Beliefs can be changed and can be changed through rhetoric. The beliefs an audience has tomorrow will however be affected by those it has today, because the beliefs it has today will partly determine which arguments it finds persuasive.’<sup>841</sup>

I argue in this chapter that, as Hindmoor suggested, Blair and New Labour were alive to what they perceived to be the expressive tendency of the party they led, and accepting of the need to find rhetorical arguments that were persuasive to Labour people. I also argue that as well as a persuasive rhetorical strategy, giving greater

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‘Introduction’, in B. Barker (eds.), *Ramsay MacDonald’s Political Writings*, (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1972).

<sup>839</sup> M. Perryman, ‘The Great Moving Left Show’, in M. Perryman (eds.), *The Corbyn Effect*, (Chadwell Heath: Lawrence and Wishart, 2017), pp.5-34, p.16.

<sup>840</sup> Hindmoor, *New Labour at the Centre*, p.58.

<sup>841</sup> *Ibid.*

resonance to Labour's more expressive tendencies is important for a Labour person's *identity* and the collective unity of the party as a whole. The use of expressive oratory not only helps to cajole and persuade, it connects an actor to an important tradition within Labour's ethos. In other words, it shows an actor understands – in relation to this tradition – the 'right' and appropriate way to engage in Labour Party politics. This chapter does not argue, however, that those at the top of New Labour held individual interpretations of Labour's ethos which highly valued the expressive nature of the party's politics. Indeed, I believe the opposite is the case. Blair undoubtedly held an interpretation of Labour's ethos which believed in the instrumental priority of Labour politics – that one can express their ideals all they like, but without power these ideals remain an abstract notion. Yet 'speaking the language', as I argued in the previous chapter when considering Blair's political strategy, was considered essential by the New Labour leadership to convince the wider party to support them, and indeed invest them with sufficient freedom to make policy decisions.

Andrew S. Crines has argued that prominent Labour people from the 'moderate/radical left' have tended to be 'more romantic and emotion-driven' in their rhetorical style 'because of the inclination to draw from past battles and future causes as a means of challenging "the establishment"... [and for] justifying socialist thought'.<sup>842</sup> Such a style included 'drawing on historical movements or individuals who appear to give credence to their argument of a longer running opposition to "the establishment"'.<sup>843</sup> Crines identified Michael Foot, in particular, for using 'arguments based on moral causes and collective opposition rooted in class conflict, liberal socialism and the rank and file'.<sup>844</sup> In contrast, leading Labour figures from the 'social democratic right', including Blair, tended to use language which 'appeared more pragmatic and logical... [and] tended to prioritise electoral victory at the expense of socialist romanticism'.<sup>845</sup> Social democrats were 'more willing to change aspects of Labour's historic *raison d'être* in order to appear in touch with the electorate'.<sup>846</sup> While I agree with aspects of Crines' argument, particularly some of the features

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<sup>842</sup> A. S. Crines, 'The changing face of Labour oratory', in S. Crines and R. Hayton, *Labour orators from Bevan to Miliband*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp.200-204, p.201.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202.

<sup>844</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*

which he assigns to the Labour Left and to social democrats, and which I assign to expressive and instrumental politics respectively, this chapter argues that such an analysis overlooks a tendency among the majority of Labour people – including social democrats – to offer a blend of expressive and instrumental politics. This was the case with both Blair and Brown in opposition, though it was a strategy the former – and to a lesser extent, the latter – abandoned following years of government, to the cost of a generation of politicians who followed them.

### **Managers of a conservative country**

The fault line in Labour's ethos between interpretations which posit a more expressive or a more instrumental politics was recognised by Blair in a lecture he gave at a university in Perth, Australia in 1982. As Rentoul noted, as a 'seeker of a safe seat'<sup>847</sup> Blair's tone and content at the time were uncontroversial, while he rarely stretched far from frontbench positions.<sup>848</sup> He had fought and lost for Labour the no-hope seat of Beaconsfield earlier that same year – having been heartily endorsed by party leader Michael Foot in the process – and was soon to be selected for the safe seat of Sedgefield to contest the 1983 general election. Nevertheless, while Blair's words were undoubtedly affected by the strategic imperative of appearing attractive to all but the Militant tendency and those defecting to the SDP, for the purpose of this chapter, his strategy is instructive. For while there are signs in the lecture of what would become, two decades later, Blair's reputation for pragmatism, more obvious is Blair's perception of a party that required change, but through a process which blended expressive and instrumental political approaches.

The Perth lecture criticised the Labour Right for cosiness with the establishment press, while applauding the Left for resisting the party leadership's slide into management of a conservative country instead of commitment to transformative change.

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<sup>847</sup> J. Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, (London: Little, Brown, 2001), p.74.

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*

In critiquing the Right, Blair argued that in order for Labour to bring about ‘enormous state guidance and intervention’, the next Labour government would:

‘[Come] into sharp conflict with the power of Capital, particularly multi-national Capital. The trouble with the right of the Party is that it has basked too long in the praise of the leader writers of the Financial Times, Times and Guardian, that it is no longer accustomed to giving them offence. It will find the experience painful but it is vital.’<sup>849</sup>

Such language brings to mind the critique of the first Attlee Government, in the pamphlet *Keep Left*, that Labour’s difficulties were the result of ‘not enough boldness and urgency and too much tenderness for vested interests’.<sup>850</sup> It isn’t quite ‘you can’t make socialist omelettes without breaking capitalist eggs’,<sup>851</sup> as *Keep Left* argued, but in criticising ‘mild tinkering’<sup>852</sup> and elucidating Labour’s struggle against capital, Blair was speaking to a more expressive interpretation of Labour’s ethos. Applauding the Left, Blair took aim at something that would later become synonymous with New Labour’s objective - being ‘the natural party of government’. He argued:

‘Honest people on the right and centre will admit that the Left has generated an enormous amount of quite necessary re-thinking in the Party. We were in danger of drifting into being “the natural party of government” but of a society that was unradicalised and unchanged. We had become managers of a conservative country.’<sup>853</sup>

Yet the Labour Left didn’t have it all. Blair argued the Left retained a narrow, doomed strategy of trying to win an election based on a working class base topped up with liberal metropolitans.<sup>854</sup> It occasionally risked ‘blind obedience to traditional doctrine’<sup>855</sup> (note: traditional doctrine, not traditions per se). It failed ‘to mix

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<sup>849</sup> T. Blair, ‘Perth Lecture’ at Murdoch University, Western Australia, 1982, p.12.

<sup>850</sup> R. H. S. Crossman, M. Foot, I. Mikardo, *Keep Left*, (London: New Statesman and Nation, 1947), p.15.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid.

<sup>852</sup> Blair, ‘Perth Lecture’, p.12.

<sup>853</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.

sufficiently with the electorate’ and resisted having ‘a democratic relationship with the electorate’<sup>856</sup> (a process of listening to and interpreting the public’s views). Finally, it maintained too strong a commitment to outdated Marxism, which Blair considered to be influential, but strongly without a roadmap or plan for the future.<sup>857</sup> The Right, Blair contended, brought the ‘pragmatism, that hard-headedness of purpose’ which the Left ‘consistently underestimates’.<sup>858</sup> What was required, then, was a coming together. However, in taking public opinion as an example, Blair contrasted two extreme positions without fully explaining the alternative:

‘It would be absurd if the Party descended into oblique populism, merely parroting the views of “the electorate”, however those views could be gauged. Equally absurd, though, is the view that there is anything to be gained from capturing control of the Labour Party machine whilst leaving the voters behind.’<sup>859</sup>

From where did Blair’s call for reconciliation and compromise – from both Left and Right, expressive and instrumental – spring? His Perth lecture identified two points that informed his analysis: that the Left convincingly crushed a more complacent, crudely instrumental view of politics following the 1979 election defeat; and that the party’s rank and file had changed, risking a divergence between members and the rest of the Labour movement, including the trade unions. Summing up his view of the legacy of the 1974-1979 Labour Governments, Blair argued:

‘The powerful appeal of the Left to the fundamental socialist instincts of the Party, coupled with the election defeat, easily overwhelmed the tired excuses of pragmatism from the Labour right. As often in politics, it is not how things actually are, but how they are perceived that is important. The May 1979 election defeat was perceived by the Party and indeed Labour Movement as a whole, as a victory for the ideology of Thatcher and a defeat for middle-of-the-road consensus politics... The 1979 election defeat propelled the leftwards

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<sup>856</sup> Blair, ‘Perth Lecture’, p.17.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>858</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>859</sup> Ibid., p.17.



movement forward... it lifted the responsibility of power from the shoulders of the Party... [and] by pointing to the election defeat, the Left were able to dispose of the continual refrain of the right-wing that moderation was essential to the retaining of power.’<sup>860</sup>

This convincing victory for the narrative of the Labour Left was coupled, in Blair’s argument, with the need for the Right to acknowledge ‘that the Party has changed irreversibly’ through the influence of ‘new white-collar participants in the Labour Party’.<sup>861</sup> Blair’s conciliatory view of Labour’s ‘new’ Left was of a people who bring social issues to Labour which break with ‘traditional’ socialist political economy. Discussing green issues and social equality, Blair noted: ‘Ironically, indeed, they tend to be issues cutting across Party boundaries. The “new” left, so readily accused of being sectarian, often embrace policies that have non-sectarian appeal.’<sup>862</sup> In Rentoul’s biography of Blair, he argued that ‘it is difficult to trace Blair’s transformation from labour movement orthodoxy to arch-revisionism in his public utterances for some time’ after these comments.<sup>863</sup> Indeed, while Blair’s Australia lecture was delivered 12 years before Blair led the Labour Party, what makes it an important – and curiously under-studied – piece of Blair oratory is its early indication that Blair’s public arguments would not commit to outright confrontation with Labour’s members and the wider movement. There is a clear recognition evident in both Blair’s argument and tone that the power of the Labour Left in the early 1980s was not only organisational – it struck numerous chords with Labour’s rank and file for its expressive and ideologically-confident approach.

### **More than vanguardists – Blair’s strategic context**

Before analysing Blair’s rhetorical and political strategy during the 1994 leadership contest, some of the main factors within Blair’s strategic context must be expanded upon. John Smith’s sudden death had created an unusual moment for the ‘modernisers’ and their efforts to change the Labour Party. On the one hand, the

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<sup>860</sup> Blair, ‘Perth Lecture’, p.6.

<sup>861</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid.

<sup>863</sup> Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, p.114.

majority of the PLP had been happy with Smith's leadership, believing him to be more popular than Kinnock and in with a very strong chance of winning the general election. On the other hand, Smith's leadership had frustrated some within the modernising clique. Mandelson had argued for a more 'radical option'<sup>864</sup> at the time of Kinnock's resignation, and Blair had attempted to convince Brown to run against Smith.<sup>865</sup> Despite Brown's hesitation and loyalty to Smith – a moment both Blair and Mandelson argued ended his chances of becoming leader before Blair – and his agreement to back Smith and become Shadow Chancellor, on economic policy Smith was seen to rebuff the modernisers. His address to the 1993 Labour Party Annual Conference argued:

'This commitment to the goal of full employment is central to our economic approach. It means using not just interest rates - which now even the IMF believe should be cut - but all the instruments of economic policy to go for growth, jobs and investment. It means what we, as democratic socialists, have always believed, that it is the duty of Government to match unmet needs with unused resources.'<sup>866</sup>

This was seen by Brown and his allies as a commitment to profligacy. When Jack Straw, who had written a pamphlet on reforms to Clause IV, privately raised its publication with Smith, he demanded Straw drop the idea, told him he could lose his Shadow Cabinet seat, and 'threw the envelope containing the pamphlet' at Straw as he exited the meeting.<sup>867</sup> Some saw the 'one-more-heave' narrative as a concoction of the Blair coterie to make the case for change, rather than being grounded in reality. Yet, whatever its origins, the 'one-more-heave' narrative had purchase, and was continuously repeated by many Labour people. Overall, Smith's sudden and unexpected legacy was something to be handled carefully by Blair and his allies. In addition to basic humanity and good nature following the death of a colleague, the mandate sought by Smith's successor needed to recognise the limits to Smith's approach, but delicately. Another important part of Blair's strategic context was

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<sup>864</sup> Mandelson, *Third Man*, p.135.

<sup>865</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.53.

<sup>866</sup> J. Smith, Speech to 1993 Labour Party Annual Conference, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1993.

<sup>867</sup> Straw, *Last Man Standing*, p.190.

Brown. Without replicating the drama of the back and forth between the two men following Smith's death, nor the agreement reached over economic and social policy, Brown's presence both as potential rival and as advisor to Blair was a significant factor in shaping Blair's political strategy. I return to Brown's impact on Blair's context and the 1994 contest later in this chapter.

Writing after Smith's sudden death, but before the election of Blair, Shaw warned that a more 'emphatic rapprochement with the established order'<sup>868</sup> to achieve electoral victory – what he saw as the modernisation discourse of the period – risked divergence from the party's historical objectives. From Blair's early biographers, a similar impression of non-conformism within the Labour church is conveyed. Blair stood 'outside many of Labour's traditions, and causes consternation, alarm and excitement in roughly equal proportions in his efforts to articulate a new, more pluralist language for left-of-centre politics in Britain'.<sup>869</sup> Furthermore, Blair 'doesn't talk wistfully of bygone days, conjuring up folklore memories of comrades... Blair wears none of the Labour movement's campaign medals'.<sup>870</sup> Engaging more directly with the expressive/instrumental fault line in Labour's ethos, Cronin argued that Blair 'discovered the same passive mentality as he rose through the ranks of the party and was infuriated that party leaders should be content to remain forever in opposition. A resolve to break that mentality thus became central to Blair's thinking and to the entire "modernising" project'.<sup>871</sup> Gould's reflections on the 1994 leadership contest emphasise an instrumental heart in Blair's approach:

'He was thinking [at the time of the discussions with Brown over standing down] about fighting the Tories in a new way. He did not want to get trapped on their ground: he said we should concede and move on – agree with the Conservatives where we could only lose, fight only where we could win.'<sup>872</sup>

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<sup>868</sup> Shaw, *Labour Party Since 1979*, p.225.

<sup>869</sup> J. Sopel, *Tony Blair: The Moderniser*, (London: Bantam Books, 1995), p.3.

<sup>870</sup> Ibid.

<sup>871</sup> J. E. Cronin, 'Speaking for whom? From 'old' to 'New' Labour', in K. Lawson and T. Poguntke (eds.), *How Political Parties Respond: Interest aggregation revisited*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2004), pp.15-40, p.22.

<sup>872</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.195.

As the previous chapter explained, I agree with Shaw's conclusion that Blair and the New Labour leadership believed that both the Kinnock and Smith leaderships had been too cautious and too often compromised with the soft Left underbelly of the party, from its activists to its MPs. Similarly, I agree with Cronin that, with respect to Blair's individual interpretation of Labour's ethos, he came down heavily for an instrumental interpretation of Labour's mission, rather than one which sought to balance Labour's expressive nature. Yet, while agreeing with Shaw – on policy – there is a danger in then inferring from this a strategy of persuasion that ignored Labour's ethos. That – as with the focus of Gould's reflections – Blair's strategy was primarily about 'electric shock treatment'.<sup>873</sup> Similarly, while agreeing with Cronin, this individual interpretation should not be read as one that – from the beginning of Blair's leadership – sort to confront a more expressive interpretation of Labour's ethos. Undoubtedly the theatre – and the coup of a clear victory – over Clause IV reflected Blair's willingness to challenge Labour's attachment to its past and critically engage competing traditions within Labour's ethos. Yet, as this section will go on to argue, hegemony in policy-making, and exercises in 'strong leadership', were built on a political strategy which recognised the beliefs of Labour's members in 1994, just as Blair had urged his colleagues to recognise over a decade earlier.

What were those beliefs? Analysing Labour's membership base during Blair's early period as leader, Syed and Whiteley's surveys revealed a consistent majority view that 'the Labour Party should always stand by its principles even if this should lose an election'.<sup>874</sup> Table 7 presents Syed and Whiteley's membership data for this principles/electoral tension, including a 'longstanding member' and 'new member differentiation' for 1997. By 1999, attachment to 'an ideology attached to class conflict'<sup>875</sup> had weakened, dropping from 66% support in 1990 to 39% in 1999.<sup>876</sup> During Blair's early leadership period, Blair's members were less attached to class politics and held on to the view that the party's principles – which in Syed and Whiteley's surveys included market scepticism, commitment to taxation and public expenditure, and support for trade unions<sup>877</sup> – were paramount in its politics. As this

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<sup>873</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.213.

<sup>874</sup> Syed and Whiteley, *New Labour's Grassroots*, p.61.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid., p.59.

chapter will show, these policy themes were highlighted in Blair’s opposition speeches, particularly during the leadership election. Overall, this data attests to most Labour people presenting a blend of expressive and instrumental political approaches.

**Table 7: Membership attitude to the statement ‘the Labour Party should always stand by its principles even if this should lose an election’, adapted from Syed and Whiteley.<sup>878</sup>**

<b>Year members’ attitudes recorded</b>	<b>Strongly agree/agree %</b>	<b>Neither %</b>	<b>Strongly disagree/disagree %</b>
<b>1990</b>	61	12	28
<b>1997 (longstanding member)</b>	61	17	23
<b>1997 (new member)</b>	63	16	21
<b>1999</b>	59	17	23

Ed Balls recollected Blair’s ‘nuanced’ strategy in opposition.<sup>879</sup> Specifically in relation to Blair’s leadership contest, Balls noted:

‘Our positioning and our language, and his leadership election, was quite sensible, soft-Left. It wasn’t in any way what people would recognise as ‘Blairite’... it wasn’t right-wing.’<sup>880</sup>

<sup>878</sup> Syed and Whiteley, *New Labour’s Grassroots*, p.61.

<sup>879</sup> Balls, interview, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid.

Sally Morgan, who was asked to join Blair's team following the leader's Clause IV announcement at the 1994 party conference, also saw Blair's early strategy as being a nuanced approach, balancing the focus on winning with a strategy to cohabitate, rather than embrace a 'vanguardist' approach. She argued Blair's early strategy as leader:

'Was to try and not lose the party, really... it was to try and make sure we kept a coalition of the party. You never wanted to be in the position where the only people supporting you were the sort of vanguardists... we constantly worked to try and widen the circles.'<sup>881</sup>

Blair's staff appointments, following his election, show a more nuanced mix over an instrumental focus. Jonathan Powell, one of the few Blair appointees without a previous career steeped in the Labour Party and the trade unions, explained:

'There is a particular culture... a language [in the party] ... which I didn't have... For me it was very foreign... it came as a bit of a shock to me... I used to put my foot in it pretty regularly...

'That was probably part of the reason that Tony brought me in, he wanted a sort of foreign germ to come in and make the place serious about governing rather than about just being a political party.'<sup>882</sup>

In contrast, Powell believed most of those working with Blair shared in the 'culture' of Labour people, and were more at ease in comprehending its traditions and language.<sup>883</sup> In considering the motivations for this strategy, Balls argued that those at the top of New Labour 'were always aware from the very beginning that, for the Labour Party, the betrayal of 1929 was in people's recent memories'<sup>884</sup> – a reference to Ramsay MacDonald and the short-lived Labour Government which collapsed in 1931 over public spending cuts. Powell has a very similar reflection in his book, *The*

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<sup>881</sup> Morgan, interview.

<sup>882</sup> Powell, interview.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid.

<sup>884</sup> Balls, interview, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

*New Machiavelli*, noting that ‘the ghost of Ramsay MacDonald hangs heavy over the Labour Party, and no leader wants to find himself seen as a Judas, clinging on to power by selling out’.<sup>885</sup> On economic policy, Balls suggested to Brown that Labour rewrite a document setting out the ‘purpose of the Treasury’ to show that it would be a different kind of Treasury from the past, inserting ‘a lot of Labour language... we were doing pre-emptive reassurance on that’.<sup>886</sup>

New Labour’s fascination with Bill Clinton’s New Democrats and the Clinton Whitehouse also had an element, certainly in the minds of Balls and Powell, of reassurance – an example of how to govern in a progressive way. While recognising the impact of the New Democrats on electoral strategy, campaign techniques, and policy, Balls believed ‘there was nothing “sell-out” about the Democrats’.<sup>887</sup> From the interviews conducted for this study, two things are apparent. First, there was more to Blair’s strategic context than a purely instrumental imperative. While the wider party, including the trade unions, was subordinate in relation to leadership decision-making, it was not a neutral element in Blair’s world. Blair and his team recognised the importance of avoiding a leadership ‘transfixed between what they really wanted to do and what they could do’.<sup>888</sup> Better to take the party with you, using the vital tool of Labour’s symbolism and more expressive political style.

Second, those close to Blair undoubtedly detected in his early strategy as leadership candidate and then leader a willingness to avoid direct confrontation with his party in public. While Clause IV was undoubtedly a bold initiative in challenging parts of Labour’s image Blair disapproved of, he correctly judged that Labour people were willing to back him on it. He did not judge – and again, I would argue correctly – that his political arguments and his language could fully embrace his individual interpretation of valuing instrumental politics far and above Labour’s more expressive mix. Over time, and years in government, this balance became more strongly in favour of the instrumental – something I will return to in this study’s Conclusion.

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<sup>885</sup> J. Powell, *The New Machiavelli*, (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), p.35.

<sup>886</sup> Balls, interview, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>887</sup> Ibid.

<sup>888</sup> T. Blair, Foreword’, in P. Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, (London: Abacus, 2011), pp.ix-xxvi, p.xvii.

## Where there is greed

The starting gun for the ‘non-campaign’ period of the Labour contest (it did not begin officially till 10<sup>th</sup> June 1994)<sup>889</sup> was fired not by Blair, or either of the other two candidates, but by Brown on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, the day after Smith’s funeral. Brown’s speech was pushed to the political media as a ‘call for unity’.<sup>890</sup> Aware that Blair was preparing to stand for the leadership, Brown’s speech was ambiguous in its implications for his potential candidacy, while clearly stating the need to avoid a difficult and politically-charged contest. In substance, Brown’s speech sought to show continuity of purpose with John Smith, and a strong attachment to Labour’s heritage. Brown began by stating that the ‘challenges’ a Labour leader faced were poverty, unemployment and inequality, while urging a continued commitment to Smith’s ‘unshakeable commitment to fairness and equality’ and to ‘keep alight that flame burning bright against injustice’.<sup>891</sup> Early on his speech, Brown both lauded Wales’ mining heritage and committed to continuing it:

‘If anyone is in any doubt about why we must win here in Wales, let them just visit the abandoned tower colliery... the last deep mine colliery in south Wales... abandoned not because there is no market for coal. Not because there is no coal – we are walking on top of 1000 years of coal. But because there is no minister with the political will to do what I pledge Labour will do – implement a strategy for coal.’<sup>892</sup>

Brown attacked Conservative politicians for accusing the unemployed of ‘being workshy, feckless and inadequate, when it is government ministers themselves who are guilty of these crimes’.<sup>893</sup> His peroration sort to draw a more nuanced agenda for modernisation and its relationship with the party’s past: ‘Past achievements are for guidance. Past struggles are for instruction. Past successes are to be respected. But for socialists it is the future that must be served.’<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, p.237.

<sup>890</sup> G. Brown, ‘Speech to the Welsh Labour Party Conference’ press release, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1994.

<sup>891</sup> G. Brown, ‘Speech to the Welsh Labour Party Conference’, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1994.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*



In its themes of tackling inequality, helping unemployed miners and opposing punitive welfare, Brown's speech was some distance from the 'prawn cocktail offensive' Labour's economic team had publicised so much in the early 90s. In his memoir, Brown noted he had decided 'to fight on [following Blair's entreaties to stand aside] and make a leadership speech the next Sunday in Wales'.<sup>895</sup> The speech emphasised, certainly in Brown's mind, the 'two forms of modernisation'<sup>896</sup> that he and Blair represented. Brown, certainly in his rhetoric, had for some time shown a blend of the expressive and instrumental.

His 1989 book, *Where There is Greed*, presented a lengthy, forensic critique of Thatcherite economics. The nearest Brown came to more instrumental language regarding Labour's own positioning was a sentence saying 'how we [Labour] plan for a successful economy... will determine whether we are recognised by the broad mass of the public as their natural voice in government'.<sup>897</sup> Since leaving office, Brown has singled out *Where There is Greed* as a missed opportunity for him to 'define New Labour' and move on from 'old-style national corporatist strategies'.<sup>898</sup> He does not address *why* he chose not to do those things. Such an example – of more expressive strategies from the earlier days of Blair and Brown, contrasted with their reflections after a decade in office – is instructive and important in emphasising the need for a more temporal understanding of New Labour, and how political change within the Labour Party came about.

### **Don't frighten the Labour horses**

Cronin has argued that where Brown had, early on in the campaign, 'seemed to invoke the spirit of old Labour, Blair balanced this by carefully restating his commitment to the new'.<sup>899</sup> Based on an analysis of Blair's rhetoric, and his strategic context, I lay particular emphasis on the word 'carefully'. Rentoul has described Blair's formal campaign as 'bland', with no 'lurch to the centre' so as not to

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<sup>895</sup> Brown, *My Life, Our Times*, p.96.

<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>897</sup> G. Brown, *Where There is Greed*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 1989), p.9.

<sup>898</sup> Brown, *My Life, Our Times*, p.79.

<sup>899</sup> Cronin, *New Labour's Past*, p.379.

‘frighten... the Labour horses’.<sup>900</sup> While agreeing it was bland on policy, the next section of this chapter will go further, demonstrating Blair’s willingness to deploy rhetoric which appeared to counter the Blair image – paying tribute to Labour’s heritage, invoking folk memories, and speaking to the party as he saw it, rather than as he wished it to be. Soon after the formal leadership contest began, the BBC’s *Panorama* programme hosted a debate between the three candidates in front of an audience of union delegates. Blair answered the first question from the host, David Dimbleby, with the message that ‘what is absolutely essential is that we lead the Labour Party into government’<sup>901</sup> – a straight, instrumental message playing to reports of Blair’s polling potential as leader.

Blair then went on to describe modernisation as a series of processes that needed to happen in the UK economy, in society and in the constitution, before concluding what became a short opening statement with the theme of applying Labour’s ‘traditional values’ in the modern world. Blair’s strategy, throughout the debate, was to present a consensus – as far as possible – between himself and the more ‘traditional’ candidates from Labour’s Left. When Prescott also noted what became a ‘Prescott phrase’ – traditional values in a modern setting – Blair agreed, saying ‘that’s precisely what we need to do’.<sup>902</sup> When pressed by another questioner that Blair might miss out on Labour people’s votes because he may appeal to their head, but not their ‘gut’, both Prescott and Blair responded that they were not mutually exclusive:

Prescott: They’re not alternatives

Blair: ... exactly so, they’re not alternatives, we need heart and head in the Labour Party and I tell you this, when you’ve seen the Labour Party in opposition for all these years and we’ve not been able to help people, what we’re talking about is not ripping up traditional principles in the Labour Party, it is traditional principles in a modern setting.<sup>903</sup>

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<sup>900</sup> Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, p.244.

<sup>901</sup> BBC *Panorama* transcript, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1994.

<sup>902</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>903</sup> *Ibid.*

Blair's concluding statement was slightly more instrumental in tone, though again balanced with connections to Labour's history:

'We owe obligations to one another as well as ourselves and that we depend in part upon one another to succeed. And just as people understand that in their family, so they understand it in a broader society and we've got to use that principle, the founding principle of our party. We've got to use it in order to demonstrate how we can set out a new future for this country and win a general election... move from the politics of protest to the politics of government.'<sup>904</sup>

When the contest fully got underway, Blair undertook to give a set of policy speeches to supplement a campaign launch and election statement. While Gould subsequently argued that Blair's leadership campaign displayed his ideas in a coherent way, and had advised the Blair team to present a candidate who was 'an uncompromising champion of change',<sup>905</sup> the collection of speeches Blair delivered in the June and July of 1994 evidenced caution – both in presenting his ideas in a manner consistent with Labour's heritage, and in avoiding new ideas which may have suggested he had an overhaul in mind for the party's policy platform. In relation to the former, when Blair's tentative programme was briefed to the media by Mandelson, resulting in a headline comparing it to a new version of the SDP, Blair fumed at his close ally – owing to his belief that 'the party and the trade unions were neuralgic about the parallels with the SDP'.<sup>906</sup> In relation to the latter, David Miliband – who led on Blair's policy work before joining his staff as leader – told Gould the policy agenda had been 'stuffed in at the last minute'.<sup>907</sup>

In considering the set of speeches Blair gave, it is particularly helpful to observe what Blair *wanted* to be the focus – something revealed in the press releases that acted as guides to the speech messaging, and campaign literature which condensed quite lengthy statements into core substance. What is striking, as I argued earlier, is the

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<sup>904</sup> BBC Panorama transcript.

<sup>905</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.200.

<sup>906</sup> Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, p.239.

<sup>907</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.200.

extent to which Blair put forward the party's principles as his campaign messages to the media – not only in campaign literature, but the speeches and press notices that would be reported to everyone who showed an interest, including the wider electorate. For example, the first substantive policy speech from Blair of the campaign was on a 'new economic programme for Britain'.<sup>908</sup> Drafted by Brown, Andrew Smith and David Miliband,<sup>909</sup> the speech bore many of the hallmarks of later Brown rhetoric – including a focus on long-termism, and a partnership approach to the economy as a third way between the free market and state intervention. Yet, taking a more party-friendly approach in its appeals and rhetoric, the press notice focused on the following lines of argument:

'[Blair] savages the tax system which penalises the average family and provides scams, perks and city deals for those who can employ the right accountants...

'Demands a "whole new economic culture for Britain".'<sup>910</sup>

Further extracts from the press release added emphasis:

'There are great British success stories in industry but the levels of investment and new capacity have been wholly insufficient to lay the foundations for a stable and successful economic future...

'Mr Blair says that we need to do nothing less than "change the whole economic culture of our country".'

'He says: "The culture of the 1980s was based on a very narrow view of self-interest. At its worst, it was just greed, making as much in as short a time as possible. And the benefits of it were limited. The biggest rewards by and large

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<sup>908</sup> T. Blair, Speech to the Engineering Employers Federation, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1994.

<sup>909</sup> Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.201.

<sup>910</sup> T. Blair, Speech to the Engineering Employers Federation press release, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1994.

went to the City, the speculators, the middle men and a few at the very top of industry.”<sup>911</sup>

In a speech on education the following week, Blair commenced his address with a lengthy tribute to Labour’s past record. Speaking in Manchester, he began:

‘The founders of the Labour Party, whose archives are stored in the magnificent Museum of Labour History in this city, knew that knowledge was the basis of power. They knew that to change the world, we first had to understand it. In discussion groups and reading circles, WEA lectures and Fabian summer schools, a passion for learning and self-improvement has motivated generations of socialists. That tradition should inspire us today.’<sup>912</sup>

This was in many ways a very traditional way for a politician representing the Labour Party to begin a speech, paying tribute to the party’s founders, the achievements of the British working class, and connecting Blair’s message to that from ‘generations of socialists’. The speech went on to list the campaigns of the 1920s for universal secondary education, Ellen Wilkinson’s implementation of the 1944 Education Act, Labour’s campaign against selection at 11 in the 1960s, and the creation of the Open University during Harold Wilson’s tenure. Blair explicitly tied his contemporary plans to the origins of the party, labouring the nostalgia which some analysis has claimed he shunned.<sup>913</sup> A speech on welfare reform enveloped a plan to tackle welfare ‘dependency’ in the language and legacy of John Smith, along with one of Wilson’s more famous lines. Blair argued:

‘Labour must never lose its anger at injustice. Most of us came into the party because that passion for social justice is so strong. It was central to the philosophy of John Smith. We must continue to honour his legacy. The Labour Party is a crusade for social justice or it is nothing.’<sup>914</sup>

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<sup>911</sup> Blair, Engineering Speech press release.

<sup>912</sup> T. Blair, Speech to the Manchester College of Arts and Technology, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

<sup>913</sup> Jobson and Wickham Jones, ‘Gripped by the past’, p.531.

<sup>914</sup> T. Blair, ‘Reforming Welfare: Building on Beveridge’, Speech at the Southampton Institute, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

Two days later, in a speech on constitutional reform, Blair channelled Labour's predilection for systemic transformation at the heart of government:

‘Our system and processes of Government have to change... too centralised, too bureaucratic and too indifferent to the fundamental rights of the citizen which no Government, irrespective of their “mandate” should be able to ignore.

‘... the Labour Party was founded on a set of values or principles, not a set of fixed policy prescriptions or methods of achieving these principles. The essential belief is that a strong united society is necessary to individual achievement... For this reason, it is doubly important for socialists to modernise the system of Government so that it fulfils its true purpose and does not become a playground of vested interests or worse still, a source of oppression.’<sup>915</sup>

### **The values of democratic socialism**

Prior to this set of policy speeches, Blair gave an address to a conference where he set out many of the arguments he would later include in his 1995 lecture marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election of the Attlee government, and published a pamphlet with the Fabian Society called *Socialism*. His argument in both was based on an analysis of socialist thought which divided it into ‘ethical’ and ‘scientific’ strands – dismissing the latter as related to Marxist centralisation which, since the collapse of Communism, was ‘dead’,<sup>916</sup> and embracing the former as something allied to European social democracy and Croslandite revisionist thought – particularly the disaggregation between ‘ends’ and ‘means’ which became central to New Labour. In this speech, more so than the lecture he gave a year later, Blair repeatedly connected his definition of socialism with the modern world and electoral victory. In other words, it was not dry, instrumental rhetoric about the Labour Party learning how to win – instead, it showed a blend of the expressive and instrumental, conscious as it

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<sup>915</sup> T. Blair, Speech at City Hall, Cardiff, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

<sup>916</sup> T. Blair, Speech to the Fabian/Guardian Conference ‘Whatever Next’, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1994.

was of the party's dominant ethos and focus on principles. For example, Blair contended:

‘Socialism as defined by certain key values and beliefs is not merely alive, it has an historic opportunity... to give leadership. The basis of such socialism lies in its view that individuals are social interdependent human beings, that individuals cannot be divorced from the society to which they belong. It is, if you will, social-ism.’<sup>917</sup>

On ideas and winning elections, Blair concluded his speech arguing:

‘By re-establishing its core identity, the Labour Party and the Left can regain the intellectual self-confidence to take on and win the battle of ideas. For too long, the Left has thought it had a choice: to be radical but unacceptable; or to be cautious and electable...

‘Once being radical is redefined as having a central vision based around principle but liberated from particular policy prescriptions that were then confused with principle, then in fact being radical is the route to electability.’<sup>918</sup>

The pamphlet, *Socialism*, made arguments in favour of greater clarity in the party's objectives, enhanced intellectual self-confidence, and reassurance to party members about respecting Labour's traditions. ‘For almost two decades,’ Blair argued, ‘the Left has felt itself on the defensive. Having fashioned the post-war consensus of 1945, its intellectual confidence became sapped by its own inner doubts, the problems of government in the 1960s and 1970s and the onslaught of the Right through Thatcherism.’<sup>919</sup> The solution, he suggested was to ‘regain the intellectual high ground, stating with clarity its [Labour's] true identity and historic mission. In doing so, it must show how this is not a break with its past or its traditions but, on the

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<sup>917</sup> Blair, Speech to the Fabian/Guardian Conference.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid.

<sup>919</sup> Blair, *Socialism*, p.1.

contrary, a rediscovery of their true meaning'.<sup>920</sup> As ever, Blair sought a third way between Labour's tradition of policy pragmatism and inward-looking 'revolutionary socialism':

'This is the chance for the Labour Party and the Left to capture the ground and language of opportunity for itself by policies that are entirely consistent with its traditional principles – namely intervening to equip and advance the individual's ability to prosper within this new economy – but applying them in a different way for the modern world. How it does so should be where the new thinking and ideas are developed, released from false ideological constraints. The result is not a policy vacuum or a retreat into philosophy rather than political action. It is, rather, the development of a new policy agenda and in many ways a broader one at that.'<sup>921</sup>

As is to be expected of an internal election with different audiences – from Members of Parliament to ordinary party members – Blair's election literature for the 'selectorate' showed messages with variations of expressive/instrumental orientation. In letters to parliamentary colleagues, Blair would describe 'the goal' as 'to bring Labour back to Government',<sup>922</sup> along with the message of applying traditional principles in the modern world. Blair's leaflet for constituency Labour parties (CLPs) had a more expressive orientation. Beginning with a Smith tribute, Blair offered his double-message: 'We must transform Labour from a party of protest to a party of government. I believe Labour must stand where it has always stood – for the values of democratic socialism, for the people who rely on hard work and fair play to keep them away from hardship.'<sup>923</sup> Blair's 'election statement', expected to be read by fewer members than the leaflet, landed somewhere in between:

'Our job is to honour the past but not to live in it. I have never believed that Labour's essential principles and values were its problem. On the contrary, they still retain their validity and their support amongst the public. But the

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<sup>920</sup> Blair, *Socialism*, p.1.

<sup>921</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>922</sup> T. Blair to Parliamentary Labour Party, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1994, LSE Library Archives, FAULDS/4/7/23.

<sup>923</sup> T. Blair, 'Principle, Power, Purpose', 1994 Labour Party leadership contest election literature, LSE Library Archives, FAULDS/4/7/23.



public have longed for us to give modern expression to those values, to distinguish clearly between the principles themselves and the application of them. That is the difference between honouring the past and living in it.’<sup>924</sup>

Following Blair’s election as leader, further changes in expressive/instrumental orientation were evident. However, and rather importantly for a chapter that has looked at material from an internal election, Blair’s rhetoric did not suddenly ditch the patterns I have highlighted above. A potential challenge to an analysis which looks at material so heavily influenced by an election – and the clear interest for the candidate of appealing to their voters – is whether or not, once removed from that context, there are fewer signs as to the *effect* of that audience. Yet such a distinction would be too crude. The absence of a leadership election did not transform Blair’s rhetorical strategy. And, it must also be remembered, Blair was the run-away favourite in the contest, providing him with significant scope for his own strategic judgements about how he should present his case.

There were changes during Blair’s opposition period, many of which can be seen in the collection of speech excerpts and articles published by Blair in 1996 under the title *New Britain*. In Blair’s lecture marking the election of the 1945 Attlee government, added to the existing analysis he had used the year before was more instrumental language. Labour’s record in office was criticised for not succeeding in ‘establishing itself as a natural party of government’.<sup>925</sup> Added to the party’s history – and, he argued, vital to comprehending its origins – was its founding ‘as a majority party in Britain’ with time having come ‘to fulfil that destiny in government’.<sup>926</sup> Following his success in securing party and union support for the revising of Clause IV, Blair’s rhetoric again shifted: ‘I did not come into the Labour Party to join a pressure group. I didn’t become leader of this party to lead a protest movement. Power without principles is barren. But principle without power is futile. This is a party of government, and I will lead it as a party of government.’<sup>927</sup>

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<sup>924</sup> T. Blair, ‘Change and Renewal’, leadership election statement, June 1994.

<sup>925</sup> Blair, *New Britain*, p.13.

<sup>926</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>927</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

Yet, in the same speech, Blair also provided a level of reassurance explicitly connected to Clause IV – with words that would, later in his career, be hard to imagine him uttering: ‘Let me tell you this: I will renationalise the National Health Service, to make it once more a service run for the whole nation.’<sup>928</sup> In the run-up to the Clause IV conference, Brown also made an intervention, seeking to provide reassurance about New Labour’s approach to the party’s traditions, and to its commitment to socialism. In the ‘anthology of socialism’, *Values, Visions and Voices*, Brown and the Labour MP Tony Wright wrote that ‘at a time when those of us in the Labour Party are setting out our basic values and beliefs, it seemed an appropriate moment to bring together a collection of material from our socialist tradition in Britain... identifying its enduring socialist themes through the voices of some of those who have best articulated them’.<sup>929</sup> Of the ‘voices’ picked several times in the collection, one does not find contemporary political figures, but instead the names of William Morris, Raymond Williams, George Orwell, R. H. Tawney and G. D. H. Cole.

As I noted in the previous chapter, some policy areas were chosen by the New Labour leadership as reassurance issues for the party – symbols, if you will, for traditional values in a modern setting, not the junking of Labour’s principles. Health was one such area. Blair’s leadership campaign secured three sentences in his memoir. Blair recollected that it ‘passed off without incident’ and that his preoccupation throughout was to ‘minimise stray comments... or concessions to the Left’.<sup>930</sup> An observation about Brown reveals a little more about Blair’s reading of the period. Brown was, Blair wrote, ‘brilliant, had far more knowledge of the party than me, with an acute and, even then, well-honed tactical brain; but it operated essentially within familiar and conventional parameters. Within the box he was tremendous, but he didn’t venture outside of it’.<sup>931</sup> In contrast, Blair self-appraised: ‘By 1994, I was straying well outside the box in policy and party reform, and I began to realise, with dismay

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<sup>928</sup> Blair, *New Britain*, p.53.

<sup>929</sup> G. Brown and T. Wright, ‘Preface’, in G. Brown and T. Wright, *Values, Visions and Voices: An Anthology of Socialism*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>930</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.74.

<sup>931</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

but then soberly, that something was missing. Something he [Brown] lacked. Something I started to know inside I had.’<sup>932</sup>

The previous chapter revealed the extent of Blair’s and the New Labour team’s hegemony over policy-making and key political and strategic decisions. Through Blair’s long period as Labour leader and as Prime Minister, he ‘politically reoriented’<sup>933</sup> his party, he drove – for a time – intellectual activity to reframe and revise his party’s objects, he pushed through controversial policies and decisions in the face of intense Left and Centre opposition, and bequeathed to a generation of Labour politicians the fiercely instrumental, ultimate goal of winning elections.<sup>934</sup> To co-opt Blair’s language, much of this was ‘outside the box’. Yet, suggesting this was the case from 1994 onwards does not match the evidence from the period, nor the assessments of those Blair relied upon to deliver his political strategy. Blair, like Brown, is keen to defend his policy record on the grounds of progressive achievement, but oddly abandons a political strategy as Leader of the Opposition which was more nuanced, and expressive, than he appears willing to accept.

## **Conclusion**

Blair held an individual interpretation of Labour’s ethos which was strongly oriented towards an instrumental understanding of the party’s purpose. Yet, in recognising the more expressive nature of the party he led, his political strategy was more nuanced than his individual interpretation suggested would be the case. He compromised with Labour’s competing traditions, seeing such compromises as important to legitimising (internally) the changes he wanted to make, all the while minimising any risk to the mandate he sought from the public. It was a balance, but one Blair was more attentive to than is often recognised. Is this a surprising move from Blair? Partly no. As Rentoul noted, ‘Blair’s leadership election manifesto, which did not advertise any changes to the Labour Party, turned out to be a misleading prospectus’.<sup>935</sup> Blair the leadership candidate was, as any political observer would probably expect, more

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<sup>932</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.60.

<sup>933</sup> Heffernan, ‘Tony Blair as Labour Party Leader’, p.163.

<sup>934</sup> Ibid.

<sup>935</sup> Rentoul, *Blair*, p.264.

circumspect than Blair the leader, and then Blair the Prime Minister. Following his election as leader, Blair wanted to push the boundaries of what was possible in seeking to ‘aim for the centre’<sup>936</sup> electorally. Yet as this chapter has shown – through revealing the people and ideas behind Blair’s strategy, and his continued balancing of expressive/instrumental language following his election as leader – it wasn’t the case that Blair the candidate ran left, and Blair the leader ran right.

Blair the leader may have been more honest, but his political strategy still showed an awareness of the party’s ethos. Was it, then, the move into government which changed Blair’s strategy? Blair, undeniably, caught the government bug. While he was not ‘captured’, as older suspicions on the Left would have it about past Labour politicians (indeed, Blair’s relationship with the civil service, at least initially, was quite antagonistic), he was convinced of the priority for politicians to grapple with the machinery of government, and to make it work – creating a bureaucratic industry in the process: ‘deliverology’.<sup>937</sup> This priority meant that, while party management remained a constant and time-consuming demand,<sup>938</sup> the continued connection between Labour’s identity, and Blair’s actions, gradually severed. On one level, this was conscious (Blair’s prioritisation of executive management), on another, it was a consequence of the passage of time, and political events which had a direct impact on Blair’s popularity and effectiveness as a party leader – the Iraq War being an obvious example. Blair’s later years were focused on the machinations at the top of New Labour – primarily the disagreements with Gordon Brown – and the consequences for what he saw as his policy legacy. Expressive politics to enable political change was little in evidence.

This need not imply, however, that such a divergence was inevitable, or that Blair had always planned to cease to speak and act in a manner consistent with Labour’s expressive tendency. What became the ‘Third Way’ narrative can be criticised, as Stuart Hall did, for its ‘rousing but platitudinous vagueness’<sup>939</sup> and its ‘shifting indecisions and ambiguous formulations’<sup>940</sup>. Yet, for a time, the ‘Third Way’ came to

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<sup>936</sup> Blair, ‘Foreword’, in Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.xx.

<sup>937</sup> M. Barber, *Instruction to Deliver*, (London: Politico’s, 2007), p.70.

<sup>938</sup> Minkin, *Blair Supremacy*, p.2.

<sup>939</sup> Hall, *Selected Political Writings*, p.287.

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid.*, p.288.

‘symbolise the ideology of a revived European social democratic politics’.<sup>941</sup> That Blair and New Labour were, ultimately, ‘unable to define in any precise or elaborate way what its adopted doctrine’<sup>942</sup> amounted to was a failure. Yet, from Blair’s ethical socialism, to what became the ‘Third Way’, one can detect a willingness to speak about socialist tradition and to connect his government’s mission to the identity of Left politics. Not continuing to do so left a purely instrumental approach to politics to fill the void.

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<sup>941</sup> S. Bastow and J. Martin, *Third Way Discourse*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p.1.

<sup>942</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

## **Conclusion**

‘It could be claimed that the Utopians, at present a scattered minority, are the true upholders of Socialist tradition.’

George Orwell, *Essays*

‘In following the course of policy changes it was necessary to accompany the instrumental reforms and the range of contact activities... with perpetual reminders of the purpose of change.’

Neil Kinnock, *Reforming the Labour Party*

‘I know I look a lot older. That’s what being Leader of the Labour Party does to you. Actually, looking round some of you look a lot older. That’s what having me as Leader of the Labour Party does to you.’

Tony Blair, *Speech to the 2006 Labour Party Conference*

‘So what are our first big campaigns?’

Jeremy Corbyn, *Speech to the 2015 Labour Party Conference*

### **Imaginative sympathy**

Writing on Hugh Gaitskell’s leadership, Michael Foot commented that ‘the charge was that he lacked the imaginative sympathy to understand the Labour movement which he aspired to lead, and that he was constantly, almost congenitally, seeking to guide it into alien channels’.<sup>943</sup> Such an understanding, from Foot, was drenched in the traditions of the Labour Left, the Labour Party more generally, and of the experience of having led them. Most thought-provoking from Foot, though, is the typically adroit turn of phrase ‘imaginative sympathy’. As Foot argued, the charge against Gaitskell was, certainly in his opening gambit after Labour’s 1959 election defeat, that he was too adversarial, and showed an insufficient grasp of both the importance and relative strength of different traditions within Labour’s ethos which he did not believe in. That is not to say, however, that Gaitskell was ‘not Labour’. He held to different Labour traditions, positing the importance of ideological clarity, for example, and the need to be flexible on policy, ditching ‘sacred cows’. But it is to say that in taking on, directly and robustly, competing traditions within Labour’s ethos – including those that appeared to be dominant – he walked into division and strife.

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<sup>943</sup> M. Foot, *Loyalists and Loners*, (London: Collins, 1987), p.59.

While seeking to make light of a similar reputation in his valedictory address to Labour's annual conference, Tony Blair suggested he too had given his party a hard time. On policy, and on foreign policy decisions, most notably the nightmare of the Iraq War, he undoubtedly had. Yet in terms of engagement with what is it to be Labour, the traditions and practices of the institution, and its future as a political force, Blair had disengaged. As he noted in his memoir, after Labour had returned to opposition in 2010, 'Labour should also focus attention on renewing the party... I wish I had had the time to devote to this when Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister never does'.<sup>944</sup> He too, after some years in government, lacked 'imaginative sympathy', but in a different way to Gaitskell, choosing to opt out of debates involving the party's ethos rather than engaging with its competing traditions. This was not, as this study has argued, the way Blair began as leader.

What were the consequences? As Randall has insightfully argued in relation to New Labour's relationship with the party's past:

'In disarticulating itself from the party's past this sense of historical continuity and the solidarity and teleology it generated were placed in jeopardy. The result was that the significant social democratic achievements of the governments since 1997... were discounted both inside and outside the party. In the absence of this sense of historical continuity the identity of New Labour could easily appear as managerialist at best, inauthentic and opportunist at worst... That Gordon Brown struggled so profoundly to find a distinctive direction in the initial months of his premiership must in part be accounted for by the very intangibility of his predecessor's legacy to which he was expected to respond.'<sup>945</sup>

I think this conclusion is applicable, too, to New Labour's disengagement with the competing traditions within Labour's ethos. A tight managerial squeeze on the party machinery was, as Minkin has shown, a lasting feature of New Labour. Yet the, at

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<sup>944</sup> Blair, *A Journey*, p.683.

<sup>945</sup> Randall, 'Time and British Politics: Memory, the present and teleology in the politics of New Labour', p.210.

times, more gradual process of modernisation, sensitised to Labour's traditions, was not lasting. It was, rather complacently, considered to be an opposition pastime.

This did not change with the departure of Blair. Gordon Brown, having injected *Values, Visions and Voices* into the 1995 Clause IV debates, was undoubtedly buffeted by events as Prime Minister. Yet he was also caught in the strategic bind of seeking to ditch what he thought were the unpopular bits of New Labour – Blair's policy agenda, and the poisonous legacy of the Iraq War – while retaining New Labour's electoral strategy. He struggled to develop an alternative to New Labour, while maintaining what could be described as its instrumental objective of holding on to the reins of government, come what may. That, fairly or unfairly (and I would judge it to be a bit of both), is the interpretation of Labour's ethos often attached to the generation of Labour politicians that followed Blair and Brown into government: coldly rational, electoralist, lacking a defining mission, and shy of the word socialism.

In the Introduction, I discussed the significance of this legacy and the contribution of this thesis. Critics of Blair and New Labour, often building on New Labour memoirs and earlier contemporary accounts which sought to portray the novelty of New Labour, have articulated a narrative of upheaval and discontinuation. How New Labour ended, with the accumulation of encumbrances from office (some inevitable, some the result of misjudgement and error) and a distant, uncommunicative relationship with the wider party, was not how New Labour began. That this point has been lost has had repercussions for Labour's political trajectory ever since New Labour began to fall apart. The popularity of Corbyn's leadership among party members in both the 2015 and 2016 leadership contests, which I discuss in greater detail towards the end of this conclusion, is a reaction to how New Labour came to be seen. This was not, however, a direct consequence of Labour's modernisation up to 1997. Instead, this thesis has shown how Labour's modernisers often worked within the competing traditions of Labour's ethos – traditions that remain today.

### **The effect of ethos – revisiting this study's research questions**

This study has argued that there are different and distinct interpretations of Labour's ethos, based on competing traditions that have long been contested, quite legitimately,



through Labour's history. In analysing four key fault lines that result from these competing, and conflicting traditions, I have sought to show how these distinct interpretations are factored into an actor's strategic calculations, affecting political actors themselves, as well as their strategic contexts. Overall, this study suggests that the process and substance of modernisation, undertaken from 1983-1997, was affected by Labour's ethos. The dual understanding of the party's ethos that this study puts forward – that of the individual interpretation and the dominant interpretation – helps us understand the role ethos can play in both the motives and outcomes of political change.

An actor's individual interpretation interacts with, and is relational to, the dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos. That isn't to say that, if they clash, an actor must decide to either 'take the dominant ethos on' or accept that it is a constraint. Its effect can be subtler. Instead, it is relevant to an actor's chosen strategies, affecting their pace, scale and presentation. At times, traditions within Labour's ethos can be harnessed, as part of a political strategy, to help an actor with their chosen plan. At others, it means the party's traditions must be engaged with, forming a part of an actor's endeavours. When the party's dominant ethos does appear to be more of an unavoidable obstacle, an actor's choices can come down to conflict or compromise, though the dynamic nature of an actor's strategic context, and the interactions between the various factors within it, means the management of Labour's competing traditions must be subject to reassessment and new judgements.

Turning specifically to Kinnock and to Blair, both leaders were frustrated by what they perceived to be the party's dominant ethos, but Blair was more willing to mount a sustained challenge to what he perceived to be its weaknesses. While Kinnock generated a reputation for 'taking on the Left', he did so very much from a basis he believed to be more 'traditionally Labour'. To Kinnock, challenging the 'hard' or 'extreme' Left was not challenging Labour's ethos, it was restoring it. In a revealing preface to a popular history of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, Kinnock wrote in 1985 that the 'six Dorset labourers now honoured by democrats everywhere did not have their eye on posterity. They were profoundly moderate and pitifully honest. They did not seek martyrdom or self-glorification... It is the simplicity of their case and the propriety

and patience with which they put it as much as the elementary justice of their demands which has given strength and resonance to their message down the years'.<sup>946</sup>

In the midst of what Kinnock believed to be crazy leadership from Arthur Scargill and the National Union of Mineworkers during the miners' strike, what he saw as the self-indulgence of the Trotskyite Militant Tendency and, notably, the Labour local authority in Liverpool, and his preference for patience and gradualism, Kinnock's language here is not only relevant to his view of Tolpuddle and the virtues of the British working class, but encapsulates his interpretation of Labour's ethos too. On issues which he felt *did* potentially antagonise the vast majority of his comrades, he trod very cautiously. As Hattersley recalls, 'there is no doubt that Neil Kinnock came to the Labour leadership determined to make the Party electable again. Though, in the early eighties, he still had to learn that the policy of unilateral disarmament guaranteed political defeat as well as intellectual discredit. But from the start he was determined to dispose of what he called the "illegitimate left"'.<sup>947</sup>

Blair, of course, became the leader of a party in a very different condition to that which Kinnock inherited. Many of its policies had been revised through a slow, difficult process of reform. What Kinnock had considered to be the illegitimate Left was mostly eradicated from Labour's ranks. Many of the 'soft-Left' at the top of the PLP had been on the journey with Kinnock, were traumatised by defeat and ready to embrace more change to achieve it. Clare Short, later a trenchant critic of Blair, recollected that the 'job of the reformers from 1983 was to re-establish Labour's values, update them for the present era and eject from the party those who came from a different ideological position and were misusing the democracy of the Labour Party'.<sup>948</sup> While Short was on the soft Left of the party (as a frontbencher) and did not vote for Blair, she thought him an 'asset'<sup>949</sup> and argued in favour of his changes to Clause IV,<sup>950</sup> agreeing with the need for both changes in style and substance. The wider party was perceived as being in a very similar place. Yet while all of this

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<sup>946</sup> N. Kinnock, 'Preface', in J. Marlow, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs*, (London: Grafton Books, 1985), p.9.

<sup>947</sup> Hattersley, *Who Goes Home?*, pp.273-274.

<sup>948</sup> C. Short, *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq and the Misuse of Power*, (London: Free Press, 2005), p.21.

<sup>949</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>950</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

context is highly relevant to Blair's strategic context – the factors he considered when making political choices, both stimulating and inhibiting change – none of it changes the similarities and differences between Blair and Kinnock as actors, including their differing interpretations of Labour's ethos.

Blair wanted to reform Labour's Party Objects, both to send stronger signals to the electorate and to instigate more lasting ideological change for Labour. Kinnock did not want to, despite having the opportunity – if he fought for it – to do so. Both leaders perceived some policies, or policy areas, to be powerful emblems for Labour people, despite holding individual interpretations that valued pragmatism over symbols. This affected Kinnock's approaches to policy change, and led to Blair's initial reluctance to touch some policy areas – the National Health Service being the prime example – as a matter of reassurance to the party. Over time, Blair's objection to Labour's symbols became far more prominent. Both leaders also perceived a movement which valued internal democracy and a lean towards expressive politics. On the latter, both emphasised their expressive tendencies in rhetoric. Both indulged in nostalgia in their speeches, and both saw such tactics as important in ameliorating the disgruntled and encouraging waverers to support them. On internal democracy, both believed in grip and the centralisation of control – something many Labour leaders have believed in. Yet on both, this study argues that Blair held an individual interpretation of Labour's ethos that was increasingly sceptical of these parts of the Labour tradition, more so than Kinnock's approach. Over time, as his position appeared to be dominant, Blair became increasingly distant from the approaches he had adopted as Leader of the Opposition.

Revisiting this study's four research questions, in light of the four case study analyses, allows us to explore these conclusions further. RQ1 asked whether there are different interpretations of Labour's ethos held by Labour Party people, while – connected – RQ3 asked what are the different interpretations of Labour's ethos? The case studies presented here suggest there are different interpretations and, significantly building upon Drucker's original insight, this study has shown how distinct interpretations of Labour's ethos exist along four key fault lines. Chapter 3, which focused on engagement with Party Objects, explored how the actors involved in the *Aims & Values* process held different views on the significance and relative importance of

clarifying the party's ideological objectives, balancing – as they did – their views on this fault line with other considerations of party management and political necessity, such as the need for significant policy alteration.

Hattersley and Kinnock held distinct and different interpretations of this fault line. Broadly, they stood on different sides, though both ultimately compromised: Kinnock, albeit for reasons of NEC management, commissioning Hattersley to work on *Aims & Values*; and Hattersley, having argued for a strategy of 'addition with silent substitution' finally accepting one of purely 'addition'. Other actors held their distinctive interpretations as well, with Mandelson broadly agreeing with Hattersley's initial position, though being critical of his work, while others around Kinnock, including Hewitt, largely agreed with their party leader that the work was a distraction. All of the actors, though, shared a perception of the party more widely as one reluctant to alter Labour's Party Objects – while Blair, nervous at first, ultimately judged the party ready to accept such a move by 1994.

There are wider questions, that I have not been able to address in this study, including the relative importance of Party Objects both to members of a political party and the wider electorate. Yet it is important to note that, while party programmes and policies both change and do not represent – particularly when a party reaches government – the fullness of an ideology, Party Objects are longer-lasting, can be harder to change, and provide – at least on paper – a commitment to ideological consistency from opposition to office. The limitations of policy reviews created by Labour leaders to 'cut through' with the public have been well documented,<sup>951</sup> while altering Party Objects has, in contrast, provided 'a political moment for re-evaluating the key policy instruments for delivering democratic socialism'.<sup>952</sup> Indeed, such an argument has been used by Labour people to press for reform of Party Objects. Jack Straw, who published a pamphlet advocating for the revision of Clause IV in 1993, suggested the Conservative charge at the 1992 election that 'if we [Labour] could change once [on policy], we might change again, who knows in what direction, was a powerful one'.<sup>953</sup>

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<sup>951</sup> T. Bale, *Five Year Mission: The Labour Party Under Ed Miliband*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.51.

<sup>952</sup> M. Evans, 'New Labour and the rise of the new constitutionalism' in M. Beech and S. Lee (eds.), *Ten Years of New Labour*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.68-88, p.72.

<sup>953</sup> J. Straw, *Policy and Ideology*, (Blackburn: Blackburn Labour Party, 1993), p.4.

Chapters 4 and 5 explored the different interpretations of Labour's ethos in relation to the fault lines around emblematic policies and decision-making. While Kinnock was inwardly pragmatic on changing policies, other actors – including Blunkett on unilateralism – believed the policy was important to retain, owing to the connection Labour members had with it. Blair, in common with former leaders of the party, believed Labour's tradition of more participatory policymaking through the party's institutions – such as policy committees and the party conference – to be wrong, favouring a more Schumpeterian-like position of leadership control. Others, mostly on the Labour Left, contested this view, and those holding to more participatory traditions have returned to these debates post the collapse of the New Labour project. Chapter 6, specifically in relation to RQ1 and the differing interpretations held by Labour people, speaks a lot more to the 'different Blairs' and 'different New Labours' this thesis has explored. The early Blair showed a blend of expressive and instrumental politics, one more attuned to Labour's expressive tradition. This approach was largely abandoned as Blair clocked up his decade in power, something I address below.

RQ2 considered the co-existence of both individual interpretations and a dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos, while RQ4 asked whether the existence of these affected a political actor's strategies and choices. Each chapter has explored these questions. An actor's perception of what they considered to be the dominant interpretation of Labour's ethos, having greater salience, was something they factored into their strategic calculations. Chapter 3 showed how Kinnock and others, including Crick, Blunkett and Hattersley, perceived a dominant interpretation which was reluctant to embrace changes to Labour's Party Objects, principally because of the continued attachment to Clause IV and the interaction between this part of Labour's identity, and other parts that were subject to reform and revision – such as the party's policy programme. Such a perception was built on, in Kinnock's case, his reading of the party's reactions to Thatcherism, the miners' strike and his interactions with members at informal and more orchestrated events.

In Chapter 4, the analysis shows the Kinnock leadership's perception of a party unwilling to entertain the ditching of emblematic policies – in this case unilateralism – and how this changed over time, crucially due to the interaction with a dynamic,

global external context. The data presented in Chapter 4 shows how this perception of the dominant interpretation was reinforced by observable, ‘real’ events (such as conference composites and motions). The salience of unilateralism, as an issue at party conference, reached fever pitch during the early to mid-80s, gradually lessening as external events changed the context of the debate. In both Chapter 3 and 4, the analysis suggests that both an individual interpretation held by a political actor, and their perception of the dominant interpretation, affected their chosen strategies and the political outcomes. In Chapter 3, Kinnock’s de-prioritisation of reforming Party Objects was reinforced by his perception of the dominant ethos of the time. In Chapter 4, Kinnock’s individual interpretation of the emblematic policy fault line was to be pragmatic, yet his inaction – for most of the 1980s – was significantly due to his perception of a party that would not tolerate such a change.

Neil Kinnock has recognised the effect these judgements on the party’s ethos had on his political strategies. As I argued in Chapter 3, while the 1989 Policy Review has understandably been subject to a great deal of analysis, and was an important process of significant change, opportunities to engage with Labour’s Party Objects, and its aims and values, were not taken by Kinnock. He has since reflected that ‘a justifiable criticism could be that we were not sufficiently audacious and that there was no central philosophical theme to the exercise... I would have preferred much greater attention to this, and it would have been useful to have had a neat and magnetic central theme for the work. I have to say, however, as a matter of fact rather than self-defence, that until as late as 1991 there was always a significant risk that any progressive lunge that was too big or too quick could have fractured the developing consensus and retarded the whole operation of reform and change. And as far as the central theme was concerned, I and others put it repeatedly – “the purpose is to win. Make the changes necessary to maximise the possibility of fulfilling that purpose”’.<sup>954</sup>

The analysis I presented in Chapter 3 challenges some of these reflections and reinforces others. Most importantly for this study, both my analysis and Kinnock’s review of his time as leader posit the need to understand his perceptions of the party mood, and his judgements, when explaining Labour’s political trajectory. While the

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<sup>954</sup> Kinnock, ‘Reforming the Labour Party’, p.545.

*Aims and Values* process does not support Kinnock's assertion, post his resignation as leader, that he wanted 'much greater attention' on a guiding political theme for Labour, it does attest to his constantly calibrating calculation of what he could and couldn't manage without risking 'fracturing' within the Labour Party. Without an understanding of the party's competing traditions, and Kinnock's appreciation of the party's ethos, it is not possible to fully understand the limitations of Labour's modernisation up to 1992, nor why Labour's ideological objectives remained untouched.

The same can be said of the party's attachment to emblematic policies. On the timing of Labour's move away from unilateralism, Kinnock has argued that he 'would have liked a much earlier change in the defence policy, certainly from 1985, when that became feasible even in terms of the fixed views of the Labour Party. With the appointment of Gorbachev and in the wake of a speech that Reagan made... things shifted very quickly. I am not saying that we could have secured the change at the conference of 1985 but, after Reykjavik, 1986 would have been a possibility'.<sup>955</sup> This reflection again attests to the fine tuning of political judgements, yet I think Kinnock overstated the potential for a change prior to the 1987 election – and from the analysis I presented in Chapter 4, Kinnock himself was highly uncertain as to how such a change would be received. Interestingly, Clare Short, a member of the NEC during the passage of the Policy Review, has maintained that the position agreed under Kinnock was an 'intelligent'<sup>956</sup> refinement of Labour's policy, though never implemented, an outcome for which she blames Tony Blair.<sup>957</sup> As I noted in Chapter 4, the policy agreed upon by the NEC still maintained the option for bilateral disarmament if global talks failed – which is Short's evidence for the 'refinement' – though, as I concluded in that chapter, such a commitment was absent from Labour's 1992 manifesto, before Blair became leader.

More broadly, and with relevance to contemporary debates on nuclear weapons policy, after two decades the potency of unilateralism remains alive in the Labour Party. Nuclear weapons have been retained and global disarmament talks are rarely on

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<sup>955</sup> Kinnock, 'Reforming the Labour Party', p.547.

<sup>956</sup> Short, *An Honourable Deception?*, p. 31.

<sup>957</sup> *Ibid.*

the political agenda. Commentators continue to reflect on the popularity unilateralism has in Labour's 'grass roots', while pointing to a PLP opposed to any unsettling of the status quo.<sup>958</sup> Multilateralism lacks calls to action, and any contrast with Labour's opponents. In the context of the continued – and powerful – legacy of the Iraq War, the moral and ethical simplicity of unilateralism, in the absence of the hopeful external context which Kinnock capitalised on, may well become attractive to Labour people in the future. However dormant in New Labour's time, and the years immediately afterwards, unilateralism has not lost its potential to become an emblem once again.

Chapters 5 and 6 also showed individual interpretations of the party's ethos, held by those at the top of New Labour, and their perceptions of a dominant interpretation. On policy decision-making, Blair and Brown held to an individual view that posited leadership supremacy, but recognised a movement more accustomed to deliberative processes, even if these were ignored. Blair's response was, for a time, to sequester manifestoism. He moved sovereignty from conference and delegates to party member plebiscite. New Labour was also selective about what policy changes to pursue in opposition. Undoubtedly, as Shaw observed, Labour's rank and file had approached a point in the mid to late-1990s 'which facilitated the leadership's modernisation drive'.<sup>959</sup> The party was tired of losing. New Labour's internal political strategy, meanwhile, sought to avoid direct confrontation, and balanced leadership autonomy with a more nuanced, ameliorative political strategy. However, New Labour's approach saw increasing distance, over time, between what a majority of party members wanted and what Labour's leadership appeared committed to. High-profile policies – both domestic and foreign – were not only fiercely opposed, but long-remembered as things foisted upon the party rather than embraced by it.

The analysis in Chapter 5 has a bearing on this study's challenge to the 'politics of catch-up' thesis. Heffernan mentioned Bank independence only briefly in his account of Kinnock and Blair's modernisation, suggesting that it offered early evidence of

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<sup>958</sup> R. Behr, 'Trident really is a destructive weapon – just look at the Labour Party', *The Guardian*, 10th February 2016, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/feb/10/trident-renewal-labour-corbyn-unilateralism>.

<sup>959</sup> Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1945*, p.221.



‘neo-liberal macroeconomic rectitude combined with the prospect of further liberalisation and retrenchment of the state’s role in the economy’;<sup>960</sup> an analysis presumably based on a policy objective of low inflation, and a transfer of decision-making from the Treasury to the Bank. Yet, a more-rounded analysis of this policy must surely include what the Conservative Party actually thought about it? As Chapter 5 showed, independence for the Bank was fiercely opposed by the Conservatives. Indeed, with regard to the impact on interest rates of such a move, concern about the Conservatives using Labour’s policy to politicise interest rates was a major reason for the policy remaining secret. It is a stretch to assign Bank independence to a Thatcherite, neo-liberal paradigm when Thatcher opposed the policy, and the Conservative opposition following the 1997 election voted against it. Finally, Chapter 6 showed Blair’s approach during the party’s leadership contest, and as leader, to be more sensitised to the party’s expressive tradition than is frequently suggested. This involved an appreciation of ‘nostalgia’, ‘speaking the language’ – notably, I think, of socialism – and arguments positing the need for intellectual self-confidence and the ‘rediscovery’ of values as the way to win, rather than suggesting winning was in itself the sole value Labour should pursue. It would be too crude to suggest that is where New Labour ended up, but this study has certainly concluded that Blair’s balance of expressive and instrumental styles was more firmly instrumental by the time he left office. What was considered, by the New Labour leadership team, to be ‘unfinished’ modernisation under Kinnock has a more contemporary example in the Conservative Party: David Cameron’s more ‘cosmetic’ approach to party reform.

Yet, as Bale has recently recognised, ‘[Cameron] might have staked a reasonable claim to be “the heir to Blair”... but rather than re-engineering his party, as Blair seemed to have done (before, that is, the election of Jeremy Corbyn demonstrated Labour’s longing for purity rather than power lingered on regardless), the Tory leader only re-styled it’.<sup>961</sup> This study has challenged the view that New Labour changed, or re-engineered Labour’s ethos and its traditions. In both Chapters 5 and 6, I argued that New Labour, more so than has been recognised in other studies of Labour’s

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<sup>960</sup> Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism*, p.175.

<sup>961</sup> Bale, *The Conservative Party*, p.22.

modernisation, adopted an approach in opposition which was selective in its challenges to party tradition. Post the election of Jeremy Corbyn, past claims must be subject to significant reconsideration, as Bale rightly suggests. As I noted in Chapter 1, Labour's competing traditions are inscribed into Labour as an institution, passed on by generations. They can be interpreted by Labour Party people, yet the extent to which a group can overhaul them must not be overstated. As an empirical question, Labour's competing traditions are enduring.

### **Evaluating New Labour**

As I noted in the introduction to this study, there is extensive literature contesting the view that New Labour was a continuation of Thatcherism in terms of doctrine. Much work was produced during the early days of New Labour, which I discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, with a smaller number of studies published since which consider New Labour's governing record. It is surely right to recognise that the 'imprint of neoliberal ideas can clearly be discerned in privatisation, the creation of internal markets within public services, contracting out, [and] deregulation'.<sup>962</sup> New Labour took office after nearly two decades of Conservative rule and believed that some of the changes introduced during that period were necessary. 'Acceptance', however, is not even close to being the full story. New Labour 'combined Thatcherism's emphasis on competitive markets with the aim of a fairer, more inclusive society'.<sup>963</sup> In terms of outcomes, the 'Labour governments after 1997 were not as far removed from the Attlee and Wilson administrations in politics and policy as is often assumed'.<sup>964</sup> From 1997 to 2010, public expenditure on health, education and social security increased faster than under previous Labour governments.<sup>965</sup>

From 2001 onwards, New Labour contested elections on the basis of investment in public services versus Conservatives cuts. Labour's programme under Blair and Brown, Diamond and Kenny have argued, 'was often highly redistributive,

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<sup>962</sup> Hindmoor, *What's Left Now*, p.218.

<sup>963</sup> Diamond, *The Crosland Legacy*, p.216.

<sup>964</sup> *Ibid.*, p.219.

<sup>965</sup> M. Mullard and R. Swaray, 'New Labour Legacy: Comparing the Labour Governments of Blair and Brown to Labour Governments since 1945', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol.81, No.4, (November 2010), pp.511-521, p.512.

particularly in its first two terms in office'.<sup>966</sup> With regard to past Labour administrations, 'all postwar Labour governments embraced markets and competition as the driving force of a modern industrial economy'.<sup>967</sup> While such conclusions do not necessarily indicate that New Labour was a wholly social democratic project, they do question the extent to which New Labour – and Blair and Brown – were 'following' Thatcherism. As New Labour clocked up the years in office, Blair in particular became blindsided to the limitations of his public service reform agenda, particularly the involvement of the private sector. Yet overall, as Thorpe has noted, New Labour oversaw 'real improvements to the lives of many people, including many of the weakest and most vulnerable in society'.<sup>968</sup>

Where this study has sought to add to our understanding of New Labour is in its non-doctrinal outlook. In other words, in addition to the debate about how social democratic New Labour was, in terms of ethos, was it Labour? While for many longstanding Labour Party people involved in New Labour, this question may sound strange – even offensive – there is a narrative which seeks to supplement critiques of New Labour as neo liberal with one more applicable to the party's ethos. In one recent account, Blair is portrayed as 'effectively an SDP viper in the Labour breast' with New Labour seeming to be 'neither entirely new, nor entirely Labour'.<sup>969</sup> This narrative involves an intra-familial othering of New Labour. It becomes a project that was 'done' to the Labour Party. While accepting that an old Labour Right laid the foundations for New Labour, and that much of the party's post-Attlee history is inglorious, this narrative still posits something peculiarly un-Labour about New Labour. Understood in this way, New Labour unceremoniously 'gutted' the party's constitution and 'banished even a nominal commitment to socialism'.<sup>970</sup> Labour Party members surrendered and New Labour became a calculating electoral machine that attacked its own heritage.<sup>971</sup>

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<sup>966</sup> P. Diamond and M. Kenny, 'Introduction: Reviewing New Labour in Government: Progressive Dilemmas?' in P. Diamond and M. Kenny (eds.), *Reassessing New Labour: Market, State and Society under Blair and Brown*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp.S4-S15, p.S9.

<sup>967</sup> Ibid.

<sup>968</sup> A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, (London: Palgrave, 2015), p.283.

<sup>969</sup> R. Seymour, *Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics*, (London: Verso, 2016), p.140.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid., p.141.

As with many retellings of Labour's past, there are some credible elements of this critique. New Labour was an incredibly focused group of politicians, intensely self-confident and anxious to get into power. They did believe the Labour Party, as a whole, was feeling deeply sorry for itself. They believed Neil Kinnock had saved the Labour Party, but couldn't turn Labour into an election-winning force that would deprive the Conservatives of power for a generation. Yet Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and their close allies were not aliens from outside the Labour universe. Across the fault lines of Labour's ethos – matters alluded to in much Labour literature and discourse, but never properly expressed – New Labour engaged quite legitimately from the standpoint of longstanding traditions within Labour's ethos.

Yet, as I noted earlier, a strategy sensitised to Labour's traditions did not seem to last. In a recent book, White and Ypi outlined three principles for political parties which overlap with some of the fault lines I presented in this study. First, parties should maintain 'the distinctiveness of the partisan claim... defined by a principled position irreducible to sectoral interest alone'.<sup>972</sup> Second, parties should 'give voice'<sup>973</sup> to members and supporters. And finally, to foster ideological certainty over time, parties 'need ways to authoritatively articulate the commitments partisans hold in common, manage their periodic revision and bring them to bear on the party's decision-making'.<sup>974</sup> In terms of the 'health' of Labour's identity, early New Labour met the principles set out by White and Ypi. It was distinctive from a tired Conservatism. It sought a mass membership, experimenting with new forms of internal decision-making. And it articulated the party's aims and objectives, revising them, and connecting them with the project as whole. 'Politics is an expressive form of human activity', Hindmoor has argued. It includes 'who we are and what we want to be and how we want other people to view us'.<sup>975</sup> The leadership of New Labour comprehended that politics within the Labour Party is an expressive business.

Why did Blair disengage with debates regarding Labour's ethos? Why did he stop 'speaking the language'? In a 2018 newspaper interview, Tony Blair argued that 'the single most difficult thing for politicians today is realising the difference between

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<sup>972</sup> J. White and L. Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.213.

<sup>973</sup> *Ibid.*, p.214.

<sup>974</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215.

<sup>975</sup> Hindmoor, *What's Left Now*, p.221.

campaigning and governing. The skillset that makes you a great campaigner is not necessarily one that makes you a great executive. In governments it's executive capability that matters'.<sup>976</sup> This is an understandable reflection from someone who arrived in office on the back of a stunning electoral victory, but who had no experience of having been in office. Yet as a maxim, Blair's statement is incomplete. Aligning one's campaigning principles and executive actions, with each complimenting the other, is essential to a political actor filling the two roles Blair had to fill from 1997 to 2007: Prime Minister and Leader of the Labour Party. Towards the end of Blair's period in both roles, the executive function dominated Blair's mind. To some extent, Blair has recognised this. In a foreword to a later edition of Phillip Gould's *The Unfinished Revolution*, he noted:

'One area where I completely agree with Phillip, and which is a reproach to my leadership, is that in government I did not pay sufficient attention to continuing to build the party. There are a multitude of reasons for this – not least the enormous pressure of governing – but it was a fault.'<sup>977</sup>

In his valedictory address to the 2006 Labour Party Conference – his final conference as leader – Blair gave what was expected: an impassioned defence of New Labour's record in office. Alongside this, though, was a strongly instrumental argument which sought to frame Labour as the natural party of government – one that would have to continue taking the 'tough decisions'. He argued:

'The danger for us today is not reversion to the politics of the 1980s. It is retreat to the sidelines. To the comfort zone. It is unconsciously to lose the psychology of a governing party. As I said in 1994, courage is our friend. Caution, our enemy.

'A governing party has confidence, self-belief. It sees the tough decision and thinks it should be taking it. Reaches for responsibility first. Serves by leading.

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<sup>976</sup> C. Edwardes, 'The third age of Tony Blair: the former PM on enemies, Brexit and becoming a grandfather', *Evening Standard*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2018, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/tony-blair-hq-fitzrovia-brexit-becoming-a-grandfather-a3746236.html>.

<sup>977</sup> Blair, 'Foreword', in Gould, *Unfinished Revolution*, p.x.

The most common phrase uttered to me – and not at rallies or public events but in meetings of chance – quietly, is not “I hate you” or “I like you,” but “I would not have your job for all the world”.

‘The British people will, sometimes, forgive a wrong decision. They won’t forgive not deciding. They know the choices are hard. They know there isn’t some fantasy government where nothing difficult ever happens. They’ve got the Lib Dems for that.

‘Government isn’t about protests or placards, shouting the odds or stealing the scene. It’s about the hard graft of achievement. There are no third-term popular governments. Don’t ignore the polls but don’t be paralysed by them either. 10 years on, our advantage is time, our disadvantage time. Time gives us experience. Our capacity to lead is greater. Time gives the people fatigue; their willingness to be led is less. But they will lose faith in us only if first we lose faith in ourselves.’<sup>978</sup>

For Jonathan Powell, the purpose of this final speech – and much of Blair’s later period in office – was to protect his policy agenda against what he suspected was Gordon Brown’s intention to row back on some of Blair’s plans. Here the issue is not time and governing, but political priorities and strategy. Powell argued that Blair ‘thought we’d already won [inside the party] political positioning... nobody was going to go back to Corbynism’.<sup>979</sup> Labour, it should be stated, had never been to Corbynism. But some of the seeds for Corbyn’s internal revolution were certainly present all along, and flourished in part because of New Labour’s disengagement with Labour’s ethos.

### **A new kind of politics?**

‘A new kind of politics’ was Jeremy Corbyn’s campaign slogan during the Labour Party’s 2015 leadership election. If one considered the Blair and Brown Labour

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<sup>978</sup> Blair, Speech to 2006 Labour Party Annual Conference.

<sup>979</sup> Powell, interview.

government era to be the ‘old’, Corbyn was certainly reacting with difference, offering a ‘new’ approach. Similarly, for somebody wanting to lead the opposition and be Prime Minister, Corbyn’s style was out of the ordinary, and felt ‘new’. Yet Corbyn’s understanding in 2015 of what it was to be Labour was far from new. His ‘kind of politics’ was based on well-established narratives that had long been part of the Labour Party’s ethos, indeed to many Labour supporters this was part of his appeal. Where opposing candidates appeared instrumental, or ‘electoralist’, Corbyn was expressive. When his opponents ran for particular policies in response to the Conservative government, Corbyn focused heavily on democratising the Labour Party. And while other candidates had in their sights, at times, a perceived Labour trait of playing to its electoral base, Corbyn was not shy in invoking some of Labour’s longstanding socialist goals. This was an effective strategy. Corbyn’s chances of success had been enhanced by New Labour’s disengagement with the party’s ethos, and the deep suspicion that had built up around the politics and leadership of the politicians who had followed Blair and Brown.

During the contest, the Fabian Society published a collection of short essays from the candidates standing for the leadership. The contributions from Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall each contained clutches of policies, statistics about the state of Britain, and attacks on the Conservative Party around some of the themes of the moment: Conservative budget cuts, concerns about the National Health Service and devolution. Corbyn began his contribution by noting the challenges Labour faced to win the next election, but then focused almost entirely on the way the Labour Party could be organised and run to ‘stop being a machine and start being a movement again’.<sup>980</sup> The first commitment in his essay was to reviewing membership fees and to ‘democratise our party’.<sup>981</sup> His critique of the ‘machine’ was as follows:

‘The politics of the machine dominate too much. It looks at the electorate through party labels, asking how can we win back Tory voters? How can we

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<sup>980</sup> J. Corbyn, ‘3’, in A. Burnham, Y. Cooper, J. Corbyn and L. Kendall, *Leading Labour*, (London: The Fabian Society, 2015), p.14.

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid.*

appeal to SNP voters? How can we outflank UKIP? Machine politics sees elections as a game to win.’<sup>982</sup>

Corbyn addressed Labour’s internal democracy, something no other candidate explicitly did. He argued that ‘in the past when Labour party conference voted for something the leadership didn’t like, senior MPs wheeled out to tell the press that it could be ignored. That alienates our support and undermines our principles as a democratic socialist party. That top-down behaviour has to end – we make the best policy through inclusive democratic discussion’.<sup>983</sup> Corbyn’s only clear policy commitment was for Labour to become an anti-austerity movement.<sup>984</sup> Corbyn’s landslide win in the 2015 leadership election delivered him an astonishing mandate from Labour’s members, but his leadership was swiftly challenged by the Parliamentary Labour Party, leading to another summer leadership election in 2016, with a similarly thumping mandate for Corbyn from members, registered supporters and trade union affiliates. He argued then that:

‘There’s no doubt my election as Labour leader a year ago, and re-election this month, grew out of a thirst for a new kind of politics, and a conviction that the old way of running the economy and the country isn’t delivering for more and more people.’<sup>985</sup>

None of this is to say that Corbyn has not, since he spectacularly entered the scene at the top of the Labour Party, been distinctive when it comes to policy, nor that there are not substantial differences between ‘Corbynites’ and their opponents when it comes to doctrine. During the 2015 election campaign he ventured into policy areas that other candidates didn’t, with references to ideas like ‘People’s QE’, where the Bank of England’s quantitative easing policy would fund state investment. Since then, in the debates around what ‘Corbynism’ is, some have argued that Labour under Corbyn is ‘assembling the tools and strategies to enable a Labour government to pursue a bold transformation of the British economy organised around ownership,

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<sup>982</sup> Corbyn, ‘3’, p.15.

<sup>983</sup> Ibid.

<sup>984</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>985</sup> J. Corbyn, Speech to the 2016 Labour Party Annual Conference, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016.



control, democracy and participation'.<sup>986</sup> And policy differences from Corbyn's past have proven highly significant in differentiating him from his competitors, whether it be the Iraq War or the more recent decision by Labour's then Deputy Leader, Harriet Harman, to not oppose Conservative welfare policies. Corbyn was a well-known member of the Labour Left's Campaign Group, membership of which 'was a very public signal that an MP was opposed to much of the Government's programme and was not interested in promotion'.<sup>987</sup> In short, Corbyn has been seen as a divergence from the policies of New Labour, both on the basis of Corbyn's record as a rebel and in the policies he has floated since. Yet Corbyn's success, his 'new kind of politics' mantra, and the competing narratives in the 2016 leadership election about a Labour person's capacity to win elections and to govern, have a commonality: they are about the party's ethos, as well as its doctrine.

When Owen Smith challenged Corbyn for the leadership of the Labour Party in 2016, his approach to policy was characterised as 'man-for-man policy marking on the left wing'.<sup>988</sup> Writers and activists sympathetic to Corbyn's leadership have since pointed out that such a stance left the debate empty of substantive difference – though they omit to mention the significant gap between Smith's opposition to Britain's exit from the European Union and Corbyn's position, at that time, of upholding the 2016 referendum result – resulting in Smith making 'increasingly ugly attacks on the leader and his supporters'.<sup>989</sup> Smith's pitch boiled down to a debate about political professionalism: whether or not, with Corbyn's dire personal approval ratings, it would be better to pick a new leader with similar policies but a new face. Below the surface, however, were far deeper differences. Smith, and much of the parliamentary party, adhered to different Labour traditions to Corbyn. The veteran Islington MP continued to hold firm to policies from Labour's past that were considered, by most other MPs, to be anachronistic – unilateral nuclear disarmament being one example. His support for enhanced internal democracy was seen by the parliamentary party as

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<sup>986</sup> J. Guinan and M. O'Neill, 'The institutional turn: Labour's new political economy', *Renewal*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (Summer 2018), pp.5-16, p.5.

<sup>987</sup> Cowley, *Revolts and Rebellions*, p.116.

<sup>988</sup> A. Grice, 'Jeremy Corbyn is all talk and no substance on policy, but that won't deter his supporters', *The Independent*, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> August 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/jeremy-corbyn-owen-smith-labour-leadership-policies-all-talk-no-substance-a7199576.html>.

<sup>989</sup> A. Nunns, *The Candidate*, (London: OR Books, 2018) p.283.

the long-held Labour Left position of surrendering the PLP's autonomy to party conference, and thus to activists closer to Corbyn's politics. The concern of non-Corbyn MPs was heightened, in this regard, by the pro-Corbyn leadership of some of major trade unions affiliated to Labour, and with their significant influence in the party structures.

'Professionalism' and 'being a competent opposition' also meant much more. Corbyn's approach was seen as too activist-friendly, and far too expressive in its understanding of Labour's politics. Corbyn, to many Labour MPs, embodied the party's outsider tradition: he took on causes, many foreign policy-related causes, which were important to Labour Party activists but low on salience with the public; he vented at the "establishment" and was supported by those who sought to challenge, albeit rhetorically, Britain's institutions, from the Royal Family to the 'mainstream media'; and he sought to use parliament as an outlet for the campaigns he was personally invested in, rather than – as many MPs were more accustomed to – seeing it as a forum for debating contemporary events, 'catching out' the government and seeking the fleeting advantage an opposition so often craves. As we have seen, in terms of the party's traditions, some of the interpretations Corbyn holds – and increasingly, for his supporters, seems to embody – are not illegitimate, nor are they new, they are closely connected to the enduring, competing traditions within Labour's ethos. When these competing traditions clash, with increasingly stark positions taken on both sides, some Labour Party people run low on 'imaginative sympathy' and leave – as happened in the 1980s. As observers and commentators of the Labour Party consider the current battle for the party's 'soul', the competing interpretations of the party's ethos seem likely to lead to further discord.

### **Ethos and political parties**

The Conservative Party, following its defeat in 1997, had politicians who – without significant institutional constraints, and in the wake of huge electoral defeats – seemed 'unwilling and unable to act in a way that might have given them more hope of winning or at least losing less badly'.<sup>990</sup> While the fault lines explored in this

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<sup>990</sup> Bale, *The Conservative Party*, p.1.

research are particular to the Labour Party, it is quite possible that competing traditions give rise to similar, or indeed completely different fault lines within the ethos of other political parties. Drucker's original insight, as I have noted before, was that Labour had both a doctrine and an ethos. Its ethos, Drucker argued, was rooted in the communities from which Labour originated, yet as a concept, ethos is not by definition restricted in its applicability. Consider different interpretations of traditions related to decision-making. The Liberal Democrats have a strong, dominant tradition of membership involvement and a sovereign conference, though the extent to which this is respected has seen division and turmoil, particularly following the 2010 Coalition Agreement with the Conservatives. On the same issue, the Conservative Party has a different dominant tradition, one which typically involves little or no involvement in policy-making and where the party's annual conference serves as a platform for its politicians. Yet those same conferences have long been scenes of doctrinal dispute and witnessed the airing of competing political strategies, suggesting the autonomy of Conservative leaders is not always fully respected.

Indeed, some of the tensions I analysed in this thesis, and that can be observed in the coverage of contemporary events, raise questions for democratic politics in Britain. In particular, the wishes of party memberships – an incredibly small fraction of the voting public – translating into policy, or pressuring actors towards particular political strategies and decisions, is a prescient issue today. Research from the Economic and Social Research Council-funded Party Members Project has shown that, on Britain's exit from the European Union, Conservative Party members favour one extreme,<sup>991</sup> and Labour Party members another.<sup>992</sup> In an intractable political struggle in Westminster, triggered by a referendum which divided the country and the electorate, followed by an international negotiation where both sides have stressed the need for compromise, is it possible or practical to commit to membership-led policy-making in such a context-specific, dynamic environment? As we learn more about the membership of political parties, there are opportunities to delve deeply into the values

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<sup>991</sup> R. Syal, 'Brexit: most Tory members would choose no deal over May's plan', *The Guardian*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 2019, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jan/04/most-tory-members-would-choose-no-deal-over-may-brex-it-plan>.

<sup>992</sup> P. Walker, 'Most Labour members believe Corbyn should back second Brexit vote', *The Guardian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2019, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jan/02/most-labour-members-believe-corbyn-should-back-second-brex-it-vote>

party members hold, the traditions and norms they adhere to – at both the level of ‘high’ politics and ‘low’ – and the role both individual interpretations of party ethos and dominant interpretations play in the strategic contexts of political actors.

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