

The Fightback of the Traditional Right in the Labour Party 1979 to 1987

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The Fightback of the Traditional Right
in the Labour Party
1979 to 1987

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ABSTRACT

The Labour Party, having lost the General Election in 1979 after the Winter of Discontent, descended into internal turmoil, as the Left-dominated National Executive Committee (NEC) and conference sought revenge on the centre-right Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) for its alleged failures in government. In 1981, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) split from Labour, leaving the Labour Party facing possible electoral extinction. However, the trade unions – founders of the Labour Party – came to its rescue, led by a small group of dedicated general secretaries and staff, who set out to regain the NEC for the moderates, and to return the Labour Party to what they termed “sanity” and electability, by expelling Militant, safeguarding the position of Deputy Leader Denis Healey MP when challenged by Tony Benn MP, and delivering for Neil Kinnock MP (the Leader they helped install after the 1983 election) an NEC committed to supporting him in changing the party.

The thesis documents the organisation of the Right within the PLP before 1981 (the Manifesto Group and Labour First). It then covers the internal party groupings which organised the Fightback of the party’s traditional right (the St Ermins Group of trade union leaders, Labour Solidarity Campaign and Forward Labour). It details their role in the leadership and deputy leadership elections, in changing the NEC’s political composition and its workings, in the expulsion of Militant, in campaigning for One Member One Vote, and in helping keep Moderate members within the party.

Contrary to some academic writings, this thesis shows how this was initially undertaken without the support of the Leader, and it details the amount of organisational work needed to achieve change and assist in Labour’s re-emergence as an electable party. The research draws on extensive private papers and archives, together with over 70 interviews with key players.

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Without Professor Lewis Minkin having said “excellent idea” when I first tentatively suggested I might do a PhD, the rest of this story would never have happened. Not only did he encourage me, but every step of the way has read, advised and helped the research take shape. Thanks to a brilliant suggestion from Dr Carol Homden, I then asked Prof Peter Hennessy to supervise it, and without hesitation he generously agreed, taking on the difficult task of turning a sociologist into a contemporary historian. His diligence and humour, not to say his gossip and information, have helped the thesis enormously.

As will be obvious, the research owes an enormous debt to the time of interviewees and the loan of archives and personal papers. The Rt Hon John F. Spellar MP and Roger Godsiff MP have produced both in abundance, without which the story could never have been told.

Lord (Alan) Haworth, Secretary of the PLP, Sir David Bean, Nick Butler, Bob and Helen Eadie, Mrs John Grant, John Gyford, Mike Parker, Greg Rosen, Charles Turnock, David Webster and Sir Ian Wrigglesworth have all been particularly generous with their papers as well as advice and information. Lord (Roy) Hattersley kindly allowed me full access to his papers at the University of Hull whilst Stephen Bird, the archivist of the Labour History Archive, supplied knowledge and advice in addition to access to the Manifesto Group and Labour Party’s papers. Lord (Giles) Radice – my first ever boss – gave me access to his (unpublished) diary whilst Baroness (Llin) Golding and Paul Farrelly MP let me see the manuscript of John Golding’s wonderful book before it was in print, allowing me to take advantage of its contents at an early stage of my research. The real debt, of course, is to those whose names appear in the thesis, who worked desperately to save the party they loved, and now have given of their time to allow me to re-tell the tale.

However, despite the efforts and generosity of all the above, nothing would have come of this without the patience, tolerance, computer skills, desk-building ability, grammatical eye, support and encouragement of Professor David Caplin. To him, my husband, my greatest debt is owed.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

As late as 1993, Mrs Thatcher was able to write that “on 28 March 1979, James Callaghan’s Labour Government, the last Labour Government *and perhaps the last ever*, fell from office” (emphasis added)¹. Whilst such a premature obituary from this source could have been penned more in hope than anticipation, it nevertheless might have looked prescient in 1980 or 1981. At that time the Labour Party, reeling from its 1979 defeat, faced disillusion from unions and party activists, infiltration from the Trotskyist Militant Tendency, a dysfunctional party apparatus, policy divides (especially over Europe) and a campaign to rewrite the party’s constitution to transfer power from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) to the conference and constituencies. Meanwhile the left-controlled National Executive Committee (NEC) appeared at war with the record of the last Labour Government, vindictive towards MPs, tolerant over Militant and unable to turn the party’s infantry or big guns on their opponents in the House of Commons.

In 1978, the lesson one reviewer drew from a study² of the Left’s take-over of the party was that “that those opposed to the left must organise and be as assiduous as the left”³. This thesis relates how this advice was heeded and how Labour’s traditional Right, weakened and tested by defections to the new Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981, nevertheless set about their objective of reclaiming the Labour Party to make it electable. It is an untold story: “The campaign .. to restore a moderate NEC and put the Labour Party back on the rails deserves a full study to itself. It came before red roses and mattered more”⁴.

In embarking on this campaign in the aftermath of the 25 January 1981 Limehouse Declaration (which led to the SDP), Labour’s “traditional Right” exhibited very different characteristics from those of its predecessor elements. The Labour Party, founded by unions and financially dependent on them, reflected both in its structure and its mores a division of roles between the party’s constituent parts, the deference then common in society and a deeply loyalist tradition. Thus the unions would (until the late sixties) rarely criticise a Labour government in public and, in their policy-making role

¹ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, Harper Collins, 1993, p.3/4.

² Michael Hatfield, *The House the Left Built*, Victor Gollancz, 1978.

³ George Jones, "A Left House Built on Sand", *Socialist Commentary*, November 1978.

⁴ Edward Pearce, *Denis Healey: A Life in Our Times*, Little, Brown, 2002, p.557.

in conference (where they wielded some 90% of the votes), worked to persuade rather than mandate the elected representatives. Similarly, local party members, having selected (with union input) their parliamentary candidates, largely respected MPs' decisions, concentrating on campaigning and supporting them within the constituency.

The 1960s saw the break in this "settlement" which had until then left MPs fairly independent both of the unions and of the membership. Conference voted for unilateralism against its Leader's wishes, and so the Gaitskell-supported Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS), the first organised right-wing caucus, was formed to overturn this, which was achieved in short order. Hitherto, it had been the Left which organised (in the Tribune Group) against the PLP's right-wing majority. The other change in the 1960s and 1970s was the passing away of right-wing leadership in many trade unions, which was to impact on the Labour Party for over a decade.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as Europe became a divisive issue, the Right again organised around a policy issue although its proponents were also increasingly working together against the Left who, in addition to winning seats year by year on the party's governing National Executive Committee (NEC), were increasingly vocal in their criticism of Labour governments. Their demands for control over MPs, the Manifesto and the choice of Leader were aimed at weakening the hold of the right-wing parliamentary leadership over the party, and to redistribute power to the rank-and-file, with MPs individually and collectively accountable to local activists and conference delegates⁵. Chapter Two summarises the pre-1981 position.

After the SDP split, the "traditional" Right's response changed. Solidarity (bringing together MPs and party activists) never engaged in policy, whether on incomes policy, Europe or defence. And the St Ermins Group of trade unionists set itself a more limited and focused task – to regain control over the NEC, by disciplined use of their voting strength. Only this, they reasoned, could provide an NEC supportive of the parliamentary Leadership and one willing to create an electable Labour Party – by returning it, in their words, to "sanity". The St Ermins Group members largely came from strong, loyalist, even deferential, working-class backgrounds. Some had served as Labour Party agents or councillors, all were committed to the party as the route to improving the lives of those they represented. Their experience of the inner sanctums

of the party, however, and their fear of the electoral oblivion threatened by the SDP⁶, led them to put policy differences aside and to work together to produce change within the party. Others who shared many of their political standpoints (such as David Basnett of the GMWU) favoured a different, less interventionist, approach whereby policy differences would be held at bay by keeping them out of the public eye and making some common cause with the Left, so as to win an agreement to live with their differences, and to park further changes to the party's structure.

The Right described in this thesis wanted no such compromise with the Left, partly drawing on the lessons of a previous generation⁷, but mostly because polling evidence showed the electorate's rejection of the Left's policies and behaviour. There was an urgency to their task, as the SDP notched up by-election victories, and they foresaw the possibility of being eclipsed by them in the general election. They were thus driven by electoral, rather than sectarian, considerations. In Kinnock's words, speaking of the trade unionists, "the fact of the matter is, and this took me quite a time – perhaps as much as a year – to recognise, that these people were not organising for classic Right wing hegemony in the Labour Party. But they were organising in favour of the Labour Party. ..[They were] immensely irritated by the nutters, .. frustrated by the extended weakness of the Party"⁸.

The trade unionists also had doubts about the parliamentarians' reliability. It was, after all, MPs (not the Electoral College) who had chosen Michael Foot as Leader (under whom the SDP defected and who was proving an electoral liability). The unions had witnessed a lack of courage in MPs in standing up both to Benn and to their local activists⁹. The hard men of the unions thus took the lead in changing the NEC composition, whilst encouraging Solidarity to campaign against Militant and working with them to preserve Healey's Deputy Leadership position.

Meanwhile, MPs in Solidarity found themselves in an unusual position. Coming from a loyalist tradition, they were torn between that instinct and their doubts about the ability of the Leader for whom few had voted. How that affected their success is detailed in

⁵ Jim Claven, *The Centre is Mine*, Pluto Press (Australia), 2000, p.31.

⁶ The SDP and Liberal's joint opinion poll rating, for example, in November 1981 was on 43%, to Labour's 28% and the Conservatives' 25.5% (Jim Claven, *op cit*, p.38).

⁷ See p. 89.

⁸ Neil Kinnock, interview, 7 June 2004.

⁹ The Manifesto Group was unwilling to denounce Benn (Roy Hattersley, interview, 5 May 2004).

the Solidarity chapter. Here we might note some of the characteristics of the Right as it faced the post-Limehouse future, bereft of some of its leading lights.

Firstly, this traditional Right was effectively leaderless throughout the 1980s. Solidarity was headed by Roy Hattersley and Peter Shore, whilst the organisation campaigned for Healey as Deputy Leader. The St Ermins Group of trade unionists were unknown to the public or even to the great majority of party members. Given the evidence in this thesis about the success of these groups, this absence of a strong leader is surprising in the light of the academic literature on change within political parties. Frank L Wilson, for example, states that: “Despite pressures from socio-economic change, institutional reforms and altered terms of party competition, political parties do not respond with changes unless their leaders order them to do so”¹⁰. The current thesis shows that, far from being the project of the Leader, the work of the St Ermins Group took place without Foot’s knowledge. After Kinnock became Leader, he became aware and later supportive of the Group¹¹. However, under neither Leader were the changes the result of initiatives launched from the top.

Secondly, despite the importance of policies to the party, both the St Ermins Group (and its smaller cousin, *Forward Labour*) and Labour Solidarity were effectively policy-free zones. They had strong views on internal party matters (particularly Militant and OMOV¹²) but took no positions on the big policy issues – in contrast to CLV’s¹³ earlier effective pro-European stance. Whilst this enabled the Groupings to encompass a wide spectrum of opinion, it reflected the absence of an articulated philosophy – a role filled in earlier times by Evan Durbin, Tony Crosland or other Fabians.

Thirdly, in contrast to CDS, Solidarity had neither patronage nor encouragement from Foot, the party Leader. CDS was an overtly loyalist organisation, motivating those who favoured unity behind the elected Leader¹⁴. Solidarity supporters had largely supported Healey over Foot, yet grouped traditional loyalists whose instincts remained “pro-

¹⁰ Frank L. Wilson, "The Sources of Party Change: The Social Democratic Parties of Britain, France, Germany and Spain", in Kay Lawson, *The Sources of Party Change: The Social Democratic Parties of Britain, France, Germany and Spain*, Praeger, 1994, p.275.

¹¹ Roger Godsiff interview, 9 April 2002; Neil Kinnock interview.

¹² One Member One Vote.

¹³ Campaign for Labour Victory.

¹⁴ Brian L. Brivati, "The Campaign for Democratic Socialism 1960-1964", 1992 PhD Thesis, Queen Mary and Westfield, University of London.

Leader”. Initially, many senior MPs held back from organising within the party, in deference to a plea from Foot that there should be “no Groupings”¹⁵.

Fourthly, these right-wing groupings had to fight a war on two fronts (quite apart from the Conservatives): against the Left in the Labour Party and against their former colleagues now in the SDP. The SDP split weakened internal opposition to the party’s move to the Left¹⁶, and for some time there remained suspicion that Solidarity members would defect. Hattersley felt that any pro-European sentiment could be taken as the first step to defection¹⁷.

Fifthly, for virtually the whole period of the union-led “fightback”, there was probably no majority for this within activist membership of the party. Right-wing MPs mostly believed the battle could be fought solely in the PLP and failed to comprehend the penetration of the Left’s arguments within the party. It would be for a later generation, especially Kinnock and subsequently Blair, to re-establish a Moderate majority amongst activists. Nevertheless, the Moderate Groups always believed that they spoke for Labour voters and for the wider Labour membership – and took succour from the evidence of OMOV ballots.

Finally, the difficulty in terminology even for this thesis reflects an unease within a left-wing party for anyone to be labelled “Right”. For all party members, the Conservatives were the true “Right”. Within the party before 1981, the pro-Europeans, particularly around Roy Jenkins, were fairly commonly identified as Labour’s Right, and the Manifesto Group could be labelled that way. It is more difficult after the SDP split, when many of Labour’s Right departed, to continue with that term for the remaining non-Left. The key players themselves used different terms. John Golding called his group “The Loyalist Group” or “the Mods” (Moderates). Trade unionists referred to each other as “Friends” or “Mainstream” colleagues. To Kinnock, they were “not right-wingers but certainly die-hard anti-ultras”¹⁸. Furthermore, as he now acknowledges, these very categorisation of Left and Right were a part of the problem. “Big mistake that a lot of us made .. including me, even though possibly I got over it a bit earlier than one or two others, was to draw up a category of Left and Right. Which had as major

¹⁵ Patrick Cheney, interview, 21 March 2002.

¹⁶ Frank L. Wilson, *op cit*, p. 272.

¹⁷ Roger Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas: from Bevin to Blair*, Palgrave, 2001, p.145.

¹⁸ Neil Kinnock interview.

definitive considerations – not sole, but major – where you stood on the European Community, and where you stood on the Bomb. And some people were very left-wing and very pro-European. Others were on the Right and very CND. And so many in both cases as to make the line a bloody zig zag. And we all were massively mis-led by these definitions”¹⁹.

I have labelled the post-1981 anti-Left groups “Traditional Right”, which reflects a union-based, loyalist tradition, mostly in the centre on policies (though with notable anti-Common Marketeers and some unilateralists, policies seen as “Left”), deeply wedded to parliamentary democracy and loyalty to the leadership. It is not wholly satisfactory, particularly as, over the years, some on the “soft-left” joined its ranks. Even from 1981, it is hard to define Peter Shore as “Right” in any sense that he would have accepted, yet he is key to this “Traditional Right”. For convenience, therefore, the term “Moderate” is used as an abbreviation for “Traditional Right” post-1981 (and Centre-Right to encompass both the post-split Moderates and the pre-split Right). Hopefully the story, despite shortcomings in labelling, will explain the anti-far-Left cohesion of this otherwise disparate collection, whose motivation in many ways speaks for itself.

The story – despite Thatcher’s premature obituary for the Labour Party and despite, initially, a Leadership unwilling to challenge the Left in the party – is of Moderate trade unionists and parliamentarians winning control of the NEC and gradually implementing reforms which helped make the party electable. For the whole of his period as Leader, Kinnock had a majority on the NEC (sometimes wafer-thin) which was provided by continuous and intense union organising and bargaining behind the scenes. The thesis describes this manoeuvring and assesses its success and failures. Apart from John Golding’s recently published memoir²⁰, virtually none of this organisational story has been documented. Although some of the Manifesto Group papers are available, no history of it has been written, which is also the case for those Groups whose archives are not available at all. The St Ermins Group archives are now in the care of this author; Solidarity’s are in a closed archive at the University of Hull, but have been made available by the kind permission of Rt Hon Lord Hattersley, to whom I am indebted. Other personal papers are listed in the bibliography. In addition to drawing

¹⁹ Neil Kinnock interview.

heavily on archives, the thesis relies on extensive interviews with virtually all the key players from the Centre-right of the party. Because it is an untold story, it is those players who have been interviewed rather than the Left, most of whom knew little of what was going on amongst the Right, and the most useful of whom (Benn) has committed so much to paper, in his published diaries, that these have been used where needed. A few activists from the Left have been interviewed, partly to test the accuracy of the picture that emerges. However, the research draws on participants themselves. The interviews have been transcribed and, where quoted, are *verbatim*, even where the language sometimes appears telegraphese – it is how the words were spoken.

²⁰ John Golding, *Hammer of the Left*, Politico's, 2003.

Chapter 2 The Scene the Right Faced

The 1979 Labour Party Conference sapped the strength of its Leader, James Callaghan¹, who indicated to Neil Kinnock that he was at the point of resigning². Votes for mandatory reselection of MPs, calls for control of the manifesto to pass to the NEC, distrust of the parliamentary party, and moves to widen the franchise for the election of the Leader, had the Right feeling defensive, depressed and insecure. Meanwhile, on the Left, a strong band of organised supporters, receiving succour from unions and party activists, campaigned to change the constitution and the leadership itself³.

The May 1980 Special Conference, with its attacks on David Owen and fellow right-wingers⁴, heralded a likely split in the party whilst the 1980 Annual Conference in Blackpool witnessed a major assault on the record of the Labour Government – by one of its own members. Benn’s attack on his erstwhile Cabinet colleagues⁵ and the PLP, as well as his “impossibilist” programme for a government⁶, simultaneously epitomised and sharpened the fissure between the party in the Commons and the party in the country.

The response of the Right was muted. Within parliament, the Manifesto Group secured majorities in internal elections but had little dialogue with the NEC. It had no cheerleader and no shared view on Europe, defence or economic policy – the rallying cries within the wider party. The right-wing activists’ Campaign for Labour Victory (CLV) was outgunned. Unbeknown at the time, it also had within it a small group preparing to split from the party and launch a new political movement⁷. Superficially, the impending battle looked like the 1960s’. Indeed, most of the CDS surviving members, both inside and outside parliament, were active in the Manifesto Group or in

¹ His speech to Conference followed an attempt by a delegate to move “a vote of no confidence in Mr. Callaghan” (*Report of the 1979 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.225).

² Neil Kinnock in *The Battle for Labour*, BBC 4, 30 October 2002.

³ CPLD and *Briefing* literature; Jon Lansman and Jeremy Corbyn in Neil Kinnock, *The Battle for Labour*; Patrick Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, Macmillan Education, 1987; David Kogan and Maurice Kogan, *The Battle for the Labour Party*, Fontana, 1982; Martin Westlake, *Kinnock*, Little, Brown & Co, 2001.

⁴ *Report of 1980 Labour Party Special Conference of the Labour Party*, pp. 249 and 251.

⁵ *Report of the 1980 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, pp. 146-148.

⁶ *ibid.*, p 30; Giles Radice, interview, 25 July 2002.

⁷ Jim Daly, interview, 3 May 2002, and Jim Daly papers.

CLV⁸. Some therefore expected that a similarly managed, targeted effort could achieve its required ends⁹. However, the 1980s were different for Labour's Right.

Firstly, they were Leaderless. In comparison to Gaitskell's towering impact on the CDS members¹⁰, the 1979-80 Leader of the Opposition (Callaghan) offered little attraction to younger members. Denis Healey did not run a "court"¹¹ and there was no intellectual lead¹². Shirley Williams was outside the House, as was Roy Jenkins (in Brussels). Neither Owen nor Rodgers fitted the bill and Crosland was already dead. Shore's anti-Europeanism ruled him out. Hattersley failed to attract personal loyalty either within the PLP or outside¹³ and was not yet an heir-apparent.

Secondly, there was a range of policy positions within the Right. They were united more against the Left's agenda (especially on constitutional reform and PLP/ party relations) than on any one policy. Neither Europe nor defence united all the anti-hard-left, unlike earlier battles in the party¹⁴.

Thirdly, the charges of "betrayal" levelled against the 1974-1979 Governments, which were part of the *cause célèbre* of the Left, came not after a long period in Opposition with its attendant frustration at repeated election defeats (the CDS experience), but close on the heels of a period of government and when there appeared a prospect of returning to power¹⁵.

Fourthly, the Right's opponents had an agenda of democratic constitutional reform, making the *status quo* harder to defend. An age and class split made the "accountability/ radical/ change" agenda attractive to newer, younger members whilst the older, working-class members had difficulty defining their opposition to apparently reasonable demands. Early calls for OMOV initially found little favour amongst unions and it was only on the agenda long after it could be a rallying cry for the Right.

⁸ Bill Rodgers, *Fourth Among Equals*, Politico's, 2000, John Gyford, interview, 25 April 2002; Jim Cattermole, interview, 16 May 2002, Brivati, *op cit*, and Manifesto Group Archives (MGA).

⁹ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*.

¹⁰ *ibid*; Brian L. Brivati, *op cit*.

¹¹ Giles Radice, interview, 24 June 2002.

¹² Brian Lapping comment, quoted by George Cunningham, interview, 24 May 2002; Giles Radice interview.

¹³ Clive Wilkinson, interview, 17 April 2002; John Gyford interview; Jim Cattermole interview.

¹⁴ Roger Broad, *op cit*; Bill Rodgers, *op cit*.

¹⁵ Labour nearly won the Southend East by-election in March 1980 and, in her first year in office, Thatcher's standing in the polls suggested that she could be beaten.

The Right's major problem was its distance from the party's activists. It is therefore important to understand its roots. Labour's vote was concentrated in urban areas where many councils were Labour-dominated. The MPs, councillors, JPs, school governors were all party and union stalwarts, in touch with their community but unable to respond to social change. Such change came quickly to the industrial cities, with the closure of engineering, wholesaling, manufacturing, textile and printing companies. Manual work declined and professional residents moved in. The 1950-60s migration of working class families to the new towns, followed by local government reorganisation (which increased council size, making it less likely that councillors or employees lived cheek by jowl with those they served), saw a severing of party-community links¹⁶. Many blue-collar trade unionists, the bedrock of local parties, found the new breed of university-educated party members difficult to manage and felt themselves frozen out of the activists' agenda. The former were predominantly white, male and over-40, largely unmoved by Vietnam demonstrations, abortion debates, feminism or the public sector unions' disillusion with the Callaghan Government. Small local parties sufficed when the co-operatives, unions, Catholic Church, Labour Clubs or the pubs offered a constant dialogue between party activists and their locality. They were a major problem when the membership no longer reflected their community.

The major discord between activists and the PLP was over the interpretation of the record of the 1974-79 Governments. This was not the first time that a Labour government had been found wanting. Evaluation of earlier governments had documented insufficient moves towards equality¹⁷. Seminars had debated how ministers became distant from the party¹⁸. The emergence of state-funded political advisors was just one attempt to retain party/government dialogue¹⁹. However, the conflicting appraisals of 1974-79 lay at the heart of the subsequent hostilities and help explain the delay in the usual solution of the-unions-riding-to-the-aid-of-the-party.

¹⁶ Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, Edinburgh University Press, 1988; John Gyford, *The Politics of Local Socialism*, George Allen & Unwin, 1985; John Silkin, *Changing Battlefields: The Challenge to the Labour Party*, Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1987, p. 26-28, Peter Tatchell, *The Battle for Bermondsey*, Heretic Books, 1983, Jim Daly interview, Matt Tee, interview, 16 April 2002.

¹⁷ Peter Townsend (ed), *Labour and Inequality*, Fabian Society, 1972, *Labour and Equality*, 1979, Fabian Society.

¹⁸ Such as at a Fabian seminar at Plaw Hatch, November 1974 (witnessed by the author).

¹⁹ For other examples, see Andrew Blick, *People who live in the Dark*, Politico's Publishing, 2004.

In the public mind, the unions hampered the government. Yet, despite Callaghan's view during the Winter of Discontent that "this great trade union movement in this great crisis .. has nothing to say. It is completely leaderless"²⁰, the unions refused to accept any blame for the disaster²¹. Success in overturning *In Place of Strife*²², had led both Callaghan (the leading dissident) and union leaders to assume a government-TUC dialogue would carry the unions with it. But just as the 1960s generation in the constituencies were challenging assumptions of local parties, so the new shop-steward movement meant that union leaders could no longer carry their members. The Cabinet's failure to heed the general secretaries' warnings that they could not continue with the pay policy led to the 1978/79 industrial disputes.

After the 1979 election, differing conclusions were drawn. Union members, along with constituency activists, blamed the Leaders for not listening to the led. An existing mood for constitutional change and greater accountability turned into the belief that it was no longer enough just to win policy resolutions in conference. Until elected leaders were accountable, they would continue to betray the movement and fail to deliver party policy. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) was set up to work for constitutional changes to overcome these problems, through the introduction of mandatory reselection, NEC control over the manifesto, and the election of the Party Leader by an Electoral College (or conference). These demands became central to party debate. In 1979 to 1982: "the issue of democracy and power in the party became dominant almost to the point of making substantive issues secondary. .. The forms of the revolt – an attempt to seek major changes in the constitution of the Party so as to bring the Parliamentary Party under the control of the Labour Party outside the House – was unique in its force and effectiveness"²³.

The mood within the PLP turned to despair. Individually under threat because of impending reselection, and abandoned by the NEC²⁴, MPs saw local activists favour the solutions advocated by Benn. The party turned in on itself, just as the Conservative Government's policies were adversely affecting many traditional Labour voters, who

²⁰ Bernard Donoghue, *The Heat of the Kitchen*, Politico's, 2003, p.266.

²¹ Roy Grantham, interview, 2 July 2002.

²² The January 1969 White Paper which sought to regulate industrial relations, particularly unofficial strikes (Cmnd 4327, HMSO). It was defeated by union, NEC and parliamentary pressure.

²³ Lewis Minkin, *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, Edinburgh University Press, 1991, p.192.

²⁴ Joe Haines, *The Politics of Power*, Coronet Books, 1977, p.14.

later voiced their frustration that the party appeared more interested in its internal rows than in their situation²⁵. The 269-strong PLP was unable to defend the previous Government's record with confidence. The attacks hurt long-serving MPs who had trooped through the lobbies late at night to sustain a Labour Government – especially as they had seen left-wing MPs miss votes “to salvage their consciences” whilst the “loyalists” did their duty²⁶. These feelings were described in CLV's “Roll of Honour” of the 17 MPs who died “whilst keeping our government in power. .. Those strains are still showing in prematurely shortened retirements .. We should honour not abuse those who night after night fought the good fight”²⁷. The toughest attacks on the Callaghan Government came from his own party and particularly the NEC²⁸.

Labour MPs were not popular with the party after 1979. The Manifesto Group was unable to attract one new member from the 1979 intake of new MPs²⁹. Although still commanding a controlling vote in the PLP, it lost the debates on reselection, election of the Leadership (which removed the PLP's only seats on the NEC), and control over the manifesto. It was out-gunned in the newspaper and TV debates about the future of the party. As the traditional leader of the Right, the PLP failed to offer any leadership against the Left. Right-wing activists were frustrated at the absence of personalities willing to battle for them. CLV complained that few Shadow ministers would grace their platforms³⁰ and a deputation to Healey had him “patronisingly” reassure them “to leave it to him”³¹. Right-wing MPs continued to believe the battle would be fought solely in the PLP and underestimated the penetration of the Left's arguments within the party. Even the soft-left misunderstood the trends. For example, when John Silkin later stood for Deputy Leader, he was amazed and disconcerted to discover that the new Electoral College required him to put himself around CLPs and unions rather than simply his fellow parliamentarians³².

²⁵ Neil Kinnock, *The Battle for Labour*.

²⁶ Jim Wellbeloved, interview, 3 April 2002.

²⁷ *Labour Victory*, October 1980.

²⁸ Margaret Thatcher, *op cit*, John Golding, *op cit*, Tom McNally, interview, 27 November 2002.

²⁹ Brian L. Brivati, *op cit*.

³⁰ McGivan letter to Rogers, 13 November 1979; internal document, November 1979: “MPs .. have for the most part not been forthcoming .. Anyone mildly associated with Jim Callaghan has steered clear while our prominent spokesmen have had only occasional .. links with the Campaign”.

³¹ Jim Daly interview.

³² John Silkin, *op cit*, p. 49/50.

Both the Manifesto Group and CLV had been founded before 1979. The Manifesto Group was formed to ensure the Right's natural majority was organised for PLP elections. CLV was created to counter CLPD, work for a Labour victory, increase party membership and activity, and to make the NEC more representative³³. At its founding meeting in February 1977 (the day Tony Crosland died), it passed a resolution which regretted "the negative attitudes of the [NEC] towards the Labour Government"³⁴.

Whilst the first issue of the CLV newsletter (in May 1977) concentrated on the general election and the electorate's concerns, by issue two it was leading on the need to reform the NEC, reject moves to widen the franchise for the Leader and to take action against Militant. It had acknowledged the fight had moved to within the party. These preoccupations were later reflected in a joint Manifesto Group/ CLV publication following the 1979 defeat³⁵.

Neither the Manifesto Group nor CLV were well positioned to resist the onslaught from the Left. The MPs were identified with a tired and latterly ineffective government. Two natural leaders (Jenkins and Williams) were out of the Commons. And the unpopularity of MPs led CLV to select a solid but unknown figurehead for what was meant to be a high profile campaign³⁶. Equally damaging for the Right, there was no concerted union effort to ensure the party responded constructively to its electoral defeat. New general secretaries had emerged in some of the major unions, the Left's grip on the NEC was complete and, as important, the activities of the new Conservative government focused union attention on the interests of their members³⁷.

During 1979 and 1980, whilst CLV and the Manifesto Group struggled to motivate and mobilise the Right, there was little union input (the EETPU being the main exception³⁸) and they were hampered by a potential split. This was floated as early as November

³³ *Labour Victory*, May 1977.

³⁴ Central Hall, Westminster, 19 February 1977. Their journal included a piece on "NEC – The Undermining of the Party", listing 10 major examples (*Labour Victory*, September 1981, p.5), CLV papers.

³⁵ "Reform and Democracy in the Labour Party", in *Labour Victory*, October 1979; also CLV's *The Future of the Labour Party*, February 1980.

³⁶ Clive Wilkinson, Leader of Birmingham City Council, was chosen as Chairman to represent activists around the country, Clive Wilkinson interview.

³⁷ Alan Tuffin, interview, 18 April 2002.

³⁸ The EETPU put resources into CLV (Clive Wilkinson interview). Other general secretaries, especially from AUEW, APEX and NUR, made helpful interventions (Terry Duffy in *Labour Victory*; Sid Weighell in *The Times*) and a number placed advertisements in *Labour Victory*, helping to defray expenses.

1979 in an internal CLV paper³⁹. From Jenkins' Dimbleby lecture⁴⁰ onwards, a number of CLV members covertly mobilised to set up an alternative organisation (possibly a new party). Former Labour MPs Colin Phipps and Michael Barnes were involved, whilst Jim Daly and Clive Lindley set up an organisation (the Radical Centre for Democratic Studies⁴¹) to keep Brussels-based Jenkins briefed on the UK political scene⁴². They opened talks with the Liberals, two-day conferences being held at least twice, with other seminars on voting trends and policy, the first taking place near Monmouth in January 1980⁴³. Meanwhile, some of the Manifesto Group officers (Horam, Thomas and Wrigglesworth) were decreasingly seeing the Labour Party as their only potential home. The effect of such moves was to undermine the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groupings on the Right.

Some discussions did take place between leading lights of the CLV/ Manifesto Group and trade unions, as a number of union leaders began to realise the importance of taking action to refocus the party on electoral matters, whilst simultaneously persuading those who were later to become the Gang of Three that the party was rescuable⁴⁴. Prior to the 1980 conference, CLV concentrated on putting the case for social democracy (publishing a "Gang of Thousands" advertisement⁴⁵ to support the "Gang of Three" letter from Owen, Rodgers and Williams⁴⁶) and on the composition of the women's section of the NEC⁴⁷. A CLV Conference in Birmingham in May rehearsed the party's problems and possible remedies⁴⁸. Tellingly, all the speakers (Rodgers, Owen, Horam, Williams and Nick Bosanquet) were to defect within a year.

The 1980 Conference was a dismal failure for the Right. Not only were the hoped-for gains not made in the NEC⁴⁹, but the conference voted for an Electoral College to select the Leader. Perhaps as important for subsequent events, the atmosphere in the hall was

³⁹ Though it was not until late 1980 that Hattersley, for example, first heard someone speak openly about this (Roy Hattersley interview).

⁴⁰ 22 November 1979, BBC (reprinted in Wayland Kennet, *Rebirth of Britain*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982, p.9-29). This was when Jenkins hinted at a new political movement.

⁴¹ Jim Daly papers.

⁴² Jim Daly interview.

⁴³ Radical Centre for Democratic Studies Papers.

⁴⁴ Sidney Weighell, *On the Rails*, Orbis Publishing, 1983, Denis Howell, *Made in Birmingham: The Memoirs of Denis Howell*, Queen Anne Press, 1990, John F. Spellar, interview, 18 February 2002; Roger Godsiff, interview, 9 April 2002.

⁴⁵ *Guardian*, 26 September 1980.

⁴⁶ *Guardian*, 1 August 1980.

⁴⁷ CLV newsletter, *Labour Victory*, number 15, September 1980, and number 16, October 1980.

⁴⁸ John Gyford papers.

poisonous. Delegates speaking – or sometimes even voting – contrary to the “Benn hegemony” were barracked⁵⁰. MPs as a species were in the firing line, alongside those judged likely to defect. Responding to the debate on reselection, trade unionist Sam McCluskie turned on the MPs’ bank of seats and said, in relation to what one MP had called the “penance” of their subscription to the party: “They (the MPs) have been doing penance for years to keep the Prentices⁵¹ in power, and it is .. underlined when you get Joe Ashton [MP] coming on that rostrum and telling us that Roy Jenkins, if he starts a middle party, would have 25 MPs who are already members of the Labour Party. Why don’t you join them?”⁵². This was loudly applauded – taken by the Right as a signal that they were not wanted in the party. Later, a known Militant delegate Dave Nellist⁵³ returned to the theme – to similar acclaim – stating that “If there are 25 Labour MPs .. who want to join Roy Jenkins and the so-called Centre Party, the sooner they do it and give us the chance to replace them with genuine Labour Party MPs, the better Party we are going to have for it”⁵⁴.

The main event, however, for much of the subsequent story, was the speech delivered by Benn on transferring responsibility for control over the manifesto from a joint Cabinet/ NEC meeting to the sole prerogative of the NEC. The debate had been opened by Patricia Hewitt (a CLP delegate) who claimed that “many of us .. are .. angry about much of what the last Labour Government did and a great deal of what the last Labour Government failed to do”. This was met by applause as was her call for the constitutional changes to get rid “of the divide between the policies that we as a Party decide on, the policies on which we fight the election, and the policies which the Labour Government implement in office”⁵⁵. Benn’s response to the debate was a *tour de force* on the iniquities of the Labour Government and its influence on the 1979 Manifesto. His speech, later reproduced by the Right with the “factual inaccuracies” clearly marked, became a symbol of all they believed was wrong with his campaign⁵⁶. The EETPU even used videos of the speech to show shop stewards the “fallacy” which lay

⁴⁹ *Report of the 1980 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁰ Or slow- hand-clapped. For example, *ibid*, p.140.

⁵¹ A reference to Reg Prentice MP who had crossed the floor.

⁵² *Report of the 1980 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.142.

⁵³ Later an MP.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 145.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.143.

⁵⁶ Michael Cocks MP, Chief Whip, Speech to GMWU conference, 7 June 1981; “The Last Labour Government and the 1974 Manifesto”, John Spellar/ EETPU archives (JSA), Bob Eadie papers.

at its heart⁵⁷. But it was ecstatically received in the hall⁵⁸, except by most MPs. David Lipsey, lately a political advisor at Number 10, heard it with increasingly bitterness, muttering “Liar” at least 5 times in its duration⁵⁹.

Despite Benn’s urging, the NEC’s amendment giving them control over the manifesto was defeated. There were also early indications of the role unions would take in changing the party. Basnett, GMWU General Secretary, introduced the report of a Committee of Enquiry not from the rostrum but from the platform – at that time, highly unusual. He was followed by Clive Jenkins, General Secretary of ASTMS, also not an NEC member, yet speaking from the hallowed platform. The report gave notice that the party’s paymasters were taking a close interest in the way their money was spent.

The most immediate issue, however, was the Electoral College, agreed in principle on the 2 October but without any particular method (or percentage splits between the three or four parts of the movement) being agreed⁶⁰. Attention had to turn to the make-up of the College as there were already rumours about Callaghan’s likely resignation and subsequent vacancy. Jenny Pardington⁶¹, making an off-the-cuff remark that night to Larry Whitty (GMWU research officer) that a Special Conference would be the normal way to resolve such issues⁶², saw him speed off to relate this to his boss, and then found herself hearing Basnett propose this in an emergency motion the next day⁶³ – and hence the Wembley Special Conference was born.

Before that could take place, however, the old system for electing the Leader was brought into use one more time. Callaghan resigned on 15 October and, despite calls from the NEC that the selection of his successor be delayed until a new system be established, the PLP decided (in a determined assertion of its own role) to proceed to elect a Leader. The Left were deeply unhappy about the next Leader being selected under the old rules and tried unsuccessfully to get candidates to agree to resign and stand for re-election later under the new system.

⁵⁷ JSA.

⁵⁸ With 7 interruptions for applause (*Report of the 1980 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, pp.146-149).

⁵⁹ Witnessed by the author.

⁶⁰ *Report of the 1980 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, pp. 148-155.

⁶¹ TGWU official, and joint secretary to TULV and to a Commission of Enquiry working group.

⁶² Jenny Pardington, interview, 2 February 2002.

⁶³ *Report of the 1980 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.191.

The Right assumed Healey would be elected and that a new chapter in the party's fortunes could begin. They had calculated without their candidate's personality. Even his own team acknowledge he fought a dreadful campaign⁶⁴, though in truth he did not fight, assuming MPs knew him well enough. However, he grossly underestimated both the pressure on MPs facing reselection to back Michael Foot⁶⁵, and also the desire of many for a "quiet life" which they mistakenly thought would accompany a Foot leadership⁶⁶. And three of the subsequently defecting MPs voted for Foot to hasten the party's demise⁶⁷. For whatever combination of reasons, Foot won on 10 November 1980, to the horror of the Right.

The period between November and the Wembley Special Conference saw a flurry of activity. Foot and others worked to get an NEC proposal for at least half of the College votes going to the PLP. The Left wanted less for the PLP. Meanwhile, CLV and the Gang of Four were deep in debate as to whether the party had a future. A Fabian New Year School in Ruskin College, Oxford, led by Shirley Williams (the Vice Chairman of the Society) heard her warnings about the electoral challenges but understood her as seeing the party remaining viable. Yet at the same time, she was deep in discussion with Jenkins, Rodgers and Owen. They had agreed to give Labour one last go, deciding to remain if the Special Conference agreed to OMOV for the Electoral College. On 24 January, Owen made as strong a case as any (until John Prescott's in Brighton a dozen years later) for OMOV but the union votes were already stacked against him.

Meanwhile, the unions concentrated their efforts on patching majorities together for particular formulae for the College. A briefing paper by APEX research officer Roger Godsiff for his General Secretary laid out the options and the support each attracted⁶⁸. The detailed work behind this was crucial for the unions' subsequent response to Wembley. Its research avoided wishful thinking, and meticulously calculated numbers. It showed that, correctly marshalled, unions sympathetic to the Moderate cause could command a majority. This became central to the soon-to-be-created St Ermins Group.

In the meantime, the 24 January 1981 Wembley Special Conference produced a result no-one wanted. The NEC supported a 50:25:25 composition (50% to the PLP; 25%

⁶⁴ Giles Radice in *The Battle for Labour*, BBC4.

⁶⁵ Patrick Seyd, *op cit*.

⁶⁶ Denis Healey in *The Wilderness Years*, BBC, 1995.

⁶⁷ Tom Ellis, Neville Sandelson and Jeffrey Thomas (Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p.543).

each to the affiliated organisations and the constituency parties); the EETPU and the Owenites supported OMOV; and the Left supported 1/3; 1/3; 1/3. Initially, little consideration had been given to the USDAW's proposed 30:40:30 – with 40% for the affiliates. However, as the AUEW was committed not to vote for any proposal which gave less than 50% to the PLP, left-influenced votes were switched to the 30:40:30 proposal, which USDAW (which had only tabled it to keep Audrey Wise happy and without any intention of pushing it⁶⁹) then had to support.

The Wembley result could not have been better for the potential defectors. Instead of having to launch their party on the unpopular cause of Europe, they had their ready-made and popular cause: Labour's Leader to be elected with the largest block going to those same unions who, only two years before, had led the Winter of Discontent. In the long run, Wembley might take the credit for OMOV, greater internal democracy in both unions and the party, and the rise of a populist leader. But in the immediate aftermath, two things happened. One – the high profile creation of the SDP – was drastic for the Labour Party. The other – almost clandestine – would in time move the Labour Party back to the Centre-right and to electability. The story of the first of these, the January Limehouse Declaration and the March creation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), has been told elsewhere⁷⁰. But the fightback of the Traditional Right within the Labour Party has not been documented. It started secretly in one case (the St Ermins Group) and sorrowfully in another (Solidarity) but first the old organisations had to die. CLV and the Manifesto Group both contained “stayers and goers”, and thus had to go through the process of splitting before a single new organisation of the Moderate wing, the Labour Solidarity Campaign, could be created on 17 February to cover both parliamentary and constituency membership. Meanwhile, on 10 February, the St Ermins Group was born in the Charing Cross Hotel.

The main part of this thesis tells the story of these post-SDP split “fightback” groups. But first a brief description of the main issues and events of 1981 to 1987 is given, followed by the story of the Manifesto Group of Labour MPs which tried, but failed, to hold the Right in the PLP together.

⁶⁸ APEX Internal Paper, January 1981.

⁶⁹ Jon Lansman in *The Battle for Labour*, BBC4. Audrey Wise was an USDAW-sponsored MP.

⁷⁰ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*; Ian Bradley, *Breaking the Mould? The Birth and Prospects of the SDP*, Martin Robertson, 1981.

Chapter 3 1981 Deputy Leadership Contest

The 1981 Deputy Leadership election is now recognised as the high water mark of Bennism, although at the time it was seen by many as another step to a more left-wing party. Few would have predicted that Benn would be out of parliament (and thus from contention for Leader) only two years later. Indeed, his attempt at the Deputy Leadership was viewed as the forerunner of a challenge for the Leadership. Similarly, most commentators failed to note that, within days of Benn's defeat, the Right snatched five gains on the NEC, so increasing Foot's authority there and beginning their trek back into ascendancy.

The Deputy Leadership vote was the first use of the Electoral College, and it produced for Healey a victory which would have been denied him had the College been segmented into thirds. The unions voted 25:15 for Healey – their 40% tranche helping to provide his final 0.852%¹ winning margin. (Had all the unions voted according to their members' wishes, his victory would have been more emphatic. If the TGWU had cast its 1.25 million votes – 8% of the entire College – according to its consultation, Healey would have polled 57.5% to Benn's 42.5%, a 15% majority².)

There were to be implications for union democracy from such block-voting, but the interest of the contest for this thesis is what it did for the St Ermins Group and for Solidarity. For the former, the events demonstrated the accuracy of Godsiff's predictions and the role the Group could play in marshalling votes. For the latter, it strained the Moderate/Centre-left coalition as many could not stomach open support for Healey. Even Solidarity's co-chairman, Shore, whilst voting for Healey, never endorsed him publicly.

More broadly, the contest demonstrated the gap between many union leaders and their members. NUPE, for example, whilst circulating statements from all three contestants³

¹ George Cunningham argued that, had the abstentions been discounted first, and the votes actually cast then been counted, Benn would have won; George Cunningham, "Was Tony Benn the True Winner Against Healey?", 1983 and Dianne Hayter, "What if Benn had beaten Healey in 1981?", in Duncan Brack and Iain Dale, *Prime Minister Portillo and other things that never happened*, Politico's, 2003. However, the results were never questioned by Benn. Furthermore, they confirm that each section retains its allotted quota regardless of how few of its members vote.

² *Forward Labour*, November 1981. Alex Kitson – acting general secretary – opposed Benn's challenge and stopped the union nominating him, despite Benn's claim that he would have their support (*Financial Times*, 22 September 1981 and Brian Nicholson, interview, 6 March 2002).

³ Bob Eadie papers.

(the third being John Silkin), expressed a clear preference: both Assistant General Secretaries together with 12 officers signed the Benn advertisement⁴. The NUPE leadership expected to cast their votes (4% of the College) for him and were surprised that their branch ballot favoured Healey, leading Healey's team to claim: "it was the dinner ladies what won it for us"⁵. (NUPE's increased affiliation, to 600,000⁶, also contributed to Healey's success.) Other unions found similar results, though sometimes more closely allied with their leadership. The COHSE ballot gave Healey 57% to Benn's 33%, delivering 135,000 to the victor's tally⁷. The POEU, with a 60% return, voted 72% for Healey and 20% to Benn⁸. The unions' membership votes, where tested, favoured the incumbent.

For some unions, the contest provided the opportunity to air their views on Benn. The EETPU, in particular, had been campaigning against him for some time, using material culled from his 1980 conference attack on Callaghan over the 1979 manifesto to highlight discrepancies between his allegations and the printed documentation. They also used Benn's speeches to highlight his "unsatisfactory" record. Responding to Benn's request for EETPU support, Chapple's 3-page reply rehearsed the union's objections, especially that he was "not very sympathetic to trade unions". The letter continued: "you also dismiss the views of the great bulk of members and shop stewards, blaming the media for brainwashing them. We reject this attitude of aristocratic disdain". He detailed their difficulties with Benn as employer (when a minister at Industry and Energy) before concluding: "We will, therefore, not be supporting you for the Deputy Leadership of the Party"⁹.

Organisationally, the St Ermins Group set to work at local and national level, circulating lists of potentially sympathetic CLPs to friendly unions to get branches to nominate Foot and Healey to their General Committees (GCs)¹⁰ – although only Healey faced a contest, this made the request more palatable locally. The closeness of the contest put

⁴ *Labour Weekly*, 19 June 1981.

⁵ Roger Godsiff interview. NUPE's membership voted 267,000 for Healey, 188,581 for Benn and 28,568 for Silkin; *Financial Times*, 28 September 1981. However, NUPE's Reg Race claims that the result was narrower, with a couple of large branches able to make the difference – which he could have swung had he not been hospitalised for 2 months that summer (Reg Race, interview, 6 May 2004).

⁶ from 150,000 six years earlier, Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.199.

⁷ *Financial Times*, 25 September 1981.

⁸ Nick Butler papers (NBP).

⁹ Letter of 7 September 1981 from Chapple to Benn (JSA).

enormous pressure on every MP, especially those from left-wing constituencies (with reselection looming) – despite CLPs having their own vote for the first time under the Electoral College. John Grant MP urged colleagues to stand firm, although “the long-held principle of the secret ballot, free from intimidation, has been thrown away” with MPs’ votes being recorded. He emphasised that it would not only be their GCs who would see these but “their wider electorate. It will be known and stressed at meetings and on the doorsteps ... They may succumb to pressure now – and find it backfires on them when they ask the ordinary voters, who have the last word, to return them to Westminster”¹¹. Even Peter Archer felt the need to “explain” his vote for Healey to his moderate and loyal GC, emphasising that it was “the express wish of Michael Foot” that his deputy should be supported as he had “made it clear he can work well as a team with Dennis (*sic*) Healey”¹². Others went more public. The left-wing Janey Buchan MEP published an Open Letter to Benn in *Labour Weekly* as to why she could not support him, criticising his campaign’s stance of “those who are not for us are against us”¹³. Healey was more blunt in his rebuttal of these pressures, claiming that forcing MPs to be programmed to follow the wishes of CLPs – ignoring both voters and their own consciences – would turn MPs into zombies¹⁴.

Silkin’s manifesto, favouring “the complete withdrawal of Britain from the Common Market” and nuclear disarmament¹⁵ would not attract any Right votes but was aimed at the non-Bennite Left. Whilst his candidature attracted 65 soft-left MPs¹⁶ in the first round, it offered no respite from the Benn-Healey choice at the critical stage, leaving 35 MPs the only option of abstaining¹⁷. Kinnock, who had opposed the contest and disagreed with Silkin’s candidature¹⁸, abstained on the second ballot. Sitting on the platform awaiting the result, he confided to Joan Lestor that he then wished he had voted for Healey as he thought a Benn victory would be a disaster for the party¹⁹. The impact of the abstentions was to hand victory to Healey but it also marked a major split

¹⁰ Letter from Roger Godsiff, 9 July 1981 (St Ermins Group Archives: EGA).

¹¹ John Grant MP, speech to the EETPU, Brighton, 26 September 1981, John Grant papers (JGP).

¹² Peter Archer letter to his General Committee, 3 September 1981.

¹³ *Labour Weekly*, 7 August 1981.

¹⁴ *Labour Solidarity*, July 1981.

¹⁵ John Silkin, Deputy Leadership leaflet, 1981.

¹⁶ More accurately, 64 and John’s brother, Sam Silkin, MP for Dulwich.

¹⁷ 37 actually abstained but two had voted for Healey in the first round. One appears to have missed the vote; the other was moving towards the SDP (*The Times*, 1 October 1981).

¹⁸ Neil Kinnock, *The Battle for Labour*.

¹⁹ Private communication with the author, October 2003.

on the Left. Kinnock was attacked within hours (aggressively in the gents' toilet²⁰; verbally at the Tribune rally) but the long-term consequences were seismic. It caused the split on the Left which led to the creation of the Campaign Group and with it the rightward shift in the Tribune Group.

The contest consolidated the organisational push of the St Ermins Group, and forced other unions to take more heed of their members' views. The unsatisfactory nature of the unions' consultation – some undertaking none at all – added impetus to demands for OMOV, with Hattersley urging this in September²¹ and others after the vote²².

Similarly, party members not on their GCs began demanding that their views should be sought before their CLP's vote was cast. Where constituencies balloted the membership, they all favoured Healey over Benn²³. This added to the pressure for extending democracy to individual members. Whilst the Left had long supported an Electoral College, they had not anticipated its role in delivering the Right's demand for OMOV.

At the start of the contest, Benn thought it would be “unifying for the Party ..[and would] consolidate our support” amongst the electorate²⁴. Immediately after his defeat, he claimed he had “achieved the politicisation of the trade union movement” whilst accepting that in “the non-politically conscious unions, and among the non-politically conscious members of unions, there is a hell of a lot of work to be done”²⁵. This assumption that all politically conscious trade unionists would support him was diametrically opposite to the St Ermins Group's conclusion that the more their members were consulted, the more they backed Healey.

²⁰ David Warburton, interview, 7 December 2001.

²¹ *Financial Times*, 25 September 1981.

²² Such as Phillip Whitehead MP in *The New Statesman*, 16 October 1981.

²³ Nick Butler papers.

²⁴ BBC TV news, 2 April 1981.

²⁵ *Morning Star*, 1 October 1981.

The 1981 contest was Benn's last chance of high office (he lost his Shadow Cabinet place in November) and led to the Tribune-Campaign Group split. For the Traditional Right, it demonstrated (and rewarded) their organisational effectiveness (which had been lacking in the late 1970s). It boosted the case for OMOV and for internal union democracy. Solidarity was adversely affected, because it was unable to wage a strong Healey campaign even though its members viewed a Benn victory as disastrous. Electorally, Labour Party support dropped 17% between July and December as the party fought the contest²⁶.

²⁶ N Webb and R Wybrow, *The Gallup Report 1981*, Sphere, 1982, p 192.

Chapter 4 1983 Leadership Election

The first use of the Electoral College for the party Leader was triggered, within 48 hours of the 1983 general election, by the unions which then effectively decided the outcome within weeks. Most notably, many of the St Ermins Group unions – who had worked closely with Hattersley's Solidarity – delivered their votes for Kinnock¹. This chapter looks at how they did this, and at their reasons.

The first blow struck for Kinnock was prior to the election when, through the EETPU's and Golding's efforts in Bristol South, the unions secured the winnable parliamentary seat for Chief Whip Michael Cocks², leaving Benn to lose Bristol East and thus out of contention for the leadership after 9 June, giving Kinnock a clear run on the Left. Kinnock has since said he would have preferred to fight – and defeat – Benn then³, but at the time it allowed a clear break with the Bennite legacy. The second blow came in the immediate aftermath of the election. On Saturday 11 June, the left-wing Clive Jenkins visited Foot at his Hampstead home where the Leader supported ASTMS' proposal to nominate Kinnock⁴. On Sunday, Jenkins announced his union would back Kinnock⁵ – making public Foot's retirement decision⁶ and triggering the unions' round of decisions. The General Council of the TGWU (Kinnock's union) quickly agreed to back him but then a different group of unions entered the fray. Jenkins, Moss Evans (TGWU) and the moderate Alan Tuffin met and agreed tactics over a barbecue at the US Ambassador's residence. Tuffin invited Kinnock to fly over to his union conference in the Isle of Man the following Saturday. Kinnock won a standing ovation and a vital nomination, Hattersley's request for support having been gently rebuffed⁷. The CWU was the first of the moderate unions to plump for Kinnock, but others followed:

¹ The other candidates were Peter Shore and Eric Heffer.

² Robert Harris, *The Making of Neil Kinnock*, Faber and Faber, 1984, p.193, Martin Westlake, *op cit*, p.208. The EETPU started work in Bristol early in 1982, in preparation for the boundary changes which would leave Benn without a winnable seat. By August, it had increased its GMC representation from 7 to 12, with more to follow; extensive work, including visits by head-office staff, ensured Cocks won the nomination for the safe seat (correspondence from EETPU to Bristol members, and reports to officials, 1982 and 1983, JSA). Benn was aware of this at the time (Tony Benn, *The End of an Era: Diaries 1980-90*, Hutchinson, 1992, p.182).

³ Neil Kinnock, *The Battle for Labour*.

⁴ Martin Westlake, *op cit*, p.217.

⁵ Giles Radice, *Friends and Rivals*, Little, Brown, 2002, p.312.

⁶ Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *Post-War Britain: A Political History, 1945-1992*, Penguin, 1993, p.434. It had been assumed Foot would "announce his intention to go this autumn" (private note for Peter Shore, 10 June 1983, NBP).

⁷ Alan Tuffin interview; Richard Hefferman and Mike Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock's Labour Party*, Verso, 1992, p.36, *Guardian*, 20 June 1983, Robert Harris, *op cit*, p.215.

COHSE deciding on 15 June, the NUR by 9 July⁸ and the St Ermins' stalwart, the ISTC, which encouraged others to follow suit⁹. Kinnock had addressed the APEX conference – and received a standing ovation – prior to the election¹⁰, and its branch consultation now supported him. The EETPU, abstaining on the grounds that the election should be “conducted by an individual ballot of Party members”¹¹, further deprived Hattersley of an anticipated block-vote¹². By the end of June, Kinnock had 3.8 million union votes pledged to Hattersley's 1.8 million¹³.

Equally unanticipated (at least in June) was that the majority of MPs would vote for Kinnock¹⁴, including Blair and all but one of the 1983 intake¹⁵. His victory thus comprised majorities in all three sections of the Electoral College¹⁶, bestowing on him the authority he would need – and use – in remodelling the party. It is noteworthy that a right-of-centre PLP and a moderate union movement joined the left-wing CLPs in supporting Kinnock over the Right's standard-bearer, Hattersley. The unions also helped ensure a rancour-free contest by championing the notion of a “Dream Ticket” – that the only viable option was Hattersley-Kinnock or Kinnock-Hattersley as Leader and Deputy, with each agreeing to serve under the other, and that everyone should support that duo, whatever their preference between the two. David Warburton claims credit for this “Unity Ticket” notion, with the press renaming it “Dream Ticket”¹⁷.

The moderate unions and Kinnock were subsequently to collaborate closely on reforming the party, expelling Militant and working towards OMOV. Little of this was evident in 1983. So why did these unions, working to root out the Left from the party,

⁸ Robert Harris, *op cit*, p.224.

⁹ Bill Sirs, *Hard Labour*, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985, p.130. The Executive Council selected Kinnock by 13:8.

¹⁰ Robert Harris, *op cit*, p.198.

¹¹ Letter from Chapple to John Smith (Campaign Manager), 11 October 1983, in response to his request of 29 September for the union to reconsider its decision to abstain in the Deputy Leader contest (JSA); Frank Chapple, *Sparks Fly! A Trade Union Life*, Michael Joseph Limited, 1984, p.191.

¹² Equally surprising, both the right-wing National Union of Labour Clubs and the Fabian Society voted for Kinnock, the latter after an all-members' ballot (*Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, inside back cover).

¹³ Martin Westlake, *op cit*, p.218.

¹⁴ Kinnock won 14.778% in the PLP section, to Hattersley's 7.833% (*Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.29). The Shadow Cabinet, by contrast, supported the runner up, only 3 of the 13 non-candidate members voting for Kinnock, Martin Westlake, *op cit*, p.240.

¹⁵ The exception being Stuart Bell; Stuart Bell, *Tony Really Loves Me*, Spen View Publications, 2000, p.11.

¹⁶ The figures were: Kinnock 71.272%; Hattersley 19.288%; Heffer 6.303%, Shore: 3.137% (*Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.29).

¹⁷ David Warburton interview.

line up behind this unlikely candidate? It has been assumed that Kinnock's near absence from parliament in 1982, in favour of visiting constituencies and unions¹⁸, was part of his build-up to a leadership bid¹⁹. As such, it paid off: where unions consulted their members, Kinnock mostly won by a wide margin²⁰. For some, it left a bad taste in the mouth: "Kinnock, for some time prior to the election on some pretext or other, had devoted a major part of his time touring the country making himself known to union branches and constituency parties which must have been to the detriment of his duties in the House of Commons"²¹. Such campaigning – if that is what it was – continued during the 1983 General Election, when he barnstormed his way around 100 constituencies, delivering 90 speeches (including to the EETPU conference), and spending only 2 out of 21 days in London²². However, interviews conducted for this research suggest two other factors contributed to the Moderates' support for him. One, negative, was their distaste for his opponent. The second was the real respect they developed for Kinnock from their personal exposure to him.

The interviews reflected little enthusiasm for Hattersley from outside parliament. Former CLV Chairman, Clive Wilkinson, recalls his "big disappointment that Roy Hattersley .. was never a member" of CLV. Even within Birmingham, the MP "was never there. He never turned up except for advice surgeries. We could never rely on Roy Hattersley to give support". With hindsight, Wilkinson thinks Hattersley "couldn't have made the changes" that Kinnock achieved²³. Jim Cattermole felt Hattersley was "never involved in anything – not prepared to put his head on the chopping block. When he was a Minister he let me down a few times"; despite the help given by this party official when Hattersley was looking for a seat, when he asked the minister to help form a Trade Union Lunch Club, "three times Roy Hattersley promised to come; three times he cancelled"²⁴. Furthermore, he never "made any political sacrifice"²⁵. More publicly, Chapple declared: "I wouldn't vote for Hattersley at any price, not if he was

¹⁸ Kinnock claimed he had done "over 200 Labour Movement meetings in each of the last 3 years", *Broad Left Alliance Journal*, October 1982.

¹⁹ Martin Westlake, *op cit*, pp. 178 & 216. He also declined Shadow Cabinet promotion to "avoid a damaging controversy with the right of the PLP" (*ibid*).

²⁰ *ibid*, pp. 219-220.

²¹ Charles Turnock, "Rigorous Route by Rail and River", 1995, p.226. Unlike his union, the NUR, Turnock supported Hattersley.

²² Martin Westlake, *op cit*, pp. 205-6.

²³ Clive Wilkinson interview.

²⁴ Hattersley's cancellation rate is legendary – immortalised by the 'tub of lard' which replaced him on "Have I got News for You" when he pulled out at short notice.

²⁵ Jim Cattermole interview.

the only candidate". He called him a disaster "whose compromise with the left embarrassed those who wanted to fight for moderation in the Party. I said he harmed the Party by giving in to the left and added: 'If you deal with a shark then all you do is keep losing your limbs'"²⁶. John Smith, who ran Hattersley's campaign from a third floor flat in Pimlico²⁷, must have wondered who would support his man.

However, it was not simply antagonism to Hattersley that won over the Moderates²⁸. Kinnock's campaigning brought him in contact with union officials – in their roles of attending meetings and chauffeuring politicians. In Kinnock, they saw a kindred spirit who, like them, believed returning Labour to power was the over-riding objective, taking precedence over intra-party wrangling²⁹. For Chapple, he had "got balls"³⁰. This had been evidenced by his abstention during "the Deputy Leadership in 1981. That changed the geography quite a bit .. the degree of mutual understanding changed exponentially after that"³¹. Kinnock's personality also helped. Tony Clarke met Kinnock in the mid-1970s, when they both addressed a May Day rally in Torbay, and their dialogue started then. Roy Grantham and Kinnock addressed an aerospace meeting during the 1983 election and spent two hours in Grantham's car afterwards, when they both agreed the party had to change. This key St Ermins Group general secretary recognised the Moderates would have to support Kinnock and work with him to make those changes³². Warburton's support stemmed from his desire to "jump a generation"³³, whilst Tuffin, who had also been on the campaign trail with Kinnock, felt he was "prepared to have a go at things and tear down some of the things that made us unwinnable"³⁴. Not every right-wing union supported Kinnock³⁵ but the St Ermins Group had found they could do business with him³⁶ and saw in him someone willing to do the hard work. Without referring to his opponent for the leadership, Kinnock describes the unions' attitude to some of their political soul-mates: "The trade unions

²⁶ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.191.

²⁷ Robert Harris, *op cit*, p.229.

²⁸ Though it did deliver Golding for Kinnock. See p.193.

²⁹ Martin Westlake, *op cit*, p.164.

³⁰ *Observer*, 4 September 1983.

³¹ Neil Kinnock interview.

³² Roy Grantham interview.

³³ David Warburton interview.

³⁴ Alan Tuffin interview.

³⁵ The AUEW and GMWU voted for Hattersley – the latter finally only thanks to John Smith. Its ballot favoured Hattersley, but on the eve of the vote, Basnett phoned Hattersley and, on the grounds that the union always supported Labour Leaders and Kinnock was going to win, asked if he could switch the union's vote. Smith promptly visited him and protested it made a nonsense of the balloting. The union cast its vote accordingly (Roy Hattersley interview).

were really bloody irritated by the fact that they knew that a lot of the battle had to be conducted by infantry officers that were willing to walk with their men. And some MPs would get to a TV studio but they wouldn't to a GC or regional conference. They were seriously brassed off about that. That's one of the reasons I got on with the union lads"³⁷.

There were other candidates for the leadership: Solidarity's Peter Shore had begun to plan his bid soon after the 1981 conference³⁸, whilst Eric Heffer ran from the Left (attracting only 7% of the CLP vote – compared with Benn's 83% in 1981³⁹). There was a second major ballot – for the Deputy Leadership, where the unions' commitment to the Dream Ticket saw 35.237% of their 40% share go to Hattersley, with just 4.730% to Meacher, helping to provide the new Deputy with a 67.266% to 27.886% victory over his closest challenger⁴⁰. However, the night of Sunday 2 October belonged to Kinnock, whose words in his acceptance speech echoed the unions' desire to win. Calling for unity, not just then, or during a campaign but “here and now and from henceforth”, the new Leader pleaded: “remember how you felt on that dreadful morning of 10 June. Just remember how you felt then, and think to yourselves: ‘June the Ninth .. never ever again will we experience that’”⁴¹.

³⁶ Roy Grantham interview.

³⁷ Neil Kinnock interview.

³⁸ Private briefing paper for Shore by Nick Butler (undated), NBP.

³⁹ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, Verso, 2001, p.210. The Left was divided. LCC and Clause 4 supported Kinnock. CLPD, Socialist Organiser, Socialist Action, Campaign Group, Benn and the staff of *Tribune* supported Heffer (Report from CLPD Secretary to the 1984 CLPD AGM).

⁴⁰ *Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.29. Denzil Davies and Gwyneth Dunwoody polled 3.525% and 1.323% respectively. Hattersley won greater support from the CLP section than Healey in 1981. This may have reflected the increased number of CLPs balloting their members (at least 64) rather than a rightward shift; JSA.

⁴¹ *Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.30.

Chapter 5 *Militant*

“If the Executive will not act [on Militant], the party’s centre and Right-wing will conclude that the composition of the Executive must be changed. With the assistance of one or two big unions .. it can be done – and probably will be”¹.

This thesis argues that Labour’s Traditional Right, in despair after the 1981 split and at the NEC’s ineffectiveness in tackling infiltration, set about restoring a moderate balance to the NEC. The purpose of this chapter is not to tell the story of Militant (which has been done elsewhere²) but only as it relates to the NEC’s role, the Right’s determination to make changes and to its subsequent role in expelling Militant – including its lengthy struggle with the soft-Left.

Militant was not new to the Labour Party, being formed in 1964 as successor to the Revolutionary Socialist League (which started its work inside the party in 1953)³. Whilst the NEC’s role in suppressing the Underhill Report on Militant from 1975 forms the main part of this chapter, there was in 1976/1977 a major dispute between the NEC and the Right in the PLP over the appointment of Andy Bevan, a known Militant supporter, as the party’s youth officer. Ron Hayward (who had been appointed General Secretary in 1972 on the casting vote of Benn) used his casting vote for Bevan on 24 September 1976. This was an early test of the new Prime Minister (Callaghan)’s authority as he sought to stop the NEC ratifying the appointment⁴. He failed, and on 15 December, Bevan was confirmed by 15:12, to start work in January 1977⁵.

There followed a major argument. The Tribune Group had backed Bevan⁶ but the party’s Agents’ Union, NULO, objected on the grounds that this post should go to a former agent⁷. Meanwhile, the right-wing Manifesto Group of MPs objected on political grounds⁸, one of their members having equated Militant in Labour Party with the National Front in the Tory Party⁹. 40 MPs joined the anti-Bevan campaign, signing a letter drawn up by Ken Weetch, and a resolution condemning the appointment was

¹ Joe Haines, “The Rape of Labour”, *Daily Mirror*, 25 January 1977.

² Michael Crick, *The March of Militant*, Faber and Faber, 1986.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 25 November 1976.

⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 1976.

⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1976.

⁷ *Observer*, 21 December 1976, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 January 1977.

⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 1977.

submitted to the PLP⁹. This incident, which inserted an active Militant supporter into the party's headquarters, reflected both Callaghan's weakness at the NEC and the gulf between many MPs and the NEC.

Meanwhile, the party's National Agent, Reg Underhill, who had "disclosed that six out of 11 members of the Young Socialists' national committee were .. under Trotskyist influence" as early as 1964¹¹, submitted a dossier to the NEC on 25 November 1975 from which his Report concluded: "there is a central organisation associated with Militant with its own membership and full-time organisers"¹². He was severely disappointed that NEC would not even consider it, leaving it "lying on the table"¹³.

Although not published, the subject of the Report was well covered in newspapers¹⁴. A campaign to expose Militant developed, with Shirley Williams attacking Trotskyist infiltration¹⁵ and the matter pressed on the NEC so that it set up Sub-Committee¹⁶ to consider Underhill's documents, though recalling its "opposition to witch-hunts .. and .. McCarthyism"¹⁷. The Sub-Committee's Report, whilst accepting secret meetings and similar existed, was against witch-hunts and believed "that Trotskyist views cannot be beaten by disciplinary action". It recommended that members be made aware of Militant's aims and claims (and therefore their Report should be circulated), alongside a membership drive, political education and improved meetings (which would not drive members away)¹⁸. This was approved by NEC on 25 May 1977 but Chapple immediately wrote¹⁹ asking for the documents, not just the Report. The request was refused, the NEC agreeing "that the background documents .. should not be circulated in any way"²⁰. Therefore none of the 10 documents was seen other than by the five Sub-Committee members.

⁹ Alan Lee Williams, *The Times*, 14 December 1976.

¹⁰ 7 December 1976, Ian Wrigglesworth papers (IWP).

¹¹ *Daily Mail*, 27 January 1977.

¹² "Entryist Activities", Paper to 26 November 1975 NEC, NAD/92/11/75, Labour Party Archives (LPA); *Guardian*, 15 December 1976.

¹³ *Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 1976.

¹⁴ As a "Revolutionary plot" inside the party, *Observer*, 31 August 1975.

¹⁵ *Guardian*, 22 January 1977.

¹⁶ John Chalmers, Tom Bradley, Foot, Heffer and Hayward.

¹⁷ *Daily Mail*, 27 January 1977.

¹⁸ NAD/58/5/77 (LPA) and appendix to 1977 Annual Report.

¹⁹ 3 June 1977.

²⁰ Underhill letter to Chapple, 27 July 1977 (JSA).

Underhill retired to the Lords in 1979 but received 10 more documents which were covered in the *Sunday Times*²¹, in the *Guardian*²² and as part of a 6-page supplement on “The Labour Party’s Militant Moles”²³ - each describing the degree of infiltration. Still the NEC refused to publish although it invited Underhill “to publish any documents he wishes”²⁴. At his own expense, Underhill mailed his report to all CLPs, unions and the NEC²⁵.

The NUR’s Sidney Weighell had criticised the NEC’s failure to act, and outlined a way forward, suggesting that Militant be asked to provide details of their constitution, internal structure, aims, publications, finances, membership and links with foreign organisations – and any failure to provide leading to expulsions²⁶. Underhill sent more information when the Organisation Sub-committee (chaired by Heffer) was considering a recommendation that “no action” be taken against Militant (at the same time agreeing to a Golding recommendation that the right-wing Social Democratic Alliance be expelled for planning to oppose Labour candidates)²⁷. The sub-committee “was satisfied that there was nothing incompatible” in Militant with party membership as it was not fielding candidates, but Underhill again wrote showing Militant was in breach of the constitution as it “acts as a ‘party within a Party’ ”²⁸. This long-standing party servant received a 4-line reply “Your letter of 11 December to the General Secretary was reported to the [NEC] .. on 17 December when it was decided to take no action”²⁹.

The issue rumbled on. On the eve of the Benn-Healey Deputy Leadership election, the Fabian Society published a pamphlet on Trotskyism in the party³⁰, with a long extract in *The Times*³¹. There was a strong attempt to suppress the Fabian publication, led by Frances Morrell, Benn’s former political adviser³².

In November 1981, Chief Whip Michael Cocks complained to the General Secretary about the treatment of Liverpool MPs, with 1 out of 5 deselected and 3 out of 5 having

²¹ 16 December 1979.

²² *Guardian*, 11 January 1980.

²³ Tom Forester, *New Society*, 10 January 1980.

²⁴ NEC, 27 February 1980.

²⁵ Lord Underhill letter, March 1980, JSA.

²⁶ 1980 AGM speech, Charles Turnock papers.

²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 15 December 1980.

²⁸ Underhill letter to Hayward, 11 December 1980, JSA.

²⁹ Letter of 19 December 1980, LPA.

³⁰ David Webster, *The Labour Party and the New Left*, Fabian Society, October 1981.

³¹ By David Webster, 24 September 1981.

defected – he estimated the odds of this happening as 1:1830 – and asking in vain for an enquiry³³. The Manifesto Group wrote about “extremist infiltration”, labelling Militant “a cancer in the body politic .. a party within a party”, urging the NEC not to endorse Militant supporter Pat Wall as a candidate, and “to declare the activities and organisation of the Militant Tendency as incompatible with the constitution of the Labour Party”³⁴.

At a 2½-hour PLP meeting, “speaker after speaker insisted that something be done to curb Trotskyist militant tendency”; however, the Leader, Foot, said “that he would not support expulsions from the party or proscriptions”³⁵. Despite John Morris, the Shadow Attorney General, believing that “the NEC could not ignore entryism”³⁶, Foot reiterated to the NEC that “I am against expulsions” and the NEC reaffirmed its rejection of any probe into Militant³⁷.

Something changed by December when “Foot wins call for inquiry on militant”³⁸. My assumption is that the following story – undated by its tellers – belongs here. Within the PLP, a “Group of Ten”, had been meeting for some months in various people’s flats³⁹. They were later to discuss getting rid of Foot as Leader (a cause ended by Labour’s Darlington victory)⁴⁰. They felt Foot was “in denial”, failing to see any “connection between Trots and Militant”. So, they

“went to see Michael in the Leader’s Room before PM Questions .. things were so absolutely desperate .. and said, unless he denounced Militant and recognised it was a deep cancer in the party, the parliamentary party was on the verge of deeply splitting and was going to come apart. Just as the Benn vote was a turning point, this meeting also absolutely critical to events. And Michael was shaken to the core. This was a frank speaking meeting. He faced a range of people in party terms – Ann [Taylor] was on the Right; I was not in Manifesto Group; [Martin] O’Neill ran with Tribune, as did Jack Straw; Jeff [Rooker] not in either. .. Rooker told him as it bloody was. ‘It’s no good you just putting your head in the sand’. Michael .. was white as a sheet. [And] we were not taking no for an answer. This was not a plea, but

³² Dianne Hayter papers.

³³ Charles Turnock, “Mersey Militants”, 1987, p.19.

³⁴ Letter to Hayward, 2 November 1981, MGA.

³⁵ *Times*, 19 November 1981.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *Times*, 26 November 1981.

³⁸ *Times*, 10 December 1981.

³⁹ This mixed grouping (see annex 6) presaged the alliance of centre-right and soft-left which was to emerge post-1983 (Giles Radice, interview, 26 November 2003).

⁴⁰ Giles Radice interview. Labour won the by-election on 24 March 1983, by 20,544 votes to the Conservatives’ 18,132.

an ultimatum. If you don't .. there is going to be a war. And you'll lose a lot of people .. Straw quietly accumulated a mass of documents on Militant from moles. A Dossier. He gave to me. I passed it on"⁴¹.

Whatever happened, on 9 December 1981 Foot's call for an enquiry was agreed 10:9 by the Organisation Sub-committee (Kinnock's vote providing the majority)⁴². Benn opposed, pledging to "fight like a tiger" against expulsions. Foot admitted "he had underestimated .. Militant .. and now believed they were dangerous". The resolution instructed Ron Hayward and David Hughes (Underhill's successor as National Agent) to report on the activities of Militant, and "whether these conflict with .. the constitution"⁴³. There was widespread press coverage of Militant⁴⁴ – including by Militant's Peter Taafe in *Labour Weekly*⁴⁵. Copious evidence was submitted, including a "great deal of documentation" from Solidarity⁴⁶.

The Hayward/Hughes report became the hook on which subsequent action against the Tendency was taken. Turning its back both on outlawing members for their beliefs, and on any return to the Proscribed List⁴⁷, Hayward/Hughes proposed a Register of organisations deemed compatible with party membership, but simultaneously stated that Militant was not eligible to be included on the Register. Even going this far, the authors had to genuflect to Foot's line by writing: "We fully support the sentiments contained in the Party Leader's New Year Message 1982 against proscription lists, witch hunts and expulsions. Nevertheless the National Executive Committee has the right and the duty to safeguard the Party Constitution and Rules". It is hard to see how – without expulsions – they imagined Militant could be tackled.

For many on the Centre and Right, the report was "a disappointment". Not only was the evidence to Hayward/Hughes again not published, but it only supported a Register, not

⁴¹ Ken Woolmer, interview, 12 June 2003.

⁴² The ten comprised Foot, Healey, Varley, Golding, Boothroyd, Tuck, Hough, Tierney, David Williams and Kinnock – some put on the NEC by the St Ermins Group only 2 months earlier. It was endorsed at the 16 December NEC by 19:10 (LPA).

⁴³ *Times*, 10 December 1981.

⁴⁴ Such as 3-pages in the *Daily Star*, 16 December 1981.

⁴⁵ 15 January 1982.

⁴⁶ "Militant Tendency Report" (known as the Hayward/Hughes Report), NEC paper, 23 June 1982 (LPA).

⁴⁷ which had been removed from the rulebook in 1973 (*NEC Report to 1973 Conference*, p.11). This had debarred anyone belonging to any organisation on that list from party membership. In ending it, the NEC stated there were sufficient rules to safeguard the constitution and asked members to refrain from associating with political organisations whose aims and objectives were not consistent with those of the Labour Party.

expulsions⁴⁸. Furthermore, other groups might refuse to register (“following successful precedent of the trade unions and the Industrial Relations Act”), CLPD already indicating that it would not do so. However, Solidarity members recognised that an immediate move to expulsion “cannot be got through the NEC without the support of Michael Foot”⁴⁹.

The NEC agreed the Report⁵⁰, and the new General Secretary, Jim Mortimer, immediately wrote to non-affiliated organisations (apart from Militant) asking them to Register⁵¹. It later decided that no facilities be accorded to Militant (which included selling Militant at meetings or letting rooms to them)⁵². A resolution at conference condemning this was lost by 1,754,000 to 5,049,000⁵³. The Left in the party mobilised to oppose the ban, with identical resolutions from 26 different CLPs submitted to the NEC⁵⁴.

The NEC moved against the Editorial Board of Militant whose members were expelled in February 1983⁵⁵. In 1984/85 CLPs began their own expulsions. The St Ermins Group supporters on the NEC wanted more and in December 1984 Ken Cure tried in vain to have a wider enquiry⁵⁶. However, a year later, after Kinnock’s major speech in Bournemouth attacking Liverpool’s Militants, and following letters from Basnett and “the left-wing leader” of TGWU, Ron Todd, “demanding action”⁵⁷, the NEC (by 21:5) suspended the district party and launched an enquiry. The Enquiry Team was heavy with St Ermins Group nominees⁵⁸, the Left having failed (by 9:17) to add Heffer to the team⁵⁹.

The majority Liverpool Report, which recommended action against unnamed members for involvement with Militant, was endorsed by the NEC on 26 February 1986, and was

⁴⁸ Briefing paper for Peter Shore, 22 April 1982, NBP.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Which was endorsed by the annual conference, 5,173,000:1,565,000; *Report of the 1982 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.275.

⁵¹ 28 July 1982, LPA.

⁵² NEC, 27 July 1983.

⁵³ *Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.75.

⁵⁴ NAD 6/11/83, 23 November 1983, LPA.

⁵⁵ NEC Report to Labour Party Conference, 1983, p.22. The expulsions were confirmed at Conference by majorities of approximately 5 million to 1½ million.

⁵⁶ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.26/7.

⁵⁷ *Times*, 28 November 1985.

⁵⁸ Turnock (Chair), Boothroyd, Tony Clarke, Haigh and Hough, with Beckett, Sawyer and Wise from the Left.

⁵⁹ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.27.

circulated throughout the party in printed form. A minority Report, by Beckett and Wise, rejecting any expulsions, was defeated by 18:9⁶⁰ but nevertheless published by the party. The expulsions took a long time as the Left fought the action at every step. The Court having ruled that the 8 Enquiry Team members could not sit on the NEC to hear the charges⁶¹, 7 left-wing members⁶² walked out of the NEC meeting on 26 June 1986, making it inquorate – as only 14 remained (and the quorum 15). So on 18 May the full NEC (by 18:4) changed the quorum to 50% of those eligible to participate in the business⁶³. Eventually the hearings took place and 8 Liverpool Militants were expelled, the decisions overwhelmingly endorsed by the conference⁶⁴.

The party soon afterwards set up a National Constitutional Committee (NCC) which thereafter heard all the Militant cases though it was a number of years before the Militant MPs appeared there. Throughout, many on the Left fought against all such action. There was a minority on the Left who took a different view, such as Walter Kendall⁶⁵, who wrote: “allegiance to *Marxism* is one thing, allegiance to *Leninism* is quite another”, asking Militant whether they fitted the latter⁶⁶. Similarly, in July 1982, Bryan Gould (a parliamentary candidate and former MP) claimed that the party’s “spirit of tolerance does not mean .. that no-one should be refused membership .. because of their ideas .. The notion that the party has no ideological boundaries is specious .. The only question is, where should the boundaries be drawn?”, arguing that Militant was beyond the boundaries⁶⁷. Kinnock used similar arguments when, defending his vote for the Hayward/Hughes Report, he maintained Militant had exceeded boundaries, was a “party within a Party” and supported “democratic centralism” which was “arrogant and

⁶⁰ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.224.

⁶¹ Something which Kinnock had been warned about by barrister James Goudie. It was for that reason he had held back some “reliables” from the Enquiry Team, and allowed some of the Left on, so that he could still produce a majority at the NEC without the Enquiry Team’s votes (Neil Kinnock interview).

⁶² *ibid*, p.230.

⁶³ *ibid*, p.235.

⁶⁴ *Report of the 1986 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*.

⁶⁵ Socialist historian and activist, a founder of the journal *Voice of the Unions* and author of *The revolutionary movement in Britain, 1900-21: the origins of British Communism*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969.

⁶⁶ *Tribune*, 19 March 1982.

⁶⁷ *Guardian*, 26 July 1982. Despite these views, Nellist voted for Gould for the Shadow Cabinet elections, *Dave Nellist MP Parliamentary Report*, Summer 1987.

anti-democratic and absolutely contrary to the ideology of the Labour Party” whilst he still asserted: “There is no question of a witch-hunt”⁶⁸.

Such support for action was a minority on the Left, partly due to their experience of intolerance by the Right in the 1950s and 1960s⁶⁹, partly as they believed Militant was just the start and that the Right would then move on the rest of the Left⁷⁰. In 1976, the editor of *Militant* described the Andy Bevan exercise as “commencement of a witch hunt” – stopping his appointment would be “the green light for the Right wing to attempt a return to the 1950s’ .. expulsions”⁷¹. Despite his dislike of Trotskyites⁷², Dick Clements, recalling the MP Konni Zillicus’ 1949 expulsion as “a victim of the Right’s intolerance”, pledged: “It must not happen again”⁷³.

The LCC 1981 AGM carried unanimously: “We should unequivocally oppose attempts to launch witch-hunts against any section of the Left”⁷⁴. CLPs started passing ‘Opposition to the Witch-hunt’ resolutions⁷⁵. Local groups became active, the Dulwich Labour Party newsletter writing: “Help Defend Militant .. If the attack on Militant were to succeed, next in line would be the [CLPD], [LCC] and then Tony Benn” and quoting Benn “There must be no registration of socialism”⁷⁶. Over 200 CLPs supported a “Defend Militant” campaign, with a Labour Movement Conference on 11 September 1982. A Scottish circular claimed that over 2,500 delegates attended, whilst “it is only the right wing rump of the Labour Party, the camp followers of John Smith, Donald Dewar and George Robertson, who support expulsions”⁷⁷. Over 300 delegates in London’s County Hall formed “Labour Against the Witch-hunt” on 30 October 1982. The “Southwark Labour Parties Against Expulsions” group held a rally on 11 December 1982, with Tatchell, Reg Race (Chair, Labour Against the Witchhunt) and MEP Richard Balfe⁷⁸.

⁶⁸ *Broad Left Alliance Journal*, October 1982.

⁶⁹ Dick Clements, interview, 9 July 2002.

⁷⁰ Reg Race interview.

⁷¹ Letter to *Daily Telegraph*, 17 January 1977.

⁷² Dick Clements interview.

⁷³ *Tribune*, 25 September 1981.

⁷⁴ Undated letter from Michael Meacher, Audrey Wise and others, to LCC members.

⁷⁵ *Militant*, 11 December 1981.

⁷⁶ *Dulwich Labour Party Contact*, July 1982.

⁷⁷ Bob Eadie papers.

⁷⁸ Collection of handbills.

NEC member Sawyer wrote in the *Labour Against the Witchhunt Bulletin*⁷⁹. By April 1983, 55 CLPs had affiliated. The thrust of the work was to get the “Greenwich Amendment” – a resolution to scrap the Register – on the conference agenda. CLPD circulated model resolutions opposing witch-hunts and supporting the Greenwich amendment. By August 1983, a large number of resolutions from CLPs had been received by the NEC. In the resulting debate at conference, when Jack Straw called the term “ ‘witch-hunt’ .. simply a smokescreen for those who wish to claim immunity from the terms and conditions of our rulebook”, he was slow-hand-clapped⁸⁰. Nevertheless, the resolution calling for an “immediate halt to all witch-hunts” was lost by 4,868,000 to 1,913,000⁸¹.

Pressure against expulsions continued, with the CLPD confirming by 150:77: “that CLPD should continue to campaign .. to .. prevent the continuation of the NEC’s witch-hunt of the last two years, and to reverse the proscriptions and expulsions which have been carried out”⁸². When resolutions came to NEC (for example from Islington South, the CLP of Chris Smith who signed the Campaign Group Statement against the Witch-hunt⁸³), the NEC would inform the CLP that “protecting the constitution of the Labour Party is not witchhunting”⁸⁴.

The flow of anti-expulsion resolutions to NEC continued throughout 1984 and 1985, at a time when 4,000 Militant supporters gathered in the Royal Albert Hall⁸⁵. *Witch Hunt News*⁸⁶ was launched by Labour Left Co-ordination, CLPD and the Campaign Group (the grouping included David Blunkett and Peter Hain⁸⁷). CLPD’s 1987 AGM agreed by 82:2 “to campaign against expulsions .. by promoting an amendment to ..[the] Party constitution with a view to providing a legal basis for groups of .. members holding minority views to campaign within the Party and taking up individual cases .. where the existing rules provided no valid grounds for their expulsion”⁸⁸.

⁷⁹ Number 4, May 1983.

⁸⁰ *Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.73.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p.75.

⁸² Minutes of 1984 CLPD AGM.

⁸³ March 1984.

⁸⁴ Paper NAD/69/3/84, to 28 March 1984 NEC meeting (LPA).

⁸⁵ *Guardian*, 13 November 1985.

⁸⁶ No 1, January 1986; *Witch Hunt News*; No 2, March 1986, *Witch Hunt News*; No 3, May 1986; *Witch Hunt News*, June/July 1986.

⁸⁷ *Guardian*, 20 January 1986.

⁸⁸ Minutes of 14, 21 and 28 February 1987.

This chapter has sought to describe how the Right – both in the PLP and the unions – were frustrated in trying to deal with Militant. One of their number attributed the poor 1987 election result to this and to the “constant pussy footing around by the leadership to placate the extreme left”⁸⁹. It was for that reason that the unions became so determined to alter the composition of the NEC and then play a role in expelling Militant. As one MP subsequently wrote: “For what seemed like an eternity, the NEC simply equivocated on countering the Trotskyist takeover bid. When Neil Kinnock finally had an executive with the bottle, it took action”⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, pp.268, 273.

⁹⁰ Frank Field in the *Guardian*, 10 June 2003.

Chapter 6 OMOV – One Member One Vote

In order to appreciate the importance of OMOV, a brief history of its development is outlined here. There were two aspects of OMOV: initially – and partly in response to the Left’s reselection campaign – as the method of selecting parliamentary candidates; secondly, as the way of deciding how each CLP and union should decide their votes in the Electoral College. In both cases, the campaign was hard fought, and the issue used as a ‘marker’ to label members “Left”(opponents) or “Right” (supporters).

Whilst it was resisted by most on the Left, OMOV was not simply a device invented by the Right in the 1980s to frustrate the Left’s attempt to wrest power from MPs. Its origins go back further, with proposals for a wider franchise being discussed in the 1960s¹. Any move to OMOV raised serious questions for the movement’s constituent parts. The selection of candidates was the responsibility of GCs where union delegates played a large role. It was possible in many seats (especially, as in mining areas, where one union was pre-eminent) for one or more unions effectively to select the candidate. This could also work within a region, where perhaps one seat would be accepted as the TGWU’s, the neighbouring one falling to the GMWU. Any move to OMOV, with only individual members voting, jeopardised the role of trade unions.

In the case of the Leader, similar forces were at play. It had long fallen to the MPs to elect their own parliamentary leader (who was *de facto* – and later *de jure* – Leader of the Labour Party). The majority of MPs wanted to retain this position. OMOV was proposed only when a wider franchise was inevitable – and then only for the two new sections of the Electoral College, the PLP retaining some input.

A number of unions had employed OMOV for internal elections for years – notably the EETPU and the AUEW. In the latter case, when postal ballots for officers had been under attack by the Communist Party (in favour of branch ballots), an AUEW “Insight Group” paper set out the comprehensive case for OMOV². The EETPU also played a key role in the achievement of OMOV, by arguing the case and by funding local party ballots, a hitherto unreported, but significant, intervention.

¹ *Political Quarterly*, July 1960.

² “Postal Ballots”, 1975, JSA.

Writing the authoritative *How the Labour Party Works* in 1975, the National Agent stated that parliamentary candidates were selected by GCs on a majority vote after an eliminating ballot³, little suspecting the inter-party warfare that would erupt over this issue. And yet, as early as 1971, a Fabian Group (which included Anthony Wedgwood-Benn⁴ and Reg Race⁵) produced a pamphlet in which its editor and another group member favoured opening up candidate selection to all party members⁶. Jim Daly started supporting members' participation in 1976⁷ and, by 1977, OMOV was favoured by the Centre and Right of the party⁸. CLV's founding meeting⁹ resolved to campaign for "the fullest possible democratic involvement of the Party membership" which soon became a call for membership involvement in candidate selection¹⁰. There were some – particularly MPs – who supported this in response to the Left's demands for reselection. For others it was a simply a logical extension of democracy. However, no sooner was it articulated, than it was attacked by CLPD¹¹. *London Labour Briefing* called on the Left to expose "those who seek to 'extend democracy' by introducing a primaries system for the reselection process". Even worse, "Some members of CLV, not content with advocating that all members should be involved in the final selection, are calling for a postal ballot of all members to decide the candidate"¹².

Daly took his OMOV ideas to a CLV meeting early in 1978¹³ where they became CLV policy. In 1979, CLV and the Manifesto Group called for the selection of candidates to be opened up to all party members of 2-years' standing¹⁴. Within parliament, Golding proposed to the PLP that, if reselection was introduced, "the vote should be given to all

³ Reg Underhill, *How the Labour Party Works*, The Labour Party, 1975, p.10.

⁴ Later Tony Benn. In 1971 he was an MP and Vice Chairman of the Labour Party.

⁵ Later a Bennite MP.

⁶ Inigo Bing "New Approaches to Democracy" and Oliver Stutchbury, "Reform of party organisation" in Inigo Bing (ed), *The Labour Party: An Organisational Study*, Fabian Society, 1971, pp. 25, 46 and 54.

⁷ Jim Daly, "Let ALL the Members Vote!", *Socialist Commentary*, October 1976.

⁸ Paul Tinnion, *New Statesman*, 21 October 1977; David Bean, *New Statesman*, 21 October 1977, Dianne Hayter, *The Labour Party: Crisis and Prospects*, Fabian Society, September 1977, Dianne Hayter, "NEC needs rank-and-file", *Labour Weekly*, 7 September 1979.

⁹ 19 February 1977.

¹⁰ "Is it Democracy?", *Labour Victory*, May 1977; CLV, "Let's have some real democracy in the Labour Party", 1977.

¹¹ For example, a piece on their behalf against "Why can't all members select their Parliamentary Candidate?" in *Labour Leader*, August 1978.

¹² Andy Harris, "CLPD slams CLV 'democracy' fraud", *London Labour Briefing*, June 1980.

¹³ Jim Daly papers.

¹⁴ CLV and Manifesto Group, "Reform and Democracy in the Labour Party", *Labour Victory*, October 1979.

members of the party .. not just the few who got on the GMC”¹⁵. This betrays its partial origins in diluting reselection. Thereafter OMOV was seen as a right-wing ploy, making it difficult for anyone on the Left to support. Increasingly, as many of its proponents moved towards the Gang of Three (later Four and eventually the SDP), its chances of success correspondingly fell. The NEC set its face against OMOV, whereas the Manifesto Group began to see it as a central issue. 12 of their number (the “Dirty Dozen”) supported OMOV¹⁶ and, following Callaghan’s resignation, the Group prepared 10 questions for the leadership contenders, including “Are you in favour of one member one vote in selections and reselections?”¹⁷. However, with Foot as Leader opposed to it, the campaign stalled.

In 1980, the EETPU’s submission to the Party’s Enquiry into Organisation recommended the use of “an individual postal ballot with a single transferable vote” for all members. Its second preference was for a ballot at a meeting “in which all members of the CLP are eligible to participate”¹⁸. The paper showed the proportion of membership participating in reselections – from 3% in Norwood to 18% in Fife Central. Although the proportion reached 22% in West Dunbartonshire, this was from an extremely low membership. So, concluded the paper, the selectorate was unrepresentative of membership – and even less representative of Labour voters or the wider electorate (with just 0.05% of Benn’s electorate in Bristol South East participating in his selection).

After 1981, Labour Solidarity took up the cause¹⁹, with Frank Field then deciding to concentrate solely on this objective²⁰. His support for OMOV pre-dated Wembley, when he urged that selection be by more than just “super-activists”²¹. He wanted to maintain union involvement through the formation of party factory branches, favouring OMOV for selection and leadership elections²². Two years later he established “Labour Franchise”, published a letter in *Labour Weekly* on a “One Person One Vote” campaign and put together a “pack” of supporting arguments, for local parties and friendly MPs.

¹⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.109.

¹⁶ “Why the Labour Party structure must change” by Mike Thomas, George Robertson *et al* (most of whom subsequently joined the SDP), *The Times*, 22 September 1980.

¹⁷ October 1980; Ian Wrigglesworth papers.

¹⁸ “Submission by the E.E.T.P.U. to the Party Enquiry into Organisation”, 1980, JSA.

¹⁹ See Solidarity chapter.

²⁰ Letter from Frank Field to Ken Woolmer, 10 November 1981.

²¹ *Times*, 6 November 1980; *Guardian*, 2 January 1981.

²² John Gyford papers.

In the run-up to the 1983 leadership election, Field asked the four candidates their views on OMOV for selection. It was then that Kinnock agreed to it, leading to Field's expectation that all would then happen. But he had calculated without the unions which would take another decade to deliver²³. There is an interesting postscript to Field's long commitment to OMOV. On leaving the Blair government in 1988, his resignation speech mentioned "initiating the one member, one vote campaign"²⁴. Kinnock's former Head of Office, Charles Clarke, immediately disputed this in a "robust conversation" with Field²⁵. But it is Clarke who was mistaken. Field was indeed one of the first MPs, and the first of the non-defectors, to back OMOV, and he went public long before Kinnock – or any of his staff – supported it.

One union was consistent in its support. The EETPU took on the Left's opposition to OMOV. Its *Political Bulletin* confronted the "Elitist arguments against extending the franchise", contending that "Those who argue that the average Party member .. is not well enough informed about the issues to make a mature judgement, would find ample support from the Earl of Rutland, who in 1867 said 'I do not think the state of education in the Country is sufficiently advanced to enable the Government safely to propose so large a measure as that of household suffrage'"²⁶. A paper circulated to friendly MPs included the GCs' voting figures for reselection of Campaign Group MPs (those most opposed to OMOV) – such as 28-26 for Margaret Beckett, 64-36-27 for Benn, and 15-9 for Clare Short, with the numbers voting as a percentage of average CLP membership (respectively 12.5%; 29.39% and 5.55%). Tribune Groups' figures were little different, with 34-28 for Gordon Brown (14.35% of average CLP membership), 18-0 for Robin Cook (4.16%) and 23-19 for Harriet Harman (9.72%)²⁷. For the EETPU, this was a clear case for involving all party members.

Solidarity's first OMOV leaflet was in 1983²⁸, when Hattersley described the pressure for changes as "irresistible", whilst acknowledging that union support would be needed for their loss of control over selection²⁹. As its supporters geared up for the campaign,

²³ Chris Savage, interview, 30 January 2003.

²⁴ *Hansard*, 29 July 1998, col 373.

²⁵ Letter from Frank Field to Charles Clarke, August 1988 (with kind permission of the author).

²⁶ *EETPU Political Bulletin*, August 1983, p.4.

²⁷ July 1984. The paper also noted how many of the Left, having vigorously opposed reselection from a Shortlist-of-One, then took advantage of this and faced no opponent.

²⁸ "One Person, One Vote – True Democracy" leaflet.

²⁹ *Guardian*, 11 February 1983.

the Left worked equally hard – and more effectively – to resist it. CLPD decided that it “should continue to give high priority to opposing the misleadingly named campaign for ‘one member one vote’... its propaganda gives the illusion that it would be an extension of democracy”³⁰.

Simultaneously, the St Ermins-Kinnock majority on the NEC was moving inexorably towards OMOV, John Evans writing in support, partly as a recruiting tool: “Join the Labour Party and choose your MP”³¹. Kinnock echoed these views, publishing his letter to MPs which favoured giving GCs the choice of enabling all members to participate in selection. He asked opponents to “explain how in the name of democracy they can deny the chance to vote to the people who make up the party” and challenged their belief that only GC members could decide on the candidate, the supposed difficulties in organising ballots and on dangers to the union link³². He pointed to the tiny average number of GC delegates (37) voting in the latest 206 selections and stressed the potential of opening up this decision-making to 100,000 members. “Do those who oppose the proposals for direct membership voting really think that the great majority of party members cannot be trusted to make a judgement? If they do, they .. had better admit it ..[and] tell the people of the Labour Party that it’s their membership that is wanted, not their opinion, that they are a respectful audience, not a movement”. This was strong stuff for a founding member of CLPD, and he was roundly attacked by the Left³³ who began organising union resistance to the move, on the grounds it would reduce their role in selecting candidates. The NUM, for example, argued that, as a sponsor of 15 MPs, they should be specifically consulted and that the proposed change should be delayed a year to allow for such discussion³⁴.

The Tribune Group wrote to unions criticising the move to OMOV as “highly divisive”, very difficult to implement and seriously weakening the party-union link³⁵. John Evans responded in the *Guardian*, defending the proposal (of which he was the author) to

³⁰ Minutes of CLPD 1984 AGM.

³¹ *Guardian*, 29 June 1984.

³² *Guardian*, 24 July 1984.

³³ Including by Heffer, despite his view the previous year, that “I would have one person one vote both for election of leader and deputy leader and also for selection of candidates” (*A Week in Politics*, Channel Four, 13 February 1983).

³⁴ Letter from NUM General Secretary, to Labour Party General Secretary, 3 August 1984.

³⁵ Letter from Tribune Group, 10 August 1984, signed, amongst others, by Tribune Secretary Chris Smith.

permit GCs to allow members the right to participate in selections³⁶. By now, the Leader, NEC and local members supported the rule amendment. It was defeated by the unions in conference, though Kinnock claimed “We won the argument but lost the vote”³⁷. Solidarity similarly took comfort, saying it was “now irresistible (*sic*). It is not so much a question of ‘if’, but of ‘when’ victory comes”³⁸. The campaign continued, with resolutions reaching the NEC (for example, from Epping Forest and West Gloucestershire CLPs in favour of OMOV, and Southampton against – on the grounds that “The ‘one member-one-vote’ system would mean party members not attending meetings would come under the influence of the Capitalist press, rather than being involved in the democratic processes of the Labour Party”³⁹). CLPD took a strong line against OMOV, resisting any widening of the franchise and seeking to retain power within GCs⁴⁰, though LCC made a brave move towards membership participation, Mike Craven arguing that at least a debate should take place on the Left⁴¹. This was the first breach in the Left’s almost unanimous hostility to OMOV⁴². With 5 OMOV resolutions on the 1985 conference agenda (including one from the EETPU), CLPD worked to ensure their defeat arguing they “would certainly not lead to a greater involvement even of individual party members” whilst they would reduce union input⁴³. Two resolutions were debated, with the EETPU’s (calling on the NEC to table a rule amendment) being remitted to the NEC.

The campaign continued with Solidarity producing a leaflet, “One Person One Vote: They say it can’t be done”, which rebutted their opponents’ arguments (“The Press will put pressure”; “It’s a vote for sleeping members”; “It will exclude local unions”, “It will be too difficult to administer”) and extending their demand to giving all members a vote for a CLP’s delegate to conference⁴⁴. Meanwhile, the NEC established a Working Group⁴⁵ and issued a consultation document on “Party Franchise for Selection and

³⁶ *Guardian*, 28 September 1984.

³⁷ *Labour Solidarity*, November 1984.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ NEC Organisation Sub-Committee papers, February and March 1985 (LPA).

⁴⁰ CLPD Newsletter, March 1985.

⁴¹ Mike Craven, “One Person One Vote”, *The Journal*, Clause 4, Spring 1985.

⁴² The exception being the ILP which, whilst highly critical of the Right, nevertheless supported “A democratic say for all the membership” in selections; John O’Brien *et al*, *Who Rules: Annual Conference versus the Parliamentary Party*, Independent Labour Publications (ILP), 1979, p.23.

⁴³ CLPD Circular, 25 July 1985.

⁴⁴ *Labour Solidarity*, January 1986.

⁴⁵ John Evans (Chair), Betty Boothroyd, Gordon Colling, Roy Hattersley, Larry Whitty and Joyce Gould; Consultation Working Party, *Party Franchise*, Labour Party, 1987.

Reselection of Parliamentary Candidates” which attracted 372 responses⁴⁶. By 73:10, the CLPD AGM reiterated “its belief that the GC is the nucleus of Labour Party democracy and will continue to fight any adulteration of this principle whether by OMOV or any other future manipulations”⁴⁷. Its newsletter argued against “so-called ‘one member one vote’” and urged supporters to submit its model resolution to halt OMOV⁴⁸. The other left-wing group, LCC, had meanwhile turned to embrace OMOV (which they had helped defeat in 1984), an OMOV ballot of their own members giving it a 2:1 majority⁴⁹. Solidarity continued its long-standing campaign, offering speakers for meetings to build support for the case⁵⁰.

John Evans, a staunch Kinnock supporter, author of the failed 1984 attempt and now chair of the Working Group, continued his proselytising: “I believe that the present method of re-selecting sitting Labour MPs is an enormous albatross which the Party has inflicted upon itself. .. There are no inherent grounds for arguing against the principle of extending the right to every individual member .. of a vote in selecting and reselecting the .. candidate .. the time for ‘one member one vote’ has come; .. it will rejuvenate the Party .. the overwhelming majority of Party members, weary of narrow sectarianism, agrees with me”⁵¹. The Working Group produced a range of Options, from Mandatory Balloting to the *status quo*, rehearsing the arguments for and against each (and setting out the percentage of members participating in selections – an average of 8.4%)⁵². The EETPU quickly prepared its response, outlining how reselection had failed to extend involvement to members, with often fewer than 20 participating in the vote. Reviewing the suggested Options, the union favoured Mandatory Ballots. It was, said the submission, no more than the One Person, One Vote which the party supported for all other forms of election.

Most attention in this period, however, focused on the 1987 General Election, which produced few extra seats. Immediately after the defeat, OMOV was on the agenda as a new round of reselections would start within 18 months. Some remained cautious; at

⁴⁶ 4 February 1987; Charles Turnock papers.

⁴⁷ Minutes of CLPD AGM, 14, 21 and 28 February 1987.

⁴⁸ CLPD Newsletter, June 1987.

⁴⁹ *Guardian*, 12 March 1987.

⁵⁰ *Labour Solidarity*, February 1987.

⁵¹ John Evans MP, “One Member One Vote Democracy in the Labour Party”, *Labour Club News*, April 1987.

⁵² Consultation Working Party, *op cit*.

an LCC Conference, “Robin Cook said that OMOV, whilst a good idea, was not a panacea to provide a better image for the Party”⁵³. However, Bernie Grant, newly elected for Tottenham, “At his first meeting of the Campaign Group caused a storm by making his position on One Member One Vote perfectly clear (he’s in favour of it)”⁵⁴. Undeterred, CLPD urged: “Parliamentary Selection: reject pseudo-democracy Choices before Conference”⁵⁵. Former General Secretary Mortimer similarly argued that “representative democracy is a sign of maturity”. He also tried ‘guilt by association’ by linking OMOV with Owen’s name before falling back on administrative difficulties: “A poll of members for the purpose of selecting a parliamentary candidate would require the careful checking of records and would be likely to lead to all kinds of unnecessary controversy”⁵⁶. The 1987 conference did vote to expand the franchise for selection, but a composite motion moved by the EETPU’s John Spellar in support of OMOV was defeated in favour of a local electoral college⁵⁷. This retained a 40% input from unions although it did extend voting for the other 60% to party members who either attended a meeting or, if they had good reason for non-attendance, applied for a postal vote.

After the 1988 conference, CLPD, recognising the importance of union votes, went direct to unions, circulating a model resolution for 1989 union conferences which, while acknowledging OMOV had been agreed for the choice of Leader, called on each union to “oppose any further extension .. of non-participatory voting”⁵⁸. The CLPD Executive tabled a resolution for its own AGM deploring the NEC’s decision to take an OMOV amendment to the 1989 conference and calling for a campaign to retain decision-making at the GC⁵⁹. Later, CLPD had to gear up to resist the extension of balloting to the choice of conference delegate, circulating a model resolution against postal ballots⁶⁰.

Full OMOV for candidate selection still had some time to wait. “Labour First”⁶¹ set up a “One Member One Vote Now” campaign in December 1992 (with John Spellar as co-ordinator) and everything geared up to John Smith’s mammoth battle at the 1993

⁵³ *Clause IV*, July 1987, p.4.

⁵⁴ *Clause IV*, July 1987, p.6.

⁵⁵ CLPD Newsletter, September 1987.

⁵⁶ Jim Mortimer, “Narrowing Labour’s franchise”, *Morning Star*, 15 July 1987.

⁵⁷ *EETPU Political Bulletin*, November 1987, p.3.

⁵⁸ CLPD Circular, 11 November 1988.

⁵⁹ CLPD Circular, 20 December 1988.

⁶⁰ CLPD Circular, October 1989.

⁶¹ The successor to Solidarity.

conference, when – helped, or perhaps even saved, by John Prescott – the decision was finally taken, not without the twisting of a large number of arms. Union delegations were turned around, some at the very last moment, whilst others (such as the present author) with just a couple of votes to their mandate, were summoned to the Leader and warned he would resign if the conference defeated OMOV. His Leadership acceptance speech had committed the party to “one member one vote” in place of block-votes⁶² and he believed he had to deliver.

Whilst OMOV for candidate selection took until 1993 to be agreed, it came earlier for the choice of Leader – not least because of media attention on how unions cast their massive votes, and because of the importance of this choice for the whole country not just one seat. Much earlier, the 1972 conference had remitted two resolutions calling for the election of the Leader by conference, but it was 1976 before a motion was passed asking the NEC to set up a Working Party to consider widening the electorate for the choice of Leader⁶³. Evidence submitted included 1 affiliate and 18 CLPs favouring selection by individual party members⁶⁴. However, MPs remained firmly of the view that they should retain the sole rights of election⁶⁵. The report to the 1977 conference and the accompanying resolution confirmed the MPs’ role in the election of Leader (who would, for the first time, become the Leader of the party, not just of the parliamentary party)⁶⁶. Two amendments extending the franchise beyond MPs were lost. However, the campaign to change this was to continue each year, with the 1980 Commission of Enquiry and the Bishops Stortford meeting seeing Callaghan acquiesce in an Electoral College, to the despair of the Right which saw it open the door to a Benn leadership. The wider franchise was narrowly adopted in October, its composition being decided at the 1981 Wembley Conference.

Immediately after the 1980 Conference, when MPs had lost their monopoly, CLV called a meeting of its 100 key activists, which (unintentionally) took place between Callaghan’s resignation and Foot’s election. Whilst its focus shifted to post-Wembley considerations⁶⁷, on the immediate issue, the meeting agreed (with Owen dissenting⁶⁸)

⁶² John Smith Leadership acceptance speech, 18 July 1992.

⁶³ *Report of the 1977 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.11.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.380.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p.381.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, pp.379-382.

⁶⁷ The possibility of a new party being openly discussed; Shirley Williams’ closing words were greeted enthusiastically: “If it is not possible to have democratic compassionate policies in this party then I

that CLV remained in favour of selection by the PLP and only if that failed would their choice be full OMOV. It was much too late to start a campaign for that option.

At Wembley, Chapple spoke from ^{the}rostrum: “The Labour Movement has always fought for the principle of one person one vote .. we should uphold that principle today. We support .. one member one vote, firstly because it is right in itself; next because it enfranchises the entire membership and gives each and every supporter an equal right in choosing the Leader”⁶⁹. The case against OMOV was articulated by Militant delegate Pat Wall who claimed that “one man one vote” would give the 4 millionaires “who control the media .. the biggest influence in that ballot”⁷⁰. The proposal was bound to fail. It had only been grasped, late in the day, by MPs after failing to keep the decision firmly in their own hands⁷¹. Furthermore, being supported by Owen, Rodgers, Williams (who were to defect the following day) and CLV⁷², it was opposed not just by the Left but by many whose instincts warned them off such association.

Outside the confines of the party, others saw more than just the birthpangs of the SDP, one armchair observer noting:

“What was so startlingly clear from these television pictures .. was the sincerity with which some constituency Labour Party delegates oppose the principle of one-man-one-vote. From the gleam in the eye to the finger in the air their every mannerism shows that when it comes to privileged voting rights, no 19th century totalitarian Tory demanding them in the name of the abnormal extent of his lands could outdo a 20th Century totalitarian CLP delegate demanding them in the name of the abnormal extent of his activity”⁷³.

The Left would oppose this extended democracy for another 8 years (and until 1993 for candidates), with few breaking ranks (although Meacher argued that union members

will not go on being a fig-leaf. None of us should go off on our own, we must think together and act together. We cannot be used for something we do not agree with” (Ian Wrigglesworth papers - IWP).

⁶⁸ In favour of moving straight to OMOV. Other CLV members supported the principle but sensed that the debate would focus on the proportions within an Electoral College.

⁶⁹ *Report of the NEC to the 1981 Labour Party Conference*, p.125. Option 4 of the agenda was a ballot of individual members, “Report of the Conference Arrangements Committee”, 24 January 1981, p.2.

⁷⁰ *Report of the NEC to the 1981 Labour Party Conference*, p.127.

⁷¹ Mo Mowlam referred to the “impudence of back-bench MPs” in wanting more say; *ibid*, p.145.

⁷² *Sunday Times*, 7 December 1980.

⁷³ Chris Dunkley, “The ‘Left’ exposes itself”, *Financial Times*, 28 January 1981.

should vote in their section, whilst GCs should decide locally, albeit mandated by branch meetings⁷⁴).

The biggest incentive on the party to change the working of the new Electoral College was its first airing – for the 1981 Deputy Leadership, with the image of unions casting large tranches of the vote often without consideration of their members' views. On television and in large spreads in the press, descriptions of the workings of delegations and executives shone unwelcome light on union decision-making⁷⁵. The CLP figures were not much better, with few consulting their members. 22 CLPs did undertake some sort of ballot, with turn-outs averaging 73% for postal ballot, 88.6% for personal delivery and collection of ballot papers, and 35.67% for branch ballots⁷⁶.

In mid-1982, the NEC had yet to be convinced, judging: "It would be impractical to lay down a constitutional procedure for a one person, one vote election" in every CLP although it did propose that members could be involved by a ballot either at branch meetings or at a mass meeting at CLP level, or (the favoured option) by a postal ballot. It was for each GC to decide; but few would give up power to the membership⁷⁷. After the Right took the chairmanship of the NEC Organisation Sub-committee, they continued to face Left opposition to OMOV⁷⁸ but were able to encourage full membership participation.

By the 1983 leadership election, the demand for OMOV was taking root. Many unions and CLPs decided to determine their voting choice by OMOV⁷⁹, contributing to Hattersley's "remarkable" 40-point victory over left-wing Meacher for Deputy Leader (309 CLPs supported Hattersley with just 280 for Meacher). Hattersley "won hands-down" in most CLPs that conducted individual ballots: of 54 parties using postal ballot, no fewer than 49 supported the victor. Meacher had a 2:1 lead where GCs took the decision⁸⁰. In London, a third of the GCs kept the decision to themselves, 40% opting

⁷⁴ Michael Meacher, "Breaking the block vote", *New Statesman*, 13 November 1981.

⁷⁵ e.g. *Financial Times*, 25 September 1981; "How three top communists swung 200,000 votes to Benn", *Observer*, 28 June 1981.

⁷⁶ See annex 5.

⁷⁷ NEC paper NAD/116/6/82, 23 June 1982 (NBP).

⁷⁸ *Guardian*, 6 December 1982.

⁷⁹ Though some unions used other methods, such as the ISTC, whose general secretary wrote: "I was determined that as the union was now to have some say as to who the next Labour leader would be then that decision ought to be made by as many people within the union as possible. We therefore asked all our 800 branches to let us know their views", Bill Sirs, *op cit*, p.130.

⁸⁰ Peter Kellner, "Widespread balloting gives Hattersley landslide", *New Statesman*, 7 October 1983.

for a ballot of members, with a further 20% using a branch ballot⁸¹. Where a ballot was open to all members, the percentage poll ranged from 21% to 82%, with an average of 52%. With a ballot at branch meetings, the percentage poll ranged from 12% to 35%, with an average of 24%.

While slow progress was being made on all-member ballots for selections (where vacancies were appearing), the debate went quiet for the leadership after Kinnock's emphatic victory ruled out any challenge. That was to change after the 1987 election. Early in 1988 Field returned to the fray, suggesting full OMOV for the choice of Leader⁸². Meanwhile the Left were contemplating a challenge to Kinnock⁸³, which emerged when Benn and Heffer challenged Kinnock and Hattersley for their respective positions. Whilst the incumbents were always bound to win (although Prescott's entry as Deputy Leader challenger did raise some doubts), the contest again shone a spotlight on how union members and local parties were consulted.

It was at this time that the EETPU swung into action. For any CLP where the union was affiliated, it offered to pay the postage costs of a full postal ballot to decide the CLP leadership vote⁸⁴. 34 CLPs took up the offer, the union reimbursing a total of £2,449. The results overwhelmingly favoured the incumbents but of more interest was the high number of ballot papers returned – up to 545 in one constituency⁸⁵. As the union guessed, once party members had exercised this right, they were unlikely to let it go. The following year, when the NEC began encouraging CLPs to involve members in the election of conference delegates, the EETPU repeated its funding offer to CLPs⁸⁶.

Support for full participation grew. The principle of OMOV in elections for Leader and Deputy Leader was agreed at the 1988 conference, with the appropriate rule amendment adopted the following March⁸⁷. Later, when OMOV was extended to the election of NEC members in 1992, Brown and Blair immediately took advantage of this to stand, getting elected on their first attempt⁸⁸.

⁸¹ London Labour Party Report, March 1984.

⁸² *Guardian*, 9 January 1988.

⁸³ *Times*, 21 January 1988.

⁸⁴ "Leadership Election", *EETPU Political Bulletin*, July 1988.

⁸⁵ JSA.

⁸⁶ *EETPU Political Bulletin*, July 1989, Issue 27.

⁸⁷ *The Independent*, 7 March 1989.

⁸⁸ Andy McSmith, *Faces of Labour: The Inside Story*, Verso, 1996, p.323.

It had been a long battle, fought by Solidarity and its supporters, and by the EETPU which argued the case, tabled resolutions and funded exemplary ballots. For many, it was a struggle to wrest control from left-dominated GCs. For some it was to show the public that the party's Leader would not be selected by a handful of union leaders wielding unrepresentative block-votes.

Chapter 7 Manifesto Group of Labour MPs, 1974-1983

The thrust of this thesis is that the Labour Party was, after many years of electoral failure, turned back towards electability by the activities of the traditional, loyalist Right, particularly in the unions, who conspired to change the political balance on the NEC and thus deliver for a Leader willing to change the party (Kinnock) the necessary majority for his agenda. It is therefore mostly the story of the 'stayers' from the Centre and Right who remained after the 1981 SDP split and who redoubled their efforts to 'save' the party. The unions played a crucial role in this. However, other forces were also at work, in the constituencies and within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). This chapter concentrates on the right-wing parliamentary grouping, the Manifesto Group of Labour MPs, set up to counter the Tribune Group and to deliver the PLP's 'natural' centre-right majority in internal PLP elections. Although most of its activities pre-date the 1981 split, as there is no existing study of the Group, and few references to it in the literature, this chapter describes its history, reviews how successful it was and considers whether more could have been achieved within the prevailing culture in the party.

Divisions within the PLP were not new, the most seismic having been the 1971 split over Europe. "The Labour cleavage was no longer .. Left/Right .. It was for or against the European Community"¹. It heralded a longer term split, which Owen sees as the genesis of the SDP², and followed the 1969 division over *In Place of Strife*³, when many of the 'traditional' union right-wingers sided with the Left⁴.

The majority of Labour MPs were increasingly out of sympathy with the party. On Europe, on defence, on relations with the government and on constitutional change, the moderate majority in the PLP had little in common with the NEC or the conference. This minority position within the movement was the major cause of weakness for the Manifesto Group, forcing it to keep its membership secret⁵ and its presence apologetic, and making many MPs fight shy of it. Manifesto officers were intolerant of the

¹ David Owen, *Time to Declare*, Penguin Books, 1992, p.187.

² "The true story of the formation of the SDP begins here in early 1971", David Owen, *op cit*, p.172.

³ The 1969 White Paper on union reform which was withdrawn in the face of opposition from the PLP, NEC and unions.

⁴ Jim Wellbeloved interview.

⁵ Until February 1980 when a ballot of members decided by 30:7 to opt for openness, Manifesto Group archives, Manchester (MGA).

“humbugs”⁶ or “cowards in the middle”⁷, especially those whose public and private utterances were at variance⁸. However, not all of them were themselves so brave. One trade unionist recalls that when he would make forthright contributions against “the Trots” at his GC, John Cartwright (later to defect) would quietly say “well done” but not himself speak. Reproached for this, he replied that, as the Council Leader, “he had a responsibility not to be too provocative”⁹.

Unpopularity within the party aside, there were other obstacles confronting the Group. Firstly, they were provided with no protective shield by the Leader, whether from the left-wing Wilson or, perhaps surprisingly, from the more right-wing Callaghan¹⁰. Secondly, they were effectively leaderless – or perhaps had a surfeit of leaders. Whilst there were strong and respected personalities on the Right, none put themselves at the helm of the Manifesto members or provided a single icon behind which to rally supporters. When in government, membership of the Group had been confined to back-benchers. From 1979, when the Shadow Cabinet could join and when the Right so needed a leader¹¹, the Group was unable to coalesce around any one candidate. Not until the 1981 Deputy Leadership election was the (then depleted) Manifesto Group wholly in favour of a single candidate – though they had come together for Healey in the final ballot in 1980 when he was 10 votes short of Foot’s 139 votes.

A third weakness stemmed from Manifesto members’ conflicting urges. One was loyalty to the leadership (a reflection of a deeply loyalist tradition). However, their members were initially those who had largely supported George Brown against Wilson in 1963 and, in 1980, had without exception favoured Healey in the final ballot against the victorious Foot¹². This was in stark contrast to the formative experience of many of

⁶ Dickson Mabon, interview, 3 July 2002.

⁷ John Horam, interview, 14 January 2003.

⁸ John Golding, *The Fixers: The Rise and Fall of Benn and Heffer*, 1988; Jim Wellbeloved interview.

⁹ Arthur Bonner, interview, 6 November 2003.

¹⁰ Callaghan saw his role as balancing the forces within the PLP and was careful never to favour either side (Tom McNally interview).

¹¹ Wrigglesworth regretted that: “the Left is writing the agenda” and criticised the leadership for “assuming that its centre-right troops are created in its own image”, and for putting left-wingers on the frontbench “to complement the trusty, loyal, ‘we’ll-keep-our-heads-down’ figures from the centre-right .. Those on the radical Right were being excluded .. The overwhelming need now is for leadership on the Right”, to give MPs “a sense of direction and goal” and give party members “a figure behind whom to rally. .. Those who wish to lead the PLP must .. take on the NEC and expose the cant of the dogma of the infallibility of Conference decisions” (draft speaking notes, IWP).

¹² It is alleged that at least three later defectors voted for Foot as a “spoiling” tactic, not because they supported him. See p. 81.

them, who – in their younger personae – had been active in CDS¹³. At that time, their loyalty to the leadership and their faith in Hugh Gaitskell came together in their shared position on defence¹⁴. There was no conflict between loyalty and the Leader.

In the 1970s, it was an event in the PLP rather than in Conference which created this new Group: Tribune's surprise success in getting the veteran left-winger Ian Mikardo elected Chairman of the PLP after the February 1974 Election¹⁵. Tribune never had a majority of MPs (in 1977 it printed a list of 80 members¹⁶) but the Right had carelessly nominated four candidates. When the temporary Chair of the PLP meeting announced (contrary to normal practice although apparently without a shade of conspiracy or ill-intent) it was First-Past-The-Post, the Right for once was too disorganised to react¹⁷, leaving Mikardo home and dry¹⁸. No sinister plot by the Left but poor tactics by the Right. They were determined not to let that happen again. The centre-right majority had been 'organising' votes for PLP positions, to counter the Tribune Group, with regular success. A no-name group had met informally in the tea-room to pass on intelligence and discuss tactics, voting slates and gossip. Wellbeloved, Mabon and others from this network formed the core of what became the Manifesto Group¹⁹. So, after the Mikardo victory, when a first formal meeting was called, in the words of its first Chairman, we just "knew who to invite"²⁰.

After the October 1974 Election, the Manifesto Group – initially acting slightly informally – immediately regained the Chairmanship (with Cledwyn Hughes). Then, in the election for the backbench members of the Liaison Committee²¹, they also won the Vice Chairmanship (Tam Dalyell) and took the next three positions (Willey, Mabon and Wellbeloved), leaving just two places for Tribune's defeated PLP Chairman, Mikardo, and Frank Allaun²².

¹³ Such as Hamilton, Hattersley, Howell, Magee, Rodgers, Stewart, Wellbeloved, Shirley Williams, MGA; CDS names from Brian L. Brivati, *op cit*.

¹⁴ *ibid*; Bill Rodgers, *op cit*.

¹⁵ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.167; PLP archives.

¹⁶ IWP.

¹⁷ Alan Haworth, interview, 25 January 2002.

¹⁸ Mikardo 99; Arthur Bottomley 85; Fred Willey 41; Tom Urwin 27; Willie Hamilton 20 (PLP archives).

¹⁹ Jim Wellbeloved interview.

²⁰ Dickson Mabon interview.

²¹ The joint frontbench/ backbench Committee (when the party is in power), the backbench places being elected by the PLP.

²² PLP archives, 28 November 1974.

This was back to 'normality'. Part of the shock of Mikardo's March 1974 success had been its unusualness. For example, the 1972 Shadow Cabinet²³ elections showed the Right in firm control. *Tribune* described these results as "obtained by a skilfully organised and determined campaign .. by [past] members of the Right-wing [CDS]"; every effort was made by this group to portray the contest "as a final battle which, if .. lost, would see the party firmly in the hands of the Left". *Tribune's* analysis of the MPs' voting patterns demonstrated how, by "plumping" for 7 of the 12 slots, together with judicial abstentions, they ensured the election of their "hard-line Marketeer" (Harold Lever) as well as Shirley Williams, thus moving an already centre-right Shadow Cabinet towards a more Euro-friendly position²⁴.

The wake-up call from the first 1974 Chairmanship election, together with other trends in the party, consolidated the need for a more organised response from the Right. Initially meeting with neither a name nor any officers, a group convened by Mabon and Wellbeloved decided that the Tribune Group could only be contained if the Right marshalled its forces²⁵. "We realised .. however deep our heads were buried in the sands, we realised we had now lost control. So we said, all right, now let's do it"²⁶. The main players were old hands at political organising, whether through student politics (Lee-Williams²⁷, Wrigglesworth²⁸, Thomas), in CDS (Howell, Wellbeloved) or within the Labour movement (Cartwright and Roper in the co-operative movement, Radice in the unions). Mabon, the Group's first Chairman, had been left out of the 1974 ministerial appointments (no doubt reflecting his criticisms of Wilson²⁹) and was therefore available as a respected backbencher to attract widespread support.

It was not until after the October Election (and the Group's immediate success in regaining the PLP Chairmanship) that named officers, a paper on the Group's purpose and its title emerged. Rodgers claims authorship of the nomenclature, writing of the Group: "My only contribution – as a minister I was excluded from formal membership – had been to suggest its name"³⁰. However, the name reflected the members'

²³ The Parliamentary Committee, to give it its correct title.

²⁴ *Tribune*, 17 November 1972.

²⁵ Jim Wellbeloved interview, Dickson Mabon interview.

²⁶ Dickson Mabon interview.

²⁷ Alan L. Williams, interview, 3 April 2002.

²⁸ Ian Wrigglesworth, interview, 4 November 2002.

²⁹ Dickson Mabon interview.

³⁰ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.167.

defensiveness³¹. They could – despite the party’s move to the Left and its adoption of a more left-wing programme – live with the manifesto on which they had fought the 1974 Election³². But they wanted none of the further leftward shifts they felt around them. The importance of “keeping to the manifesto” in Labour parlance did not identify them as right-wing and, importantly, emphasised their loyalist nature, a Leader’s mandate being to implement the party’s programme as contained in the manifesto. Hence support for that was a nod to the importance of conference decisions while expressing loyalty to the Leadership – despite Wilson having been the choice of few of their Group following Gaitskell’s death in 1963.

To appreciate the defensiveness of these MPs – especially in relation to party activists and the NEC – it is important to remember the shift in party membership, to a younger, less deferential, more educated and articulate group, as a generation radicalised by the 1960s made their presence felt in small, sometimes moribund, local parties. Overlying this had been the frustration with the latter years of the 1966-70 Wilson Government, damaged by in-fighting, the 1969 fall-out with the unions, and the government’s failure to criticise the US over Vietnam. It had not seemed like a government worth championing – even to some of the newer, centre-right MPs such as Owen³³, let alone the radical activists. The Manifesto Group, therefore, despite the majority it could deliver within the PLP, started life on the backfoot. Largely Euro-philes in a party of Euro-sceptics, Atlanticists in a party of unilateralists and about to challenge the moves to re-selection of sitting MPs – they were not swimming with the tide.

Having selected its officers³⁴ and name, the Group was formally constituted at a well-attended meeting in Westminster Hall³⁵ when its membership agreed to “register as a group with the Secretary of the PLP”³⁶, its formation being recorded as 17 December 1974³⁷. Its stated objectives (it could hardly say: “to run slates”) were:

To work for the implementation of the policies .. in the .. manifesto and to support the Labour government in overcoming the country’s acute economic difficulties;

³¹ Jim Wellbeloved interview; Giles Radice, interview, 8 October 2002. The group originally considered calling itself the Social Democratic Group, Ian Bradley, *op cit*, p.60.

³² Dickson Mabon interview.

³³ David Owen, *op cit*, p.91.

³⁴ See annex 6.

³⁵ John Horam interview.

³⁶ Depriving Tribune of its status as the only permanent organised faction among Labour MPs.

³⁷ Ian Bradley, *op cit*, p.xii.

To act as a forum for constructive discussion designed to relate democratic socialist philosophy to the needs of the present age;
 To endeavour to achieve a truly democratic socialist society through our representative parliamentary system³⁸.

An early list identifies 72 members – though some subsequently resigned on becoming ministers³⁹. As it was (unlike Tribune) confined to backbenchers, its true list of supporters – or “friends” as they are called in the papers and who received the “agreed list of candidates” for posts – was much higher with ministers included⁴⁰.

Labour was in government during the Group’s formative years, and facing that divisive issue: Europe. In opposition, following Jenkins’ and 68 other Labour MPs’ vote with the Conservative Government on 28 October 1971 to take the UK into the European Community, the party had, at Benn’s urging, come out in favour of a Referendum on continued membership (causing Jenkins’ resignation as Deputy Leader). Now in government, the party and Cabinet had to decide how to campaign in the 1975 Referendum. A Special Party Conference in April 1975 voted overwhelmingly against the government’s renegotiated “terms” for remaining in Europe – despite opinion polls showing a 2:1 majority in favour of staying in, with Labour voters 5:3 in favour⁴¹. Tribune’s 77 members (a quarter of the PLP, somewhat swelled by the 1974 intakes) were delighted but it heralded a new round of disputes between MPs and their constituency parties.

One of the first to be affected was Reg Prentice. His was a cause close to the heart of many Manifesto members. The Group’s Treasurer, Neville Sandelson (who would later experience similar problems before defecting to the SDP) asked the Prime Minister to “sanction the signature by Ministers” of a statement in support of the beleaguered MP. Wilson’s response went wider and dealt with his role as a member of the NEC as well as his views on small membership. Hoping the NEC would not intervene, Wilson wrote that, should it do so, “I propose to depart from a rule I have strictly followed since I became Leader .. not .. to intervene .. in matters of Party organisation, relations with constituency parties, the selection of candidates, proceedings in relation to candidates or

³⁸ Notes from the meeting, MGA.

³⁹ IWP.

⁴⁰ Tribune group membership: *Economist*, 26 April 1975; Manifesto membership: Wrigglesworth 1977 list (IWP). The Group also had the “tacit encouragement of the Cabinet’s moderates”, *Financial Times*, 9 March 1977.

⁴¹ *Economist*, 26 April 1975.

Members of Parliament". His rule would be broken because "I shall feel it my duty to raise the whole question of actions by small .. not necessarily representative groups who have secured a degree of power within a constituency". He recalled his concern about small parties, especially in safe seats, being unrepresentative of the "mass of Labour voters". His 1955 Report had recommended that CLPs membership should be at least one-twelfth of the Labour vote. In Prentice's CLP, "this would mean a membership of 1,850, which would involve a greater degree of democratic control". The problem of small membership "needs to be tackled urgently". He drew a distinction between the selection of a candidate and "one who has received in a Parliamentary Election, the stamp of the electorate. Perverse action seeking to dismiss an M.P. can get very close indeed to constitutional interference in the rights and duty of an elected member"⁴². A strong statement of support for the rights of MPs in relation to local parties, and music to the ears of the Group.

Rodgers, meanwhile, was making a distinction between the legitimate Left and "a relatively small number of activists, many of them new to the party but rich in experience of fringe politics .. [who] do not share the democratic assumptions of the 'legitimate' left. .. The clearest evidence of a new-style politics .. has been the uncompromising attack on the position of a number of MPs". Rodgers predicted that this new situation "threatens the party of [Nye] Bevan as much as the party of Gaitskell. It .. requires a tough response. .. the heirs of Bevan .. should support the heirs of Gaitskell and help rally wider opinion". The call went unheeded by the 'legitimate' Left and would lie at the root of further divisions within the party. Rodgers called for new safeguards for MPs, with a joint NEC-PLP conciliation committee replacing rules which "institutionalise conflict and treat human situations like a court of law". What was most needed was "to rally the party and to save it from enemies masquerading as friends. What is at stake is not a temporary phenomenon, characteristic of the ebb and flow of opinion within the Labour movement throughout its history, but a sustained attempt to destroy the movement from within"⁴³. Writing long after the split, Rodgers reflected that "this 'legitimate left' failed to acknowledge that they had more in

⁴² Letter of 21 July 1975 from Wilson to Sandelson, IWP.
⁴³ Rodgers Press Release, 28 August 1975.

common with Shirley, myself and our friends than with the Trotskyites and other factions of the hard left”⁴⁴.

Militant was high on the Group’s agenda. The NEC was to tolerate infiltration, despite protests from the Group, until the Right began to change its political make-up in 1981/2. In 1976, the Manifesto Group protested helplessly at the NEC’s decision to appoint the Militant Andy Bevan to the staff⁴⁵. Policy also drew the Group together. Members submitted a Memorandum to Wilson which set “out our view that a major economic initiative is needed”⁴⁶. Their recommendations included a wages policy; bringing forward the proposed public expenditure cuts; consideration of temporary and selective import controls, modernisation of industry, a larger role for NEDC and progress on industrial democracy.

Outside Parliament, local parties were becoming more questioning of their MPs while the Left-controlled NEC was giving the government headaches. Even before he became Leader, Callaghan, as Treasurer and hence on the NEC, was reprimanding it for “leaping on every bandwagon that happens to be rolling by” instead of supporting the Labour Government. He called on the NEC to be “willing to defend the Government and explain the facts to the movement at large”⁴⁷.

However, the purpose of the Manifesto Group was neither to get involved in CLPs, nor in the NEC, but – despite the lofty aims extolled for public consumption – to counter Tribune and to marshal the moderate majority within the PLP for elections. ‘Slates’ were therefore its meat and drink. In general, the Group was highly successful. In the Liaison Committee elections in 1975, for example, Manifesto member Fred Willey topped the poll – thus becoming PLP Vice Chairman – with the Group making a clean sweep of the remaining places, ousting the former PLP Chairman, Mikardo⁴⁸.

There were exceptions to this success. Two major obstacles faced them in the more significant PLP votes – for the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Party. One was the

⁴⁴ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p 168.

⁴⁵ Notes of November and December 1976, MGA. See p.33.

⁴⁶ Drafted by Radice. Signatories included Horam, Cartwright, Wrigglesworth, Tomlinson, Thomas, MacFarquhar, Marquand, Watkins, Roper and Graham; May 1975, IWP.

⁴⁷ *Report of the 1975 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*.

⁴⁸ November 1975 results sheet, IWP; MGA.

lack of a single leader. The other was the desire of some of the centre-right to support a left candidate to produce a more consensual leadership team.

Much has been written – most notably by Radice – about the rivalry between Jenkins, Crosland and Healey⁴⁹. Nowhere was this more obvious, or as damaging to the right-wing cause, than in the 1976 leadership election following Wilson’s resignation.

Wrigglesworth, the Manifesto Group Secretary, as PPS to Jenkins played a key role in his campaign, as did Lee-Williams⁵⁰ and Horam. Other of their Manifesto colleagues worked equally assiduously for Healey, Crosland and for the eventual winner, Callaghan (Wellbeloved⁵¹, John Smith, Hattersley and Cledwyn Hughes⁵²).

Furthermore, Kellner shows that some 19 Centre and Right MPs supported Foot on the first ballot – and as many as 30 in the run-off⁵³, thus signalling a further split amongst the Centre-right, with some registering “none-of-the-above” to Radice’s trio of giants.

Callaghan’s final 176:137 victory over Foot reflected the essential non-left majority in the PLP. Yet it took three ballots to reach and it saw the Centre-right supporting four candidates in round one to the Left’s two, and two (Callaghan and Healey) in round two to the Left’s one. This was not an efficient marshalling of forces. The difference between this and internal PLP elections partly reflects the greater scrutiny by CLPs eager to know their Member’s voting intention, with MPs from marginal seats keen to keep their activists happy – which they calculated a Foot victory would achieve⁵⁴. The result brought to a close conflicting electioneering by Manifesto members. However it posed a question mark over the Group’s existence with Callaghan calling for all such groups to wind themselves up⁵⁵. Mabon immediately responded “We will dissolve the day after the Tribune Group dissolves”⁵⁶. To which the new Prime Minister replied “Quite right!”⁵⁷. Mabon’s own ministerial career was secure but a number of MPs were

⁴⁹ Giles Radice, *op cit*.

⁵⁰ Alan Lee Williams, interview, 2002.

⁵¹ Jim Wellbeloved interview.

⁵² Giles Radice, *op cit*, p.235/6.

⁵³ Peter Kellner, “Anatomy of the Vote”, *New Statesman*, 9 April 1976.

⁵⁴ Kellner, *ibid*.

⁵⁵ *Sunday Mirror*, 2 May 1976, *Times*, 22 April 1976, Wrigglesworth press release, 24 April 1976. Callaghan disliked factionalism. When Chapple complained about the lack of organisation of the Moderates on the NEC, the then Chancellor retorted: “We don’t want a return to the squabbles of the Bevanite period” (Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.105). As Prime Minister, he changed his mind, appreciating Golding’s efforts to co-ordinate support for the government in 1978/1979 (see chapter 9).

⁵⁶ Dickson Mabon interview and *Times*, 22 April 1976.

⁵⁷ Dickson Mabon interview.

concerned that, despite a number of the Group having campaigned for Callaghan, continued activity in such a grouping might lead to a lack of preferment⁵⁸. The Group also had difficulty in recruiting among the 1974 intakes – thus leaving it unattractive to both senior and newer MPs.

The second major vote, by MPs but with an impact beyond the PLP, was for Deputy Leader (which carried an NEC seat) following the resignation of Ted Short. This took place in December 1976. Despite the centre-right majority amongst MPs and her popularity in the country, Shirley Williams lost by 38 votes to the Left's Foot⁵⁹. It was reported that Callaghan favoured Foot, to cement his role as conduit to the Left and to union leaders, and to maintain some semblance of party unity by binding him closer to the leadership⁶⁰. Despite the result, the Manifesto Group professed itself pleased with Williams' showing, which positioned her as a clear runner against any future left challenger such as Benn. However, with hindsight, the Group's inability to deliver for its own candidate presaged the leadership election which would follow four years later.

The Manifesto Group turned its attention to the next PLP elections, and to policy. It issued a statement on economic policy, *Keep on Course*, which called for curbs on inflation, reduction in borrowing and selective import controls plus an import deposit scheme⁶¹. Success in internal elections continued, November 1976 seeing Cledwyn Hughes re-elected unopposed as Chairman of the PLP⁶², with fellow Manifesto Grouper Willey topping the Liaison Committee poll, and thus remaining Vice Chairman. Manifesto members made a clean sweep of the remaining backbench places, with Tribune's entire slate defeated⁶³.

The Group was well established in the PLP's life, meeting weekly – at 6.30 pm on Wednesdays – to discuss "Next Week's Business"⁶⁴, elections to PLP Groups, the European Assembly and similar delegations, as well as policy. Their own elections also

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 22 April 1976.

⁵⁹ By 128 votes to 166. PLP archives.

⁶⁰ *Financial Times*, 22 October 1976.

⁶¹ 27 October 1976, IWP.

⁶² *Report of the 1977 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.83.

⁶³ IWP, 9 November 1976.

⁶⁴ MGA. "Next Week's Business" is the standard agenda item for Parliament, Shadow Cabinet and the PLP, when the parliamentary timetable, and voting arrangements, form the substance of the debate.

took place and, at the end of 1976, Sydney Irving became Chairman⁶⁵. A decision was taken to admit Peers into membership, which was to see some 20 join⁶⁶ including (Dora) Gaitskell and former CDS member, (Patrick) Gordon-Walker⁶⁷.

Increasingly, attention turned to party management, and candidate selection (welcoming, if not endorsing, a call for all-member ballots for selections as early as 13 October 1976)⁶⁸. In December there was a lengthy discussion on Militant, and agreement on the need to field candidates in NEC elections. Recognising that, unless the NEC took action, Militant would not be tackled, 30 of their number signed a resolution that noted “with grave concern recent reports of infiltration into the Party by extremist groups and calls upon the NEC in conjunction with the PLP to investigate the situation with a view to taking remedial action including a review of the rules governing the selection and reselection of Parliamentary candidates”⁶⁹.

Early in 1977, the Group made its most public appearance – and a break with its purpose of organising votes – with a pamphlet, *What We Must Do*. For academic audiences, this might be most noteworthy for its illustrious authorship: (later Professor) David Marquand, (later Professor) Bryan Magee, John Roper, John Horam, (former Professor) John Mackintosh and Giles Radice⁷⁰. Politically, its significance lay “in the recognition that the Centre-right was ideologically barren after the IMF crisis; Keynesianism had been defeated and old style Croslandism-in-one-country was in disarray. We needed to say something. The Left had all the good tunes – they had AES⁷¹. We felt that the Centre-right needed to take an ideological position. So it came out for a kind of marriage between Keynesianism and Monetarism”⁷². The publication was intended to take the social democratic case out to the wider movement where *Tribune* had been left a free hand. The pamphlet, which was well covered in the press⁷³,

⁶⁵ See annex 6.

⁶⁶ As at August 1978, MGA.

⁶⁷ Notes of meetings, MGA.

⁶⁸ Notes of 13 October 1976 meeting, MGA.

⁶⁹ 7 December 1976, IWP.

⁷⁰ Giles Radice interview.

⁷¹ The “Alternative Economic Strategy”.

⁷² Giles Radice interview.

⁷³ *Telegraph* and *Financial Times*, 9 March 1977, *The Times*, 11 March 1977, *Spectator*, 19 March 1977.

also reflected the impact made by John Wakefield's appointment as researcher/administrator (funded by Rowntree)⁷⁴.

The pamphlet was probably linked to the February 1977 establishment of the Campaign for Labour Victory whose arrival was not greeted with universal delight within the Group. Some were upset at not having been informed in advance⁷⁵. Others were alarmed that attention on a non-Tribunite organisation would shine the spotlight on them within their CLPs where their membership of the Group had been a well-kept secret. Nevertheless, given that the Manifesto Group was solely parliamentary, the majority view was that a constituency-based sister organisation should be welcomed. Many of the key players were the same – especially CLV's two convenors, Cartwright and Wrigglesworth, Manifesto Vice Chairman and Secretary. From March onwards, a CLV Report normally appeared on the Group's agendas so that members were updated on activities.

During 1977, the Manifesto Group discussed a wide range of issues at its weekly meetings, including industrial democracy, direct elections to the European Assembly, the Budget, the Lib-Lab Pact, pay policy, and internal party matters such as candidate selections, NEC elections and the Underhill report on Militant, which the Group urged should be published⁷⁶. More discreet matters were also raised. A cryptic, handwritten note on the Secretary's 11 May 1977 agenda reads: "Peter Jay – tell D.O.⁷⁷ privately". It is hard not to infer some disapproval of the Foreign Secretary's appointment of Prime Minister Callaghan's son-in-law⁷⁸ as the UK Ambassador in Washington. The Group also had guest speakers (such as Varley, Owen and Healey⁷⁹).

In November 1977, at the beginning of the parliamentary year, Cartwright took over as Chairman, when Irving resigned (having acted as a "stop gap" but not wanting to continue)⁸⁰. Cartwright was, therefore, a pivotal figure, being a member of the NEC (representing the Socialist Societies), PPS to Shirley Williams, active in CLV and the figurehead of the Manifesto Group. On becoming Chairman, he outlined his priorities:

⁷⁴ MGA. Wakefield was appointed over the favourite, Alec McGivan (later CLV Secretary), because of his "intellectual spark" which the Group felt the Right needed; John Horam interview.
⁷⁵ Notes of 8 February 1977 meeting, MGA.
⁷⁶ Notes of 25 May 1977 meeting, MGA.
⁷⁷ David Owen MP.
⁷⁸ Peter Jay was then married to Margaret Callaghan (now Baroness Jay).
⁷⁹ Calling notices, 6 July, 22 July and 23 November 1977, MGA.
⁸⁰ John Horam, interview, 2003.

to campaign in the country about the government; the manifesto for the next election; and reform of the party structure⁸¹. The latter had been a long interest of his, having helped produce *The Mechanics of Victory*, in 1962⁸².

The Group's success continued with another clean sweep of the Liaison Committee in 1977. 1978 saw a similar range of activities, with speakers Rodgers and Hattersley⁸³, together with discussions on European elections, immigration, industrial democracy and the party's Working Party on reselection. The Group was vehement in its protest about there being only 3, rather than 7, PLP representatives on this⁸⁴. Internal party matters had become the dividing line between the Group and the NEC. In July 1978, Secretary Wigglesworth wrote to the party General Secretary protesting against Jimmy Reid's adoption as parliamentary candidate for Dundee East, as he had less than the required 2 years' party membership (having been in the Communist Party). Hayward's curt reply ("I acknowledge receipt of your letter of 20 July .. I appreciate the propaganda motive in sending me this letter but I know you will also appreciate that I cannot recognise any group apart from our official group which is, of course, the Parliamentary Labour Party"⁸⁵) was a deliberate put-down. Wigglesworth's letter was ignored by the NEC which endorsed the candidature by 12:6 votes⁸⁶.

The 1978 AGM re-elected Cartwright as Chairman⁸⁷ for what would prove a difficult year. 1979 started with a protest about the PLP's exclusion from the adoption process for the European Manifesto for the first direct elections – undermining the traditional NEC/PLP balance guaranteed by Clause V of the constitution⁸⁸. Major work took place on a pre-election statement, "Priorities for Labour", on economic and industrial policy⁸⁹. This stated starkly: "We believe the Labour Party must be the party of permanent incomes policy" and dealt with import controls, nationalisation and compulsory planning agreements (against all of them), favouring public spending, reform of CAP, tax reform and industrial democracy.

⁸¹ Notes of 16 November 1977 meeting, MGA.

⁸² Jim Daly interview, 2 November 2001. Tony Benn was also in the Group. Young Fabian Group, *The Mechanics of Victory*, Fabian Society, 1962.

⁸³ 18 January and 26 July 1978 respectively, MGA.

⁸⁴ 27 February, 1 and 8 March 1978 meetings, MGA.

⁸⁵ Letter dated 27 July 1978, MGA.

⁸⁶ Notes of 26 July 1978 meeting, MGA.

⁸⁷ Notes of November 1978 AGM, MGA.

⁸⁸ Notes of 17 January 1979 meeting, MGA.

⁸⁹ 25 March 1979, IWP.

All was of no avail as the Labour Government was swept away in the 3 May 1979 General Election, following the Winter of Discontent and the failure of the government's incomes policy, by Thatcher's overall majority of 43 (71 seats more than Labour). Ministers lost their cars; Shirley Williams lost her seat; but Wrigglesworth continued to organise. Within days, he was marking off a list of new MPs as: wet-centre, hard centre-left, OK (Tom McNally⁹⁰), soft-left, ambitious-left (Jack Straw⁹¹), centre-left (Frank Dobson) and, delightfully, "eccentric centre" (Dale Campbell Savours). His list of the whole PLP, old and new, shows 149 from the Manifesto Group (64) and centre-right (85), with 94 from Tribune (57) and centre-left (37) leaving an "unknown" 25 from the depleted complement of 268⁹². A comfortable centre-right majority.

Despite Wrigglesworth's prediction, McNally claims never to have joined the Manifesto Group (though he attended an early meeting⁹³). Partly McNally attributes this to not being a "joining" type, and to his distaste for some of its members such as Sandelson. But mostly because he was under intense pressure from his new GC (having been too close to the last government) and could not risk being linked to a centre-right group⁹⁴. In fact, every new MP declined to join⁹⁵, though Roger Thomas wrote "on crucial occasions, such as choosing the 'Shadow' Cabinet, to the extent that my votes count, the 'right' people will get in"⁹⁶. It was not simply new members who held back. Former ministers could now join, but Healey held aloof. Seeing factions at work on the NEC when a party employee decades earlier, had made him very anti all such groups⁹⁷. He also slightly mistrusted those running it – claiming to have been correct because Horam and Prentice later joined the Conservatives (and many more the SDP). Like McNally, he too found Sandelson "very odd" – demonstrating that the Group's Treasurer was not

⁹⁰ Former Political Adviser at Number 10.

⁹¹ Former Political Adviser to Barbara Castle MP.

⁹² IWP.

⁹³ Notes of 15 May 1979 meeting, MGA.

⁹⁴ Tom McNally interview. Although McNally stated he never joined, a completed ballot paper in his name (voting against disclosure of the list of members) is in the archives, February 1980; in June 1981 he is listed as a member of a Manifesto working party (MGA).

⁹⁵ Brian L. Brivati, *op cit*, p.285.

⁹⁶ Letter of 25 May 1979 to Neville Sandelson, MGA.

⁹⁷ Denis Healey, interview, 16 October 2002.

the most effective recruiting sergeant. Even so, by 13 June 1979 the Group had 59 members and 81 supporters⁹⁸.

The first post-election meeting, chaired by Wrigglesworth, had 40 present, with a good turn out of former ministers⁹⁹ although Mackenzie regretted the “sad lack of new members present”. Discussion turned to the forthcoming Shadow Cabinet elections as well as to the Group’s role. On the former, there was a lengthy debate on whether to run a slate, and if so whether to have a full slate of 12, or just 9 so as to allow some non-aligned members to be elected. Duffy was against any slate for this first round as this was “offensive to non-members (especially in TU Group)”. In contrast, Ashley strongly favoured a slate, if only of 9 names, whilst Willey thought a slate of 12 was needed as that was what Tribune would have. Palmer, Archer, Mackenzie, Ennals, Roper, Owen, Sam Silkin, Rodgers and Horam all supported a slate for this “popularity contest” (Horam’s words) as did Douglas-Mann who supported a list of 9 to leave space for “the Shores¹⁰⁰ and [John] Silkins”¹⁰¹.

Regarding the Group’s purpose, Golding argued it should “stick to giving voice of silent majority” as well as fighting elections. Mabon stressed the need to be making speeches to outdo the Left. Thomas wanted the Group to become a broader church as well as a source of ideas. Howell warned of the “parlous state” of the party and, in particular, of “TU leaders” having “opted out of the struggle”¹⁰². Magee wanted to oppose the Conservative government as well as Tribune, whilst Palmer favoured the articulation of the Group’s philosophy. Archer stressed the need to “get rid of idea of our being less socialist. We are in main tradition – we need to persuade”. Ennals saw the “need to do some policy thinking because Transport House ain’t going to do it” whilst Roper and Grant wanted links with unions. Owen correctly predicted “EEC issue going to be great” but warned they “mustn’t let it divide group”. Douglas-Mann predicted that there would be a “big battle over the future of PLP” and wanted work within the party in the country. Despite being “temperamentally opposed to Groups”, Hattersley conceded

⁹⁸ Membership list, MGA.

⁹⁹ including Archer, Duffy, Ennals, Golding, Hattersley, Howell, Mabon, Owen, Rodgers, Sam Silkin and Wellbeloved.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Shore.

¹⁰¹ Notes of 15 May 1979 meeting, MGA and IWP.

¹⁰² Denis Howell, as President of APEX, later played a significant role in re-engaging these union leaders. See St Ermins Group chapters.

“we need them” to organise¹⁰³. That evening after the meeting, Wrigglesworth wrote to supporters asking for support for Willey (as Chairman of the PLP) and Michael Cocks (as Chief Whip)¹⁰⁴. Both were elected comfortably – Willey by 151 to Tribune Buchan’s 87; Cocks by 188 to Flannery’s 44¹⁰⁵.

The next meeting, with 32 present, voted by 23:3 that members could not be ordered not to stand for the Shadow Cabinet¹⁰⁶, and decided on a slate of 9, despite Wellbeloved’s support for the maximum of 12. Those selected to be “recommended to members and friends” were former ministers Hattersley, Healey, Mabon, Mason, Owen, Rees, Rodgers, John Smith and Varley¹⁰⁷. There was some discussion about the remaining places and the need to “make certain 3 Trib not at top of ballot”. The meeting also agreed that the Shadow Cabinet could be full members, though whether they could hold office was left open.

The slate was circulated by Wrigglesworth who added “In choosing nine the Group had in mind that Members might wish to support individual personal preferences in addition to those the Group wish to recommend. It is, of course, a matter for you how many candidates you vote for, but it is very much hoped that you will feel able to support those listed”¹⁰⁸. All but Mabon were elected, the remaining places going to John Silkin¹⁰⁹ and Shore (in second and third place to Healey’s first, suggesting strong Manifesto support¹¹⁰) with only Orme and Booth from Tribune¹¹¹.

In June, the AGM re-elected Cartwright as Chairman, with George Robertson replacing Wrigglesworth as Secretary, the latter having stood down after 3 years¹¹². Robertson, a

¹⁰³ Notes of 15 May 1979 meeting, MGA.

¹⁰⁴ Letter of 15 May 1979, MGA.

¹⁰⁵ Circular from Frank Barlow, PLP Secretary, 17 May 1979, PLP archives.

¹⁰⁶ Important for success is the discipline of not running too many candidates. This may explain a note from Mason saying: “I have been asked by several colleagues to stand .. for chairman of the P.L.P. I have begged leave to decline .. [as] a long-serving and much respected colleague is already in the field. I could not oppose a friend”, 10 May 1979, IWP.

¹⁰⁷ Notes of 21 May meeting, MGA. This is the first showing John Smith’s attendance; as a minister he had not been eligible to join.

¹⁰⁸ Letter of 24 May 1979, MGA.

¹⁰⁹ Silkin later boasted: “during the period 1979-86, there was only one MP not on a slate ..[elected] to the Shadow Cabinet. First it was me, [then] Denzil Davies .. when I decided to stand down” John Silkin, *op cit*, p.80. Silkin was not as generous with his own votes: “A scrutineer at a Shadow Cabinet election noticed a ballot paper with a single cross for Silkin and was assured .. that this was his habitual practice”, Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p 538/9.

¹¹⁰ Though also reflecting a strong anti-European sentiment as both were well known sceptics.

¹¹¹ Results in PLP circular, 14 June 1979, PLP archives.

¹¹² See annex 6.

former official with the GMWU, was a formidable organiser. There was a distinct northern flavour to the Group, reflecting its traditional moderate party. Horam¹¹³, Radice and Wrigglesworth represented the North-East, supported by strong regions of the TGWU and GMWU. Such solid back-up would be needed in the months ahead.

A whole new situation confronted the Group. Firstly, there was the shock of electoral defeat with the recognition that the party needed to re-engage with voters if it was to win in 1983/4. Secondly, an increasing number of members were under pressure from their local parties. Thirdly, an enormous debate was taking place on democratising the party – demands for mandatory reselection, NEC control over the manifesto, and a wider franchise for the election of the Leader. The Group concentrated on influencing the PLP discussions on these, but also collaborated with CLV in producing a joint statement, “Reform and Democracy in the Labour Party”. Its opening words were “The Labour Party in 1979 is at the crossroads”. It hinted that a “lengthy period of opposition” might be in prospect, pointing to declining membership, poor organisation and weak finances, and asserted “We cannot accept the allegation that Labour Governments have consistently betrayed the platforms on which they were elected”¹¹⁴.

This marked clear water between the predominant Bennite position within the wider party. The paper recognised the failure to find a solution to problems of low growth and slowly rising living standards, but went on to concentrate on internal party matters, pointing to the 1979 General and European election results as being the worst since the 1930s, and to a party £1 million in debt. The system of electing the NEC was criticised for failing to provide a proper balance of opinions. The left-wing majority on the NEC was taken to task for failing to face up to the party’s multifarious problems – financial and Militant (the report on which the NEC had refused to publish) – as well as acting “as if it was in permanent opposition to the Labour Government”. The paper rebutted the proposals for constitutional change and proposed its own “Agenda for Reform”. This encompassed increasing membership (so that CLPs were representative of Labour voters), restructuring the NEC to make it representative of party opinion (creating PLP and local government sections) and improving policy-making to enable proposals to be

¹¹³ TGWU sponsored.

¹¹⁴ CLV and Manifesto Group, “Reform and Democracy in the Labour Party”, *Labour Victory*, October 1979.

discussed with the PLP and TUC before adoption¹¹⁵. CLV distributed the statement, providing some alternatives for local supporters, should they wish to take on CLPD.

Meanwhile, the debate raged within the PLP. On 19 June, Benn and Heffer called for the full PLP to have the “final authority” over the day-to-day work of the party in the Commons, the right to discuss all proposed appointments, all shadow ministers to be elected by *open* ballot, portfolios to be agreed by the PLP, subject groups to recommend front-bench speakers for debates and to nominate for positions on Committees. In addition, no names should be proposed for peerages, there should be regular NEC/Shadow Cabinet meetings, and Shadow Cabinet staff (then employed by the individual MPs) should become party staff. Their paper envisaged these changes continuing when the party was in office¹¹⁶. Perhaps the most far reaching proposal would have been the open ballots. The comfortable centre-right majority in the PLP produced through confidential voting would hardly survive scrutiny from left-wing CLPs. The Centre-right controlled the Shadow Cabinet, and the Benn-Heffer paper envisaged it losing virtually all its powers, as well as its staff.

While the Bennite/CLPD proposals had been debated in the press and at party conferences, this paper now put the PLP itself on the agenda. It spurred the Right into action. A flurry of meetings and papers swirled around the House, with Thomas, Whitehead and Radice submitting a 4-page memorandum on “The Working of the PLP”¹¹⁷. This was no defence of the *status quo*, as it recognised the lack of democracy within the parliamentary party. Neither was it about MPs’ relationships with other parts of the movement (the unions, CLPs or conference) although it strongly “deplore(d) the suggestion that Labour MPs should be intimidated by the removal^{of} the principle of secret ballots in PLP elections”. The authors’ proposals were hardly far-reaching. They called for a formal agenda for PLP meetings, more consultation of the PLP by government, increased backbench input into policy and an extension of Clause V to give a greater role for the whole of the PLP (not just the Shadow or actual Cabinet) in the manifesto process. The paper went some way towards the Benn proposals, with backbench groups nominating to Committees and wider consultation before portfolios were allocated. It also suggested an increase of the Shadow Cabinet to 15 elected members, with up to 3

¹¹⁵ *Labour Victory*, October 1979.

¹¹⁶ Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, “The Future Work of the Parliamentary Labour Party: An agenda for discussion”, 19 June 1979, IWP.

additional spokesmen appointed by the Leader, and agreed that funds for the opposition from parliament “should be deployed for that purpose and an annual budget approved by the PLP”, with consideration given to a new, elected post of PLP Treasurer¹¹⁸. So the paper, overall, was a pale shadow of the Benn/ Heffer document, with no radical alternatives on offer.

Consideration of these matters was something of a sideshow as the debate on the three major constitutional reforms was hotting up within the wider party. The Centre-right felt particularly unsupported by the PLP leadership. In July, a strongly-worded letter, signed by 107 MPs, was sent to Callaghan. This expressed their “deep concern .. about the changes in the constitutional position of Labour MPs and of the PLP” being advocated by some NEC members, and went on: “we believe the time has come for you and the Parliamentary Committee to make it clear to the NEC that to make changes of the kind proposed – on the PLP’s rights over the Party Manifesto, on reselection of MPs and on the election of the Party Leader – would be to reduce the [PLP] to the role of poodle of the Party Conference and to move dangerously close to making individual MPs mandated delegates on pain of losing their jobs”. The letter called on the leadership to take these views to the wider party and concluded “The proposals of the NEC are designed to upset the careful balance between the different roles and responsibilities of the component parts of the Party .. They comprise a major threat to the unity of the Party. The time has come to say to this group on the NEC that ‘enough is enough’”¹¹⁹. Over 100 MPs – for once unafraid to be named – represented a significant expression of opinion¹²⁰, and effectively positioned the Manifesto Group as the majority voice in the PLP. But they had little impact. The House rose for the summer and the party conference, where the Left’s agenda would be in the ascendancy.

Rodgers described the 1979 Brighton Conference as

“a disaster. .. Although the proposal on the election of the leader was [temporarily] lost, resolutions on mandatory reselection and the manifesto were carried. Conference also established a Commission of Enquiry on organisation and finance .. [however] the NEC minimised the role of parliamentarians on it and ensured that it had a built-in majority of the left. Apart from the Leader and Deputy Leader, none of the 19 MPs on the NEC

¹¹⁷ 4 July 1979, MGA.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Letter of 25 July 1979, MGA.

¹²⁰ A majority of the Shadow Cabinet would have supported these views but by convention would not sign a round-robin.

sufficiently command the support of their own parliamentary colleagues to get elected to the Shadow Cabinet, and 14 were unequivocally on the left”¹²¹.

There seemed little impact the PLP could make within the wider party. But in the Commons, the Manifesto Group’s work continued with Robertson circulating “a list of candidates for the chairmanships of the PLP Subject Groups” to sympathisers at the end of the recess¹²², and a call for a full attendance at a vital PLP meeting at the end of October¹²³, with a special plea to Manifesto members to stay until the end and vote¹²⁴. He similarly wrote urging votes for Radice, Thomas, Urwin and Whitehead for the 5 backbench places on the internal Enquiry (leaving a fifth place for others).

As matters deteriorated, with the NEC moving further from the PLP, the Group discussed its response. In November, members worked on their evidence to the Commission of Enquiry¹²⁵ and sought a meeting with Callaghan about the state of the party¹²⁶. Vice Chairman Radice considered their main task might “be to get all MG reselected”¹²⁷.

It is about this time, as the NEC-CLPD proposals gained ground, that the first warnings appear of what was later to happen. First there was the Dimbleby Lecture on 22 November 1979, when Jenkins first floated the idea of a breakaway party. Earlier that day, Horam, a Manifesto Group Vice Chairman, told Rodgers “that the Labour Party was finished”¹²⁸. A key staging-post can be seen in Rodgers’ speech in Abertillery, the text of which he had shown to Manifesto members Horam, MacLennan, Wrigglesworth, Radice and Weetch¹²⁹. In this public arena, the former CDS organiser, Cabinet minister and political-fixer predicted that the party had “a year .. in which to save itself .. A year to start winning friends amongst the .. 30 million .. who did not vote Labour last time”; he warned that “A party of the far left – in which Tribune members would be the moderates – would have little (electoral) appeal .. If the hard-line leaders of the Left

¹²¹ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.190.

¹²² Letter of 22 October 1979, MGA.

¹²³ Letter from George Robertson to sympathisers, 25 October 1979.

¹²⁴ Letter from George Robertson to members, 25 October 1979.

¹²⁵ Established by the 1979 Party Conference.

¹²⁶ Notes of 7 November 1979, MGA.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.198.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.199.

want a fight to the finish, they can have it. But if as a result they should split the Party, they should not suppose that the inheritance will be theirs”¹³⁰.

If not before, it was clear from this date on that senior Manifesto members could envisage a split within the party. In private, there were more signs. The day after his Abertillery speech, in a meeting with Jenkins, whilst both Williams and Rodgers stressed that their priority was to save the Labour Party, Rodgers had clearly given the matter enough thought to have judged that a new party could survive without trade union money¹³¹. From then on, it is hard to believe the Manifesto Group could have succeeded in holding the social democrats within the party, given the views of their leading lights. Furthermore, the chance of them attracting any more supporters ended with such open talk of a split.

Before the year-end, Rodgers – stalwart of the parliamentary Right and of the constituency-focused CLV – was to have another major fall-out with the party. On 12 December, one of Labour’s Election Broadcasts carried a strong anti-European message. The Shadow Cabinet Member wrote angrily to Callaghan condemning the broadcast as “appalling” and “irrelevant to [a] by-election”. More fundamental was his charge that “It seemed deliberately designed to divide the Party and raise old issues”. Whilst recognising that the Common Market was unpopular, and seeing no objection in exploiting that, Rodgers distinguished that “from moving the Party increasingly into a position where it appears to be against membership on principle and ready to consider pulling out”¹³².

If 1979 appeared stressful, it was only a gentle preparation for 1980. Nowhere were the issues as clearly contested as in the Manifesto Group which brought together the pro-Europe Right, aghast at the NEC and conference decisions, but faced with two emerging alternatives: to stay and continue the fight to bring the party back to where it had a chance of being electable, or to take the risk of creating a new party, without union affiliates, but able to capitalise on the electorate’s emerging anti-Thatcher feelings. The arguments were strongest within the Manifesto Group as these were the key MPs whose defection, or continuation, would ‘make or break’ any new party.

¹³⁰ Bill Rodgers press release, 30 November 1979, MGA.

In early 1980, Manifesto meetings exhibited uncertainty, worry and overwhelming isolation. Knowing that the Left had made all the running in party debates¹³³, members also acknowledged that they lacked the backing of union leaders¹³⁴ and were failing to attract non-Left PLP members, evidenced by the creation of an alternative centre grouping (the “soggy middle” in Whitehead’s words), Labour First¹³⁵. Members knew their right-wing image put off MPs and feared the split of the non-Left. The formation of Labour First led to difficulties in agreeing the November slate for the Shadow Cabinet¹³⁶ – a serious weakness just when the Moderates needed to be at their strongest. The PLP was preparing its submission to the Commission of Enquiry, and thus the Centre-right needed a concerted voice.

The NEC meanwhile sought to formalise groups within the PLP and wrote seeking details of staffing, funding and objectives. The Group’s response set out the original three aims, confirmed that membership was open to MPs and Peers who took the Labour Whip, listed the officers’ names and sadly recorded no finances other than membership subscriptions and a tiny amount from sales of publications, the Rowntree funding for a Research Assistant having ended in May 1979¹³⁷.

The less-remembered first Wembley Conference, in May 1980, unsettled Manifesto members. Summoned to endorse a “Peace, Jobs, Freedom” statement, it represented the adoption of a further left policy agenda but, more significantly, reflected the tone of debate then current in the party¹³⁸. “The new brutishness was very much on show”¹³⁹. At one point, Militant delegate Terry Fields (speaking immediately before the present author who herself was well barracked) shouted to the Right to “Get out of our Movement. There is no place in it for you. Cross the House of Commons, join

¹³¹ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.200. A group was meanwhile meeting in West London around former MPs Michael Barnes and Colin Phipps. Barnes had circulated to a select group a paper on “A new Centre Party” which was discussed on 6 January 1980; Jim Daly papers.

¹³² Letter from Rodgers to Callaghan, 13 December 1979, MGA.

¹³³ Notes of 9 July 1980, MGA.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Notes of 26 March 1980, MGA. See chapter 8.

¹³⁶ Notes from November 1980 meetings, MGA.

¹³⁷ Letter from Robertson, Secretary of the Manifesto Group, to Labour Party General Secretary, March 1980, MGA.

¹³⁸ *Sunday Times*, 1 June 1980.

¹³⁹ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p 532.

Prentice”¹⁴⁰. The treatment meted out to Owen was a significant factor in his move from the Labour Party¹⁴¹.

Soon afterwards, the Group discussed “The present Position within the Party”, with Rodgers opening and Owen winding up¹⁴². Later meetings reflected the Group’s mounting concerns. Sandelson, openly admitting to “panicking”, said he “couldn’t decide whether to cut [his] throat or take [an] overdose” but nevertheless urged his colleagues to “stand up and fight”. The MP later told the press that the NEC was “dividing the whole Labour Movement and sickening masses of Labour supporters”. He called it a “malevolent group” that had “diseased the Party with its support for Communists, Trots and psychotic anti-social elements who have flooded in and by its espousal of ideologies which will destroy us at the polls” and warned that unless the composition of the NEC changed in the autumn, “the Labour Party will break up. There is no chance of winning the next Election with this poisonous bunch dictating our policies”¹⁴³. His colleagues might not have argued with his analysis, but it was exactly such intemperate language which put some MPs off the Manifesto Group. His 6-year spell as Treasurer of the Group ended at this time, being replaced by the more emollient Ken Weetch¹⁴⁴.

However, the major preoccupation for the Centre-right was what was happening within the wider party and on the Commission of Enquiry where Callaghan (and subsequently the Shadow Cabinet) accepted the concept of an Electoral College to choose the Leader¹⁴⁵. David Basnett, GMWU General Secretary, had already swung behind a College giving 50% to the PLP with 25% each to CLPs and unions¹⁴⁶, leaving the Manifesto wing of the PLP increasingly isolated over this issue. As rumours of the Commission accepting an Electoral College circulated, the Group condemned the outcome as “profoundly unsatisfactory”; such a change having “grave implications for the relationship of the different parts of the Party” and which “could substantially undermine the Party’s commitment to parliamentary democracy”. The Commission was “wholly at variance with the view of the .. the PLP [which] rejected

¹⁴⁰ *Report of the Annual Conference and Special Conference of the Labour Party, 1980*, p.251.

¹⁴¹ Ian Bradley, *op cit*, p.74/75.

¹⁴² 11 June 1980 notes, MGA.

¹⁴³ Press Release from Neville Sandelson MP, 26 June 1980, MGA.

¹⁴⁴ Circular from Robertson to Manifesto members, 7 July 1980, MGA.

¹⁴⁵ 11 June 1980 notes, MGA.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

overwhelmingly the specific proposal of an electoral college. .. We call upon the Commission .. to produce proposals which will command wide support within the Party as a whole”¹⁴⁷.

During the Summer recess members were not idle, with two major newspaper initiatives. The first was the “Open Letter to their Fellow Members of the Labour Party” from Williams, Rodgers and Owen in the *Guardian*¹⁴⁸ which labelled them the “Gang of Three”. The second, in *The Times*, led to what became known as the “Dirty Dozen” statement¹⁴⁹. This article on “Why the Labour party structure must change” not only appeared to accept the possibility of “a new Centre Party”, but it downplayed the likelihood of the Centre-right making gains in the forthcoming NEC elections and questioned the union role in financing the party and casting block-votes at conference. It pointed to the historically low level of party membership, querying whether it could claim to represent Labour voters. The article proposed 6 changes to the party’s structure, including OMOV for the selection of candidates, restructuring the NEC (to represent ordinary members, MPs and local government) and the creation of a directly-elected Party Chairman. All 12 of ‘the Dozen’ were major Manifesto figures, including Chairman Cartwright, Secretary Robertson, Vice Chairman Horam and former Secretary Wrigglesworth¹⁵⁰.

Despite such Centre-right initiatives, the October 1980 Conference was a triumph for the Left. Although they lost the vote on control of the manifesto, they won the principle of the Electoral College. Late in the day, the Group had begun to consider OMOV as an alternative to a College. However, as this still removed the choice of Leader from the PLP (and thus undermined their main argument), it never received full support until it was far too late to be championed successfully. Owen and Rodgers called for choice of Leader to be by complete OMOV, for any candidate nominated by 20% of the PLP¹⁵¹. Hattersley moved to accepting a wider franchise, with 55% for the PLP and 45% spread between other parts of the movement (the largest part to CLPs, with OMOV and split preferences used)¹⁵². Tribunate John Silkin and others supported 40:30:30 (the PLP

¹⁴⁷ Statement of 18 June 1980, IWP.

¹⁴⁸ *Guardian*, 1 August 1980.

¹⁴⁹ *The Times*, 22 September 1980. Thomas undertook much of the publicity around this and took delight in the “Dirty Dozen” attribution; Mike Thomas, interview, 2 July 2002.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Paper by Owen and Rodgers; it also recommended the alternative vote system (IWP).

¹⁵² Paper by Hattersley, IWP. He also spelt this out in the *Guardian*, 24 November 1980.

having the 40%), leaving each GC to decide whether to ballot their own members¹⁵³. (Apparently forgetting his support for a minority for the PLP, Silkin later resented this outcome, complaining – when standing for the Deputy Leadership – of the time he had to spend touring CLPs and union conferences¹⁵⁴.) As the PLP vote approached – on the Shadow Cabinet’s motion for at least 50% of the College to be for the PLP – Manifesto members tabled an amendment that if OMOV was not assured, then the PLP declines to accept a wider franchise¹⁵⁵. Whilst Willie Hamilton sought to have the “in-principle” decision rerun, Jack Straw urged support for the conference decision. The Left tabled an amendment to reduce the PLP’s proportion to a third¹⁵⁶. The PLP adopted the Shadow Cabinet’s motion in November, when the Group was busy ensuring the re-election of Willey, as Chairman of the PLP¹⁵⁷.

In October a Leadership campaign took precedence, following a disastrous Conference for the Right, and Callaghan’s resignation on 15 October. On the 16th, Robertson wrote round to ensure a good turn-out for the coming PLP meetings¹⁵⁸ (to halt attempts to elect an interim Leader until an Electoral College be put into place). The Secretary confirmed the Group’s position of not endorsing any one candidate (though Radice was helping Healey’s campaign¹⁵⁹), but that “the officers should approach each candidate to seek a meeting with representatives of the group to discuss the important issues facing the Party”. This was surely meant to help Healey, who largely shared their views. Before any such meeting, the Group agreed to draw up a set of questions to put to the candidates. Thomas wrote the first draft, opening “This election is being held at a time of crisis for the Party and the Nation” and stressing two major issues: one of “parliamentary democracy and the constitution and democratic functioning of the Labour Party” and the other of the credibility of the policies to be put to the electorate. He was emphatic about any Leader’s willingness to defend the independence of the PLP and individual MPs, and about the need to reform the NEC and policy-making – as well as some of the policies (such as renationalisation without compensation, unilateralism and exit from NATO)¹⁶⁰. On 20 October, a meeting turned his draft into a list of 16

¹⁵³ Paper by Booth, Orme and John Silkin, IWP.

¹⁵⁴ John Silkin, *op cit*, p.33/4.

¹⁵⁵ PLP paper, PLP archives. The amendment was signed by 18 Manifesto members.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Notes of meeting of 12 November 1980 and circular of same date, MGA.

¹⁵⁸ Letter of 16 October 1980 to “Manifesto Group and Colleagues”, MGA.

¹⁵⁹ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p.537.

¹⁶⁰ Mike Thomas paper of 16 October 1980, IWP.

questions¹⁶¹ – including on secret ballots, union block votes, rights of MPs, NEC restructuring, PLP’s rights, the EEC, unilateralism and incomes policy. The final questions must have been aimed at Foot: “Do you see yourself as a caretaker¹⁶² in any sense? Are there any personal factors – age, health – that you feel might inhibit your performance as leader?”.

Whilst the questions were put to all four candidates, the greatest impact the meetings had was to alienate some of Healey’s own supporters. The delegation to him got “decidedly short shrift. Healey was trying hardest to get the votes of the centre, of people scared of their constituency parties, above all of party loyalists unhappy at the new snarling developments, but prejudiced against splitters. He thought and said to their faces that they had nowhere else to go”¹⁶³. This might have cost him votes. Whilst Barry Jones¹⁶⁴ “was asked by David Owen and Bill Rodgers to inspect their ballot papers” to see they had voted for Healey, “It is generally accepted that at least three MPs who later left Labour, first voted against Healey. Tom Ellis, Neville Sandelson and Jeffrey Thomas seem clearly to have made that decision”¹⁶⁵. Even for those who supported him, Healey’s behaviour helped some later prove they did have somewhere to go by establishing the SDP¹⁶⁶. Healey’s mishandling of his natural supporters, together with his refusal to pen an article for the *Guardian* or to issue a “manifesto”, was sufficient to make one of his own lieutenants, Whitehead, vote for Shore in the first ballot before supporting him in the decider¹⁶⁷.

Foot’s election, on 10 November 1980, was the trigger for some members’ subsequent defection¹⁶⁸. For the entire Group, however, Healey’s defeat was a body blow. Nevertheless, the work of their members continued, Radice and Robertson touring the Commons to maintain the nerve and resolve of despairing members¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶¹ IWP.

¹⁶² This referred to the suggestion that, if elected, Foot would stand aside for Benn.

¹⁶³ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p. 542/3, and John Horam interview, 2003. The delegation included Horam and Thomas.

¹⁶⁴ On Healey’s campaign team.

¹⁶⁵ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p. 543.

¹⁶⁶ Mike Thomas interview. He nearly sent Healey a postcard the day the SDP was created saying ‘Have found somewhere else to go’.

¹⁶⁷ John Golding, *op cit*, and Phillip Whitehead, interview, 9 January 2003.

¹⁶⁸ Tom McNally interview.

¹⁶⁹ Giles Radice interview.

In November, the group met with Frank Chapple, one of their few supporters within the senior ranks of the unions. The December AGM opened with an obituary tribute to Lord Gordon-Walker, one of the Group's links to the predecessor CDS. Radice took over as Chairman from Cartwright (who was to leave the party within months) with Weetch elected Treasurer. An issue which pushed some "beyond the pale" was also aired. Rodgers had thought to join Owen in not standing for the Shadow Cabinet but was persuaded by Roper and others to run. He did well, coming joint eighth¹⁷⁰ – only to be offered what he considered low status or inappropriate portfolios (such as Northern Ireland) by the new Leader, Foot¹⁷¹. It was not just personally insulting; it sent a signal to his allies that they were not valued or even wanted within the party. For Roper, it was his psychological moment of departure¹⁷². A year earlier, Wrigglesworth had regretted the number of left-wingers given positions by Callaghan¹⁷³; now a left-wing Leader was failing to bring the Right on board. The AGM also discussed the NEC's attempts to side-step Conference's rejection of its demand for sole responsibility for the manifesto (the "Clause V" issue) – seeking to undermine the PLP.

Immediately after Christmas, the most dramatic and personally difficult of all the Manifesto meetings took place¹⁷⁴ as the schism between stayers and leavers became clear. Beforehand, Chairman Radice had written in *The Guardian* on "Why the Labour Party Must Not Split"¹⁷⁵ and circulated a "Note on the Manifesto Group's Future"¹⁷⁶. His note described the Group's achievements, pointing to the PLP elections, where they won 9 out of the 12 Shadow Cabinet places, along with the PLP Chairman and most of the subject group chairmen. The Group had "been most successful ..(in)..Articulating a centre-right Viewpoint" within parliament. It had "succeeded in .. sustaining a centre-right coalition in the PLP, much wider than its actual membership .. (and) helped keep in office the last Labour Government". However, he did not flinch about the weaknesses: "it has never had a constituency presence and its trade union links have been weak". He listed the dangers facing the Group: the formation of Labour First (which damaged its recruitment prospects); the swing to the Left, on the NEC, at conference and in the CLPs; reselection; and "Divisions within our own ranks". He

¹⁷⁰ PLP Circular, 4 December 1980, PLP archives.

¹⁷¹ All the positions offered later went to non-Shadow Cabinet members.

¹⁷² Personal communication at the time.

¹⁷³ See p.57.

¹⁷⁴ Giles Radice interview.

¹⁷⁵ 12 January 1981.

acknowledged that some had decided “that there is no longer any room for a centre-right viewpoint within the” party. However, most “believe that the situation is retrievable and we should continue to fight on inside the Labour Party”. The Manifesto Chairman recommended concentrating on: winning PLP elections; articulating Centre-right views; holding speaker meetings; helping members with reselection problems, and establishing union links.

The 14 January 1981 meeting witnessed an outflow of emotions. Its Chairman recalls it as “the famous meeting .. Big Row between Hattersley and David Owen, Mike Thomas and Ian Wrigglesworth about them leaving”¹⁷⁷. The memorable contributions were the statements of intent, albeit scarcely legible in Robertson’s fast-deteriorating handwriting. Owen thought it “understandable that people would take different views – few had thought the party would degenerate so fast” and asked “Be tolerant if people go in different directions”. Thomas felt “that fighting in L.P. has been done .. and believe strategy has failed”. Wrigglesworth worried about the voters who were deserting the party and was “not prepared to see that vote decline”. He had “tried hard” including forming CLV to work in the constituencies. But the stayers held their ground. Though some (Wayland Young) said they were “hanging on by eyelash”, Golding said he was “Not abandoning the inheritance to bunch of lefties”. Bob Mitchell, recalling that the “Left stayed in and fought”, now urged members to do the same – though admitted it might be a “different ballgame if some not reselected”. Owen hinted that there might be a coming together again at some later date but Whitehead doubted it as the “circumstances of a split will mean bad blood for a generation”. Instead, we “must persuade people not to go out”. Hattersley, the most senior stayer to speak, recalled how their section of the party had grown up being in the majority and were unaccustomed to being a minority. However, “so long as we control P.C.”¹⁷⁸ we control the manifesto” and he was “not going to fight on anti-EEC or unilateralism”. He warned that the chances of fighting back were weakened if people threatened to leave¹⁷⁹. After the meeting (which endorsed the Chairman’s paper), the two factions “each gave separate press conferences”¹⁸⁰. No doubt Radice was upbeat at his but,

¹⁷⁶ MGA.

¹⁷⁷ Giles Radice interview.

¹⁷⁸ Parliamentary Committee, or Shadow Cabinet.

¹⁷⁹ Robertson’s notes of 14 January 1981, MGA.

¹⁸⁰ Giles Radice interview.

asked in 2002 to assess the Manifesto Group, he judged: “It was a failed group – not entirely. But failed – because some of our members left and set up another party”¹⁸¹.

A separate meeting with Foot prior to Wembley, with 28 MPs and five peers present, urged him to do more to preserve the PLP’s position. Foot said he had “done everything in my power to get the 50:25:25” but without the AUEW, it was not possible. He stressed he “want(ed) to keep people in” and offered “If anything I can do to help MPs under pressure [from reselection] then will help”. The Manifesto Group members pushed him on Militant, the proposed referendum on the EEC, on “Death by a thousand cuts”¹⁸². Whitehead voiced the “fear that the Party is on the brink” and called on him to “speak out in interests of coalition or it will fall apart”. Foot’s response, to the despair of many, was noted as: “don’t think on brink”. Mason sadly recalled that he had “never seen such nastiness and intolerance in CLPs” and asked Foot to “make appeal for more tolerance or the party will split”. The Group would stay and fight from within but to do so “we need your support. [The party] needs all wings”¹⁸³. The Leader’s response satisfied few, their Chairman recalling “He was rather awful”¹⁸⁴.

Events worsened when, on 24 January 1981, the Special Conference decided on the composition of the Electoral College agreed in principle in October. The result was the worst of all possible outcomes for the PLP: just 30% of the total compared with 40% to the unions and 30% for the CLPs¹⁸⁵. It provided the defectors with a popular cause on which to split (unions being unpopular after the 1978-79 Winter of Discontent) rather than the European issue, which united the defectors but scored negatively in opinion polls. The Gang of Four exploited the unsatisfactory outcome to the full in the Limehouse Declaration the following day, as a dozen Labour MPs lined up to join what was clearly going to be a new party.

The Manifesto troops were traumatised. Meeting days later, 29 of them shared their despair. The first resignation¹⁸⁶ was reported but a number who were to defect later were there. Many still hoped the inevitable would not happen, talking of “if” not

¹⁸¹ Giles Radice interview.

¹⁸² Dickson Mabon, who accused the Left of repeatedly pressing things defeated at conference.

¹⁸³ Robertson’s notes of meeting, MGA.

¹⁸⁴ Giles Radice interview.

¹⁸⁵ Report of the NEC to the 1981 Conference, p.155/6.

¹⁸⁶ Lady Burton of Coventry, who hoped, after 36 years in the party, “that one day we shall all be together again”, 2 March 1981 letter, MGA.

“when”¹⁸⁷ or seeing it as “a catalyst. A warning signal to people including Tribune”¹⁸⁸. Magee thought the Limehouse supporters might one day wish to come back and urged colleagues “Don’t push them”. Weetch urged that they “Keep door open” whilst admitting the “time for conciliation is very short”. But Bob Cant retorted that Owen “the ambitious” and Rodgers “the conspirator .. have weakened us. If welcomed back then I will resign”. A major concern was the very future of the Group. Bob Mitchell acknowledged that their association with Prentice had harmed them. Underhill warned that “Any suspicion that the MG is openly connected [with the Limehouse group] will damage. Many joined because of link with the unions and if they don’t split then we don’t”. Parker concurred: “no future of a soc[ialist] party without roots in unions”. These predictions were to prove accurate, the unions’ complete solidarity helping Labour to triumph over the SDP. Summing up, Radice announced that the public statement would be “that we stay in and fight”¹⁸⁹.

Later, on the eve of the Council for Social Democracy’s metamorphosis into the Social Democratic Party, Radice and Robertson, as Manifesto Chairman and Secretary, issued a statement claiming that the SDP was “bound to become more right wing and anti-union .. [its] intervention could stop Labour candidates winning and so assist another Conservative election victory. .. Running away from the struggle for a broad based, tolerant Labour Party and for effective socialist policies in favour of an illusory middle ground is not only defeatist but a betrayal of Labour Party supporters and members”¹⁹⁰. There were no personal attacks and the authors kept their own sadness to themselves. Given that those leaving included their former Secretary (Wrigglesworth), Chairman (Cartwright), Secretary and Chairman (Horam) and Treasurer (Sandelson) together with name-giver Rodgers and a host of their close political friends, this showed remarkable constraint. To his predecessor, Robertson wrote “You did much for the Group, and within the Party. Maybe that is why your departure is so sad”¹⁹¹.

And so a chapter ended. The Group continued to exist, but bereft of a swathe of its members, until after the 1983 election¹⁹². It had to contend with distaste arising from its former association with those who had defected, as well as suspicion that others might

¹⁸⁷ Willie Hamilton saying he hoped “they will stay in and fight”, MGA.

¹⁸⁸ Bruce Douglas-Mann, who would be one of the last to join the SDP.

¹⁸⁹ All quotes from Robertson’s handwritten undated notes, MGA.

¹⁹⁰ Press release, 25 March 1981, MGA.

¹⁹¹ Letter to Ian Wrigglesworth, 16 March 1981, MGA.

yet leave (as many indeed did). Furthermore, it was now fighting on two fronts: against the Left in the PLP and against their former members in the SDP.

Despite this, activity did not wane. Circulars went out urging attendance at PLP meetings which, surprisingly, had been poorly attended, to make the “voice of the centre-right heard”¹⁹³. The Group held meetings with Healey (Deputy Leader) and Hattersley¹⁹⁴, and an important one with the Leader on Militant, when members spelt out the effects Militant was having in constituencies¹⁹⁵. Palmer related how Militant had “wiped out total EC of Bristol NW” and led to a situation where “TGWU members not paying levy”¹⁹⁶. Magee described “Hordes of them .. coming from Newham NE” into his Leyton constituency and how Militant “had plenty of money. We don’t have the resources to fight”. He called on the party to “introduce the proscribed list” although predicting it would “not be done by this NEC”. He warned that Militant “will destroy party. They are revolutionary and antagonists”. Bob Mitchell had two full-time organisers in Southampton and described how, in the Southern Region, the “TGWU noted widespread political levy withdrawal”. Boothroyd recalled there was “already a proscribed list of one [SDA¹⁹⁷]” so thought it could be widened. Ford recounted how Edward Lyons was spending all his time in Bradford West fighting them, the older members having been pushed out. It was, he said, a “sick atmosphere”. Golding, mocking their “Nazi salute with arthritis”, pointed out that Militant had more organisers than the party, and that they kept meetings going until 3 a.m., so no-one could compete. Do not “allow them to come in and destroy the party” he pleaded. Whitehead’s experience was similar: it was “Very hard to get people to go to meetings. London is crumbling”. In Derby there were disaffiliations from ASLEF and TGWU. Underhill added to his earlier report, describing how Militant had “branches in CLPs and full-time organisers. They can get money .. which should be going to the party”.

¹⁹² See Solidarity chapter.

¹⁹³ Circular, 4 March 1981, MGA.

¹⁹⁴ On 25 March, and 8 April 1981 respectively.

¹⁹⁵ On 18 March 1981.

¹⁹⁶ Like other unions, the TGWU had a political levy which members could opt out of. Finally, it was this union pressure, in Liverpool and elsewhere, that persuaded a number of unions – not least NUPE – that tolerance of Militant was no longer an option.

¹⁹⁷ In December 1980, the NEC resolved that “in the light of the decision of the Social Democratic Alliance to maintain a political organisation .. with its own separate and distinct programme, principles and policy and to promote candidates .. in opposition to the Labour Party” the NEC declare it “ineligible for affiliation .. and membership of this organisation is therefore incompatible with membership of the Labour Party”, *NEC Report to 1981 Labour Party Conference*, p.8.

Responding to this catalogue, Foot said he would “Take seriously what they said. Do not believe they are going to take over. Can be counteracted effectively”. He did “not think best way is proscribed list”, the answer was to “defeat them in debate” though he acknowledged the problem of violence and intimidation, and recognised the difficulties some MPs were having in reselection. The priority was to “engage in the argument” – though he (accurately) surmised that this might be seen as “an inadequate response”¹⁹⁸. After Foot left the meeting, the Group – whilst expressing their disappointment – agreed to gathering further documentation. However, they feared there “will be other people who will go after conference” so the “timescale is short” and agreed to press that view with the Leader¹⁹⁹.

In the Group’s internal discussions, John Smith warned of the possible consequences of the forthcoming political fund ballots, but mostly members contemplated the potential effects of reselection whilst re-affirming their role in defending the leadership and in countering the well-organised Hard-left. They were also busy on policy, setting up working parties on industrial policy and defence²⁰⁰.

However, as soon as the Group settled down to its new existence, it was confronted by the first ever Deputy Leadership election not to be decided by MPs alone. At the beginning of April, Benn announced he would challenge Healey, using the new Electoral College. Ever loyalist, the members agreed “Must rally around MF. We must protect him from those who voted for him” and saw the need for a “thumping vote in PLP” for Healey. They would campaign around “Support for existing leadership”²⁰¹ and they openly took sides, urging “that all our members, and as many MPs as possible, personally nominate Foot/Healey for the joint leadership”²⁰². Members were urged to get CLPs to support this ticket and to “all pull our full weight for Michael Foot and Denis Healey”²⁰³ – this from the very people who seven months earlier had worked desperately to prevent Foot becoming Leader. There was a third candidate, John Silkin, but given he favoured “Withdrawal from the E.E.C.” and “Nuclear disarmament”²⁰⁴, he

Robertson’s notes point out that the SDA had only threatened to put up candidates and that “there was not a word or suggestion of witchhunts then”.

¹⁹⁸ Quotes from Robertson’s handwritten notes, 18 March 1981, MGA.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ June 1981 papers, MGA.

²⁰¹ Notes of 8 April 1981, MGA.

²⁰² Circular from Robertson, Secretary of the Group, 25 May 1981, MGA.

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ June 1981 letter from John Silkin to all CLPs.

would not find support in this Group. By the “hair of one of my eyebrows”²⁰⁵, Healey retained the Deputy Leadership.

In October, the Group backed Dormand for PLP Chairman²⁰⁶, who polled 102 votes on the first ballot. The runner-up, Mikardo, with 65, then withdrew, removing the need for a second ballot²⁰⁷. A full slate of 15 for the newly enlarged Shadow Cabinet was circulated²⁰⁸, the Group having helped ensure Cocks’ re-election as Chief Whip²⁰⁹. It had lost the battles over re-selection and the Electoral College, but was not going to admit defeat over Militant, appealing (unsuccessfully) to the NEC not to endorse Militant supporter Pat Wall as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, and “to declare the activities and organisation of the Militant Tendency as incompatible with the Constitution of the Labour Party”²¹⁰.

An end-of-year letter from the Chairman and Secretary recorded: “This has been a traumatic year for the Party, and for the Manifesto Group. However, we must not be disconsolate”. It took comfort from the NEC gains²¹¹ and from their efforts on Militant having “sparked off the process which has resulted in an inquiry” though “the pressure for action on the entryists must be kept up”. Members were urged to “Get resolutions in to the NEC supporting Michael and the Militant inquiry. Others are organising fast”²¹². This represents the first documented attempt to influence the NEC, perhaps reflecting the increased number of Manifesto friends now on it.

The Group continued to meet throughout 1982, agreeing a full slate of 15 and maintaining pressure over Militant. The NEC had finally voted to set up a Register but Robertson predicted that the debate at the autumn conference would be “violent and rigorous. .. Militant is mobilizing its forces and will be mounting a fierce propaganda campaign”. He recalled that Militant had admitted that their Fighting Fund had massed £103,000 in 1981 as well having a “drilled organisation, enormous energy .. fighting for their very existence”. An added problem was that “resistance to the idea of a Register .. is now being well orchestrated, often by non-Militant people” and urged members to

²⁰⁵ Denis Healey interview.

²⁰⁶ Letter of 20 October 1981 to members, MGA.

²⁰⁷ PLP circular, 5 November 1981, PLP archives.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ By 156 to Martin Flannery’s 51, PLP archives.

²¹⁰ Letter from Radice, Robertson and Weetch to Hayward, General Secretary, 2 November 1981.

²¹¹ See chapter 10.

²¹² Letter from Radice and Robertson, December 1981, MGA.

write to the press, and to get resolutions from local parties and unions to the NEC²¹³. Opposition to Militant now extended beyond Manifesto and Solidarity members (for example, to Straw²¹⁴) but it was far from universal. “Labour Against the Witch-hunt” (with many Tribune MPs in support) was flooding the NEC with resolutions.

One of the first organisations to register under the new provisions was the Manifesto Group, setting out its officers, purposes, and finances in a letter to the new General Secretary, Jim Mortimer²¹⁵. So the Group had achieved one of its long-standing aims – action against Militant – but only after the SDP split, and when its own membership was at its smallest: just 27 MPs and 7 peers. Within the PLP, the Group continued to meet for another year, when it merged into Parliamentary Solidarity²¹⁶, where its members continued to prepare and work for Shadow Cabinet slates.

The Manifesto Group was set up to marshal the Centre-right majority for PLP elections. In this, it was – with one major exception – overwhelmingly successful. It dominated the PLP, holding the Chairmanship and Vice-chairmanship continuously from late 1974, making a clean sweep of the Liaison Committee from 1976, and winning most of the Shadow Cabinet places after 1979. Whether it was wise to ‘take no hostages’ and to enforce such hegemony is open to question, as it delayed any rapprochement with the Centre-left and gave an impression of authoritarianism²¹⁷. That was not how its members saw things. Excluded from the NEC, beleaguered within their own CLPs, Manifesto members who had loyally supported first the Labour Government and then the Opposition Leadership, were perplexed and then angered by their alienation from the new Left within the party which had been their life. They saw their success in internal elections as a fair representation of the views of the PLP. Some of the older MPs were influenced by their 1952 “Keep Calm” Group attempts to cooperate with the Left, which made them vow not to make the same mistake again²¹⁸.

In the single most important PLP election, however, that between Foot and Healey in October 1980, they failed to deliver, and thereby contributed to the creation of the SDP.

²¹³ 1 July 1982 circular, MGA.

²¹⁴ *Tribune*, 9 July 1982.

²¹⁵ 19 July 1982, MGA. See annex 6.

²¹⁶ See p.198.

²¹⁷ Lewis Minkin, interview, 10 December 2002.

²¹⁸ Particularly George Strauss and Michael Stewart; Michael Stewart, *Life & Labour: An Autobiography*, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980, pp 85 and 268.

Some of the failure can be laid at Healey's door²¹⁹, and some to the short-sightedness or cowardliness of the Centre. The Manifesto Group nevertheless failed because of its inability to build a coalition for Healey's candidature.

Before looking at its wider success and failures, it is worth listing the Group's strength and weaknesses. Its major handicap was its isolation from prevailing opinion on the NEC, on GCs and at party conference²²⁰. Some of its members were not sufficiently linked into the party; they were perhaps "intellectual" socialists rather than embedded in the party's grassroots²²¹. They had little contact with members of the NEC²²².

Others of the Group's members added to its problems, with both "that ass"²²³ Sandelson and Prentice putting off potential recruits²²⁴. Its hard-right image made it unattractive and it failed to recruit the non-Tribune Centre who were key to achieving its objectives. However, it was not just the Group's image that hampered recruitment, but the fear – even terror – of pending reselections which dominated MPs' waking hours. Even those, like McNally, who voiced distaste for Sandelson, admitted that the reason for not joining was his fight with his own GMC where "he felt real hatred"²²⁵. Party membership had declined so much that it could no longer be said to represent Labour voters, to whom MPs feel a strong affinity. The party – all of it, not just the PLP – had failed to respond to this or to the arrival of the 1960s generation amongst party activists. This was a party-wide problem but it particularly weakened the Manifesto Group. The PLP was out of tune with the wider party, and this was reflected in – rather than caused by – the Manifesto Group. Furthermore, although loyal to the leadership, the Group got little in return by way of support, whether from Wilson, Callaghan or Foot. Their members had voted for neither the first nor last of these, yet were committed – in their aims and by temperament – to supporting the leadership: an unrequited loyalty. The Labour Government's unpopularity was also a problem, as the Group was committed to its defence, before a party troubled by its record.

²¹⁹ As he himself acknowledges; Denis Healey interview.

²²⁰ Weetch confessed to rarely attending (communication to the author, March 2003).

²²¹ Kinnock interview.

²²² John Horam, interview, 2003. Williams and Cartwright were on the NEC, but others were less linked in with the movement.

²²³ Letter from George Cunningham to the author, 11 May 2003.

²²⁴ See p. 69.

²²⁵ Tom McNally interview.

The Manifesto Group was effectively leaderless. Its hard-working officers had neither the stature nor the position to offer an alternative to the scene-stealing Tony Benn. Healey was outside the Group, and the Cabinet (and later Shadow Cabinet) was debarred from holding office. Williams, a possible contender, was outside the House from May 1979. So a surfeit of talent failed to be translated into effective leadership. Finally, the Group had within it the seeds of its own destruction. The SDP split came entirely from within it, and on the very issues that had united its members against party conference: Europe and the Electoral College.

Ranged against these manifold weaknesses was the Group's single strength: its size. Whether measured by Callaghan's 1976 majority over Foot (176:137), Wigglesworth's 1979 estimate of 149:94, or by the 107 MPs willing to sign a letter to Callaghan protesting at the party's constitutional changes, the views represented by the Manifesto Group were those of the majority of the PLP. Thus whilst MPs might have been out of step with the party, the Group was not out of step with them.

Given all its weaknesses, and its one single strength, did the Group achieve its aims of supporting the government in implementing manifesto promises, acting as a forum for constructive discussion, and working to achieve a democratic socialist society through parliamentary means? In truth, such aims were beyond the means of an underfunded gathering of MPs, without staff for most of its existence. Had the Manifesto Group not been created, however, it is difficult to imagine where the Centre-right, loyalist, pro-leadership view would have been articulated. The NEC and Tribune attacked the government; the NEC and the party became pre-occupied with internal party reform. There was no other machine championing Labour values against an increasingly radical Tory government, and no-one else arguing against EEC withdrawal, unilateralism, and renationalisation without compensation. Had this flag not been kept flying, it might have taken Kinnock much longer to begin his rewriting of policy into an electorally-attractive package. Finally, on internal matters, it was only the Manifesto Group (and CLV) which supported OMOV prior to the split, and only the Manifesto Group (and later the St Ermins Group and Solidarity) which kept up the pressure on Militant which was eventually to lead, timidly under Foot, wholeheartedly under Kinnock, to action against them.

The Group failed in its desire to restructure the NEC to include representatives of ordinary party members, local government and (crucially for them) the PLP. These

changes had to await Blair's premiership. The Group also failed to promote any alternative modernisation agenda to reselection and the Electoral College. It was late to champion OMOV (largely because this would have excluded trade unions from candidate selection, and removed the PLP's monopoly in leadership elections). It thus had no positive agenda to offer. However, its stated aims never included party reform so it might be unfair to rank this as a failure to meet objectives. The most valuable success of the Group – despite Radice's view that it failed because the party split – was to prevent a greater haemorrhaging, to offer solidarity to MPs under pressure, to reassure them they were not alone and to prove, after 1981, that Centre-right, social democrats could be at home within the Labour Party.

Chapter 8 (Parliamentary) Labour First

For a section of MPs, the Manifesto Group was a bridge too far. Tainted by being so Right-wing, and concentrating on organisation rather than discussion, it held little attraction for MPs who disliked the two established sects but recognised the need to meet together for support and debate. Labour First's inaugural meeting took place on 25 March 1980¹. At the time, the PLP felt marginalised by the Left, particularly by their demands for mandatory re-selection, taking the choice of Leader out of MPs' hands, and for removing MPs from decisions on the manifesto. Labour First was set up amidst numerous PLP meetings to agree a joint submission to the Committee of Enquiry, and when cataclysmic warnings about whether the party could ever form a government were daily in the papers.

The MPs who formed the Group² were not just concerned about winning the argument within Westminster. The choice of name reflected the founders' desire to put Labour, as opposed to any particular faction, first. They saw the other groups undermining the "unity and cohesiveness of the Labour Party, both in Parliament and in the country" and wanted to counter such divisions. However, this was seen by others on the Right as the "soggy middle"³ – at best naïve, at worse as cowardice – leading to the soubriquet, "Safety First"⁴. Nevertheless, the some 30 MPs joined⁵, although the atmosphere dictated that the list be kept secret⁶.

The Group embarked on an active programme of debates, largely organised by its hard-working Secretary, Edmund Marshall⁷. Within two years, Labour First organised 16 meetings outside the House, in which panels of MPs answered questions and participated in discussion with party activists. Five of these were conference fringe events, but 11 others were held around the country⁸. In the House, 32 meetings were held, virtually all with speakers, who included Foot⁹, Healey, Hattersley, Benn, Harold

¹ David Clark papers. It was initially called the "Non-Group" meeting (letter from David Watkins to the author, 19 April 2004).

² Brynmor John, David Clark, Terry Davis, John Grant and Edmund Marshall (Edmund Marshall letter to the author, 12 November 2003).

³ Phillip Whitehead; notes of 26 March 1980 Manifesto Group meeting, MGA.

⁴ As recalled by Nick Butler; interview, 2 March 2003.

⁵ See annex 6.

⁶ Edmund Marshall letter, 12 November 2003.

⁷ Lord Clark of Windermere (David Clark), interview, 2 December 2003.

⁸ "Report on the Year's Activities", by Edmund Marshall, Secretary, Labour First, 31 March 1981 and 20 April 1982, David Clark papers.

⁹ Then Leader of the party.

Wilson, Lord Carver¹⁰, Gordon Borrie¹¹ and trade unionists Alan Fisher, Clive Jenkins and Len Murray.

The Group also produced one paper, on internal party organisation¹². At the end of 1980, when the conference had decided in principle to amend the system for electing the Leader, but had failed to agree a method, the PLP sought to coalesce around one position. Labour First's submission called for an OMOV ballot of all party members, instead of an Electoral College. This was supported by many of the MPs who subsequently defected but not by the Shadow Cabinet nor the PLP (which went along with an Electoral College, with half the votes for MPs). In this one collective position, therefore, Labour First firmly placed itself on the Right. Yet, by holding aloof from the Manifesto Group, it was seen by the Chairman of the latter as damaging his Group's recruitment prospects¹³, weakening the Centre-right in the PLP.

What was the purpose of this non-aligned Group, and what did it achieve? Its instigators wanted a forum for discussion outside of the polarised choice within the PLP. Benn described it as being "set up by people who are dissatisfied with the Manifesto Group which is right-wing and pro-common market, and with the Tribune Group which they think of as dangerously left-wing"¹⁴. However, Golding wrote that "the moderate members of Labour First were far from being dissatisfied with the Manifesto Group and helped create Labour First as a meeting point with those in the Tribune Group who opposed the excesses of Wedgie and Eric Heffer"¹⁵. John Grant, one of the original Vice-Chairmen, defined it as a Group who were "deeply unhappy with the faction fighting which .. bedevilled the parliamentary party as well as the party beyond"¹⁶. One Manifesto Group stalwart was less charitable: "They were Soft-left. Decent, but couldn't bring themselves to call themselves 'Right' "¹⁷. Perhaps "soft-Right" would have been more appropriate.

¹⁰ Former Chief of the Defence Staff, Field Marshal Carver.

¹¹ Director General of Fair Trading; now Lord Borrie of Abbots Morton.

¹² "Proposed amendments to the Labour Party Constitution to implement a new system for electing the Leader of the Labour Party", Labour First, 11 November 1980, David Clark papers.

¹³ Note to the Manifesto Group by Radice, January 1981, MGA.

¹⁴ Tony Benn, *op cit*, p.12.

¹⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, Chap 14, p.7.

¹⁶ John Grant, *Blood Brothers*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992, p.102.

¹⁷ Jim Wellbeloved interview.

Brynmor John (the Chairman throughout its existence), Grant, Marshall, Clark and Davis had sounded out other like-minded MPs to set up something to counter the polarisation and foster “an improved spirit of tolerance”. They resented the effectiveness of the other two slates, and – according to Grant – in 1981 put up their own list, representing what they defined as “the middle” and which helped see John, Dunwoody and Archer elected to the Shadow Cabinet. The Secretary of the Group, Edmund Marshall, remembers it differently, claiming that Labour First did not run any slate “although it would not have been surprising if members of Labour First supported those [of its] members who were candidates for the Shadow Cabinet”¹⁸.

The Manifesto Group sensed there was a separate slate¹⁹ and resented the consequent dilution of its own effectiveness. Despite such hiccups, members from Manifesto were welcomed into Labour First, and there were a number active in both (such as Archer) as well as some who were later prominent in Solidarity (Woolmer, Jack Cunningham, Clark, Mitchell and O’Neill) and others subsequently to defect – Grant, McNally, Douglas-Mann and, much later, Marshall when no longer an MP. Perhaps the most significant role the Group played was the provision of mutual support. The pressure on MPs was intense, and the bitterness in the party palpable. For example, although Clark had no Militancy within his own CLP, his experience in another seat which he visited as a Labour First speaker, remains live in his memory:

“I remember speaking at one in Haltwhistle, with Arthur Davidson (who was himself close to Tribune) in the Miners’ Hall. The feeling was intense. My wife was there – and had a box of leaflets under her chair. One woman at the meeting – a long-standing councillor – said to my wife: ‘I hope that’s a bomb’. Such was the atmosphere. Then they slagged off Arthur. Said he and others were ‘milking the Labour Party; lining their pockets’. Arthur Davidson – a QC – said he could make far more as a barrister”²⁰.

For Clark and his friends, Labour First provided a handrail on the route back to a more collegial party and a source of support and encouragement. Labour First continued to meet until Easter 1983 when attention turned to the forthcoming General Election. By the year end, the Group had been subsumed (along with the Manifesto Group) into Parliamentary Solidarity, with Brynmor John becoming Chairman of the new Grouping and Clark a Vice-Chairman²¹. The size of the election defeat was the trigger – only 209

¹⁸ Edmund Marshall letter, 12 November 2003.

¹⁹ See Manifesto Group chapter.

²⁰ David Clark interview.

²¹ Solidarity Committee paper and minutes, 14 December 1983 (DRH/1/2; DRH/1/24).

MPs – and the shock of the response on the doorstep. “Two per cent fewer votes and we'd have been finished. After that, the soft-Tribunites were talking very differently”²². That the Left was split, between those (like Benn) who considered the 1983 election a victory for a good socialist manifesto, and the bulk who acknowledged the scale of the crisis, was evidenced by the likes of Blair and Brown who, as new MPs, joined the Tribune Group. The presence of such typically Centre and Centre-right members in Tribune altered its colours and nearly shot the Right's fox. The Common Market had also dimmed as a marker, not least as events in eastern Europe (such as Solidarity in Poland) were shifting the European debate. It was time for a new focus in the PLP; Labour First found it quite comfortable to make the move into Labour's Solidarity²³.

Looking at achievements of the Group, its former Secretary concludes “it is difficult to measure any specific legacy left by Labour First. Clearly we did not dissuade the formation of the SDP, nor did we have any marked effect on restoring Labour Party fortunes. One indirect result of our existence may have been the failure of Denis Healey to become Leader of the Labour Party, which election came only shortly after he had baldly declined an invitation to come to speak at one of our meetings! Michael Foot did accept such an invitation”²⁴. However, the fault for this does clearly lie with Healey, who similarly upset the Manifesto Group. Marshall does not mention what might have been their greatest strength – to bring some of the Soft-left into debate with the Centre-right. To a degree, this was a characteristic of Labour First from the start, drawing on a wider spectrum within the PLP than the Manifesto or Solidarity groupings. A number of Tribune and non-Tribune Left were found in its midst, some of Labour First members' more sceptical views on Europe perhaps making this easier. Thus Labour First maintained a dialogue which even Solidarity found difficult to sustain. This was to pay off at least once, when, after the 1983 election, two vacancies occurred in the North East when MPs announced their retirements. Labour First was able to do a deal with the Tribune members in the region, whereby one group would run a candidate in each seat, with both groups then working to support each other's nominees – vital in CLPs where Militant were strong. Labour First, given Gateshead East, ran Joyce Quin; Tribune chose Albert Booth for Sunderland North. In the first case, Quin won by the

²² David Clark interview.

²³ David Clark interview.

²⁴ Edmund Marshall letter to the author, 12 November 2003.

slenderest of majorities against Militant²⁵. In Sunderland, despite considerable work by Labour First, the ex-MP and older Booth was unable to fight off Bob Clay²⁶. However, it showed the potential of the groups co-operating against the Far-left.

The full centre and soft-left alignment, which only really occurred after 1987, was undoubtedly helped by these earlier activities, but might perhaps have been brought forward had this grouping been more strategic, and concentrated on that objective. At the time, it was instead seen by the Right as being coy about declaring its anti-Benn sentiments. By failing to take an early stand against the Hard-left, it could be said to have provided the breathing space that allowed this Left to continue to damage the party and its electoral prospects. Nevertheless, for its members, it gave support and solidarity – attributes sorely lacking but essential for the day-to-day political battles.

The Group had one more contribution to make. Another Election on, and the Labour Solidarity Campaign was wound up. But neither the individuals concerned, nor the need for organisation, disappeared. The phoenix which arose in 1987 (again aided by Spellar and Godsiff) wrote to Brynmor John²⁷ seeking permission to take on the name. In response, John gathered the remaining members together to wind up the original Labour First formally, and then bequeathed the name to the emergent body²⁸ which still exists today.

²⁵ Though she questions how much real help was offered by Labour First (comment to the author, July 2004).

²⁶ David Clark interview.

²⁷ Letter of 6 November 1987 (JSA).

²⁸ Letter from Brynmor John, 17 November 1987 (JSA) and John F Spellar interview.

Chapter 9 St Ermins Group – The Background

The St Ermins Group of trade unionists was born on 10 February 1981. However, a number of overlapping developments preceded this. One was a ‘Loyalist Group’ on the NEC, one was a ‘chewing the fat’ coterie of moderate general secretaries, often over dinner at the St Ermins Hotel, a third was a pro-incomes policy grouping, a fourth was of union political officers and yet another was a sub-set of unions which supported the constituency-based CLV. Thus, prior to the St Ermins Group, the key players met in a variety of gatherings as well as at the TUC General Council.

Another dimension linked many of the people who were to play key roles in the party’s fortunes. By 1981, a significant group of Midlands men found themselves occupying national positions in London: Denis Howell (MP for Birmingham Small Heath, former CDS union organiser¹, President of APEX); Roy Grantham (former Midlands Organiser, General Secretary of APEX²); Jim Cattermole (former East Midlands Labour Party Organiser³); Terry Duffy (Black Country AUEW President); John Golding MP⁴ and Bryan Stanley (POEU, a close colleague of the party’s national agent, Reg Underhill, from the latter’s days in the Midlands⁵). Later activists included the West Midlands AUEW’s Ken Cure⁶, together with two staffers who had first collaborated in South Lewisham Young Socialists in the 1960s: Roger Godsiff and John Spellar (later both West Midlands MPs). Other alliances were important, such as the ‘Triple Alliance’ of coal, steel and rail, which saw ISTC’s Bill Sirs in close contact with the NUR’s Sidney Weighell⁷.

The background of these men helps explain their politics. They comprised, in the main, general secretaries of manual unions, men who had left school at 14, with little formal education, and who made their way up through their unions – a demonstration of intelligence, leadership, determination and sheer hard work. Sandy Feather, one of their number (though not a general secretary – albeit the son of a TUC General Secretary),

¹ Denis Howell, *op cit*, p.103.

² Denis Howell, *op cit*, p.267; Roy Grantham interview.

³ Jim Cattermole interview.

⁴ Brought up in Birmingham Sparkbrook, *Guardian*, 14 July 1983.

⁵ Bryan Stanley, interview, 24 January 2003.

⁶ Andy McSmith, *op cit*; Lord (Tony) Clarke of Hampstead, interview, 11 February 2002; Charles Turnock, interview, 29 January 2003.

⁷ Sandy Feather, interview, 11 September 2002.

attributes a further quality to the coterie: “There’s a breed of ‘fix-it’ people. Don’t usually fix it for themselves”⁸.

Sidney (Sid) Weighell’s grandfather, father and brother worked on the railways⁹, though he alone made a union career which saw him become NUR General Secretary as well as a Labour Party Agent in the 1950s and on the NEC in the 1970s¹⁰. It was here he saw the Left caucusing and began his passion to “save the party from the Left”¹¹. He wanted Labour to be a broader-based party whose conference “would more accurately reflect the views of ordinary rank-and-file and Labour voters” and an NEC with a “powerful and sensibly balanced representation of the trade unions, the constituency parties and MPs”¹². He believed passionately in the party. At the height of the Winter of Discontent, he let it be known that he was “in the business of saving the Labour government”¹³. Despite his role in the Group – and his personal sacrifice¹⁴ – Weighell received little thanks, being offered no peerage and being beaten by a young Anthony Blair for the Sedgefield nomination in 1983¹⁵.

Terry Duffy, the straight-talking President of the Engineering Union, was endlessly underestimated – even mocked – by Labour’s intellectuals. Yet he was to prove the fulcrum on which the party’s fortunes turned. He had beaten left-winger Bob Wright for the Presidency. “For the left within the union, and indeed for the Labour party left, this was seriously bad news”¹⁶. Under Duffy, the AUEW’s “was the block vote which Neil Kinnock or John Smith knew they could count on”¹⁷. Many failed to recognise the brain behind the face. Following the 1981 Wembley Conference (when his union was locked into a prior decision to support nothing less than 50% of the College for the PLP and thus unable to vote to prevent a worse outcome), the middle-class, university-educated John Silkin (unfamiliar with union procedures), disparagingly suggested that

⁸ Sandy Feather interview.

⁹ Sidney Weighell, *op cit*; Terry Pattinson, Obituary of Sidney Weighell, *Independent*, 15 February 2002; John Lloyd, *Financial Times*, 18 February 2002.

¹⁰ Sidney Weighell, *op cit*, p.23.

¹¹ John Lloyd, *Financial Times*, 18 February 2002.

¹² Sidney Weighell, *op cit*, pp.135/6.

¹³ Bernard Donoughue, *op cit*, p.266.

¹⁴ See next chapter.

¹⁵ *Independent*, 15 February 2002.

¹⁶ Andy McSmith, *op cit*, p.135.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p.136.

the working-class Duffy supported a 40%, 40%, 40% formula¹⁸. His union collaborators saw Duffy differently: he was “superb – he always delivered on what needed to be done”¹⁹. “Terry was .. lovely .. It was like a breath of fresh air .. He was prepared .. to try to make things better. Because he had this view that the union and Labour movement were being held back with things as they were”²⁰. Others recognised his effectiveness: “Particularly important for the eventual success of the counter-insurgency against the left .. was the election in 1978 of Terry Duffy and John Boyd, two classically anti-communist leaders²¹, as President and General Secretary respectively of the Engineering Union”²². Dick Clements, who worked for Foot and Kinnock, described him as “helpful”; Duffy “would say to me ‘Tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it’. And then did”²³. Another concurs: “The ‘chatterers’ were dismissive of Duffy .. they underestimated him. He played an important role in initiating St Ermins”²⁴. Amongst all the Group papers, almost the only reference to anyone by name occurs when Duffy’s death was noted with sadness, not only for the Group but because of the loss of a powerful vote within the General Council²⁵. “More than any other union leader, he was the one who halted the TUC’s leftward drift”²⁶.

Bryan Stanley helped bring about the first meeting of the Group. A self-styled “middle of the roader”²⁷, he was an unlikely ally: opposed to the Common Market and a unilateralist. But his similarities were greater than any policy differences. A Post Office employee from 14, Stanley’s strengths lay in the characteristics of his union, and in his personality. The Post Office Engineering Union was “not one of the very big unions and not in a mainstream industry. So we were not trying to poach members. Not in competition with other unions. It was twentieth in size. They didn’t fear us”²⁸.

¹⁸ John Silkin, *op cit*, p.38. (He would perhaps rue such comments when the AUEW helped defeat his bid for the Deputy Leadership.)

¹⁹ Roger Godsiff, interview, 4 December 2001.

²⁰ Bryan Stanley interview.

²¹ Sir John Boyd was not just anti-communist. He could not tolerate Trotskyites and wanted to “cleanse” the party, describing Militant as “a sewer with all sorts of rubbish floating in it” (*Guardian*, 24 April 1982; Eric Shaw, *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party*, Manchester University Press, 1988, p.234).

²² Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.150.

²³ Dick Clements interview.

²⁴ Lord (Richard) Faulkner of Worcester, interview, 11 March 2002.

²⁵ Notes of 22 October 1985 meeting, EGA.

²⁶ Andy McSmith, *op cit*, p.137.

²⁷ Bryan Stanley interview.

²⁸ Bryan Stanley interview.

His own personality helped; he never fell out with anyone²⁹. His ability to get on with everyone enabled him to encompass the ego-driven Basnett and keep an eclectic group, from the staunchest right-wingers to the left-leaning, together. Outside the meetings, “I did manage to get Basnett, Chapple and Duffy round the same table over lunch – but I had to be there. They argued all the time. I had to stop them dealing with subjects where they would fly apart”³⁰. Politically, Stanley “was terrific! This guy had never been a phone engineer – but his phone-engineering, in terms of in thinking through circuits and finding answers, was terrific. ..[He saw] politics as serious business. This wasn’t for sectarian or sectional purpose within the Labour Party. It was for the party”³¹.

Stanley had been on the NEC and was in contact with other general secretaries who shared his distaste about what was happening in the party. He decided to do something. As did Roy Grantham. The APEX General Secretary was midwife to the Group, not just ensuring it was delivered, but producing its nurse-maid, Godsiff (see below), without whom St Ermins might have been born a poor wee thing³². Grantham’s union was central to the Right – in the European movement, CLV and later Solidarity.

Golding learnt his fixing as the POEU education officer. At that time, it was unusual for working people to have access to telephones at work. Post Office engineers were the exception. So early on Golding became accustomed to “ringing round” to ensure people turned up, or supported particular candidates. He helped run BLOC (the moderates within the union) which was a miniature St Ermins, controlling elections to the Executive; the skills thus learnt remained with him³³. He became an MP (thanks to his colleague³⁴) and a minister, though his heart remained with the union and he later resigned his seat to return as General Secretary. But it was on the NEC he forged his lasting reputation. In 1978, “the left had apparently been strengthened by the election of Dennis Skinner and Neil Kinnock to the NEC’s constituency section. But little noted at

²⁹ Peter Archer, interview, 27 January 2003.

³⁰ Bryan Stanley interview.

³¹ Neil Kinnock interview.

³² Bryan Stanley interview.

³³ Norman Howard, interview, 14 February 2002.

³⁴ The Newcastle-under-Lyme party invited Stanley to be their MP. He “declined but recommended the young John Golding. The Potters [Ceramics] union conveniently called a meeting half an hour before the start of the selection conference, though expenses for attending would be handed out after the selection. The 90 or so who went, and stayed throughout the party meeting, ensured Golding

the time was the simultaneous election .. of John Golding, a right-wing machine politician .. a key player in the formation of a hard-line right-wing group of union leaders, known as the St Ermin's Group, determined not to compromise .. in the counter-insurgency against the new left. He was to play the leading role in challenging and eventually defeating Benn's and Heffer's leadership of the NEC"³⁵. Golding was the Group's link with the Leader's office and head-office³⁶. Early on, Kinnock realised "that the very effective organiser of this combined action and the main political stimulant was John Golding. And that he was putting into literal effect the maxim 'the victory of political ideals must be organised' "³⁷. No matter how intense the politics, Golding's 'hinterland' was never far away. He fished enthusiastically and would have a TV at meetings to watch the racing³⁸. Bill Sirs wrote: "The man who was a fount of information and most active was John Golding. None of the politicians could hold a candle to him"³⁹.

In time, Charlie Turnock took over Golding's role as the 'whip' on the NEC. Self-taught and an NCLC alumni, Turnock has an extensive library ranging from Lenin and Trotsky through virtually the whole of Labour history⁴⁰. "At St Ermins meetings he had a big leather case. Full of papers. Would dig in his bag to find the requisite paper"⁴¹. His nose for detail was to prove devastating for Militant, particularly in Liverpool, when he chaired the Enquiry. His life was not always led out of a briefcase. He followed his father onto the railways at 14, before going into the Commandos. After the war he rose from a passenger guard to become an NUR organiser. Beaten by Weighell to the general secretaryship, he remained a staunch ally of his new boss and collaborated with him in furthering the St Ermins Group⁴². Together with Duffy, he is the other member named in the minutes, on his retirement, being thanked "for his unstinting efforts" and "outstanding contribution"⁴³. Another NUR man was Russell Tuck, "nobody's idea of a right-winger [but] frustrated by the weakness of the party. And as a classic NUR man,

was selected" (Bryan Stanley interview). Golding admitted the selection had been fixed – not as a confession but to expose the injustices of the old selection system (*Guardian*, 14 July 1983).

³⁵ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.151.

³⁶ Sandy Feather interview.

³⁷ Neil Kinnock interview.

³⁸ Gordon Colling, interview, 1 November 2002.

³⁹ William Sirs, letter to the author, 21 October 2002.

⁴⁰ Charles Turnock interview.

⁴¹ Gordon Colling interview.

⁴² Charles Turnock interview.

⁴³ Notes of 22 September 1987 meeting, EGA.

he wanted to do something about it. Absolutely classic role of the National Union of Railwaymen over the first 80 odd years of its history”⁴⁴.

Gordon Colling, who became one of Kinnock’s closest confidants, recalled the cloak-and-dagger mode of invitation. “Somebody sidled up to me and said: ‘A group of us meet now and again. Exchange information and views. Would you like to come along? Interested in discussing NEC positions’ ”⁴⁵. He shared their objective of returning the party to sanity and electability and was “our rock”⁴⁶.

Chapple, though a rare attendee at St Ermins meetings⁴⁷, was a powerful figure behind its success. As with Grantham, part of his contribution was to bequeath the services of his political officer, Spellar, to their work. Chapple was an experienced organiser who had taken on and beaten the Communist Party within his own union. He had served on the NEC – where he had “remonstrated with Jim Callaghan, the [then] Chancellor of the Exchequer” at the end of his first NEC in 1965 “that the moderates were not putting up any sort of fight”⁴⁸. Much later, during the 1978/9 Winter, he tried to rescue Prime Minister Callaghan: “I don’t actually support any fucking incomes policy, but I will support one now if it will help this fucking Government”⁴⁹. The determination he had shown against the communists appeared again with the Bennites and Militants in the Labour Party. He kept Healey briefed about the Group, who commented: “I didn’t encourage them [the St Ermins Group]. They encouraged me”⁵⁰.

There was one empty chair. Despite the GMWU’s traditional Centre-right politics, its “weak and vain boss”⁵¹, David Basnett, was never to grace the meetings⁵². His colleagues put this down to personality. The kinder attribute it to a role he sought for himself: “Basnett wanted to keep close to the TGWU and to Clive Jenkins. He didn’t bother with the St Ermins group people”⁵³. He “saw his role as the mediator between Left and Right, even though he was basically a moderate .. Also David didn’t get on

⁴⁴ Neil Kinnock interview.

⁴⁵ Gordon Colling interview.

⁴⁶ Sandy Feather interview.

⁴⁷ “Frank Chapple only went once – to the first meeting (in bow tie and DJ!) – and then left Spellar to do the business after that” (Roger Godsiff interview).

⁴⁸ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.105.

⁴⁹ Bernard Donoghue, *op cit*, p.267.

⁵⁰ Denis Healey interview.

⁵¹ Bernard Donoghue, *op cit*, p.266.

⁵² Nor did his successor, John Edmonds.

⁵³ Roy Grantham interview.

with Frank Chapple – because of the Isle of Grain inter-union dispute. I still have a message sent by Basnett to Callaghan which reads: ‘The Isle of Grain is keeping us all apart’⁵⁴. Others are less charitable. Callaghan’s aide-de-camp: “It was Basnett’s vanity. Basnett was the first GMWU leader to take pride in being thought of as part of the Left rather than taking pride in being a good old right-wing union boss who looked after the Leader. He got flattered by the Left into re-positioning the G&M .. in ways which made it difficult”⁵⁵. Foot’s aide-de-camp found him a chore: “Basnett was quite loyalist but you had to go through the whole palaver over and over again. With others, easily settled: like Duffy who’d say to me ‘Tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it’. And then did. David Basnett needed many lunches, many explanations”⁵⁶. This indecision – or need of flattery to make him feel in charge – is echoed by Godsiff: “Basnett wouldn’t go because he couldn’t run it”⁵⁷, and by Feather: “Some of our people would approach Basnett. He was usually reliable but would never deliver 100% – because he wanted some say himself. Of course he would always need to support the TGWU. But he would chop and change his votes for the smaller unions”⁵⁸. Godsiff developed a *modus operandi*: “Once it was agreed what would be done, I had to phone Basnett to tell him – but in a certain style. For example, when they wanted to support Sam McCluskie, I said ‘How would you feel about Sam as treasurer?’ He said ‘Quite happy’. I’d then say ‘You’d be quite happy’. That was how it had to be done. Basnett had a veto”⁵⁹.

Only one commentator attributes Basnett’s stand to any political belief. Shaw incorrectly assumes that the whole union kept its distance from St Ermins. He suggests that Basnett “swung his traditionally solidly right wing union on to a more centrist course”, his footnote adding: “Thus the GMWU never participated actively in the St Ermine’s (*sic*) Group of right-wing unions”⁶⁰. In fact, Burlison, Hough and Hadden did attend and, from the first meeting, the former Head of the GMWU Research Department, Radice, represented the union, acting as a “go-between” with Basnett⁶¹. “Denis [Healey] was keen I should be there. Basnett not exactly keen but knew .. I was

⁵⁴ Giles Radice interview.

⁵⁵ Tom McNally interview.

⁵⁶ Dick Clements interview

⁵⁷ Roger Godsiff interview.

⁵⁸ Sandy Feather, interview, 6 November 2002.

⁵⁹ Roger Godsiff interview.

⁶⁰ Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p.359/360.

⁶¹ Roger Godsiff interview.

sent by the Group to talk to him. I went to most meetings .. until I got on to the Shadow Cabinet” in 1983⁶².

Stanley was the other conduit⁶³. He saw some rationale behind Basnett’s caution. Radice’s replacement as Head of Research, Larry Whitty, was very close to Ken Gill’s wife, Tess Gill, and Basnett perhaps knew there would be few secrets between them. It led to some “cloak-and-dagger” meetings, as Stanley recalled: “in his heart, he knew the extreme Left in the Labour Party and the extreme Left in the TUC had to be defeated. But he would not stick his head above the parapet. [Automaticity]⁶⁴ was where Basnett was true. He’d never show it but he was true to this Group. But I had to meet David Basnett in his secret [GMWU] office in Duke Street or where he was having lunch – or sometimes, at conference, I had to go to his bedroom”⁶⁵.

There were other senior trade unionists, some on the TUC’s General Council, some on the NEC (overlapping membership being banned), who were active in the Group, such as Tony Clarke of the Post Office Workers, Alan Tuffin (his union’s General Secretary); Tuffin’s predecessor, Tom Jackson; Sandy Feather, Roy Evans and Keith Brookman of the ISTC; the GMWU’s Neville Hough and Tom Burlison; Tom Breakell (EETPU); Alex Smith (NUTGW), David Williams (COHSE), Bill Whatley (USDAW), Richard Rosser (TSSA), John Weakley (AUEW) and David Ward (NCU)⁶⁶. No names were included on the Group minutes and no list ever circulated.

The power behind the St Ermins Group was the initial core (Chapple, Duffy, Grantham, Stanley) together with Golding and Turnock. But there were two other “special ingredients” to whom all pay tribute and without whom the venture would have little success. “Roger Godsiff and John Spellar. They were the mechanics”⁶⁷. “They were ultra-diligent – they left no stone unturned. They were figures men. They worked the columns. They used the phone. They got in touch. Nothing was too hot or too heavy. They did play a hell of a big part. Ensuring first that their people have voted. Secondly that they have all voted in a consistent, organised way because they explained the

⁶² Giles Radice interview.

⁶³ Roy Grantham interview; Bryan Stanley interview.

⁶⁴ The system for electing the TUC’s General Council; see p.133.

⁶⁵ Bryan Stanley interview.

⁶⁶ Alan Tuffin interview, Tony Clarke interview, Roy Grantham interview, Gordon Colling interview, Sandy Feather interview.

⁶⁷ Gordon Colling interview.

purpose of following it through. And why elections to Regional Executives mattered. And why who was on the political committees of the national union mattered. And worked it through in a systematic, organised way – without which politics is pleasant, but it's only poetry"⁶⁸.

Now MP for Howell's old seat, Godsiff's contribution was his masterminding of voting figures. He was "one of the small circle of union officials who, when every one else in the Labour Party appeared to retreat before the advancing Bennites, set about counting where the block votes lay and brokering secret deals to turn them over. .. Godsiff .. was the man with the pocket calculator, who worked out exactly how many block votes were pledged to each candidate in .. NEC elections"⁶⁹. He "was the master of calculation and the formulation of deals. Thinking arithmetic all the time, he would always be working out what deal to make .. Roger's key understanding was that winning seats was more important than the size of the majority, except to individual egos"⁷⁰. A member of Kinnock's office confirmed that Godsiff was "always reliable. Not involved in policy. Just reliable numbers"⁷¹. This was the case even when the news was bad⁷². "Roger would put deals in an absolutely honest way – you will get more votes but you won't get on"⁷³. A number-cruncher extraordinaire, he was also trusted. He got on well with Golding from the start and managed to persuade some unlikely figures to follow his road-map. He did not simply use a calculator. If not actual strong arm-tactics, there were smoke-and-mirror methods in his armoury: "the best wheeler-dealer ever – even with Clive Jenkins"⁷⁴. Approval came from the top: at a conference reception when the Godsiff formula had been pulled off with just 40,000 votes to spare, Kinnock made a point of crossing a crowded room to thank its architect in person⁷⁵.

Spellar's Midlands connections started though his wife (who hailed from his original Birmingham seat) but grew through St Ermins and the Labour movement. His Warley West seat now places him firmly amongst the Midlands Labour Right. However, from his south London origins he hardly crossed the Thames (parliament aside), spending his

⁶⁸ Neil Kinnock interview.

⁶⁹ Andy McSmith, *op cit*, p.219.

⁷⁰ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 13/p.8.

⁷¹ Neil Stewart, interview, 14 March 2002.

⁷² Gordon Colling interview.

⁷³ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.182, quoting Doug Hoyle.

⁷⁴ Sandy Feather interview.

⁷⁵ Roger Godsiff interview.

working life at the Bromley-based EETPU, as political secretary to Chapple, Hammond and Jackson, successive general secretaries of an ever amalgamating and name-changing union. It is hard to overemphasise Spellar's impact on the Group, whose members – being elected national officers (mostly general secretaries) – were senior to him and Godsiff. Alan Hadden, a former party Chairman, judges that “Spellar was the real political push” behind the Group⁷⁶. He was not afraid to take on the Left. At one London party conference, “Arthur Latham, in the Chair, asked ‘if anyone wanted to vote or speak in favour of good socialist comrades being thrown out of the party’. One voice ‘Yes!’ It was John Spellar. He was heartily booed. However, Ken Livingstone later remarked: ‘But two years later they were out; and four years later his side had won’ ”⁷⁷. Spellar was trusted by his various bosses, and was their surrogate at St Ermins meetings. Golding described Spellar as “a prime driving force .. providing long-term tactical perspective, continually pushing hard and .. persuading the hard right to agree to deals from which they got little benefit”⁷⁸.

Those are the *dramatis personae* of the St Ermins Group. The Group's birth followed a gestation period when some were already beginning to conspire to change the party. A ‘Loyalist Group’ on the NEC had been instigated by Stanley in 1978, who asked Golding to “form an alliance” with Tuck, McCluskie⁷⁹ and others to “organise a defensive group for Jim Callaghan” following the NEC's constant attacks on his Government. Not all were right-wing, but all were from the unions, motivated by the need to unify to win the election. It was a minority, but it offered some resistance to the unremitting attacks on the Government. It also accustomed an inner group to working together, reaching agreements and keeping to them. The Loyalist Group “first met under the Chairmanship of Russell Tuck at the North Western Hotel in Euston”; Golding was made the convenor (despite being a minister, he was reckoned to have the time!). The Group worked by agreeing voting arrangements – taking account of each person's personal and union sticking points – often arriving at what Golding called “a shoddy compromise”. The convenor's job, to “maximise the support for Jim Callaghan and the Labour Government”, involved pre-planning but also ensuring “that loyalists stayed for vital votes on the [NEC] and then voted as they had agreed. If there was no

⁷⁶ Alan Hadden, interview, 23 January 2002.

⁷⁷ John Lloyd, interview, 18 March 2002.

⁷⁸ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 13/p.7-8.

hope of winning a vote, [Golding's] job was to prevent a decision from being made". There were major obstacles: the Left "held all the chairmanships and controlled the Secretariat"⁸⁰.

Despite the Kogans' assertion that the union group had no pre-meetings⁸¹, meetings were held, but kept secret – a pattern later followed by the St Ermins Group. But one man did know; Callaghan approved of what was going on, and perhaps took comfort from their few successes. How rare these were is shown by the Loyalists' delight on winning a resolution supporting the Labour Government – on the 28 March 1979, the day of the Vote of No Confidence in the Commons⁸². Their influence was more critical over the manifesto when, in coalition with the Cabinet⁸³, they gave "Callaghan greater strength in ensuring that the General Election was fought on a realistic manifesto"⁸⁴. Where they wanted to differ from Callaghan (such as over abolition of the House of Lords, where they would have sided with the Left), however, they were unable to extract any concession from the Prime Minister⁸⁵.

In addition to the Loyalist Group, the problems in the party led a number of unions to support CLV⁸⁶. APEX, POEU, NUR, GMWU, UCW, AUEW and even a section of the NUM took advertisements in its publication, *Labour Victory*⁸⁷. When, in due course, CLV's leading lights largely defected to the SDP, the union members stayed loyal to the party.

A further dozen general secretaries were brought together by junior minister, John Grant, who persuaded them to sign a pamphlet on pay policy⁸⁸. The signatories included Chapple, Duffy, Grantham, Jackson, Sirs and Weighell⁸⁹ who would comprise

⁷⁹ McCluskie's responsiveness, despite his left-wing allegiances, was largely the result of being defeated by Heffer for the chairmanship of the Organisation sub-committee (*ibid*, chap 4/p.4).

⁸⁰ *ibid*, chap 4/p.1.

⁸¹ David Kogan and Maurice Kogan, *op cit*, p.74.

⁸² John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, pp. 77 and 79.

⁸³ Under the party rules, the manifesto is agreed at a joint Cabinet-NEC meeting.

⁸⁴ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 4/p.6.

⁸⁵ *ibid*.

⁸⁶ The activist-based Campaign for Labour Victory.

⁸⁷ Gerald J. Daly, "The crisis in the Labour Party 1974-81 and the origins of the 1981 schism", 1992, PhD Thesis, University of London, p.267; Charles Turnock interview; CLV archives.

⁸⁸ *A Better Way*, published by the Signatories (which did not include its un-named author, Grant), January 1979. It also "shows a new preparedness to organise on the Labour Right" (*New Statesman*, 2 February 1979). The pamphlet sold 8,000 copies. A slight surplus (£395.57) was later sent to charity (John Grant papers - JGP).

⁸⁹ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.148/9. Dinners were held at the Great Northern Hotel on 20 November 1978, 9 January and 26 February 1979 (JGP).

the core of the St Ermins Group two years later. Yet another group had been meeting in David Owen's office in Old Scotland Yard well before Wembley. Although mostly MPs, it included Chapple, Weighell, Sirs, Grantham as well political officers Spellar and Feather⁹⁰. The staffers were already members of TUPO (Trade Union and Political Officers Group) which met at the Commons. This was a selective grouping of "trusties", whose general secretaries sent them with their blessing. It was rather clandestine and too junior to achieve much. However, it spread useful intelligence and began co-operating on number-crunching for TUC and NEC votes⁹¹.

At a senior level, Grantham and friends (especially Duffy) had been meeting before 1979. This (no name) group met over dinner at the St Ermins Hotel to discuss "TUC General Council Business" – and talk politics. At one point, a party official wrote complaining about the meetings. Grantham's reply, to the effect that "general secretaries have to look after the other interests of their members – so do have meetings. The unions were the creators of the Labour Party, and have to decide what to do as unions about certain things", appears to have forestalled any further enquiry⁹². This group wanted to change the make-up of the NEC, with an attempt in 1978 to remove Joan Maynard and Renee Short from their seats⁹³.

It was the continuous undermining of the Labour Government and the break-down in government-NEC relations which forms the backdrop to St Ermins and led to the determination of these general secretaries to change the composition of the NEC. The unions were vital to the party. They had set it up and trade unionists formed the backbone of the membership. In the fifties, three-quarters of trade unionists were affiliated members but "by the mid-Eighties this had shrunk to little more than half"⁹⁴. From early on, constituency membership was to the Left of the unions. In 1952, for example, Bevanites won six out of the seven constituency places on the NEC, whilst Gaitskell's speech "made him leader of the moderate factor inside the parliamentary party and the favourite of the big unions, who, in 1954 voted him into the party treasurership and increasingly saw him as their candidate for the succession"⁹⁵. CLP seats on the NEC were thenceforth filled by the Left with their candidates winning "all

⁹⁰ Sandy Feather interview.

⁹¹ Sandy Feather interview.

⁹² Roy Grantham interview.

⁹³ Patrick Wintour, "Can the Left win this time round?", *New Statesman*, 20 July 1979, p.87.

⁹⁴ John Silkin, *op cit*, p.7.

seven places in 1967, 1968 and 1969. Denis Healey successfully challenged this monopoly between 1970 and 1974. The complete left-wing monopoly of this section was re-established in 1975 and [was] maintained ..[for many years], with the sole exception of Jack Ashley's election in 1977"⁹⁶.

It was not simply that the unions were on the Right. They had an ingrained loyalty to the leadership. "During the Attlee governments the right-wing trade union leaders that dominated the movement had often shared the sentiments of resolutions criticising government economic policy, but had always successfully instructed their delegations to vote against them"⁹⁷. The unions were not uncritically leadership-led, crucially refusing Gaitskell's attempt to change Clause IV. As Radice foresaw, "If there was ever to be a real chance of changing the clause, then the leader had to have both the big unions and potentially hostile rivals like Bevan and Wilson on his side"⁹⁸. The unions did, nevertheless, at the second asking, support Gaitskell on defence. They had earlier chosen him as Treasurer and, in 1967, repeated their prediction for Leader by electing Callaghan Treasurer over Foot⁹⁹. At this stage, the NEC supplied comfort to the Leader. Jack Jones recalls how, in 1964¹⁰⁰, he was unimpressed with his first meetings of the NEC, when the ministers loyally supported Wilson. Jones was told "that 'the trade union section always vote together, Jack', and 'we hope you will follow the same pattern'. I [said] that if that meant I would be expected always to vote with the top of the table, it was not on. My reaction surprised them"¹⁰¹.

Jones marked the beginning of a leftward shift in the unions. As early as 1965, Mikardo could "sense a new political radicalism among the union delegations at party conferences and appreciate what this might mean for the party: 'Watch the Unions: That's My Tip', he told his readers in Tribune"¹⁰². Union hesitancy on some policies was evident, with conference votes against the war in Vietnam, economic policy and incomes policy. "But it was not only the government's policies that were being

⁹⁵ Giles Radice, *op cit*, p.98.

⁹⁶ Patrick Seyd, *op cit*, p.207.

⁹⁷ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.21.

⁹⁸ Giles Radice, *op cit*, p.114. Tony Blair had Gordon Brown and John Prescott, as well as the unions, on his side when he achieved this over 30 years later.

⁹⁹ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.109; David Owen, *op cit*, p.153.

¹⁰⁰ The year Chapple failed to get elected, motivating the EETPU to change the composition so that it could be represented on the NEC and TUC (Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.102).

¹⁰¹ Jack Jones, *Union Man: An Autobiography*, Collins, 1986, p.167.

¹⁰² Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.21.

challenged. Also brought into question was the authoritarian manipulation of the unions' block votes by their leaders .. and deference towards the leadership as constituting the primary meaning of solidarity. This change gradually found expression at the level of the unions' national leaderships. Left-wing union leaders were elected in the late 1960s in four of the six largest unions". In the mid-1970s, the changes produced a left-wing majority on the NEC¹⁰³ and "the right-wing trade-union bloc vote was no longer dominant at the Party Conference"¹⁰⁴.

A left-dominated NEC was bound to be on a collision course with a more right-wing PLP and government. "The party pressures upon Harold Wilson were the pressures which arise from continuous tension. During 1974-6 .. the party in the country remained .. the source of his strength. .. But relationships with party headquarters, Transport House, which he had always neglected and with the [N.E.C.] were bad and forever worsening"¹⁰⁵. Even in opposition, "he had to fight against the party being committed to some breathlessly hare-brained schemes .. It was .. a struggle .. about the supremacy of the Parliamentary leadership and its freedom to resist domination by the party outside Parliament. .. A temporary reconciliation with the N.E.C. – which had moved decisively leftwards – came after the first election victory of 1974 but then the leader-N.E.C. relationship resumed its deteriorating course"¹⁰⁶. Wilson's "tactic for dealing with the N.E.C. was simply not to turn up at its meetings and ignoring any decisions .. with which he disagreed .. He was sorely tried by it"¹⁰⁷. The NEC had become unrepresentative of the movement and "By the end of Harold Wilson's premiership, the situation was little short of open hostility"¹⁰⁸. Callaghan had little better luck. On one occasion, at a tense Cabinet/ NEC meeting, he upbraided the NEC for being too negative and urged that they tell the country more about the Government's achievements¹⁰⁹. The NEC members did not heed his request, casting 23 successive votes critical of the Labour Government over 14 successive meetings¹¹⁰.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p.22; Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p.viii; Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.63.

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Seyd, *op cit*, p.47.

¹⁰⁵ Joe Haines, *op cit*, p.13.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p.14.

¹⁰⁹ 16 February 1977. John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 2/p.1.

¹¹⁰ Tom McNally interview and Gerald Daly, *op cit*, p.113. To some, this was 'just rewards' for Callaghan's 1969 vote on the NEC when, although a Cabinet member, he voted against *In Place of Strife*, David Owen, *op cit*, p.154.

Under Wilson, the NEC refused to do anything to prevent MPs being ‘sacked’ by their CLPs¹¹¹. Under Callaghan, “The NEC attacked the Government, went public, refused to take action in 1975 on the Underhill Report, endorsed Left-wing Parliamentary candidates while upholding the deselection of Right-wing MPs”¹¹². Furthermore, “all the polling evidence .. showed the policies the NEC supported were the policies the British electorate would never ever support”¹¹³. Yet it was the union block-vote which kept an unrepresentative minority in control of the NEC throughout the 1970s despite most union leaders being from the Right and Centre-right¹¹⁴.

At the 1976 conference, Callaghan used his first address as Prime Minister to voice his goal “to re-establish the dominance of the parliamentary leadership over the NEC”¹¹⁵. In 1979 he appointed Owen to the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee which he hoped “would become as important as the NEC”¹¹⁶. He succeeded in neither ambition. The 1969 ‘In Place of Strife’ episode had lined up many centre-right MPs against the government and seen Labour’s left-wing collaborating with union leaders who had hitherto resided in a different camp. Whilst even the left-wing union leaders were cautious of pre-empting the autonomy of the parliamentary party, and did not “see themselves as rivals for political leadership of the Labour movement”¹¹⁷, this experience had, nevertheless, given rise to the Left’s belief “that the unions were the principal institutional base for socialist advance .. This .. furnished a source of support within the movement which enabled the left to capture a locus of power on the NEC”¹¹⁸. The “alignment of the trade unions with the Tribune position” in the early 1970s heralded “an unprecedented degree of influence [for the left] on the making of Party policy”¹¹⁹. The estrangement of the unions from the leadership and the desire for revenge after the

¹¹¹ Joe Haines, *op cit*, p.14.

¹¹² Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.113.

¹¹³ Lord (Bernard) Donoughue interview with Gerald Daly, 5 April 1989 (*ibid*, p.121) and David Owen, *op cit*, p.430.

¹¹⁴ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.148, Lewis Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference*, Manchester University Press, 1980, p.358-361.

¹¹⁵ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.176.

¹¹⁶ David Owen, *op cit*, p.421.

¹¹⁷ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.25.

¹¹⁸ Alan Warde, *Consensus and beyond: The development of Labour Party strategy since the second world war*, Manchester University Press, 1982, p.163.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p.171.

Winter of Discontent, together with a demoralised and divided Right, were crucial in the success of the Left¹²⁰.

The unions' reaction to In Place of Strife and the Winter of Discontent fuelled a union/left-wing alliance which helped cement a left-dominated NEC. This gave them the chairmanships of the major committees (from 1978 all three were chaired by the Left: Benn, Lestor and Heffer)¹²¹ as well as control of staff appointments – something which an earlier Leader, Gaitskell, never allowed to happen. He had ensured that Transport House was packed with his placemen – an advantage which Wilson lost through neglect¹²². Tony Page claims to be the last non-Bennite to join the party staff for a decade, the subsequent recruit being the Militant Andy Bevan¹²³. It was Bevan's appointment which fuelled Stanley's determination to end the left-wing majority on the NEC, which was helping destroy the party. He had been astounded to find the General Secretary voting for Bevan and the NEC rubber stamping the decision¹²⁴. "And so we appointed what was the greatest danger to the YS¹²⁵ movement – we appointed him to the organiser and officer of the YS!"¹²⁶. Whilst new staff were henceforth Bennites, the majority – especially in the regions – remained Centre. The resulting fissure between the NEC and employees, and the NEC's constant attacks on the government, led to staff demoralisation¹²⁷. "The frequent overturning by the NEC of enquiry recommendations was particularly resented by regional officials because it undermined their political standing. By suggesting they did not enjoy the full confidence of their masters, it diminished their authority"¹²⁸.

It was not just on the NEC that the Moderates were losing. The Left had been winning "time and time again because they were organised. The Right had the numbers but didn't use their majority. There was nobody to pull it together. Reg Race¹²⁹ and NUPE were running rings round them"¹³⁰. Nowhere was this more clear than in the Left's

¹²⁰ Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.164; K Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State*, Macmillan, 1990, p.245.

¹²¹ Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.161.

¹²² Joe Haines, *op cit*, p.13.

¹²³ Tony Page, interview, 21 March 2002.

¹²⁴ See p. 133.

¹²⁵ Young Socialists (the party's youth wing).

¹²⁶ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹²⁷ Roger Robinson, interview, 29 November 2002.

¹²⁸ Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p.216.

¹²⁹ NUPE official.

¹³⁰ Roger Godsiff interview.

agenda for constitutional change. Their three demands were for mandatory reselection of MPs, a wider franchise for the election of the Leader, and the NEC having sole control over the manifesto. These became the battleground. Between 1979 and 1982, “the issue of democracy and power in the party became dominant almost to the point of making substantive issues secondary”¹³¹. Even before any change in rule had been passed, the NEC used its majority to assert its right to determine the manifesto for the 1979 European Parliament elections¹³². These were the first direct elections so there was no precedent for agreeing a manifesto. However, for General Elections, Clause V of the constitution was clear: a joint Cabinet (or, in opposition, Shadow Cabinet) and NEC committee made the decision. The Euro-Manifesto reflected the changing balance between the parliamentary leadership and the NEC.

The unions had never pressed for the changes promoted by the Left which “appeared to threaten the balance of the coalition groups inside the Labour Party by entrenching activist and NEC power and thus establish a Left-wing hegemony over the Party”¹³³. Indeed, as Minkin has demonstrated, in 1979 “not a single resolution or amendment was submitted by the unions relating to the three constitutional issues”¹³⁴. “More than that, the union majority had actually voted against the amendments”¹³⁵. Before the 1979 conference, a high level delegation gave the “unanimous view of all the trade union leaders associated with the TULV¹³⁶ that all constitutional matters be once again put off until after a Commission of Inquiry into the organisation of the party had been established and reported”. However, the “NEC stood up to the pressure”. They agreed to the inquiry but refused to take issues off the 1979 agenda (despite Foot, Golding and four trade unionists voting to do so)¹³⁷.

The Commission of Enquiry immediately caused upset. It was established with a 2:1 majority for the Left¹³⁸ and with no PLP representation (other than the Leader and Deputy). It was left to Healey to lead “the attack on the way the National Executive had rigged this Committee of Enquiry. It had appointed seven left-wingers to represent

¹³¹ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.192.

¹³² David Owen, *op cit*, p.149.

¹³³ Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.17.

¹³⁴ Lewis Minkin, *Exits and Entrances: Political Research as a Creative Art*, Sheffield Hallam University Press, 1997, p.127.

¹³⁵ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1997, p.277.

¹³⁶ Trade Unions for a Labour Victory.

¹³⁷ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.179; and Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, p.197.

¹³⁸ Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *op cit*, p.423.

itself, while the trade unions chose a balanced team of five, picked from all the main currents of opinion, and the Labour MPs were allowed only two representatives, Jim Callaghan and Michael Foot; so the National Executive had a built-in left-wing majority". The PLP appointed Healey to put their case to the NEC. "They simply ignored my arguments"¹³⁹.

The Commission, started in January 1980, led to the *casus belli* of the SDP split. Its final meeting at Bishop Stortford on 15 June agreed, by 7 votes 6, to recommend an Electoral College¹⁴⁰ to choose the Leader. A staffer recalls Callaghan remonstrating with its proponents: "you only want it because it would elect Benn"¹⁴¹. Nevertheless, he gave way. For the Right, Callaghan's capitulation remains inexplicable. Grantham reflected: "Good men don't always do the right thing". He thought that the Prime Minister did not talk enough to friends, who rarely went to Number 10, yet "the critical issues were party issues, not government ones"¹⁴². Could the decision have been overturned? Healey judged that "A battle against the Bishop Stortford agreement would have meant a break, not only with Jim, but with the majority of trade union leaders who had supported it, believing that it would at least protect the Party from a takeover by the Left. The fight I was being asked to lead .. had no prospect of victory. It would have meant splitting the Party"¹⁴³. Chapple's view was different: Callaghan was "much to blame for the slide. .. he went along tamely with those who sought to remove from Labour MPs the exclusive right to choose the Party leader"¹⁴⁴. A crisis was developing. By tradition, the unions "were expected to stabilise the Party situation". However, now "The NEC was under the control of the Left and deeply hostile to the interventions of union leaders. Also, there was no consensus on the Right as to how to move forward"¹⁴⁵. There was a lack of leadership and organisation. "Reform of the election of the Leader could have been averted .. had the Right been able to secure a measure of agreement on what it wanted, communicate this to its union allies and 'police' the united strategy"¹⁴⁶.

¹³⁹ Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life*, Michael Joseph, 1989, p.474.

¹⁴⁰ with 50% for the PLP; 25% for the CLPs; 20% for trade unions and 5% for the socialist societies.

¹⁴¹ Jenny Pardington interview.

¹⁴² Roy Grantham interview.

¹⁴³ Denis Healey, *op cit*, p.475 .

¹⁴⁴ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.161/2.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.201.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.200.

The proposal for the manifesto to fall under NEC control was defeated in 1980 but two of the Left's changes were passed. Mandatory reselection was adopted by 3,798,000 to 3,341,000, probably without a union majority in favour¹⁴⁷. More significantly, delegates voted by only 98,000 to support an electoral college. "The moderate unions were completely outmanoeuvred by the Bennite forces"¹⁴⁸. There was probably a union majority against this and it would have failed without NUPE's increased affiliation (from 150,000 in 1974 to 600,000 in 1980)¹⁴⁹. Furthermore, had each union respected its mandate, the proposal would have been lost. The Boilermakers had decided, at their pre-meeting, to vote against the Electoral College. However, when the two senior members, Chalmers and Hadden, were called away, "the delegation was left in the hands of Len Hancock. When they got back, they found he'd voted contrary to that decision"¹⁵⁰. Without the Boilermakers' 75,000 votes, the motion would have been lost by 3,586,000 to 3,534,000 – a majority against of 52,000.

The unions had, by accident or design, created the Electoral College and cemented mandatory reselection – both seen as undermining the PLP. The Left majority on the NEC – provided in part by the unions – put itself at the service of those demanding change¹⁵¹. The out-numbered Centre-right ploughed a lonely furrow. Even in Chapple's time, when there was a right-wing majority, Wilson "seldom asserted himself or used his authority as Prime Minister, simply ruling himself out of disciplinary matters by saying that he didn't want to be an unfair influence". Even their majority of one "was seldom of any real value since, either through absences or lack of genuine debate, votes were rarely called for". On one crucial vote, when "Labour was in disarray over Britain's pending entry into the Common Market, .. I was persuaded .. to attend the all-day NEC .. I was assured that heads had been counted and that my vote was vital, but at the meeting, Shirley Williams, who was supposed to be against a [special] conference, voted for one. Once again the moderates had miscalculated"¹⁵².

Later, when there was no chance of having the numbers, the Moderates paid the price of having lost control over the bureaucracy. The Bennite "research staff, like Geoff Bish,

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.195.

¹⁴⁸ Sidney Weighell, *op cit* p.137. The figures were 3,609,000 to 3,511,000 (*Report of 1980 Labour Party Conference*, p.152).

¹⁴⁹ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.199, and Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.152.

¹⁵⁰ Alan Hadden interview; Robert Taylor, *Observer*, 5 October 1980.

¹⁵¹ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.196.

¹⁵² Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.129/3.

would try and swamp the committee with so much paper that things would slide through”¹⁵³. Cartwright, Williams and Tom Bradley therefore “devised a system where they would each take chunks of the agenda and see what was going on, so we could alert the others. And there were some other trade unionists who worked with us. Not very organised on their part. But we three were more organised”¹⁵⁴. Cartwright found Callaghan no different to Wilson. “Callaghan was a great disappointment to me. Given his reputation for being an apparatchik, and product of the organisation, I assumed when he took over as Leader he’d take greater interest but he didn’t .. He was trying to keep the government, and the policy, and the PLP on an even course. The battle with the Left therefore never really took place on the NEC. There was no organised attempt to fight it. He was never interested in head-on battle”¹⁵⁵.

NEC meetings had become bear-fights. After the 1979 election, Williams was out of parliament but remained on the NEC which she found “increasingly unpleasant and unrewarding”¹⁵⁶. “The main battlefield in the war for the Labour Party’s survival was its National Executive Committee, which in 1979 was solidly dominated by the Left”¹⁵⁷. Healey – a beachmaster in the war and never afraid to take on the enemy – had lost his NEC seat in 1975 so there was no political leadership for the Moderates. In addition to Bevan’s appointment, the other decision which convinced Stanley that that left majority had to go was the Underhill Report. “In spite of clear evidence in this, the left-wing majority on the NEC constantly described any attempt to criticise or to investigate the Militant as a witch-hunt. And used any and every excuse to take no action and to cover up the damage that was being done to the party and to its prospects of ever forming a Labour Government”¹⁵⁸.

Whilst moderate union leaders grew exasperated at the party, elsewhere things were moving apace. Despite Williams’ 1979 view that “there has been a considerable shift of power in respect of our major unions .. They are clearly moving back to the centre. It is only a small handful now which represent the far left”¹⁵⁹, she and her fellow Social Democrats despaired of progress and the Gang of Three published an appeal in the

¹⁵³ John Cartwright, interview, 6 March 2003.

¹⁵⁴ John Cartwright interview.

¹⁵⁵ John Cartwright interview.

¹⁵⁶ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.192.

¹⁵⁷ Denis Healey, *op cit*, p.471.

¹⁵⁸ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹⁵⁹ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.151.

Guardian on 1 August 1980. Union members had been slipping away electorally, with Labour winning “only half of the trade unionists’ vote, while the Tories won nearly a third” in 1979¹⁶⁰. As the unions felt the impact of a Conservative government (with unemployment, tax concessions to the wealthy, public expenditure cuts, privatisation, erosion of union rights), their leaders “became increasingly anxious to restore unity and prepare the Party for Office”¹⁶¹.

The 1980 Conference was the final straw for many Social Democrats, though the failure to agree a formula for the Electoral College delayed the inevitable until after Wembley. Whilst the Gang of Four (with Jenkins now added) planned their move, many sought to dissuade them. Healey tried: “I spent several hours in a private discussion [with Owen, Williams and Rodgers] in September..[and told them] that the moderates had a good chance of winning a majority on the National Executive and thus transforming the situation – but this was bound to take several years”¹⁶².

Union leaders tried: “Sid [Weighell] and I had a long meeting with Shirley Williams at the Charing Cross Hotel. We invited her to lunch and tried to persuade her of the error of her ways. This was about a month before Wembley. There was no going back with her. She was definitely convinced. She listened to the arguments. But she was too deeply committed with the other three”¹⁶³. Her union also tried. “Denis Howell and Roy Grantham worked hard on Shirley Williams”¹⁶⁴. The persuasion was not all one way. Alan Tuffin was in their sights. “I was being canvassed quite heavily by Shirley about leaving the Labour Party. They were desperate for a big union. It never happened. Just wasn’t going to happen. Even today, with the Labour Party, it’s not so much national, it’s local. There are thousands of trade unionists who are local Labour councillors. Their union – the break would destroy that. Never, never a reality”¹⁶⁵.

At Wembley, the arguments continued. Stanley recalled:

“Shirley Williams approached me in my seat at the end row of POEU delegates. Since I held the union’s voting card, I was reluctant to move far

¹⁶⁰ Denis Healey, *op cit*, p.466.

¹⁶¹ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.194.

¹⁶² Denis Healey, *op cit*, p.477. In 2002, his memory was slightly different: “In my meeting with Shirley and others, I told them just to wait 6 months. The NEC would change. I knew from Roy Grantham that things were happening. I knew who the candidates were, and who would win”, Denis Healey interview.

¹⁶³ Charles Turnock interview.

¹⁶⁴ Roger Godsiff interview.

¹⁶⁵ Alan Tuffin interview.

away from my seat. Therefore I said, we can have a talk but we will have to sit on the stairs. Shirley's message was clear. Owing to the Left-wing control of the NEC and Trotskyite infiltration .. the Labour Party was unelectable and it was time to look at a new party based on social democratic beliefs. Shirley was saying to me: 'Look, I don't agree with you on everything but you are prepared to fight the Militant and the extreme Left. And that is what we want to do, but in a new Social Democratic grouping. Will you join us?' I said 'Now look, Shirley, I do respect you and I do like you personally, but I will never leave the Labour Party. I've been a member for 30 years, and I want to be a member until the day I die. I agree with you that things are wrong, but what we've got to do is work together to put them right; and if that means organising to defeat the well-organised machine that the Left operate, then we've got to do that from inside the party. If you go, you will come to grief because there's an innate loyalty of Labour Party members and trade unionists to the party .. there is no way the majority of us are ever going to leave'. I tried to persuade her not to go"¹⁶⁶.

Before the final vote, there were pleadings from defectors and stayers. At a packed Fabian lunchtime meeting (fortified by sandwiches from the near-empty Williams' meeting next door¹⁶⁷), Hattersley made a vigorous case for staying¹⁶⁸. For the Fabian audience, it was an effective rallying cry. But organisationally, it was a disaster as "the Left were going round switching to the USDAW formula. It was such a cock-up. We had been out-manoeuvred by the Left"¹⁶⁹. Over lunch, CLPD decided to support USDAW's 40:30:30 amendment¹⁷⁰. "In the absence of effective organisation on moderate side, it was a foregone conclusion that the better organised Left would dominate the conference"¹⁷¹. The result was "due to disarray of the Right"¹⁷². It was all unnecessary: "The unions could have outvoted the constituencies but they were disorganised and uncertain"¹⁷³. The AUEW, forced to abstain by a prior decision of their executive (and despite the urgings of many¹⁷⁴), bequeathed USDAW's formula to the party, the largest share going to the unions (unpopular with the electorate) and handing this issue – rather than unpopular Europe – to the Gang of Four as the rationale

¹⁶⁶ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹⁶⁷ Baroness (Mary) Goudie, interview, 7 January 2003.

¹⁶⁸ Giles Radice interview and author's notes.

¹⁶⁹ Giles Radice interview.

¹⁷⁰ John Silkin, *op cit*, p.38.

¹⁷¹ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹⁷² Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.198.

¹⁷³ Phillip Whitehead, *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies*, Michael Joseph, 1985, p.361.

¹⁷⁴ TV footage showed Basnett urging them to vote (Roger Godsiff interview).

for their defection. It was, said Weighell, “A disastrous Saturday’s work”¹⁷⁵. The Limehouse Declaration followed on Sunday, foreshadowing the SDP.

For Radice, “That was background to St Ermins – lack of organisation. How incompetent we’d been”¹⁷⁶. Another observer watched from the balcony: “Ken Livingstone was there and said: ‘the unions will always win these arguments’. I thought: that’s not right. It was the beginning of a lot of us realising we were not paying enough attention. We all had our own industries to run and we were not paying enough attention to what was going on. Typical situation, like NEC meetings, London EC meetings, they would sit there patiently to the late hours, provided they always had a quorum. And people like myself, who’d been working all day in the office, and a case full of work to take home. So 10 o’clock – I’m going home. This was their work. It wasn’t our work”¹⁷⁷. Post-Wembley, things were going to be different for the unions. “The SDP split forced the party to recognise the reality, that if the good guys didn’t get together, the left would always win. The split made Sirs, Grantham and the others say: ‘we’ve got to do something about this’ ”¹⁷⁸.

Frank Chapple, who had been close to CLV and those who were to form the SDP, contended “that if a Labour split was inevitable then it should be the left, not those who truly represented millions of working people, who should be forced to quit .. The best prospect for halting the leftward drift lay within the unions and not in the confusion of a new fourth party”, noting that Jenkins had “declared that a trade union based rescue of Labour was unacceptable”. He now decided “I wanted to help mobilise trade union moderates to oust the unrepresentative left-wing majority on Labour’s NEC”¹⁷⁹.

Stanley was similarly determined. “I made up my mind that I would do my utmost to bring together leaders of the Labour movement to combat the organisation and manoeuvring of the left-wing factions”¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁵ Sidney Weighell, *op cit*, p.139.

¹⁷⁶ Giles Radice interview.

¹⁷⁷ Alan Tuffin interview.

¹⁷⁸ Sandy Feather interview.

¹⁷⁹ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.164/5.

¹⁸⁰ Bryan Stanley interview.

Chapter 10 St Ermins Group – The Story

“Both in 1931 and afterwards the influence of the trade unions had steadied the Labour Party: in 1931, when there was a danger that MacDonalld might carry a greater number with him; afterwards, when the reaction threatened to swing the Party over to the Left”¹.

The union leaders, outflanked at Wembley, had worse to contend with the following day, as some of their erstwhile friends lined up behind the Limehouse Declaration. All their gentle persuasion had come to nothing. A stark choice faced them. They would not leave, but would they do more and steady the Labour Party as their predecessors had done 50 years earlier? Their response drew on the groupings that already existed, but suddenly it was serious. This chapter sets out what they did, and how.

Grantham talked urgently to fellow general secretaries. Together with Stanley and with the wholehearted support of Duffy, he quickly convened a meeting for 10 February². It was to turn into the inaugural meeting of a very significant grouping.

There was “no letter. We were approaching people on the phone. We approached the general secretaries .. in all the unions where we felt we could trust people. We decided the best place would be a central London hotel. We asked all to keep confidence. We invited Denis Healey because he seemed the person in the top levels of the party who could help us greatly if we were going to be effective. We met in the Charing Cross Hotel. And we immediately realised that we were all on the same wavelength. And whilst Denis said ‘I cannot be party to any grouping that you have, you are doing the right thing which is so badly needed. But I can’t be part of it: I wish you well’. He left. The meeting went on and we appointed people to do various jobs. The most significant of the appointments was to take up Roger Godsiff’s offer to be Secretary/ Organiser. John Golding was going to be the contact in PLP. I was going to be the link with all the different groups that we had to consult, bring together, notify of what we were going to do”³.

Howell chaired this first “Meeting of General Secretaries” at which there were 17 present⁴. Beginning a practice that continued throughout the Group’s life, no list of attendees appears in the minutes, but participants included: Grantham, Stanley,

¹ Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: A Biography* (ed Brian Brivati), Politico’s, 2002, p.219.

² Roy Grantham interview; Bryan Stanley interview; Roger Godsiff interview.

³ Bryan Stanley interview.

⁴ Notes of 10 February 1981 meeting, St Ermins Group Archives (EGA).

Chapple, Duffy, Healey, Weighell, Tom Jackson, Turnock⁵, Sirs, Radice, Bill Whatley, Golding, Feather, Spellar and Godsiff⁶.

Godsiff had already demonstrated the value of careful number-crunching. Prior to Wembley, he prepared a paper for APEX on the Electoral College⁷. This detailed each union's size and voting intention, and concluded that a "consensus" position giving the PLP 50% could be won, provided it had some CLP support, although "the attitude of .. U.S.D.A.W. .. could well be crucial in determining the outcome of the final result". He was right. The Group knew they had lost at Wembley through lack of planning, organisation and discipline. Now, in front of this intimidating array of general secretaries and three former ministers, the young research officer ventured "something like: 'With respect, if you look at the figures, you can achieve things if you put it together'. They more or less said 'OK; get on with it'. So I did a paper with the figures for NEC seats" for the next meeting. Godsiff was to be proved right again. Before, "the Right had the vote but never organised. Once they did, they won"⁸.

The rationale behind the group was clear. The unions wanted a Labour Government and believed it would only come with a move to the Right⁹. "The aim of the Group was to retrieve the Labour Party from the mess it was in and ensure the TUC General Council was reformed to become a better representative of the unions" said one convenor¹⁰, the other agreeing: "St Ermins came together for the purpose of removing the artificial dominance of the Left over the NEC and General Council"¹¹. The Group never dealt in policy, only in positions together with the structure of the TUC¹². The absence of policies made co-operation easier. "Some were from left unions. They'd got difficult situations to control. Principle is we'd talk about mechanisms. Means to end to return sanity to the party"¹³. Another member commented: "The cement that brought us all together was not only self-preservation of the unions but our dream – all

⁵ "Russell Tuck was on the party executive – nice but not politically conscious. So Sid Weighell sent me. He couldn't go to first St Ermins Group meeting as it clashed with executive of the NUR", Charles Turnock interview.

⁶ Roger Godsiff interview; EGA; Giles Radice (unpublished) diary; John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 13/ p.5.

⁷ Paper dated 20 January 1981, EGA.

⁸ Roger Godsiff interview.

⁹ Gerald J. Daly, *op cit*, p.227.

¹⁰ Roy Grantham interview

¹¹ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹² John Lloyd interview; Sandy Feather interview.

¹³ Gordon Colling interview.

we wanted to achieve needed a Labour Government. That was the Common Denomination. Survival and social progress. We had to be electable for our aims to be attainable”¹⁴. Turnock knew that the Group “had to change NEC. And what went on within the TUC. Also Automaticity”¹⁵. Some didn’t want to entangle TUC and party but I saw them as intertwined”¹⁶.

There was a degree of self-interest for some unions which were denied a “seat at the table” by the existing political carve-up. So it “also offered mutual protection. Everyone got something out of it. The Leadership got a supportive NEC”¹⁷ whilst the members simultaneously pursued their unions’ objectives. For the ISTC “getting Roy Evans elected to NEC was an objective. Therefore the ISTC had a particular interest in St Ermins – it meant they could get on the NEC”¹⁸. Similarly for the GPMU, an entrée into the political councils was central to its industrial interests¹⁹. APEX’s Grantham had been kept off the TUC because of his pro-Europeanism²⁰.

The February meeting established their way of working. Monthly meetings would henceforth take place (up to 1995)²¹. Detailed papers were prepared by Godsiff. Spellar liaised with union political officers and Golding with the PLP. Stanley:

“realised that if anything was going to succeed, someone had to link up with all the prominent players who wouldn’t link up themselves. And therefore I was the go-between. I would personally arrange a meeting with each of the principal unions who shared our view. And they, if the general secretary or president, they would arrange a lunch and we’d deal with it, or more frequently, they would nominate a representative. I had to go to every union to clear the way forward, to determine the names of candidates and then, after the meetings where it was finalised, to convey to them what was going to happen and to be sure we’d got their support. There was absolutely no point in putting forward candidates which were going to be shot down because there was no unity. So I had to go and clear all the candidates”²².

This is referred to in the minutes as “Further discussions”²³.

¹⁴ Tony Clarke interview.

¹⁵ See p.133.

¹⁶ Charles Turnock interview.

¹⁷ Roger Godsiff interview.

¹⁸ Sandy Feather interview.

¹⁹ Gordon Colling interview.

²⁰ Jim Cattermole interview.

²¹ Monthly agendas and minutes, EGA.

²² Bryan Stanley interview.

²³ “Code for work we had to do behind the scenes”, Bryan Stanley interview.

Meetings were to be kept completely confidential, though not without an initial hiccup.

“Just before we left that first meeting, everyone expressed the view that the meeting *must* be behind closed doors otherwise it wasn’t going to succeed. Everyone present said ‘no publicity’. I had a drink in the hotel bar with one or two before we left .. There were newspaper sellers outside the Charing Cross hotel, a placard which bore the heading ‘The March of the Labour Party Moderates’. It was the *Evening Standard*. It was reporting the proceedings of the meeting I’d just left. It must have been printed while the meeting was going on! Fortunately, we had anticipated that the Charing Cross was too prominent a place and so we’d agreed to arrange the next meeting in St Ermins – more off the track. They let hotel rooms set up for conferences; we just gave out the hotel room number. So from then on, although the Left found out we were meeting at St Ermins, there was no leak and no publicity but we became known as the St Ermins Group”²⁴.

St Ermins Hotel, near Scotland Yard, had long been a venue for Labour movement machinations. Used for the bondage scene in the 1985 film “Mona Lisa”, this former monastery played host to innumerable business meetings, surreptitious liaisons (including diplomatic and political) as well as to the Prime Minister’s team in the 1979 Election. Used as offices during the war, it was considered as party headquarters afterwards²⁵ but reverted to a hotel. It remained a favourite – for meetings between union leaders and the General Secretary (Morgan Phillips) and Treasurer (Gaitskell) in 1955²⁶; for a “tactics” meeting between Rodgers and the party’s conference-fixer, Derek Gladwin, before the 1970 Party Conference on Europe²⁷, and for the meetings which led to CLV²⁸. Union leaders frequented it – often linked to negotiations with employers. On such occasions, after the hard bargaining was over, talk would turn to union and party matters²⁹. Sometimes the leaders would “have a lunch together after the NEC or General Council. They used to meet on the same day, on a Wednesday morning³⁰, so everyone was in town and looking for lunch and it was very convenient to put lunch on”³¹.

²⁴ Bryan Stanley interview.

²⁵ Norman Howard interview.

²⁶ Christopher Hemming, "Labour's 'penny-farthing' machine: was Labour's local organisation better than the Wilson spin suggested?", 2002, p.7.

²⁷ Bill Rodgers, *op cit*, p.125.

²⁸ Ian Bradley, *op cit*, p.61.

²⁹ Roy Grantham interview.

³⁰ The overlap continued until Prime Minister’s Questions moved to Wednesdays, and NECs to Tuesdays.

³¹ Bryan Stanley interview.

The Group, with only two minor exceptions, henceforth kept the proceedings almost completely secret³². Part of their success lay in the virtual absence of written material and the bland minutes produced. Members were highly cautious about what they said and wrote. One only ever wrote “Group” in his diary³³. A late joiner commented:

“The letter inviting you just said: ‘There will be a meeting at this place at this time’. They made it clear to me, that I’d been well vetted and that the meeting was secret. If a story broke which had come from the group, there would be a ‘Court of Inquiry’. How could anyone know that? It must be someone here. And in some way, the one who was suspected wouldn’t come any more! Someone would say ‘the only person there who hadn’t been before was so-and-so’. Ones who’d been before were trusted”³⁴.

There were only one or possibly two leaks throughout its existence – and both when outsiders had joined them for a specific item³⁵. It is surprising that journalists found out so little as, by the end of 1981, the Group had moved to Swinton House (ISTC Headquarters) in Grays Inn Road where they then remained. This was chosen because it “was cheaper, and we could concentrate on business, it was very discreet. No journalists around! It was away from the limelight”³⁶. That description was not entirely accurate as it was

“virtually next door to Acorn House, the journalists’ union. And we drank afterward in the Lucas Arms – the NUJ pub. Some of St Ermins people not that well known but even so ..! It was extraordinary it wasn’t rumbled. [It helped] that Mrs Thatcher was distancing herself from the union movement. Therefore unions less important, less courted and less covered and followed by the press”³⁷.

As a result of this discipline, until 2003 the literature revealed little of the Group. Maintaining their oaths of confidentiality, neither Weighell, Chapple nor Howell mention the Group in their autobiographies³⁸. Even like-minded politicians knew nothing about it³⁹. Academics fare little better. Seyd makes no reference to it despite

³² The March meeting discussed the leak, which apparently resulted from Duffy speaking to journalists. It was agreed that meetings would be conducted on the basis of complete confidentiality; documentation would be tabled at meetings and collected at the end; correspondence would be conducted using home addresses (John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.181).

³³ Sandy Feather interview.

³⁴ Gordon Colling interview.

³⁵ Roger Godsiff interview; Sandy Feather interview.

³⁶ Roy Grantham interview.

³⁷ Sandy Feather interview.

³⁸ Sidney Weighell, *op cit*; Frank Chapple, *op cit*, Denis Howell, *op cit*. Howell makes just one reference to Swinton House, when he describes arriving “at the headquarters of the Iron and Steel Trades Union for a discussion about trade union and Labour Party matters to be met by Sandy Feather, who asked me to telephone home at once”- to learn of the car accident which killed his son (*op cit*, p.371).

³⁹ Peter Archer interview.

claiming that “Only one .. group, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism [in the 60s], on the Labour Right, compares for organisational ability [with CLPD] in the history of Labour factionalism”⁴⁰. Shaw does not include St Ermins in the index, though it appears twice in footnotes, both times mis-spelt as “St Ermine’s”⁴¹. Pearce also misnames it “St Ermine’s” and completes his description in five lines⁴². Kogan and Kogan make no mention at all⁴³. The main chronicler of the unions, Lewis Minkin, makes passing references to the Group and, by inference, mis-dates its creation. He suggests that, in 1981: “An extension of the ‘St Ermin’s’ alliance took place. The leaders of the AUEW, .. APEX, EETPU, ISTC, NUR, POEU and USDAW (the core of the St Ermin’s Group) were now joined by the GMWU and the UCW, which had in recent times kept aloof from the Rightwing grouping”⁴⁴. The UCW was actually involved from the start, whereas the GMWU held aloof. Panitch & Leys misunderstood the *modus operandi*: “The right-wing St Ermin’s group of unions similarly began to take the initiative for the counter-insurgency from the TULV, flexing their muscles with well-publicised plans to reverse the Wembley decision and to secure right-wing control of the NEC”⁴⁵. Well-publicised they were not! Whilst 2003 saw John Golding’s brilliantly atmospheric descriptions of many of these events published posthumously⁴⁶, he too maintained silence in his lifetime.

The St Ermins Group was not the only response to Wembley and the SDP. On the 4 March, Howell

“gave a report on the Labour Solidarity Campaign which had been set up with the support of 120 MPs. He referred to the work .. to secure office accommodation, issue a regular bulletin, obtain finance and donations and to set up regional organisations. He also advised the meeting that a letter would be sent to Trade Union General Secretaries .. explaining why the Solidarity Campaign had been set up .. It was agreed that wherever possible the Campaign should be supported by .. the placing of advertisements in their bulletin”⁴⁷.

The Group’s initial objective was to win NEC seats. Godsiff produced a paper for the March meeting, the first of four held at the St Ermins Hotel, concentrating on the five

⁴⁰ Patrick Seyd, *op cit*, p.117.

⁴¹ Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p. 358/9.

⁴² Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p.557.

⁴³ David Kogan and Maurice Kogan, *op cit*.

⁴⁴ Lewis Minkin, *op cit*, 1991, p.325.

⁴⁵ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.194.

⁴⁶ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003.

women's places. Although theoretically elected by the whole conference, the unions' near-90% share of the vote gave them control. Godsiff's paper set out the 1980 results, emphasising that the top three runners-up⁴⁸ were all "sensible", whilst the left-wing Margaret Beckett⁴⁹, lying fifth, was a prime target. Carefully detailing every union's size and voting intention, he indicated which votes needed to be harnessed, and concluded "If there is a will on the part of 'moderate' trade unions to make really big changes in the composition of the NEC then it can be done in both the Trade Union and Women's Section but it requires a belief, commitment and voting discipline which has been lacking in the past"⁵⁰. Golding, meanwhile, had begun discussing a "slate" for support. "Boothroyd, Summerskill, Hayter and Dunwoody had 'picked themselves' for support in the women's section" and by April, they had 12 names for the union seats, including McCluskie and Kitston – supposedly on the Left⁵¹. The minutes record that "Attention was drawn to the need to ensure that 'uncommitted' unions were contacted" to get their support for the list⁵². For this initial round, no deals were made. The aim was to harness the moderate unions to support the slate. It was the first time it had happened, and "it proved that the composition of the NEC could be changed by co-ordinated organisation"⁵³.

Discussions with the swing votes were about to begin. However, on 2 April, plans were thrown into disarray by Benn's challenge to Healey. Suddenly there were more important stakes; item one of the April agenda was the Deputy Leadership, the NEC elections taking second place⁵⁴. Much of 1981 was taken up with this contest, which many saw as a struggle for the survival of the party. The 24 June meeting, for example, discussed a paper on the Deputy Leadership which identified which unions needed to be contacted, and members undertook to make various approaches. The Political Officers'

⁴⁷ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 13/ p.7. (The unions were as good as their word, placing a number of advertisements in the newsletter.)

⁴⁸ Betty Boothroyd, Shirley Summerskill and Dianne Hayter (Fabian Society General Secretary).

⁴⁹ Former MP for Lincoln. She later joined the left-of-Tribune 'Campaign Group' (1983/84 Annual Report of Campaign Group of Labour MPs).

⁵⁰ 2 March 1981 paper; EGA.

⁵¹ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 13/p.10.

⁵² Notes of 15 April 1981 meeting, EGA.

⁵³ Roger Godsiff interview.

⁵⁴ 14 April 1981 Agenda, EGA.

Group⁵⁵ continued to meet, convened by Spellar and Golding, and fed in other intelligence – such as changes in affiliation (and hence voting) numbers⁵⁶.

Three other items appeared on that summer's agenda. One was the Group's (half-hearted) attempts to revise the Wembley formula (to 50:25:25), which got nowhere. The second concerned the seats on the TUC's General Council (GC). A meeting was held when the list of nominees appeared, to deal with these elections⁵⁷. The Group had difficulty finalising its slate, so Grantham asked them to phone him in Blackpool on the eve of voting to be given the final recommendation⁵⁸. The third matter was the election of the party Treasurer. At its 15 April meeting, the Group agreed to support Eric Varley. NUM-sponsored, a former minister and, importantly, former Chairman of the PLP Trade Union Group, he would start with the advantage of NUM support, despite his and their politics.

These moves had not been kept completely secret, although the Group's name never appeared. The *Daily Mirror* reported that "A hit list of Left-wingers has been drawn up by Labour's increasingly active Right" and said the Group "hopes to dent – or even overturn – the Left's dominance of the ruling National Executive .. Top of the hit list is party treasurer Norman Atkinson. .. Other prime targets are left-wingers Joan Maynard and Renee Short"⁵⁹. *The Times* added that "With the minor scandal of the right wing slate for the TUC General Council elections unburied, it came to light that the anti-left liaison group⁶⁰ wants a clean-up of the militant-dominated Labour Party leadership. The list circulated to unions proposes that four left-wingers should be ousted"⁶¹. *The Mirror* repeated their story⁶² whilst David Gow discounted the chances of success⁶³.

The tally and rallying of votes for the treasurership and other NEC seats were critical to the September results. Just two days after Healey's wafer-thin victory over Benn, five seats fell to the Moderates. Varley beat the left-wing incumbent and AUEW member,

⁵⁵ TUPO – see previous chapter.

⁵⁶ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap13/p.11. The EETPU research department produced lists of each union's membership, political fund size and expenditure (JSA).

⁵⁷ Notes of 25 August 1981 meeting, EGA.

⁵⁸ Letter from Grantham to members, 11 August 1981, EGA.

⁵⁹ 7 September 1981.

⁶⁰ The Group had originally been known as 'Labour Liaison' (Sandy Feather interview).

⁶¹ *The Times*, 8 September 1981.

⁶² *Daily Mirror*, 25 September 1981.

⁶³ With the exception of Hayter who he erroneously thought would succeed, *The Scotsman*, 29 September 1981.

Norman Atkinson, but only by Duffy persuading his delegation to withdraw support from one of their own members. Beckett and three other left-wingers lost their seats. The Right was strengthened enormously. Boothroyd kept the seat she had inherited on Williams' resignation, and was joined by Dunwoody and Summerskill⁶⁴. At the result, Renee Short shouted "This is all your fault, Terry Duffy"; "Guilty" Duffy cheerfully retorted⁶⁵. However, it was not Duffy's handiwork alone. The results were no surprise to those close to Godsiff. A comparison between his prediction and the actual results shows a mere 4.4% error⁶⁶: Golding won a wager with Callaghan over this result but – perhaps because he had used insider information with Godsiff's predictions – he never cashed the cheque⁶⁷.

"Moderates sweep to victory on the NEC" claimed *The Financial Times*; "The changes mean that there has been a fundamental change in the balance of power within the Labour Party. They indicate, far more convincingly than Mr Denis Healey's narrow victory .. that the tide has now turned against Mr Tony Benn and the far Left and that at last the attempts of right-wing union leaders to organise against the left have paid off. They mean that Mr Foot should now be able to command a majority on the executive,.. on most issues Mr Benn will now be in a minority"⁶⁸.

A little premature, but its analysis that the Left's 19:10 dominance had been replaced by a committee with "the balance .. tipped in favour of the moderates and centre-left by 15:14" was about right. Boothroyd recalled the Moderates⁶⁹ doing "spectacularly well in the NEC .. We broke the hard left's grip by making five gains. I held my seat with strong trade union support and Gwyneth Dunwoody swelled the anti-Militant ranks. .. The terminal dangers facing the party were far from over, but we had edged away from the abyss"⁷⁰.

Panitch & Leys acknowledge the significance of the result. "The Labour new left's defeat .. was not restricted to the deputy leadership .. far more important .. was another set of votes for the National Executive .. The right-wing leadership of the Engineering Union finally fulfilled its promise .. to produce a right-wing delegation .. (t)hat went so far as to vote to remove Norman Atkinson, himself a member of the union, from the post of Party Treasurer. .. It was, however, only a small part of a much larger targeting

⁶⁴ *Report of the 1981 Conference of the Labour Party*, p.95.

⁶⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.197.

⁶⁶ See annex 3.

⁶⁷ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 14/p.15.

⁶⁸ *Financial Times*, 30 September 1981.

⁶⁹ Without mentioning the St Ermins Group.

and purge of those members of the NEC who supported the new left”⁷¹. The *Mail*, hailing Duffy as the “master mind”, claimed that they had “served notice that their next targets would be the Trotskyist Militant Tendency”⁷². The Moderates chalked up one other success – defeating the NEC’s proposal to have sole responsibility for the manifesto⁷³ – their case being articulated in the debate by Radice and Stanley⁷⁴.

The Right did not, however, have a majority on the NEC as Foot refused to support them, voting to leave the existing sub-committee Chairmen in place⁷⁵. Thus Benn retained the Home Policy and Heffer the Organisation chairmanships. The PLP responded badly to Foot’s action⁷⁶. They had voted Benn off the Shadow Cabinet in 1980 and against him for Deputy Leader. His re-election to this NEC position accentuated the PLP/NEC divide. Furthermore, Benn got the Organisation sub-committee to reject an enquiry into Militant⁷⁷. It was a year to the day that Foot had been elected Leader, since when the SDP had defected, Healey had nearly lost the Deputy position and PLP/NEC relations had hardly improved. The Left continued to exert their strength, replacing Tuck as Chairman of the Finance Committee with Kitson⁷⁸, further incensing the Group. Despite their five gains, knew they must redouble their efforts for 1982.

The 1981 successes assisted negotiations for the coming year. However, the Group recognised that even sympathetic general secretaries needed to keep their delegations on side. The slate therefore embraced as many unions as possible⁷⁹, with general secretaries given latitude to vote for a left-winger, favoured by their union, who was bound to get on, so that they could then support a marginal name on the list⁸⁰. This attention to marginal candidates was in part the secret of Godsiff’s success.

Sometimes, right-wing unions “might have to vote for a Leftie – it was part of a deal. Naturally I would question that: ‘are you *sure* you want me to do that?’ ‘Absolutely, then we can get someone else to vote for you’. [It

⁷⁰ Betty Boothroyd, *Betty Boothroyd: The Autobiography*, Century, 2001, pp.109/110.

⁷¹ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.199.

⁷² Robert Porter, *The Daily Mail*, 30 September 1981. He noted where the Group met, albeit calling it the St Ermine’s Hotel.

⁷³ *Report of the 1981 Conference of the Labour Party*, p.212.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, pp.207/208.

⁷⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.213.

⁷⁶ *The Times*, 10 November 1981.

⁷⁷ *ibid*.

⁷⁸ *The Times*, 24 November 1981.

⁷⁹ It included left-wingers McCluskie and Kitson who were bound to be elected.

⁸⁰ Bryan Stanley interview; Sandy Feather interview.

would have been Godsiff or Spellar replying.] We were relying on the skills of the organisers. The list they sought support for was maximising the support they could get for the Group as a whole. When they were working on the list I had to get the OK from my union political people that I could trade votes. And others could trade votes. And you didn't do it yourself. Everything done through Spellar and Godsiff. We would try and get as far down the St Ermins list as possible. Some of people on the list squeezed in by narrowest of margins. Only way it could be done was to leave Spellar and Godsiff to do it. If we'd all tried, we'd get chopped up and would fail"⁸¹.

Twenty years later, one union official still recalls the horror of being asked to vote for Scargill (for the TUC). It hurt, but by following orders it got another union to support a marginal candidate the Group wanted elected⁸². At times, Godsiff managed some unlikely deals. He recounted one:

“The EETPU could never get their person on – but nevertheless ran Tom Breakell. But G and M wouldn't support him – so for a couple of years this became a bit difficult. I told Eric Hammond that the EETPU must vote Hoyle, so as to get ASTMS to vote for the rest of the St Ermins slate, and told him – a general secretary! – that he had to show the ballot paper at 2.30 pm. There was Clive Jenkins and Doug Hoyle, plus Eric Hammond and John Spellar plus the ballot papers. ASTMS had indeed voted the St Ermins slate other than for the EETPU. After this, Hoyle asked me ‘Will I win?’ To which I replied ‘No’. And he didn't that year”⁸³.

Godsiff recognised that union loyalty and institutional ties (such as between the GMWU and NUPE) had to be respected, particularly the Triple Alliance of mining (NUM), rail (NUR) and steel (ISTC). Other factors helped: it was easier to get Tony Clarke elected, because “everyone loves a postman”⁸⁴. The “marshalling of votes to prevent some of those of the left getting on even continued on the conference floor right up to the time that the ballot papers had to be put in the box”⁸⁵. In the year Colling was elected, “Stanley had persuaded his [leftish] POEU delegation that the NGA was on the Left. After the meeting, Alan Meale⁸⁶ visited the delegation and said ‘Hang On!’ and explained the real politics. So they had a second delegation meeting. The POEU

⁸¹ Gordon Colling interview.

⁸² Arthur Bonner, Chairman of the NGA political committee, interview, 28 October 2003.

⁸³ Roger Godsiff interview. Hoyle was defeated in 1982, elected in 1983. See footnote on p.106.

⁸⁴ Roger Godsiff interview.

⁸⁵ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.203.

⁸⁶ Alan Meale, who did the Left's slate, would compare notes with Godsiff (Roger Godsiff interview).

swapped – but although they came off Colling they then supported another good candidate!”⁸⁷.

The Group meanwhile turned its attention to the composition of the TUC General Council (GC), where a restructuring was the objective. At the time, the whole TUC voted for the seats in every section – such as engineering, transport, electricity. This gave the big unions – particularly the TGWU – considerable power as they effectively determined the composition of the whole GC. The big unions were politically insensitive in their use of these votes, preferring communists from smallish unions (such as Ken Gill) to the mainstream, pro-European Grantham – who was out of line with the left-wing TGWU⁸⁸. In the 1960s, this strength had been used to keep the EETPU’s Les Cannon off, in favour of a small union (which later became the part of the TGWU). The main electricians’ union – and the only one with the muscle to close the country down – was therefore not represented at the unions’ top table. This weakened the TUC as it was not reflecting industrial reality. The TUC also did not represent the politics of its true paymasters – the rank-and-file of affiliated unions. In the seventies, the Communist Party “probably played a larger part on the national scene .. than ever”⁸⁹. With the support of Jones and Scanlon “the TUC left, largely marshalled by Ramelson⁹⁰ and Ken Gill, co-ordinated the unions’ fight against the two Wilson governments”⁹¹. Chapple had wrested his union from communist control, only to see it denied a place at the TUC by that same Communist Party. Although by 1981, the electricians had won their seat, the “sheer outrage” felt by the EETPU fuelled its motivation to change the system⁹².

By “picking people who were absolutely unrepresentative of the unions in any particular group” the TGWU ensured that eventually there would be a response. “We saw the key to breaking the stranglehold. If we could persuade the unions in all the sections that they were going to benefit .. by changing the voting methods – whether lefties or not – their union interest was to make the change. I had a brilliant young

⁸⁷ Roger Godsiff interview.

⁸⁸ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.130; Jim Cattermole interview. Howell blamed an inter-union dispute with ASTMS which “cost Roy Grantham his seat on the general council .. an act of petty vindictiveness”, Denis Howell, *op cit*, p.271.

⁸⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, Allen Lane, 2002, p.266.

⁹⁰ Bert Ramelson, the Communist Party’s industrial organiser.

⁹¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *ibid*.

⁹² Frank Chapple, *op cit*; John Spellar, interview, 2003.

research officer, Chris Bulford. I talked to him in total confidence. ‘This is the problem and this is the objective. To free General Council from these extreme left-wingers (even communists). We can’t whilst the TGWU votes in every section. But we won’t get change without getting it through the Congress probably for two years running because there’ll be a fightback .. The scheme has got to hold water and has got to pull the votes of the middle range of unions’. He said ‘I’ll come back with some ideas’. That was how the two of us formulated the POEU motion for Congress”⁹³. The answer was ‘Automaticity’ whereby all the larger unions were represented on the GC, with 11 seats reserved for unions with under 100,000 members.

The effect was enormous, not just on the TUC but on the Labour Party because the myriad of deals done for the NEC and GC had been intertwined. Once the TUC places were released from TGWU control, unions could cast their NEC votes without jeopardising their own GC seat. Even behaviour at the TUC changed, as smaller unions no longer needed TGWU patronage so did not “have to kow-tow; they could say what they believed”⁹⁴. Stanley was right that it took two years to achieve, as there was stiff resistance. “There were people in the T and G [Walter Greendale] terrifically opposed to anything which smacked of democracy”⁹⁵.

Stanley and Bulford devised the strategy but St Ermins produced the votes. The 1979 TUC Congress had asked the GC to consider Automaticity but no progress had been made. It had been raised in 1980 but no action taken⁹⁶. The POEU’s first attempt in 1981 saw the motion adopted, but left-wing unions quickly launched “a campaign to overthrow the proposals approved .. in September”. An “invitation only” meeting, chaired by Kitson, was called “to assess the strength of opposition to the proposals which were comfortably approved by congress”⁹⁷. Meanwhile, St Ermins discussed the issue on 25 May 1982 (when they learnt that one union was “to submit a motion restoring the status quo”), 6 July, 27 July (when it “seemed likely that the General Council would support the decision of last year’s Congress .. to give automatic representation .. to unions with 100,000 or more affiliated members. A number of unions who had originally opposed the change were now prepared to support the

⁹³ Bryan Stanley interview.

⁹⁴ Bryan Stanley interview.

⁹⁵ Charles Turnock interview.

⁹⁶ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.173.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 9 December 1981.

decision”), 24 August (noting an attempt to defer the decision for a year) then, after their success, to discuss implementation of Automaticity, with “further consultations” on candidates⁹⁸. The period had witnessed intensive persuasion, as they gradually brought all but the TGWU on board. These talks were kept very quiet, Bulford having advised keeping everything confidential so that the TGWU would never realise how many votes were coming over. Any leak – especially over their confidence that they could win – would have produced a heavyweight counter-response. The TGWU was so convinced they would retain the system they had run for so long – one official laughing at the idea of defeat – they were surprised when it went through. Bulford attributes some of their success to the TGWU being in crisis as Moss Evans was ill, leaving Kitson in charge (whose interest was the NEC rather than the TUC) and the union less-focused than under Jack Jones⁹⁹.

However, it took until 1983 for Congress to implement the new system¹⁰⁰. This was a difficult year for its architect. Stanley was in hospital with cancer of the hip. His doctors advised him to “put his affairs in order” but his response was that he had to go to Congress. He left hospital, went home and learnt to walk on crutches. At Blackpool, when called to speak, he was jeered as he hobbled up, delegates trying to block his way and one threatening: “we’ll break the other leg”¹⁰¹. They had misunderstood both his strength and the determination of the St Ermins Group.

Automaticity did not relieve the Group of any effort, as unions with fewer than 100,000 members still competed for 11 seats. However, hard and persistent work would ensure that the St Ermins Group slate had won all 11 seats by 1986¹⁰².

The NEC seats were, nonetheless, the Group’s focus and where they made the biggest impact, especially in 1982, when there was, however, one big downside: “Sid Weighell put his neck on the block”¹⁰³. “Sid broke his mandate and didn’t vote for the Triple Alliance (miners; steel; rail – they’d always voted for each other). Sid asked me about the figures. I showed him them and said ‘we can’t quite do it’. He commented: ‘Unless I don’t vote for the miners’ and I said ‘I know I can’t ask you not to do that’. He said

⁹⁸ Notes of dated meetings and of 16 November 1982, EGA.

⁹⁹ Chris Bulford, interview, 12 April 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.186.

¹⁰¹ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹⁰² Roger Godsiff interview.

¹⁰³ Bryan Stanley interview.

no more. And then he didn't vote for the miners. It was done *not* for the NUR man but the wider Group. The NUR man was in anyway – he was on both slates, Left and Right. So it was done for the wider Group”¹⁰⁴.

The vote for a St Ermins Group candidate (Breakell) rather than for the NUM's Eric Clarke was immediately obvious – not least to an NUR scrutineer. Weighell faced the wrath of his executive and offered his resignation. Within weeks, a special delegate conference voted to accept it – “a sorry day for the NUR”¹⁰⁵. Weighell's “conscience was clear; because he thought Labour had little chance of winning the next election if it was run by the far left and he believed his actions were in accordance with the wishes of the majority of Labour Party supporters”¹⁰⁶. “At least one other general secretary did the same as Weighell with his union's votes at the 1982 conference but was not found out”¹⁰⁷. He and Weighell shared what was then a widespread view that the party was finished unless it moved back to the centre”¹⁰⁸.

Weighell's fellow union leaders had not asked him to break his mandate and did not “want one person to take the responsibility on his own shoulder. They wanted to persuade the delegates who to vote for or to give the mandate to the general secretary. We didn't want anyone to *defy* their instruction. It would bring our efforts into disrepute”¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, “Weighell's control of NUR was already tenuous – and nothing was worth jeopardising that”¹¹⁰. St Ermins had lost a stalwart founder member but the 1982 results gave them the majority they desperately sought on the NEC. Howell (who had chaired the first St Ermins meeting) beat Eric Clarke, and Anne Davis defeated hard-left Maynard. Furthermore, friends within the National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs (Labour's drinking clubs)¹¹¹ enabled MP John Evans to oust Les Huckfield from the Socialist Societies' seat, whilst Varley beat off Meacher's challenge for the treasurership¹¹².

¹⁰⁴ Roger Godsiff interview.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.203.

¹⁰⁶ Terry Pattinson, Obituary of Sidney Weighell, *Independent*, 15 February 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Bill Sirs, who told Richard Faulkner.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Faulkner interview.

¹⁰⁹ Bryan Stanley interview.

¹¹⁰ Roy Grantham interview.

¹¹¹ Particularly NULSC President (Brian Baldwin, EETPU) and Treasurer (Bill Thomas from the West Midlands, later Spellar's agent).

¹¹² *Report of the 1982 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.66.

The results caused considerable interest on the Tuesday morning of conference. Not only the NUR vote, but Davis' unexpected victory, was followed at 10.55, just as Chief Scrutineer Dorothy Lovett finished, by a bomb scare evacuating the building¹¹³.

Standing outside, Stanley heard party staff debating "How did Anne Davis come from nowhere, an unknown, and get elected?"¹¹⁴. The conspirators – who kept their support for Davis secret to prevent any counter-measures¹¹⁵ – had done their job well.

The Group did not win everything. The NUR and APEX tried unsuccessfully to change the structure of the NEC, to create a PLP section, confine the CLP section to non-MPs, and add two local government seats. This was similar to what Blair introduced 15 years later but it had little support in 1982. The NEC election results were also "offset by the carrying of a pure unilateralist motion [by] .. votes which had just decimated the left on the NEC, passed moreover by a two-thirds majority"¹¹⁶.

Nevertheless, the Moderates had obtained their majority on the NEC, a victory celebrated with a cake baked by Patsy Feather – iced with the words "St Ermins"¹¹⁷. The NEC's Register of Non-affiliated Organisations – the first step in dealing with Militant – was overwhelmingly endorsed by Conference¹¹⁸. The Moderates took control of the NEC committees in November when they used their voting strength single-mindedly, taking no prisoners. "We moderates were exhilarated and the left utterly demoralised as we walked out of Walworth Road that day. What we had done .. was to end the dominance of extreme left wing socialists .. and bring about the fall of the Benn-Heffer axis which would never carry credibility again"¹¹⁹. Benn, Heffer, Richardson and Allaun were culled from the key Chairmanships, and the Moderates then set about their objectives. The NEC proscribed Militant at the end of 1982, and went on to expel the five members of its editorial board¹²⁰.

The injection of numbers also changed the dynamics of the NEC. Healey, as Deputy Leader, had found his role difficult as Foot never involved him, so he was unable to organise. With the extra votes, Healey provided more leadership. His political advisor,

¹¹³ *ibid*, p.67.

¹¹⁴ Roger Godsiff interview.

¹¹⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 1998, chap18/p.4.

¹¹⁶ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p.571; *1982 Conference Report*, p.280.

¹¹⁷ Sandy Feather interview.

¹¹⁸ *1982 Conference Report*, p. 275.

¹¹⁹ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.261.

¹²⁰ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *op cit*, p.204.

Richard Heller, started writing briefing notes for the NEC and sub-committees, working alongside Golding, and advising Healey which sub-committees to attend. They were assisted by the triumvirate of women: Boothroyd, Dunwoody and Summerskill¹²¹. Golding ascribes successes at the NEC more to his tactics and the Group's cohesion than to Healey's politics. Planning tactics for the NEC was as important as winning seats. Prior to 1982, this had been arranged by Golding's "ring rounds". Following the increase in numbers, a more formal approach was taken and one dinner held at Locketts restaurant. It was hardly an auspicious start: Foot was also there and must have noticed the troupe of Moderate NEC members¹²². The dinner did sort out the arrangements for the take-over of sub-committees, but its location would not guarantee confidentiality¹²³. A subsequent dinner was therefore held at Boothroyd's flat, and a couple at Howell's before they settled on the Tufton Court home of Helen de Freitas¹²⁴. From then onwards, immediately after the St Ermins Group (which met on the evening before the NEC at Swinton House), those who were on the NEC would bundle themselves into Tony Clarke's or Ken Cure's car and make off for Tufton Court. Here they would meet up with their NEC allies, the MPs plus the trade unionists not in the Group.

Boothroyd's autobiography revealed all. At the time, however, neither Healey, Radice nor even Stanley knew of these secret suppers. "We called ourselves the Beaujolais Group because we planned our strategy over food and a glass of wine. I kept the accounts. It was hardly high living; we ended 1984 with a deficit of £24.05, which was cleared by everybody paying a modest sum"¹²⁵. The group included Hattersley, Dunwoody, Colling, Renee Short¹²⁶, Howell, Turnock, Tony Clarke, Hough, Cure, McCluskie, Golding, Ambler¹²⁷, Davis, Tierney, David Williams and Tuck (but never Healey nor Varley)¹²⁸. "We met to discuss tactics on the eve of every meeting of the full NEC. Sam McClusky (*sic*) .. usually sat in Helen's spacious rocking chair, but tended not to come when there was something on the agenda on which he could not

¹²¹ Richard Heller, interview, 22 January 2003.

¹²² Richard Heller interview.

¹²³ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.256.

¹²⁴ The widow of Boothroyd's former boss, MP Geoffrey de Freitas.

¹²⁵ Betty Boothroyd, *op cit*, p.112. The next year's deficit was £37.62 (following 7 such dinners); accounts from Turnock's private papers.

¹²⁶ Once she had joined the moderate cause.

¹²⁷ His son-in-law, Brian Key, had been deselected as an MEP, bringing home the difficulties in constituencies (Richard Tomlinson, interview, 28 January 2003).

¹²⁸ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 22/ p.1; Charles Turnock interview; Gordon Colling interview, Roy Hattersley interview.

follow through”. The suppers always finished by the 10 pm vote “so that nobody would notice our absence. .. It was an effective alliance, masterminded by John [Golding]... He reported the results of our deliberations immediately after every meeting to Neil”¹²⁹. Turnock, who later took over as ‘whip’ of the Moderates, described how they used these suppers to decide “Who’d move resolutions; whether we took a particular line”¹³⁰. When he was elected in 1983, “The moderate group on the NEC consisted of 14 members. Three did not attend the meetings but accepted the decisions. Some others attended irregularly”¹³¹. Out of an NEC of 29, it was a useful dinner party. Nevertheless, decisions were not sufficient. Delivering the Beaujolais vote was also challenging: “I had to place myself at National Executive meetings not only so that I could always catch the Chairman’s eye but also so that none of the Moderates could leave without passing me. I had constantly to keep a majority – or, if that was not possible, to ensure there was no quorum”¹³². The group increased the NEC quorum from 10 to 15 “to make it impossible for the Left ever to be in a working majority”¹³³.

Many of the St Ermins Group hailed from the Midlands. Another group lived in St Albans, Bedford, Borehamwood and Radlett¹³⁴ so discussions continued in the journeys home as one of them acted as chauffeur. They then took to the telephone. Golding, whilst “whip .. would spend hours on the phone on Sunday evenings”¹³⁵ as did Colling later: “I would ring them every Sunday – especially Sunday before NEC but actually every Sunday. 2pm to about 7pm every Sunday”. If an issue proved difficult, he would get Kinnock to make the necessary call¹³⁶.

This intelligence, planning and confidentiality were vital because of the issues facing the NEC, press interest, party hostility and their lack of a comfortable majority. Militant was the major challenge, but there were other decisions including the appointment of a General Secretary, preparation for the election, Europe, party management and OMOV.

¹²⁹ Betty Boothroyd, *op cit*, p.113.

¹³⁰ Charles Turnock interview.

¹³¹ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.229.

¹³² John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 21/ p.4.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Clarke, Colling, Stanley and Turnock.

¹³⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 21/ p.3.

¹³⁶ Gordon Colling interview.

The St Ermins Group held 59 meetings between 1981 and 1987¹³⁷ to work on a range of issues.

The first – which they lost – was the replacement in December 1981 of Hayward as General Secretary, where Foot's support¹³⁸ for Mortimer¹³⁹ saw him beat the unions' Alex Ferry by one vote. The Left never subsequently claimed much success for Mortimer's tenure. As Dick Clements – a close ally of Foot, albeit a candidate for the post¹⁴⁰ – admitted: "Everyone thought he was a good organiser but no-one questioned his politics!". Asked when it became obvious that Mortimer was not the best choice, he replied "Pretty early on. He was a sad mistake"¹⁴¹. The Right's opposition was vindicated by his "hopeless" performance in the 1983 election but at the time "his appointment was a reverse for the moderates and this defeat strengthened .. our desire to get control over the NEC"¹⁴².

One crucial vote – and an important thank-you – the Moderates did win, despite a vehement campaign from the Left, was when the NEC endorsed Godsiff as the prospective candidate for Birmingham Yardley¹⁴³. The Group also took pleasure in Spellar's election in the Birmingham Northfield by-election in October 1982. The NEC also dealt with appeals from sitting councillors de-selected by their local parties. St Ermins Group allies on the London Regional Executive¹⁴⁴ had done their best to prevent the destabilisation of Southwark where council leader, John O'Grady, and others had been ejected by the Left. Some were reinstated, but not all, and the row was growing. The NEC asked Heffer and David Hughes to seek a solution. This failed and, in due course, led to the ill-fated Bermondsey by-election – caused as much by Foot's ineptitude as by the St Ermins Group's weakness on the NEC¹⁴⁵.

Another individual who was to cause trouble was Tariq Ali. He had stood (whilst in the IMG¹⁴⁶) against Syd Bidwell, the MP for Southall, in 1979 (winning 77 votes). Bidwell described him as a "rich playboy" – in contrast to Benn's description: "civilised and

¹³⁷ See annex 4. Average attendance was 10.5.

¹³⁸ *The Times*, 15 December 1981.

¹³⁹ Former Chairman of ACAS and the London Transport Board Member.

¹⁴⁰ Editor of *Tribune*. He received one vote – Kinnock's (Dick Clements interview).

¹⁴¹ Dick Clements interview.

¹⁴² John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 18/ p.2.

¹⁴³ *ibid*, chap 17/ p.10.

¹⁴⁴ Particularly Spellar, Tuffin, Hayter, Bonner and Helen Eadie.

¹⁴⁵ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 17/ p.18.

charming”¹⁴⁷. He now applied to (re)join the party¹⁴⁸. Golding and Healey moved “that Tariq Ali be not accepted into membership” (Benn and Maynard pressing acceptance). The former duo won 11:6. However, the local party (Hornsey) voted to admit him and had to be brought into line by the National Agent. In August 1982, his exclusion was re-confirmed by the NEC although it had to be endorsed at the 1983 conference. He was finally expelled at the 26 October 1983 NEC¹⁴⁹. In these long and twisting sagas, Golding recalled, “I would need to seek advice on how to play it from my brothers at the Swinton House meeting”¹⁵⁰. These meetings – chaired by Stanley or sometimes by Grantham or Howell – settled in to a regular pattern, sustained by fruit and coffee¹⁵¹. Golding would give a report on “what was happening on the NEC, .. responding to questions about the possibility of making progress on a number of pet projects near to the moderates’ hearts, such as the introduction of one member one vote .. [However] I usually had to impart bad news – that it was Michael Foot and not the Mods that had control of the NEC”¹⁵².

This was often the case when dealing with the other perennial problem – of MPs under threat of de-selection. Sometimes, as in Brent, the NEC could help, and one major victory concerned rules for new parliamentary boundaries where the 1981 conference had sought to make MPs go through a second re-selection if their boundaries changed. This was causing considerable alarm to an already jumpy PLP. Delays (helped by the Chief Whip) led to the NEC agreeing a new system whereby MPs in constituencies with no major changes could retain their seats without a further re-selection. Even this did not assist every case. In Tower Hamlets, where Peter Shore represented Stepney and Poplar, with Ian Mikardo in Bethnal Green and Bow, the Boundary Commission rotated the divide, making the seats “Bethnal Green and Stepney” plus “Bow and Poplar”. The Left were happy with Mikardo but not with Shore. The NEC had agreed that any MP who, after boundary changes, still represented^{ed} a majority of the new constituency, would be automatically reselected. If it was less than 50%, there would be an open selection. Shore fell just below 50%. The Left was entitled to a full selection. Friends

¹⁴⁶ International Marxist Group.

¹⁴⁷ Tony Benn, *op cit*, p.180.

¹⁴⁸ *Guardian*, 20 November 1981; *Tribune*, 27 November 1981.

¹⁴⁹ *Guardian*, 27 October 1983; John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.273.

¹⁵⁰ John Golding, *op cit*, 1988, chap 17/ p.20.

¹⁵¹ All for £5, paid regularly by APEX to ISTC (EGA).

¹⁵² John Golding, *op cit*, 1988 chap 18/ p.1.

came to his aid; David Bean¹⁵³ drafted a let-out clause: “Where the boundaries of two or more constituencies adjacent to each other with endorsed candidates are altered, but where the number of seats remains the same and no other constituency is involved, then each of the endorsed candidates shall be treated as having a majority claim in any of the new constituencies which includes a part of his or her old constituency”. This went (from the National Agent’s Department) to the NEC¹⁵⁴. The Moderate majority adopted it with Benn, Shore’s old family friend, muttering “I know what you’re doing!”¹⁵⁵.

Dealing with Militant was a continual challenge for the NEC members, who reported back to the Group on progress and setbacks, including how CLPs facing legal challenges from Militant were faring and proposals to rid the YS of Militant¹⁵⁶. They also dealt with organisational issues, from the launch of *Labour Party News*¹⁵⁷, rules for Socialist Societies and regional conferences¹⁵⁸ to staff appointments¹⁵⁹. Staff appointments were very important in changing the party, and “recommendations and suggestions” were often made¹⁶⁰. The Group’s whip, Colling, “ended up chairing the Staffing Committee, working with Larry [Whitty] on clearing out the staff situation, which was highly organised by Militant. Andy Bevan was leader of the whole staff group”¹⁶¹.

The St Ermins Group’s achievements owed much to planning, discipline and single-mindedness, as well as to effective whipping. Golding had originally been the task-master; on his departure in 1983 he was replaced by the newly-elected Turnock¹⁶². It was an inspired choice. Well-read, hard-working and committed to the party’s re-election, he tackled the task with gusto. He was also a smart political operator, understanding the need to anticipate press attention. One example relates to an incident when there was a vacancy for Chair of the Home Policy Committee. Hattersley was anxious to take this on, so he could table more appropriate papers than those produced

¹⁵³ Now Sir David Bean, a High Court Judge; then a Solidarity activist.

¹⁵⁴ NEC paper, NAD/109/3/83, 23 March 1983 (LPA).

¹⁵⁵ David Bean, interview, 28 May 2002.

¹⁵⁶ Notes of 25 March 1986 and 24 March 1987 meetings, EGA.

¹⁵⁷ Notes of 25 February 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁵⁸ Notes of 22 April 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁵⁹ Notes of 22 July 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁶⁰ For example, notes of 25 November 1986, EGA.

¹⁶¹ Gordon Colling interview.

¹⁶² Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p. 229; Charles Turnock interview.

by party staff¹⁶³. The Group was in favour but Sawyer was also standing – and could attract soft- and hard-left support. Turnock warned his colleagues that they must leave it to him to count the votes at the meeting, as the absence of any one of them could mean defeat and a major embarrassment for the Deputy Leader. Turnock's head-count revealed two votes short, so he made no nomination and Sawyer was elected unopposed¹⁶⁴.

Turnock had more success earlier when he needed to teach the new General Secretary the way of the world. His practice had been to find out which Ermins Group members wanted to be on which sub-committee and then meet with Mortimer (with whom he had a good relationship from London Transport days).

“The outcome of the meetings with the General Secretary resulted in our Group having a majority on every committee. As a consequence, we got the Chairmen we wanted, and could vote down any alterations the Left proposed at the first NEC after Conference .. When Larry Whitty took over, I adopted the same procedure with him, although I did have a feeling of apprehension in the first year knowing his past association with Benn. We were taking a family holiday in Tenerife which unfortunately clashed with the full NEC. I decided to fly back to attend the meeting. After arrival at Heathrow early the previous afternoon, I called at Walworth Road only to find that what Whitty had drafted was way out of line with what we had discussed. He accepted he would have to alter it or face an unholy row the next day. The amended recommendations went through with only a few minor amendments that did not affect the balance. He did not make the same mistake again”¹⁶⁵.

Later, Colling followed Turnock as the Whip.

“I thought I'd only be on one year – having just scraped on – so may as well learn as much as I could in that 12 months and do as much as I could. I did everything Charlie wanted me to. He was enormously impressed. I was at every meeting he'd asked me to be at. Did what I'd said I'd do. Sometimes he'd give me a bollocking if I hadn't said the right thing!” Colling understood that organising the NEC was as important as winning seats. “Often it was a case of getting a proposal in first. Then have that proposal discussed rather than something else. Worse thing was to waffle. If turn up without a line, hard-left and soft-left would get together”¹⁶⁶.

In due course, Colling became Whip to the entire union group, “Not just the little band of Moderates”; the GMWU and TGWU came under his wing by the end¹⁶⁷. By 1987,

¹⁶³ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.236.

¹⁶⁴ Charles Turnock interview.

¹⁶⁵ Charles Turnock interview.

¹⁶⁶ Gordon Colling interview.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon Colling interview.

Kinnock could rely on the whole NEC in a crisis except for Benn, Skinner and Livingstone. If the office or Leader needed something, they would speak to “the trade union Whip, Colling, who would say: ‘I’ll speak to my friends’, which was code for ‘they’ll vote that way’ ”¹⁶⁸. Nevertheless, even after Kinnock had a comfortable majority, a number of MPs from the constituency section could not be seen to vote with the Leader – though they could be absent. One of Kinnock’s team described how:

“Colling or Haigh would take the lead on many policies on the NEC .. I would have a list, marked-up as: ‘For; Against; and Abstain or Leave early’. This continued right up to the ‘92 election. On the day of Nellist and Terry Fields¹⁶⁹, Kinnock only had 13 votes in advance. He would have resigned if it had not gone through. We had to know the numbers, so I would talk to Gordon and he fixed it”¹⁷⁰.

There were occasions when something went wrong, as at the first NEC after the 1986 conference. Someone broke ranks, to the Group’s disapproval. There was:

“reference to .. misunderstandings and problems which had occurred over the appointment of various persons to Chair the Sub-Committees .. it was emphasised that the success which had been achieved in electing a more responsible N.E.C. over the last five years had been due to a lot of hard work and collective action, and that this should not under any circumstances be placed in jeopardy. It was also pointed out that the success of the leadership of the Party reflected a widespread political opinion and any success in the future will also have to be based on the same criteria. It was felt that many of the misunderstandings could, in hindsight, have been avoided but it was hoped that discussions would take place amongst members of the N.E.C. to avoid these problems happening in the future”¹⁷¹.

Given that normal minutes were brief in the extreme, this was an unusually long and sensitive paragraph.

Whilst those on the NEC struggled to make their votes effective, and deliver a majority for the Leader, the St Ermins general secretaries and trustees continued their regular monthly work. NEC slates constituted the main business, but there was a range of other preoccupations. In January 1983, a paper on “A system for Balloting in the Labour Party” was discussed – the long campaign for OMOV for the election of Leader and Deputy Leader taking shape. The Moderates got the Organisation sub-committee to endorse the principle, though it would not apply for some years. Following the resignation of Foot and Healey, the meeting discussed the “procedures being used by

¹⁶⁸ Mike Watts, interview, 7 May 2002.

¹⁶⁹ The NEC meeting to expel Militant MPs Dave Nellist and Terry Fields.

¹⁷⁰ Neil Stewart interview.

unions who were seeking the views of their wider membership” regarding the contest. The Group noted the CLPD’s support of Heffer for Leader and Meacher as Deputy¹⁷², neither of which would draw their votes.

Late in 1984, the meeting discussed the proposal to allow CLPs to involve the membership in the selection of candidates, although this presented difficulties for unions as it weakened their input into GCs. In mid-1985, the Group agreed that OMOV should be dealt with at the 1986 conference¹⁷³. In January the members “agreed that the views of interested parties should be sought as to whether this matter should come up at this year’s Conference”¹⁷⁴ but, following consultations, suggested it “should not be brought up again [this year] but that the N.E.C. should approve the principle and then conduct a detailed investigation as to how it could best be implemented”¹⁷⁵. In February 1987, the party sent out a consultation document for comment. The Group thought “there was an obvious need, particularly in the light of events in Greenwich¹⁷⁶, to ensure that a wider selectorate [was] involved in the choosing of Parliamentary candidates”¹⁷⁷. Kinnock favoured a local electoral college, and his office was “taking soundings” on this. The Group hoped that “the situation that arose at the special Wembley conference [where the unions had not co-ordinated their votes] would not repeat itself” and that an extension to the franchise would be agreed¹⁷⁸.

The Group stepped up their efforts for the TUC GC elections with the first use of the Automaticity process. In January 1983, they agreed 7 names for the 11 seats reserved for the 83 unions with under 100,000 members, and considered Godsiff’s recommendation “that we consider voting for the Musicians’ Union and the National Union of Seamen in return for their support for our candidates and .. more important, for support for our [NEC] nominees”¹⁷⁹. This could be the year Godsiff was referring to when he related how he often appealed to Ego rather than Principle when winning votes. “John Morton [Musicians’ Union] was key at one point. I went to see him. He’d been soft-left. I said – we can put you top of the poll. But you have to do so and so ..

¹⁷¹ Notes of 25 November 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁷² Notes of 23 June 1983 meeting, EGA.

¹⁷³ Notes of 7 May 1985 meeting, EGA.

¹⁷⁴ Notes of 21 January 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁷⁵ Notes of 22 February 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁷⁶ Where a left-wing by-election candidate had lost to the SDP.

¹⁷⁷ Notes of 28 April 1987 meeting, EGA.

¹⁷⁸ Notes of 21 July and 22 September 1987 meetings, EGA.

¹⁷⁹ TUC Slate, EGA.

His eyes lit up – and he delivered”¹⁸⁰. In March, Godsiff presented a detailed analysis of TUC affiliation figures and the 29 candidates for the 11 seats, where the Left was hopeful of making gains, the Left unions having also been meeting, with ASLEF, ACTT and the FBU involved¹⁸¹. The September results were heartening for the Moderates, when 7 of their slate were elected. The *Daily Mail* hailed this as “Right Turn” and “Militants are purged”¹⁸². It was a substantial tilt: the enlarged GC had a 31:20 moderate majority as opposed to 22:23 before. By January, work started on the 1984 slate, with a detailed assessment of the 1983 results¹⁸³. In 1984, the Group made another two gains, with 9 of their slate elected (and the remaining two the runners-up), due partly to:

“Much more discipline amongst those unions who supported all, or most, of our recommended candidates and considerable indiscipline amongst the unions with candidates on the ‘left slate’ cause by blatant ‘self-interest’ and also by the fact that they only ran a slate of 10 candidates. It is quite obvious from the voting that a number of sitting members on the left slate did not vote for other candidates on the slate and were only interested in their own self-survival. The real cause for satisfaction was in the fact that the discipline exercised by [our] unions ensured that, almost without exception, all of our candidates advanced together”¹⁸⁴.

Although not minuted, the Group took delight in ousting two prominent left-wingers, Alan Sapper (ACTT) and Ken Cameron (FBU).

Discussions on the 1985 slate began in the February with the full slate of 11 (including Grantham as APEX’s membership had dipped below 100,000) finalised in July. All but one were elected (ASLEF’s Ray Buckton being the Left’s sole success)¹⁸⁵. This was not sufficient for the Group which wanted a full house. In September 1986 they “noted with satisfaction” that all 11 on its list were elected¹⁸⁶. However, they failed to appoint a whip as “on a number of recent votes on the General Council, the moderate majority had not asserted itself due to a lack of cohesion and it was agreed that discussions

¹⁸⁰ Roger Godsiff interview.

¹⁸¹ *Financial Times*, 18 April 1983. They were called the ‘Tuesday Club’, despite meeting on Mondays, in the Red Star, Soho Square, where they took turns to pay for supper. The group, which included Ken Gill, Ken Cameron and Walter Greendale (but not Kitson) was close to Benn (though he did not attend). After the Red Star, they met at different union offices until Nicholson found out they were meeting at the TGWU’s Transport House – and Moss Evans said they had to go (Brian Nicholson interview).

¹⁸² *Daily Mail*, 7 September 1983.

¹⁸³ Godsiff paper, EGA.

¹⁸⁴ EGA, 17 September 1984.

¹⁸⁵ Paper for 25 March 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁸⁶ Notes of 23 September 1986 meeting, EGA.

should be held with interested parties with a view to trying to ensure that this problem is overcome”¹⁸⁷. In July 1987, Godsiff credited the success over the previous four years in winning all 11 seats to

“coordinated hard work and discipline based on mutual self interest, which has been greatly facilitated by the gradual emergence of a clear moderate majority among unions with under 100,000 members. It has also been helped by the fact that our recommended candidates have come from unions which reflect a wide spread of industrial interests, which had allayed the fears of a number of people that automaticity would lead to a ‘take-over’ by white collar unions in this Section”¹⁸⁸.

The union leaders had achieved more than a simple transfer of power. Their work had helped strengthen the moderate forces within individual unions so that political belief rather than simple “deals” accounted for some of the results.

The level of affiliation to the party became another problem, as unemployment soared and union membership declined. “Strong emphasis was placed by the meeting on the need for affiliated trade unions to retain and, if possible, increase their affiliation to the Party in view of the importance of the N.E.C. elections. It was agreed that discussions should be held with a number of unions”¹⁸⁹.

By mid-1984, they had a new worry when the party entered discussions about reducing the unions’ vote at conference from its existing 89%. In the 1950s, the union-CLP balance had been about 75:25 but by 1981 it was nearer 90:10, which was unsatisfactory for constituency members. The 1983 conference remitted a resolution calling for a rebalancing towards the CLPs; in May 1984 the NEC sought views on this. This timing was particularly unfortunate given that affiliates were preparing for the first round of ballots on the retention of Political Funds. “It was, therefore, agreed that unions should write to the Labour Party pointing out that this matter should not be pursued until all affiliated unions had conducted ballots in accordance with the new legislation”¹⁹⁰. On behalf of APEX, though expressing the views of the other unions, Grantham stressed that no changes should be proposed “until all affiliated organisations have completed the ballots on the retention of their political funds as any controversy

¹⁸⁷ Notes off 24 February 1987 meeting, EGA.

¹⁸⁸ Notes and paper from 21 July 1987 meeting, EGA.

¹⁸⁹ Notes of 11 January 1983 meeting, EGA.

¹⁹⁰ Notes of 12 June 1984 meeting, EGA. The ballots were approached with concern. A poll for Channel Four’s “Union World” showed that 55% of members thought unions should not be involved

arising from such proposals could adversely influence such ballots”¹⁹¹. In July 1985, the NEC drafted proposals for the 1986 conference to bring the two parts more into balance. Meanwhile, the Group emphasised the importance of maximising affiliation levels for the 1985 NEC elections¹⁹².

Over time, the Group began to discuss conference resolutions, whereas in the beginning the focus had been on elections. In 1986, some pro-leadership resolutions were circulated and the Group agreed to support a TSSA resolution “seeking a wide-ranging re-examination of the Party’s constitution” and one from APEX on the Labour Women’s Conference¹⁹³. The Group continued to take an interest in the wider party, but in November 1983 “Concern was expressed that the work of the Labour Solidarity Campaign had become moribund over the last few months”. Members no doubt compared Solidarity with the activity rate of CLPD, whose literature was distributed to them by Godsiff. As this reflected the output of a dedicated team of hard-working volunteers, with detailed circulars, model resolutions, voting records from the NEC and methodical planning for conference¹⁹⁴, the more modest output of the centre-right group, dedicated less to activists and more to parliamentarians, would have looked poor by comparison. However, in February 1984, they showed “more satisfaction with Labour Solidarity, and agreed to appoint three trade union representatives on to its Steering Committee”. The Group also agreed to support “Labour Students Solidarity”¹⁹⁵, and in 1986 had a report back from Solidarity’s National Advisory Council¹⁹⁶. This was all in contrast with their view of *Tribune*, in respect of which they had urged unions to consider its tone before placing advertisements in it¹⁹⁷. In 1987 the Group met with Solidarity to discuss NEC elections¹⁹⁸.

The Group also looked at developments in the union movement, discussing a left-wing union conference held in Sheffield, and other left-wing groupings. The St Ermins Group worked with some non-affiliated unions to counter the Left, which led to the

in party politics (*Guardian*, 2 March 1985). The final ballot was not due until December 1985, leading to a year of uncertainty.

¹⁹¹ Letter to David Hughes, Labour Party National Agent, 18 June 1984, EGA.

¹⁹² On 23 October 1984 when reviewing the 1984 results and again in February 1985; EGA.

¹⁹³ Notes of 22 April, 20 May and 22 July 1986 meetings, EGA.

¹⁹⁴ CLPD Bulletins, Newsletter, Executive minutes, AGM reports and minutes, EGA.

¹⁹⁵ Notes of May 1985, EGA.

¹⁹⁶ Notes of 20 May 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁹⁷ Notes of 22 July 1986 meeting, EGA.

¹⁹⁸ Notes of 24 March 1987 meeting, EGA.

creation of another organisation, “Mainstream”, on 30 March 1985¹⁹⁹. In addition, representatives from some non-party unions met with the Group occasionally, joining the Swinton House meetings at 6.30 pm, after Labour Party issues had been discussed.

Turning to other business, the Group had a first discussion on the post-Mortimer General Secretary candidates in February 1984, and about the equivalent TUC position on 9 May after Len Murray announced his retirement. It was followed by a letter from Godsiff on the 14 May alerting members to the fact that Gavin Laird (AUEW) was interested in the post. When it later became clear there were just two in the race, Norman Willis (TGWU) and Murray’s deputy, David Lea, there was the usual paper detailing the TUC’s 10.135 million affiliated membership – which necessitated the winning candidate attracting 5.068 million votes. Godsiff’s breakdown of committed support shows Willis with 50.78% (plus a further possible 4.5%) and Lea with 23.4%. On that basis, the final figures would be 70:30. The actual figures were 7,362,000 to 2,678,000²⁰⁰.

The following year, the new General Secretary of the party was appointed. A senior elected union official might have been expected to apply and for a time the smart money was on the GMWU’s effective political operator and Chairman of the Conference Arrangements Committee, Derek Gladwin²⁰¹. In the event, it was another GMWU employee, Larry Whitty, who was also secretary to TULV, who beat the party’s Scottish Secretary, Helen Liddell, to the post. The Group subsequently “agreed that every assistance should be given to him in dealing with the difficult problems with which he will be faced”²⁰². A hefty overdraft and continuing staffing problems were just two of these. His proposal for reorganising headquarters was discussed along with the action being taken against Militant in Liverpool²⁰³. Another crucial area was regional staff appointments, particularly Regional Secretaries, which were then in the hands of the NEC. The Group “was relentless” on these, understanding the importance

¹⁹⁹ February 1985 paper, EGA.

²⁰⁰ August and September 1985 papers, EGA.

²⁰¹ But he was not asked. Had Kinnock said the word, he would have applied (Lord [Derek] Gladwin of Clee, interview, 29 November 2001).

²⁰² Notes of 26 February 1985 meeting, EGA.

²⁰³ Notes of 18 June 1985, EGA.

of organisational staff to achieving the electoral and political changes they were planning²⁰⁴.

One issue which concerned the NEC, and the Group, was ‘Black Sections’ where these were apparently being set up (when GCs still selected candidates) to influence the choice of MPs. The unions believed such groups were unrepresentative of the black members they purported to represent. The 1984 conference voted 5 million to 1 million against Black Sections, so the Group supported the NEC “in upholding the Party constitution against those constituency parties who were seeking to subvert it”. In June, the NEC was urged “to assert its authority over East Lewisham Party” where a candidate had been selected with the unauthorised participation of a Black Section delegate, contrary to an NEC ruling²⁰⁵. Whilst the NEC would never learn of such urgings, these minutes are evidence of NEC members taking advice from fellow Group members.

Women’s seats on the NEC were not the only female matter which engaged this all-male group. They arranged a slate for the TUC Women’s Advisory Committee and in 1983 they discussed the anti-union sentiments expressed at the National Conference of Labour Women, concerns shared by the TGWU²⁰⁶. Little seemed to have improved, as there were continuing reports from the 1984 Conference²⁰⁷. In 1986, following concern over “open hostility towards trade union delegations”, the party held a meeting with union representatives²⁰⁸. In March 1987, the party issued a consultation note on the future of this conference and the Group agreed a response to improve the situation. In 1985, it had been the TUC women’s conference which led to complaints, with the union leaders agreeing to take up their concerns about voting procedures with the TUC²⁰⁹.

Throughout all of this, the Group’s preoccupation had been on increasing their vote on the NEC. 1983 was always going to be difficult, Weighell’s 1982 action and his subsequent departure jeopardising the NUR’s vote. Jimmy Knapp, his successor, was on the Left, opening the possibility of left-wing gains²¹⁰. To make matters worse, the

²⁰⁴ John Spellar, interview, 2003.

²⁰⁵ Notes of 18 June 1985 meeting, EGA.

²⁰⁶ “Why our women are so angry”, Margaret Prosser, *TGWU Record*, EGA.

²⁰⁷ Notes of 12 June 1984 meeting, EGA.

²⁰⁸ Notes of 22 July 1986 meeting, EGA.

²⁰⁹ Notes of 26 February 1985 meeting, EGA.

²¹⁰ *Observer*, 27 March 1983.

POEU, reflecting an internal shift to the Left, decided not to re-nominate Golding which, Martin Linton assessed, would “have a profound effect on the Labour Party”. Linton portrayed Golding as “hardly a charismatic leader with his shambling look and his grey suits .. but he is far the most politically astute among the trade union representatives that give the right its majority”²¹¹. 1983 saw considerable changes to the slates and to voting. It was the first year when a full list of how each organisation had voted would be published. CLPD claimed that this meant “any repeat of the NUR saga will be on record .. which will be a strong deterrent against any repetition”²¹². In fact, the major effect was to end Militants standing in the CLP section (their candidates withdrew and never stood again), as votes for them would be obvious to any delegate’s own CLP²¹³. Furthermore, because the general election had seen Joan Lestor and Ann Taylor lose their parliamentary seats, they were no longer automatically eligible for the NEC²¹⁴ – though this took time to be confirmed. Ann Clwyd MEP had earlier written to Grantham seeking support, but without success²¹⁵. However, when Taylor – on the Ermins’ list – was ruled out, the Group switched to Clwyd (which saw her elected in second place on her first attempt).

CLPD had been hoping for considerable gains in 1983. 1982 had been a bad year for them, not so much for the loss of the Left majority on the NEC but because of “Deep divisions within the CLPD”²¹⁶. Their secretary, Vladimir Derer, in his AGM report on 25 January 1983 (when CLPD had 1,203 members) wrote that “1982 was a year of continual in-fighting”. This resulted from their debate about whether to Register but the Militant issue spread into every consideration. Sawyer, on the Left’s slate, was writing for *Labour Against the Witch-Hunt* and CLPD pressed for opposition to witch-hunts to be the focus for conference activity. The Left seemed set to recapture the NEC²¹⁷. Its slate included anti-witch-hunters Beckett, Patricia Hewitt and Maynard together with Renee Short²¹⁸.

²¹¹ *Guardian*, 14 July 1983.

²¹² CLPD “Guide for Conference Delegates”, 1983.

²¹³ *Tribune*, 7 October 1983.

²¹⁴ Unless they became delegates from, and nominated by, their home CLPs.

²¹⁵ 14 July 1983 letter, EGA. She was pro-European, but against expulsions.

²¹⁶ CLPD *Newsletter*, Number 27, May 1983.

²¹⁷ *Tribune*, 22 July 1983.

²¹⁸ CLPD circular, 20 June 1983.

The St Ermins Group was worried, not just because of CLPD. Its number-cruncher predicted: “In the women’s section we are likely to lose two seats and could possibly lose all four” and would only achieve a small margin for Varley over [Albert] Booth as treasurer. Assuming Kinnock and Hattersley won the leadership and deputy leadership, the best guess was for 9 Moderates, 5 soft-left and 15 hard-left, giving the hard-left an overall majority of one²¹⁹. The actual results were better for the Group, even though Hoyle dislodged Howell. Judith Hart was defeated and Beckett failed to win. They lost Davis but Boothroyd, Clywd and Dunwoody won – along with Maynard. *Tribune* judged “Kinnock holds the balance” (12:12)²²⁰. It was, initially, unclear how the NEC would divide on key issues, with a new leadership in place (Hattersley having beaten the Left’s Meacher as Deputy). In theory, “the right lost its overall majority .. returning its balance, as in 1981-2, to the centre-left leadership loyalists”. In fact, this centre-left grouping, when aligned with the Right, “narrowly outnumbered the left”²²¹ and Kinnock could command a majority.

At the subsequent Swinton House meeting, there was satisfaction with the results “particularly bearing in mind the tremendous efforts that had been made by the ‘hard Left’ to try and defeat other sitting members”²²². Godsiff’s analysis showed:

“Due to indiscipline on the left and a lot of hard work we were able to minimise the damage in the [union] section and only Denis Howell lost his seat. Our [3] marginal candidates .. were all elected.. The discipline amongst our Group compared with the indiscipline on the left was crucial in minimising our loss of one seat .. the fact that the left slate only consisted of 11 candidates helped us considerably. .. Prior to Conference we expected the left to gain three seats .. In the event, the discipline amongst our Group, together with the indiscipline among the left .. resulted in a nett loss of one seat and the important defeat of Judith Hart. .. we were lucky”²²³.

They were not complacent; in February they started work on the 1984 slate. In looking at whom to support, the March meeting had a breakdown of Sawyer’s votes on NEC decisions (such as: Tariq Ali; selections following boundary changes; Militant). This showed him voting contrary to the leadership on 15 key votes. Meanwhile, a new candidate was needed as party treasurer. Varley had resigned mid-term, allowing the runner-up Booth to replace him. Turnock observed that at “the first tests he joined the

²¹⁹ Godsiff paper, July 1983, EGA.

²²⁰ *Tribune*, 7 October 1983. Similarly “A net gain of three” for the Left, had Kinnock holding the balance; *Financial Times*, 5 October 1983.

²²¹ Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p. 254.

²²² Notes of 1 November 1983 meeting, EGA.

left .. [over] two issues. One was the student Conference, .. Booth voted with the left. The second issue [was] the proposed expulsion of 6 Blackburn members for Militant activity. Same voting”. Booth had voted with Blunkett, Hoyle, Meacher and Sawyer against Kinnock and the Moderates²²⁴; he had to go. The brothers noted that McCluskie (who was often helpful, wherever possible supporting Kinnock) was standing, so discussions began²²⁵. On the basis that the Group would support McCluskie and that he would win, Godsiff’s May 1984 prediction was that “our position this year is 29,000 votes worse than last year due to reduced affiliations and we, therefore, need to ensure the maximum unity of support from amongst those unions who would normally support our candidates”. Dropping Clwyd (“in view of her voting record”), they ran Boothroyd, Davis, Dunwoody, Diana Jeuda and Renee Short – supported in view of her “excellent” voting record and who thus moved directly to the Right slate from the Left’s. By June, Godsiff was no more upbeat. “The position from which we start this year is no better than last year. Nearly all unions have suffered drops in their membership and .. a number of moderate unions will have reduced theirs. We had the advantage last year because the ‘left slate’ had only 11 names on it and a number of left unions cast at least one of their votes for moderate candidates”²²⁶. Their nervousness showed, and a number of approaches were made to potentially sympathetic unions, with Godsiff preparing careful briefs for each union to help the particular Group member nominated to approach them. His emphasis was always on the marginal candidates, stressing to one general secretary, for example, that if he failed to get his delegation not to vote for Maynard, then to try and support the marginal Davis or Jeuda but certainly avoid Beckett “who could be a potential threat to one of our sitting candidates”²²⁷.

Despite Basnett failing to vote for Sawyer²²⁸, the 1984 results swung slightly to the Left²²⁹ although McCluskie held off a challenge from Booth for the treasurership and Davis replaced Clwyd²³⁰. Godsiff’s verdict was that “Bearing in mind that on a straight

²²³ January 1984 paper, EGA.

²²⁴ Charles Turnock, *op cit*, p.232.

²²⁵ See Godsiff’s recollection; p. 104.

²²⁶ June 1984 paper, EGA.

²²⁷ Briefing notes, August 1984, EGA.

²²⁸ He promptly apologised to NUPE for this “error”, *Tribune*, 5 October 1984.

²²⁹ *ibid*.

²³⁰ According to a teller, Boothroyd and Dunwoody had “received only 11 constituency party votes apiece” (*Tribune*, 5 October 1984) – leading to pressure from the Left to remove the women’s seats from union control.

calculation of figures between ‘left’ and ‘moderate’ we were 500,000 votes behind, the results were not at all bad”. The balance moved to a 17/12 Moderate majority²³¹. *Tribune* commented “Despite a paper majority for the Left in the trade unions and an overwhelmingly Left majority among the constituency parties, various deals between trade unions resulted in a seven-to-five majority for the Right in the trade union section and a four-to-one majority to the Right in the women’s section”. The paper blamed the TGWU, claiming it had “clearly struck some poor bargains” as it had voted for 9 right-wingers as well as failing to support TGWU-sponsored Beckett²³². Perhaps Kitson topping the poll, with a massive 5.33 million votes, explains the TGWU’s decision, concentrating unwisely on the size of an individual’s majority in contrast to Godsiff’s preoccupation with marginal candidates. *Tribune* noted the GMWU’s failure to vote for Sawyer, despite their normal support for NUPE. However, as Sawyer was comfortably elected, further votes would have been wasted – a point the paper failed to grasp. The Campaign Group thought that the result was an improvement but should have been better as the Left had “a commanding 300,000 majority”²³³. Other commentators noticed the imbalance between numbers and the results, Rodney Bickerstaffe complaining to Spellar: “Every time I go to Labour Party conference thinking we’ve got a left majority and every time you do it!”²³⁴. The Campaign Group noted the unsatisfactory result in the women’s section where “the left should command a safe majority .. The fault seems to lie in the voting of the TGWU .. who could .. have .. elected at least M. Beckett and C. Short if they had strategically voted. However .. other unions also made misjudgements. .. unions .. do not seem to take the election in the women’s section as seriously as other sections”²³⁵. There may have been more to it than that. The Campaign Group Secretary (who presumably drafted these words) was the Left’s number-cruncher, Alan Meale. According to one St Ermins Group activist, they benefited from “Meale’s inability to count. Godsiff ran rings round him”²³⁶.

In the treasurership election, McCluskie’s narrow 46,000 victory was partly due to the Dyers and Bleachers’ surprise vote (a union liberated from TGWU pressure by

²³¹ Godsiff paper, EGA.

²³² *Tribune*, 12 October 1984.

²³³ 1983/84 Annual Report of Campaign Group of Labour MPs, p.16.

²³⁴ John Spellar, Interview, 2003.

²³⁵ 1983/84 Annual Report of Campaign Group of Labour MPs, p.17.

²³⁶ John Spellar interview. There is no equivalent or counter balancing record of Meale’s vote-gathering and counting in, for example, Benn’s diaries for this period.

Automaticity²³⁷ – though they might have supported McCluskie so that their left-wing nominee, Haigh, could capture the vacated seat). Despite his provenance, Haigh turned out to be a “Hero” to the Moderate’s Whip: “Eddie was hung out to dry on one issue. Had said to me ‘if I’m there for that issue, I will have to vote the way the union wants’. I told him: ‘You go to the toilet, we’ll spring the vote’. And we did just that!”²³⁸. (He joined the Moderates’ slate in 1986²³⁹.)

The new NEC had hardly got to work before work started on the 1985 slate. By May, 10 of the names for the union section were agreed, with “further discussions” to take place for the remaining two places. Richard Rosser and Ted O’Brien were then added²⁴⁰. The women’s slate was finalised in July. Godsiff remained pessimistic, as

“the ‘moderate’ unions trailed the ‘left’ unions by 500,000 votes last year and if anything will be accentuated through reduced affiliation [and mergers]. We need .. to ensure that the candidates we recommend .. have the widest possible appeal beyond our own group and also maintain maximum discipline .. to secure the extra votes which our marginal candidates will need to be elected”²⁴¹.

He thought the women might do better because of splits among the Left groups on their varying slates. The actual results, despite the Left’s expectation of making gains²⁴², gave “some considerable cause for satisfaction” as nine of their slate were elected in the union section. “There was intense competition for the marginal places .. but thanks to some favourable arrangements and the generous assistance of the moderate unions”, the Group displaced Hoyle and got Colling elected²⁴³. One women’s seat was lost, when Beckett (this time with TGWU support) beat Davis. Overall, the Moderates would have a 15/14 majority on most issues “and on the big issues, where the credibility of the Leadership is at stake, the majority could be as high as 20:9”²⁴⁴.

²³⁷ See above, p.133.

²³⁸ Gordon Colling interview. At times, the gents toilet must have been a busy place. Kinnock also relates how often NEC members decided they needed to go, just when an awkward vote was coming (Kinnock interview).

²³⁹ Notes of 22 July 1986 meeting, EGA.

²⁴⁰ List of the slate, EGA.

²⁴¹ Godsiff paper, June 1985, EGA.

²⁴² *Tribune*, 23 August 1985.

²⁴³ Helped by Meale having put Colling on the Left slate, even claiming his election as a success for their side (1984/1985 Annual Report of Campaign Group of Labour MPs, p.15).

²⁴⁴ Godsiff paper, October 1985, EGA.

Shortly after, the CLPD Secretary wrote, under the subhead “The Decline of the Labour Left”, that in 1981:

“the Left lost five seats on the National Executive, and Tony Benn was defeated in the Deputy Leadership contest because the hitherto Left-wing NUPE cast its vote in favour of the Right-wing candidate. ..[In 1982] the Left was routed over the Register and the scene was set for the expulsions of [Militant] supporters .. In the NEC election of that year there were further Left losses. .. 1983 .. saw the Left-wing candidates in the Leadership and Deputy Leadership contest heavily defeated. An overwhelming majority of CLPs, and a sizeable majority of Left Labour MPs, voted for Neil Kinnock in preference to Eric Heffer. TU delegations voted for Kinnock en masse, and only a few supported Michael Meacher for Deputy Leader. In 1984 the pace of erosion of the Left’s influence seemed to have slowed .. Yet the Left lost the .. Treasurership .. The miners’ defeat early in 1985 and the isolation of Liverpool council .. gave the Leader and the NEC Right-wing majority a new strength at the 1985 Party Conference”²⁴⁵.

The Bulletin, circulated to the St Ermins Group, must have brought a knowing smile to the authors of these changes.

Despite the 1985 successes, the grass was not allowed to grow before work on the following year’s contests started. In February, support was agreed for McCluskie as treasurer and for the 5 women, plus 9 names in the union section while “discussions should continue with other interested persons”. July saw a detailed, 15-page briefing on the candidates and voting numbers, which showed that, while in 1985

“we had to exercise considerable agility and flexibility in order to get 9 of our candidates in the Trade Union section and 3 .. in the women’s section elected ..[as] we were over 600,000 votes behind [the left] in the .. Unions’ section and nearly one million votes behind in the women’s section. There are .. indications that the situation in the Trade Union section will have improved the prospects of moderate candidates”. The meeting noted “the need to maximise the support for our recommended candidates and to ensure that the credibility and trust which has been built up over the last five years, thereby enabling major changes to be made in the composition of the N.E.C., was retained”²⁴⁶.

Howell withdrew his nomination “in order not to split the votes for recommended candidates” (the Group wishing him good luck for the 1992 Olympic bid he was overseeing), and Lestor was agreed as a reserve for the women’s seat.

Godsiff’s 1986 briefing paper was more optimistic as “political changes within TGWU could result in gains for moderate candidates”. McCluskie had indicated he would

²⁴⁵ “Secretary’s Statement”, *CLPD Bulletin 11*, January 1986.

continue as treasurer even if he became general secretary of the NUS, rather than move to the General Council. However, despite the better omens and at a time “when the political climate has moved strongly against disruptive elements within the party and on the N.E.C.”, Godsiff as ever writes “it is essential that unity and discipline is maintained among the moderate unions”²⁴⁷. On the eve of conference, Godsiff noted that, of the 12 supported for the union seats, nine “were well placed to retain their seats” but maximum support was required for the marginal three. On the women’s section, problems were anticipated and

“mindful of the .. widespread agreement on the need to ensure that an increased number of persons were elected .. who will be supportive of the leadership of Neil Kinnock, thereby enabling him to spend more time out and around the country campaigning on behalf of the Party, it was agreed that every effort should be made to maximise the support for Anne Davis and Diana Jeuda who were best placed to gain seats currently held by Beckett and Maynard”. In a telling note, he recommended that if support was needed to bolster Lestor, “it would be taken from Renee Short or Betty Boothroyd who were already guaranteed re-election with very large majorities”²⁴⁸.

On the opposing side, Blunkett was urging support for Beckett and Maynard, who would be successful “if the constituencies and not the block vote of the trade unions counted”²⁴⁹.

The actual results were evidence of the Group’s efforts. The unusually long minute gives an insight into the *modus operandi* of the Group. In the union section, 10 of the 12 were elected, Rosser being beaten by the NUM’s Clarke despite

“considerable effort and organisation [being] expended on maximising [his] vote .. After ‘arrangements’ had been made with some ‘left’ union, it appeared, with half an hour left before the ballot closed, that Rosser would be elected. Unfortunately, the ‘left’ were then successful in persuading GMBATU²⁵⁰ to switch their votes to Eric Clarke .. [Had] the GMBATU voted for Rosser instead of Clarke, which they had originally intended to, Rosser would have been elected 10,000 ahead of Clarke”. The women’s section reflected some equally nifty footwork. “In the women’s section we gained an extra seat with the election of Diana Jeuda at the expense of Margaret Beckett. Again, ‘arrangements’ with certain ‘left’ unions worked to our advantage, particularly the support obtained from ASTMS for Jeuda. .. Anne Davis was in contention up until Monday lunch-time but was finally

²⁴⁶ Notes of July 1985 meeting, EGA.

²⁴⁷ Notes of 21 January, 25 February, 22 April, 22 July and 19 August 1986 meetings, EGA.

²⁴⁸ Notes of 23 September 1986 meeting, EGA.

²⁴⁹ David Blunkett Column, *Tribune*, 5 September 1986.

²⁵⁰ The GMWU had been through a number of name changes, at this stage having merged with the Boilermakers Union.

beaten by the decision of the UCATT delegation, after three ballots, to support Maynard and not Davis”. Overall, Godsiff’s plotting and “arrangements” led to a gain of one seat in the women’s section and “a more reliable replacement for Alex Kitson”²⁵¹ – a Moderate majority of 18:11²⁵².

CLPD concurred, heading their report “NEC Elections – Right Gains Significantly”²⁵³. *The Times*’ succinct “Right wing tightens grip on NEC” took account of a further Moderate gain, where Heffer was defeated in the CLP section by Tam Dalyell, benefiting from his persistent criticism of Thatcher’s Falklands role²⁵⁴. Shaw described how, “By 1986, the work, begun several years earlier by John Golding, of constructing a solid bloc of leadership loyalist encompassing virtually all trade union members of the Executive had been completed”²⁵⁵. CLPD later noted: “Since 1981 the political composition of the NEC has been changing. Increasingly nominees of the party’s right wing have been elected. This partly reflects the shift of opinion in the country. But it is also due to successful electioneering by the right wing in the party and the trade unions. Its effectiveness was not matched by the left. As a result, the right wing has made substantial direct gains in the Trade Union and Women’s Sections”²⁵⁶.

After the 1986 results, Godsiff allowed himself the luxury of reviewing their NEC losses and gains, noting that “The Conference in 1981 marked the beginning of the ‘fight back’ by the moderates .. to stem the advance of the broad left”. He set out the changes which “culminated in the election this year of an N.E.C. overwhelmingly supportive of the Parliamentary leadership and with a very large moderate majority”²⁵⁷. The Group took no respite, and the 1987 slate was in preparation by February, with the added complication of Turnock’s retirement²⁵⁸. The list was finalised in July, Lestor taking the place vacated by Boothroyd (who was about to become a Deputy Speaker in the House of Commons)²⁵⁹. Problems were anticipated, the meeting urging maximum support “for our 3 most marginal candidates” in the union section. The women’s section was fluid although it was “quite possible that all five .. could win .. provided the maximum discipline was maintained, but that any fall off in support could result in the

²⁵¹ Jack Rogers of UCATT.

²⁵² Notes of 21 October 1986 meeting, EGA.

²⁵³ CLPD Newsletter, Conference Edition.

²⁵⁴ *The Times*, 1 October 1986.

²⁵⁵ Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p.270/1.

²⁵⁶ CLPD letter to supporters, August 1987.

²⁵⁷ October 1986 paper, EGA.

²⁵⁸ Notes of 24 February, 24 March and 28 April 1987 meetings. Unusually, Turnock was named – to be thanked – in the September 1987 minutes, EGA.

loss of one seat”. All five were deemed “marginal” so maximum support sought for all²⁶⁰. (In previous years, votes could be switched from Boothroyd, who attracted widespread support and was bound to win, to help a worse placed sister – something the former cheerfully accepted.) In fact, the 1987 results were the “Best Ever”²⁶¹. All ten union seats were retained plus two gained in the women’s section so that, for the first time, all five were in Moderate hands. The number-cruncher commented that

“Bearing in mind .. we were more than 180,000 worse off than last year, these results give considerable cause for satisfaction and were due to the overall excellent discipline exercised by those unions who support our recommended candidates and .. the very considerable help given by unions in the arrangement which were made to protect .. our most marginal candidates”²⁶².

Early in 1986 the Group started thinking about the composition of what was to become the National Constitutional Committee (NCC). One of the Group’s early objectives had been to rid the party of “infiltrators”. St Ermins Group members of the NEC had been in the forefront of this unpalatable work. Ken Cure chaired the Appeals and Mediation Committee from 1983 to 1987, leading a number of difficult investigations. Turnock led some of the biggest enquiries – especially into Liverpool²⁶³. The NEC itself undertook expulsions – spending days on the Liverpool Militants, for example, and running into legal difficulties when the same people who had conducted an enquiry also then tried to hear the expulsions. The demands on the Leader’s time in these cases was wasteful, the publicity damaging. Natural justice demanded a separate body to adjudicate on cases once the NEC had decided to formulate charges. Hence the creation of the NCC.

In summer 1986, the Group welcomed the plans for such a committee and “agreed that consideration should be given .. to the names of persons who unions would wish to nominate .. [as] a postal ballot would take place” after the October conference²⁶⁴. The balancing of unions’ interests had to be carefully weighed. As there were to be only 5 union and two women’s seats (the latter effectively union controlled), “it was

²⁵⁹ Notes of 21 July 1987 meeting, EGA.

²⁶⁰ Notes of 22 September 1987 meeting, EGA.

²⁶¹ Godsiff paper, 27 October 1987, EGA.

²⁶² *ibid.*

²⁶³ Turnock and Cure were involved in reports on St Helens, Sparkbrook, Knowsley North, Brent East and Bristol South (Charles Turnock’s papers).

²⁶⁴ Notes of 22 July and 19 August 1986 meetings, EGA.

recommended that no union should consider nominating for both”²⁶⁵. Godsiff’s paper in October noted that a number of unions wanted to make nominations but that there was “an obvious need to ensure that those unions who do not have a nominee already on the [NEC] are sympathetically considered”. Despite that hint, the Group agreed to support nominees of the AUEW, GMWU and TGWU and to consider Keith Brookman (ISTC) and Rose Degiorgio (APEX), whilst further consultations took place. The list posted out on 14 November did not include Alan Quinn of TGWU in view of his association with Militant, but urged full support for the others “in view of the absolute necessity to ensure that the [NCC] has a clear majority of members who will act responsibly to ensure that the rules and constitution of the party are upheld”²⁶⁶. The elections – unusually at that time by postal ballot – gave the Group four of the 5 union places (Quinn having been elected). It would, said Godsiff’s paper, have been unheard of for any TGWU nominee to be defeated in a trade union election, though that union’s mistake in choosing such a candidate almost achieved the impossible. All the unions which normally followed the Group slate voted for Eric George rather than Quinn, other than the GMWU – without whose votes the TGWU flag-carrier would have lost. In the women’s section, the GMWU supported the slate so both candidates were elected over the TGWU nominee, as “favourable arrangements” had been concluded. The balance on the NCC was 7:4 for the Moderates, a result which was “much welcomed” and only achieved “because of the discipline which existed amongst those unions which traditionally supported our recommended candidates”²⁶⁷.

After the 1987 conference, the Group reviewed the impact they had made since 1981 across the NEC, NCC and TUC General Council. On the NEC, the Group had won 10 out of 12 union and all 5 women’s seats; on the NCC, 4 out of 5 union and both the women’s seats; and all 11 in the “under 100,000” GC section²⁶⁸. Outside observers concurred: the 1987 NEC providing “a comfortable soft-left/ centre-right base” for Kinnock²⁶⁹. It was a mammoth achievement for these dozen men, who had met monthly and laboured hard by persuasion and some darker methods (or “hairy

²⁶⁵ Notes of 23 September 1986 meeting, EGA.

²⁶⁶ Sandy Feather papers.

²⁶⁷ Notes of the 27 January and 24 February 1987 meetings, EGA.

²⁶⁸ Paper for 27 October 1987 meeting, EGA.

²⁶⁹ Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *op cit*, p.568.

stunts”²⁷⁰) to change the political complexion of the governing councils of the Labour movement.

From the disaster of 1981 to the June 1987 election was barely six years, but in this time the Moderates felt the party's fortunes had been turned, even though an election victory was still ten years' off. A Leader determined to change the party had been elected, and he was backed by an NEC determined to walk that road with him. Could it have happened without the St Ermins Group? It seems unlikely as, again and again, the Moderates lacked the numbers but made up for it with discipline and cunning, both in marshalling votes for NEC seats and then in utilising them on the NEC.

It is said by some that it was not organisation but the shock of the SDP departure, followed by the 1983 election disaster, which turned the party around²⁷¹. This underestimates the impact of Duffy's success in moving the AUEW to the Moderate cause, which he achieved by late 1981²⁷² as well as the unions' determination to rid themselves of Thatcher. It was their members who suffered from her industrial and other policies and they knew this prior to the 1983 defeat. As the archives show, their efforts and some of the major victories (Automaticity, seizing the NEC majority and Healey's Deputy Leadership victory) preceded that election. The Moderate NEC members found that they had many years of neglect to correct, as the Left's long control of the NEC had secured a staff immune to their objectives, a deep penetration of the party by Militant and an electorate hostile to Labour. They were also dealing with a large organisation which “like an oil tanker, is hard to turn round”²⁷³.

Commentators have stressed the importance of organisation in political parties²⁷⁴ but few have glimpsed the professionalism and determination of this Group of union leaders. Some did understand it: “The preconditions of Labour Party recovery would be brought about .. by untrumpeted union men .. who would work – much as [Bill] Rodgers had worked twenty years before – through the unions, to shift the NEC back to reason”²⁷⁵. Pearce refers to the “regular gatherers at the St Ermine's (*sic*) Hotel,

²⁷⁰ Roger Godsiff interview.

²⁷¹ Tom McNally interview.

²⁷² Roy Grantham interview.

²⁷³ Gerry O'Brien, interview, 16 February 2002.

²⁷⁴ Patrick Seyd, *op cit*, p.113; Eric Shaw, *op cit*, p.224; Ben Pimlott and Chris Cook (eds), *Trade Unions in British Politics*, Longman, 1982, p.24.

²⁷⁵ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p.535.

Labour's favourite resort of conspiracy and so known as 'the St Ermine's Group'. ..The campaign, not just to re-elect Healey, but over a longer period to restore a moderate NEC and put the Labour Party back on the rails deserves a full study to itself. It came before red roses and mattered more"²⁷⁶.

Two politicians confirm this. Healey admitted: "Without the unions, change wouldn't have happened"²⁷⁷. The other was Kinnock, both in interview²⁷⁸ and in his inscriptions in a couple of books. In Tony Clarke's copy of his book, Kinnock wrote: "Without you many parts of this book would not have been written"²⁷⁹ and on Turnock's monograph he wrote "to Charlie with thanks for sense, socialism – and some of the best laughs too!!"²⁸⁰. It should be remembered that Kinnock's crucial 1985 Bournemouth speech, on Militant, was delivered with the massed ranks of a supportive NEC behind him on the platform.

Kinnock also acknowledged not only their diligence and discipline, but the unpopularity this sometimes brought them within their own unions:

"Self-discipline and collective discipline .. They had a fundamental belief in the use of votes .. At a later stage, they said, we've got to win the arguments as well as votes. What made them say that to me was that, even with good organisation, even with winning seats consistently on the NEC, they never had quite enough to ensure a guaranteed outcome when just one or two of the trade union group voted in another direction .. In order to ensure unanimity, or something like it, in the trade union group, they had to win arguments, .. they had to win the vote and arguments .. So they acknowledged having a solid, disciplined group with particular organised political objectives in mind, would be crucial but sometimes it wasn't quite enough .. The trade union people were putting themselves on the line; they were representing their leadership stance but not the unanimous view of their annual conferences. Didn't automatically win them popularity and support within their own unions. So they took some risks"²⁸¹.

²⁷⁶ *ibid*, p.557.

²⁷⁷ Denis Healey interview.

²⁷⁸ Neil Kinnock interview.

²⁷⁹ Tony Clarke interview.

²⁸⁰ Charles Turnock, "Labour Needs 30 Miracles", 1987 – front cover.

²⁸¹ Neil Kinnock interview.

Thus whilst unions were blamed, following the Winter of Discontent, for Labour's travails, there seems little doubt that this committed band harnessed the resources and commitment to Labour within the movement to steer the party back towards electability, for, without a compliant NEC, it is unlikely that Kinnock could have succeeded. The St Ermins Group continued for nearly another decade but its toughest assignment had been completed by 1987. Just as, in 1931, trade unionists including Ernest Bevin had played a decisive role in steadying the party, 50 years later it fell to another generation of union leaders to maintain the party created by the unions in 1900 as an electoral force.

Chapter 11 Labour Solidarity Campaign, 1981-1988

***“Giles Radice is given the credit for building up something called the ‘Manifesto Group’ which helped save the party. So far as I remember, it was Solidarity which did this job over the dead body of the Manifesto Group”
Austin Mitchell, Solidarity Treasurer¹.***

***“Solidarity .. tried hard [but] had neither the resources nor the leadership to be successful”
John Golding, Solidarity Member².***

The Manifesto Group had failed to deliver the party leadership for Healey or to hold the PLP together. The party adopted the Wembley 40:30:30 formula for the Electoral College, leading to the Limehouse Declaration within 24 hours and the SDP within two months. Wembley also led to the creation of the St Ermins Group and to the better known Labour Solidarity Campaign. This was set up 24 days after the conference, partly in recognition that the Moderates' failure to organise³ had allowed the Left to engineer the very formula that would produce the schism. Solidarity was created to reverse that formula and to stem the flow of defections from the party. The vitriol within the party, and the condemnation of the 1974-79 governments, had left the Moderates on the backfoot. They now believed that they had to act if the party was to return to “sanity” and electability. Their aims consolidated as: changing the Wembley formula, OMOV, expelling Militant, creating a tolerant party, getting a Moderate majority on the NEC, keeping members in the party, arguing the case for representative (or parliamentary) democratic socialism – and achieving these by organising the natural majority within the party.

This chapter tells the story of Solidarity and tests the above views of its Treasurer (Austin Mitchell) and a supporter (John Golding), one of whom praised, one of whom questioned, the role it played in “saving” the party. Mitchell places it above the Manifesto Group, Golding below the St Ermins Group. Both may be correct.

¹ Austin Mitchell, "Party People: Review of Dictionary of Labour Biography", *The House Magazine*, 4 November 2002.

² John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.181.

³ Cited by Spellar, quoting the Left's tale of its better organisation: Chris Mullin in *Tribune*, 30 January 1981 (JSA).

Immediately after Wembley, centre-right MPs experienced the loss of colleagues – and the haemorrhaging of Manifesto Group numbers – to the SDP. Confronted with resignations from the PLP, the Moderates had to act fast. Their response was a Statement by 150 MPs – Tribunites as well as Manifesto members – which, while accepting an Electoral College, disagreed fundamentally with the formula. “All of us agree that the decision of Wembley was a mistake and should be rectified at the earliest opportunity”⁴. These 150 were the pool from which Solidarity emerged, and comprised the invitation list for its February founding meeting.

Within days of Wembley, Spellar wrote to a number of senior MPs (who became the Solidarity leadership⁵) and senior trade unionists calling for the creation of a organisation to replace CLV, involving general secretaries, MPs and party members. “If the moderate majority in the Party are to assert themselves and turn the tide then we will have to become as effectively organised as our opponents” wrote Spellar, proposing as priorities: a journal, regional conferences, control of the NEC and a “statement of purpose” drafted by Hattersley. This latter described how:

“For too long, the natural majority within the Labour Movement – left, right and centre – has allowed unrepresentative minorities to impose their own narrow views upon the Party .. To leave the Party now is both defeatist and divisive. Our prime task is to put the Party back on course and .. save the country from the ruinous policies of Margaret Thatcher”⁶.

Spellar’s paper, slightly redrafted, was adopted by the Group together with a statement of purpose: “The recreation of a Labour Party which is: genuinely representative of the millions .. who support the Movement; broadly based and tolerant of all democratic socialist opinion; safeguarded against infiltration and domination by extremist factions; determined to protect the democratic rights and electoral responsibilities of Members of Parliament”. The immediate objectives were: “To reverse the Wembley decision; to obtain a moderate majority upon the N.E.C.; to seek the adoption of moderate .. candidates; .. to confirm in office the elected leadership of the LP”⁷.

It is interesting to note this early preoccupation with infiltration, and the need to defend the position of elected representatives. The paper reflected the Group’s analysis that

⁴ Statement by 150 MPs, January 1981, MGA.

⁵ Including John Smith, Robertson, Hattersley, Shore, Radice, Healey, Mitchell, Golding, Boothroyd, Dunwoody (handwritten notes, JSA).

⁶ Undated paper, JSA.

⁷ Woolmer’s handwritten amendments to Spellar paper, MGA.

without a change to the NEC, few problems would disappear. The suggestion of finding reliable candidates mirrors one of the successful activities of the earlier CDS⁸. The comment on the “elected leadership” was a portent of Benn’s challenge to Healey only weeks later⁹.

Whilst Spellar put pen to paper, MPs knew they must act urgently to hold on to members and reassure them that the bulk of Moderates were remaining in the party. Hattersley credits the energy behind this to Howell:

“Solidarity wasn’t my idea. Nothing about it was my idea. Denis Howell .. came into my office after the Wembley conference .. and said ‘You’ve got to take the lead. You have got to do all these things’. I said: ‘Why me, why not Denis Healey?’ .. He said ‘Denis Healey won’t’. I suspect he had already asked Denis [Healey]. .. Denis Howell called the meeting in the Grand Committee Room; Denis Howell sent out the notices; Denis Howell phoned round people; Denis Howell badgered me into phoning round people; Denis Howell attended the meeting and announced to them that I was the Chairman of this new organisation”¹⁰.

An initial group, including Howell and three acting officers (Hattersley as Chairman, Woolmer as Secretary and Mitchell as Treasurer), met before the inaugural meeting. Preparations included the choice of a name¹¹. This emerged in a meeting in Healey’s room in the Shadow Cabinet corridor when a group was “picking his brains, and it was at the time of Lech Walesa in Poland. It was Healey’s idea: ‘only one name you can give it: Solidarity’ he said”¹².

On 17 February, 102 MPs¹³ from the 150 signatories met under the chairmanship of Hattersley and agreed to establish the Labour Solidarity Campaign¹⁴. A Steering Committee was appointed¹⁵ – drawn from the Manifesto Group, Labour First and Tribune – and the meeting agreed to advertise its presence, organise regional rallies, issue a newsletter and open an office. Within two days, its Treasurer was soliciting funds from MPs, whilst others were building up contact lists. On the 18 February, the officers circulated a statement endorsed by the 102. This referred to those defecting, as

⁸ Denis Howell, *op cit*, Brian L. Brivati, *op cit*, Jim Cattermole interview.

⁹ Woolmer always suspected this would happen (Ken Woolmer interview).

¹⁰ Roy Hattersley interview.

¹¹ Suggestions included Democratic Labour Movement, Labour Movement Action, Representative Labour Movement; Labour Representative Movement (JSA).

¹² Ken Woolmer interview.

¹³ Including Healey. The initiative was further supported by 10 absentees, *Guardian*, 18 February 1981.

¹⁴ Notes of the meeting, JGP.

well as to others “who don’t believe in Parliament” trying to take over the party, and defined the organisation as being “to give Labour new life as a tolerant party that believes in carrying out effective socialist policies through action in Parliament”. The Group set itself limited objectives, as Geoffrey Smith noted, when he described Solidarity “with backing from some of the reasonable left as well as from the right and centre” as being “well placed to isolate the Militant Tendency and other representatives of the hard left”. But its aims concerned only “the way in which Labour conducts its affairs, not [its] policies”¹⁶. This accurate portrayal belies that fact that, for Solidarity, there was no hope of changing policies until the composition of the NEC, and the pressures on MPs from hard-left activists, could be changed. In addition, the breadth of support of MPs meant that “Members of the Campaign have widely different positions on current political issues”¹⁷. Indeed, short of agreeing that Thatcher was ‘a bad thing’, the Steering Group might have been hard pressed to draft any policy the 102 MPs could endorse. But that was its strength. By abstaining from policy, Solidarity could attract MPs from a wide spectrum, making it easily the major grouping in a PLP of 251 members.

Only the names Hattersley, Woolmer and Mitchell were initially on the headed notepaper. However, at the first recorded meeting of the Steering Committee, Hattersley welcomed Shore’s attendance and invited him to become Joint Chairman. Howell had pressed on Hattersley the need for a second figurehead – and another “aspirant for leadership” of the party – so that the organisation did not look like an embryo ‘Hattersley for leader’ campaign¹⁸. Shore accepted, stressing that the “only people not organised in the Labour Party are the great majority”¹⁹. By this first meeting, the group had already raised £400 together with the promise of a £6,000 donation. They knew they must spend fast (initially on advertisements in *Tribune* and *Labour Weekly*) to build momentum. The veteran journalist John Bevan²⁰ agreed to edit a newsletter while an Organising Committee, chaired by Jack Brooks²¹, set about

¹⁵ See annex 6.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 27 March 1981.

¹⁷ John Grant, *The Post*, July 1981.

¹⁸ Roy Hattersley interview.

¹⁹ Steering Committee Minutes, 24 February 1981, DRH/1/2 (Roy Hattersley/ Labour Solidarity Archives, University of Hull). All Solidarity papers are from the Hull archives unless otherwise stated.

²⁰ Lord Ardwick (a former CDS member).

²¹ Lord Brooks of Tremorfa; Callaghan’s Agent, Chairman of Welsh Regional Council of the Labour Party and Leader of South Glamorgan County Council.

finding offices. At first, proceedings were a little informal, early minutes referring to “a lot of humming and Hahing” and “a vague Treasurer’s report which seemed to satisfy some people who were worried about finance”²² but gradually the more formal requirements of an organisation emerged, not least when Mary Goudie became the National Co-ordinator²³.

Within the PLP, Solidarity’s first aim was to stem the trickle of defectors²⁴. However, it had also to replace the former activists’ grouping, CLV, many of whom had joined the SDP, and assure the wider party that the mainstream were remaining in the party and fighting – this being the critical period between the Limehouse Declaration of 25 January and the SDP’s launch on 26 March. Its priority was therefore to establish a presence and to sign up supporters. Fringe meetings at all the regional conferences (between March and June) were quickly arranged whilst work began on the newsletter. John Grant, MP and former journalist, agreeing to write and to drum up advertising revenue from unions, to meet costs but also to emphasise that all the centre-right unions, and their leaders, were remaining in the Labour fold²⁵.

Solidarity set out its stall as being “broadly representative of the Party’s natural mainstream majority” which should now “vigorously assert itself and reverse the narrow and intolerant decision which unrepresentative minorities have” imposed upon us. Wembley, “the most recent self-inflicted wound .. must be overturned”. The founding statement flagged up the need for the NEC to “more adequately represent the wide variety of Party interests. .. We have no doubt that to leave the Party now is both defeatist and divisive .. our over-riding priority .. is to get the Party back on course. .. We pledge ourselves to fight enthusiastically and unswervingly to that end”²⁶. The Group had to react to fast-moving events, not least the resignation on 2 March of 12 MPs from the PLP (as a prelude to moving to the SDP). That day, Solidarity regretted “the divisive and defeatist decision of the small group of dissident MPs, who have mistakenly opted to defect .. and to abandon the real battle against both this appalling Tory government, and against the unrepresentative minority in our own ranks .. A major

²² Steering Committee minutes of 26 February 1981 (DRH/1/2).

²³ Though this formal title was not used until 1982; Steering Committee minutes, 24 November 1982 (DRH/1/2).

²⁴ Giles Radice interview.

²⁵ Woolmer recruited Grant to try and prevent him defecting – something that did happen, albeit not until November (Ken Woolmer interview; and JGP).

²⁶ Solidarity Archives, Hull.

fight back is now under way .. We urge real Labour supporters everywhere to pledge their immediate backing for the Labour Solidarity Campaign”²⁷. On 26 March, Solidarity described the SDP launch as a “declaration of war on Labour, led by those who owe both their reputations and their careers to the Labour Party .. It is now clear that the defections were plotted long before .. [the] Wembley .. decision on the leadership election – a decision which Labour Solidarity wants to see rectified”²⁸. The defectors had been fortunate that Wembley had voted for such an untenable formula, giving the SDP this, rather than the less popular Europe, on which to make their stance. Hence the importance of Solidarity emphasising that Wembley was not universally applauded within the party.

In February and March, the priority was to emphasise these views and make it clear that this Group was not defecting. CLV’s mailing list, held on the EETPU computer, was made available so that in February a circular could go from Mitchell inviting members to sign up to Solidarity. His letter claimed “There is no salvation”²⁹ outside the Labour Party. .. It is essential to fight back. Desertion reinforces weakness”. The CLV list, together with contacts from MPs and others, was used for the first edition of the newsletter which appeared in March, with its leader “The Road Back from Wembley”³⁰. In common with the composition of the Steering Committee, the contributors reflected the breadth of support, with Manifesto members (Radice and Hattersley) being joined by Tribunate Ashton (on “How to choose a delegate to conference”) and Field as well as the anti-Marketeer Shore. Shore criticised the NEC for encouraging some “whose faith in democratic and parliamentary socialism is virtually non-existent”, failing to safeguard the party’s constitution and tilting the balance of power away from elected representatives. He saw the party being “seriously threatened by both splitters and wreckers” whilst “the majority opinion .. is not being reflected in the present disputes”. Local government was represented by Jack Smart, Chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. The newsletter and other publicity quickly attracted supporters (including a young Tony Blair³¹); by September there was a mailing list of 5,000.

²⁷ Reprinted as “Their Mistaken Option”, *Labour Solidarity*, March 1981.

²⁸ Press release, JGP.

²⁹ Later versions amended this to “solution”.

³⁰ *Labour Solidarity*, March 1981.

³¹ Letter of 14 April 1981.

Meanwhile, the Organising Committee³² found premises at 62 Charles Lane, in London's St Johns Wood³³. The Campaign moved in at the beginning of June, hitherto the work having been done at the Commons or Goudie's home. Goudie was to be the lynchpin throughout Solidarity's life, taking no salary from the Group – and even her expenses not always reimbursed when the finances were stretched³⁴. In April, the Committee agreed to engage a paid administrator and Chris Inman was taken on for the remainder of the year, with Goudie using her extensive contacts, built up over years of party and Fabian activity, to recruit volunteers to assist³⁵.

Goudie's priority was to set up Fringe Meetings, most urgently at the party's regional conferences and at the Annual Conference in Brighton. Her address book of members around the country – and her persuasiveness – brought in volunteers to book rooms, print flyers and distribute leaflets. It was partly the success of these which gave Solidarity life, as party members could see the presence of the Group and hear Healey, Shore and Hattersley not only say 'we are staying' but also 'we are fighting our corner and we *will* take on the hard-left'. This was a message Moderate members had long sought but had found neither from the Manifesto Group (which had no constituency presence) nor from CLV which was too overtly pro-Europe and always had a hint of distance (justified when most of their leaders did defect). Solidarity filled a great need; its newsletter and fringe meetings were testimony to its seriousness. The *Telegraph* acknowledged "the group has made a considerable impact on the party by staging fringe meetings at regional conferences"³⁶. At the first of these, in Camden Town Hall during the London conference, Hattersley set out the task facing Solidarity: "a re-affirmation of faith in the Labour Party", victory at the election, and to oppose "with all the vigour at its disposal, the enemies of democratic socialism" – the Tories, the defectors and the "unrepresentative minorities within the Labour Party .. [who] pursue their own sectarian causes". He attacked the "bitter propaganda of the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, the devious manoeuvres of Militant, the divisive threats of litigation from the [CLPD] .. and all the "disruptives" .. authoritarian extremism" dressed up "in

³² See annex 6.

³³ Rented from Labour-affiliated Poale Zion.

³⁴ For example, in 1984 (DRH/1/24). In 1986 she even had to guarantee the organisation's overdraft (DRH/1/3).

³⁵ Including Jennifer Beever, Richard Tomlinson, Alison Butler and Evan Durbin's widow, Marjorie, with Kay Graves, Jo Wilkins, Sally Graveling and Betty Clarkson helping out – sometimes paid, sometimes for the cause.

³⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 1981.

acceptable socialist language”, and calling on “real Labour Party members to play an increasing part in the work of the movement”, including having a direct vote in the Electoral College. He turned on the Left’s “category of alleged crimes committed by the last Labour Government” (an attack on the un-named Benn)³⁷.

A notable Fringe Meeting took place in Ely, on a sunny Saturday lunchtime on 13 June. Shore was to speak but when Weetch checked the room, he found it was a long way from the Eastern Regional Conference. He asked Shore how he felt about outdoor meetings and, receiving an enthusiastic reply, set up a massively successful rally on the Green which (despite “heckling from the Trots”) gave real energy to the large, loyalist membership that existed in East Anglia³⁸.

Whilst practical and propaganda hands were turned to the mechanisms of setting up a new body and building its profile, Dewar, Field and Radice penned “a brief note on strategy”³⁹. This suggested that the Group’s objectives should be, *inter alia*, encouraging members not to leave the party, making the party more tolerant and more representative, and arguing the case for representative democracy. The three MPs raised questions for urgent decision, such as the preferred formula to replace Wembley’s and whether it would include OMOV in the CLPs; whether to have a slate for the NEC or to propose a change in its composition (such as adding PLP and local government sections), and whether to ask for an enquiry into Militant⁴⁰. They prioritised an office, newsletter, meetings’ programme and supporters’ list, all of which were quickly achieved. The following week – in a bid to involve unions – it was agreed to prepare a letter, from Healey and the Joint Chairmen, to general secretaries. Meanwhile, the officers found the party unwelcoming, with the General Secretary (Hayward, whose sympathies lay with the Left) objecting at the Shadow Cabinet to the advertisement placed in the party’s *Labour Weekly*. *Labour Weekly* then refused to take letters or advertisements from Solidarity⁴¹. This would not be the only tussle with headquarters, which repeatedly omitted Solidarity from the list of friendly organisations

³⁷ Roy Hattersley Speech, Solidarity Meeting, 7 March 1981. Other speakers were Roy Shaw, Leader of Camden Council, and John Grant who appealed for funds for a “sustained campaign, a long hard struggle” against “the resources of Militant and the [SDP] .. There’s a price to pay for the kind of Labour Party we want to see. It’s a hard slog and cash will help” (speaking notes, JGP).

³⁸ Ken Weetch, interview, 3 April 2003.

³⁹ Steering Group minutes, 3 and 4 March 1981.

⁴⁰ All of these would be achieved eventually.

⁴¹ Steering Committee minutes, 25 March 1981.

in the pocket-diary⁴². In 1984, the party's European Campaign Pack's list of contacts included the LCC but not Solidarity⁴³; on more than one occasion the Group's Fringe meeting was omitted from the Conference Diary of Events⁴⁴.

Meanwhile, the officers continued their work amongst MPs. A Recall Meeting (of the initial 102) was held at the end of March, when over 40 MPs signed in⁴⁵. More MPs were added to the Steering Committee and it was agreed to set £10 a month as the subscription⁴⁶. In fact, the letter to MPs asked for £5 a month and soon there were 44 in operation, bringing in £259 a month. Regional representatives were nominated to help with fringe meetings, provide names for the database, and involve local members⁴⁷. A second Recall Meeting, with Shore and Hattersley speaking, was held in July, when the 35 signatories included Boothroyd and John Smith⁴⁸.

It was not just in parliament that Solidarity was organising. In Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Stevenage, Ealing and Teeside, and in Scotland, local groups were rapidly established, with MPs doing sterling service in speaking at these and the various fringe meetings. Hattersley took on much of this work: "He was a great traveller – the Marco Polo of Solidarity"⁴⁹.

Whilst the Wembley formula and the SDP split were the catalysts for the creation of Solidarity, the aim of changing the former quickly slipped away. The Steering Committee did fix on an alternative of 50:25:25 (in preference to 30:30:40), and with OMOV postal ballots for CLPs⁵⁰, but there was little energy behind this, not least because of the lack of support within the movement. Woolmer circulated a draft rule change in June⁵¹ but by August, according to *The Times*' political editor, Julian Haviland, Solidarity had "tacitly agreed that this objective .. is out of reach"⁵². Solidarity failed to get its model motion on the conference preliminary agenda, although

⁴² Goudie's 7 October 1982 letter to the Director of Communication was "lost" in headquarters resulting in this omission for which an apology was received on 25 April 1983 (DRH/1/26). The error was repeated in 1984 (DRH/1/27).

⁴³ *Forward Labour*, April 1984.

⁴⁴ Organising Committee minutes, 14 July 1981 (DRH/1/1). In 1986, the party omitted Solidarity's meetings from the Fringe Guide and *Labour Weekly* listings (DRH/1/3).

⁴⁵ Including McNally, who would defect in October.

⁴⁶ Notes of 30 March 1981 meeting (DRH/1/2).

⁴⁷ Notes of 24 March 1981 meeting, JGP.

⁴⁸ 15 July 1981 (DRH/1/55).

⁴⁹ Ken Weetch interview.

⁵⁰ Minutes of 25 March 1981 (DRH/1/2).

⁵¹ Letter of 4 June 1981.

the UCW tabled an amendment giving the largest say in the Electoral College to MPs. However, there was no support for this. For Haviland, Solidarity had failed “both to organize and to persuade”⁵³. Despite this, he was generous in his praise of Solidarity’s core of 60 MPs who “possess a quality which is becoming steadily less common: they have little fear of Mr Benn’s supporters”. Furthermore, with some 4,500-5,000 supporters, as well as local groups, he acknowledged that “the fight goes on”.

Whilst Wembley had to be put to one side, the issue of infiltration – Militant – moved centre stage. Alone in the party, it was Solidarity which openly called for action on the Tendency. Their union friends wanted this, Chapple informing Woolmer that the EETPU had “overwhelmingly” passed a resolution that: “This Conference is alarmed at the degree of infiltration of the Labour Party at all levels, and at the unwillingness of the [NEC] to take any action”⁵⁴. The Steering Committee had already asked Woolmer and Field for a paper on Militant⁵⁵ and later the Group produced a leaflet on Militant, written by Joe Haines⁵⁶, which was widely distributed.

“Solidarity also enlisted the help of Lord Underhill and the evidence of several defectors to compile a seventeen-page report detailing Militant’s history, organization and finances; Roy Hattersley subedited it, added a few literary touches”⁵⁷. Militant remained a constant theme in the Group’s work (it was disgust at the Tendency, and at the NEC’s failure to act, which attracted many to Solidarity). QC John Smith (and through him Derry Irvine, assisted by the young Blair) were to provide legal advice during the process of expelling Militant⁵⁸.

Before Solidarity could set about their objectives (on Militant, Wembley or the NEC), they were hit within weeks by the 2 April announcement of Benn’s challenge for the Deputy Leadership – and the first use of the Electoral College. It could not have come at a worse time: the office was not yet open, mailing lists were incomplete and the SDP was drawing electoral and membership support. Furthermore, it exposed divisions

⁵² *The Times*, 1 August 1981.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Letter from Chapple to Woolmer, 18 August 1981 (DRH/1/32).

⁵⁵ Minutes of 25 March 1981 (DRH/1/2).

⁵⁶ Harold Wilson’s former press officer, whom Kaufman had involved; Jack Cunningham, interview, 5 February 2002.

⁵⁷ Michael Crick, *op cit*, p.195.

⁵⁸ Michael Crick, *op cit*, p.208; Dominic Egan, *Irvine: Politically Incorrect?*, Mainstream Publishing, 1999, p.101.

within Solidarity as not all had yet made the break with Benn. Solidarity's priority had been "to strengthen its support on the left"⁵⁹, not to invite its members to walk one side or other of the dividing line. The Steering Committee viewed its major task as Healey's re-election (no mean feat) whilst also holding the Solidarity coalition together. On the 15 April they agreed the careful line "That Solidarity would support the collective leadership"⁶⁰. This drew Foot into their strategy and enabled them to be seen as loyal to the left-wing Leader (for whom few had voted in October 1980). Healey's support for Solidarity had been given "with Michael Foot's encouragement"⁶¹ and helped bring the organisation close to the Leader in a way that had never been possible with the Manifesto Group. Solidarity "deeply regret[ed] Tony Benn's announcement .. [which] can only produce a public conflict in the party .. To insinuate that the present leadership cannot be trusted to keep faith with the party's wishes is an attack on Michael Foot no less than on Denis Healey .. Labour Solidarity Campaign believes the team of Michael Foot, and Denis Healey as his Deputy, provides the best combination for election victory"⁶². Even this careful enjoining of Foot's name was not enough to hold the fragile coalition together. The effective support for Healey caused problems and in June "the Committee supported the collective leadership but also [recognised it] must take into view the cross section of our membership"⁶³.

Shore was outspoken. "In an onslaught on virtually everything Mr Wedgwood Benn stands for .. [he said] that the Labour Party might never recover if the far left's campaign for 'the supremacy of party democracy over that of parliamentary democracy' succeeded"⁶⁴. He attacked Alan Fisher (General Secretary of NUPE) for promising his union's support to Benn (little knowing that NUPE members would opt for Healey). However, it was not simply the person that Shore feared, but a Deputy Leader being imposed on the PLP contrary to its own preference.

Solidarity struggled to hold its disparate membership together. One draft release, calling on the movement to keep "the present balanced leadership team" reminded colleagues that many who had not voted for Foot now loyally defended him and considered "that Denis Healey is entitled to similar consideration". But the battle in the

⁵⁹ Julian Haviland, *The Times*, 1 August 1981.

⁶⁰ Steering Group minutes, 15 April 1981 (DRH/1/2).

⁶¹ Julian Haviland, *op cit*.

⁶² *Labour Solidarity*, May 1981.

⁶³ Steering Committee minutes, 3 June 1981 (DRH/1/2).

constituencies and in the unions was hotting up, and a later draft reads “The Labour Solidarity Campaign unequivocally advises its supporters to vote to retain Denis Healey as the Party’s Deputy Leader”. Though drafted on 3 June, it was immediately overtaken by events when Foot threw down his challenge to Benn to run as Leader, rather than as Deputy⁶⁵. The Group then used Foot’s own attack on Benn to call on the party “to keep the present balanced leadership team”⁶⁶. This was still too much for some and O’Neill resigned⁶⁷. He saw Solidarity becoming the Healey campaign rather than the broader based group he had wanted (and into which he had even tried to draw Kinnock). He believed that, in being so committed to Healey, it would fail to attract a middle group⁶⁸. In September, he was to vote for Silkin in the first ballot, and then abstain⁶⁹. (He was not alone amongst Solidarity members. Ashton and Davidson followed suit, whilst Field voted Silkin then Healey⁷⁰.)

However, Foot’s tacit support for his Deputy (though he would abstain in September) allowed Solidarity to organise the Deputy’s campaign, which Healey undertook with gusto. Whilst the May issue of *Solidarity* only argued “Why Benn is Wrong to Stand”⁷¹, in June it told readers to keep the Foot and Healey team⁷². The race intensified; in July the Steering Group agreed: “The Joint Chairmen to write the front page article including supporting Denis Healey, and the Editorial would also come up in support of Denis”⁷³. Whilst the choice of speakers for the conference Fringe (Healey, Shore and Hattersley) clearly indicated Solidarity’s thinking⁷⁴, the Group’s decision to come out for Healey never happened. As requested, Grant:

“penned a forthright pro-Healey leading article [but] our arrangement was that I needed the approval of the co-chairmen for contentious pieces which committed Solidarity .. Hattersley agreed with the pro-Healey article. Shore .. was away and returned just in time to use his veto, much to my disgust. I had a heated argument with him. In deadlock, we recalled the committee to

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 27 April 1981.

⁶⁵ *Labour Solidarity*, June 1981.

⁶⁶ Documents of 3 and 4 June 1981, JGP.

⁶⁷ Steering Committee minutes, 17 June 1981 (DRH/1/2).

⁶⁸ Martin O’Neill, interview, 17 September 2003.

⁶⁹ *Report of the 1981 Labour Party Conference*, p.343.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *Labour Solidarity*, May 1981.

⁷² *Labour Solidarity*, June 1981.

⁷³ Steering Committee minutes, 22 July 1981, DRH/1/2.

⁷⁴ *Labour Solidarity*, August 1981.

decide. .. We had a wrangle .. but the majority favoured a toned-down version”⁷⁵.

Nevertheless, the September issue makes fascinating reading. The Chairmen’s front page praises the “Foot-Healey” team three times but fails to name Healey (the only one up for election) alone. Shore wrote merely that it would “weaken the Parliamentary Party if someone is imposed upon it who does not carry the confidence of the majority”. According to some of the Shadow Cabinet researchers, Shore “never endorsed Denis Healey”⁷⁶. One page of the newsletter gave “Three Good Reasons for Saying No to Benn” and another, on Healey, is headed “The Man Best Fitted to work with Michael Foot”⁷⁷. This reticence stemmed not just from qualms within the committee but from the recognition that Healey’s unpopularity with party members⁷⁸ could best be overcome with the link to Foot. It is indicative of the difficulty of being a Healey supporter that his campaign badges contained both names “Foot. Healey” to protect their wearers. Healey’s unpopularity stemmed largely from his role in the 1976 IMF cuts; he also carried activists’ resentments for all the shortcomings of the 1974-79 governments.

Whilst many MPs equivocated about supporting Healey (the only one who could stop Benn), Roy Jenkins ran Labour a very close finish in the Warrington by-election on 16 July 1981, providing stark evidence of the inroads the SDP was making into Labour’s heartlands⁷⁹. Yet little time could be spent campaigning against the SDP (or the Tories) as the summer of 1981 was used amassing votes for Healey. The “Sherpas” – advisors to the Shadow Cabinet – doubted that the politicians did as much as the staff or unions. One Steering Group member did “fuck all” and another of the supposed team “was in the US all summer – so didn’t do anything”⁸⁰. Healey himself campaigned hard and admitted “I learnt more about the inner workings of the trade union movement in those six months than in my previous thirty-seven years of Party work”⁸¹. Other Solidarity members were similarly busy, with Goudie and Inman organising innumerable

⁷⁵ John Grant, *op cit*, p.107.

⁷⁶ Sherpas, interview, 21 March 2002. Though Shore did vote for Healey.

⁷⁷ *Labour Solidarity*, September 1981.

⁷⁸ Even a moderate party (Braintree) voted for Benn. “People who voted Benn here were the ‘Starry Eye’d’ not the sinister. They really did see Benn as he would like to see himself – as the repository of some native, indigenous, radical, tradition: ‘Foot Writ Young’” (John Gyford interview).

⁷⁹ Labour’s Doug Hoyle just held the seat with 14,280 votes to Jenkins’ 12,521.

⁸⁰ Sherpas interview: Political Advisors to the Shadow Cabinet, 1979-83 (Tony Page [Varley], David Cowling [Shore], Richard Heller [Healey], Patrick Cheney [Howell]).

⁸¹ Denis Healey, *op cit*, p. 482.

meetings, mailings and leaflets. They were looking for votes for Healey and for the NEC. Whilst the unions were successful in this, Solidarity failed to swing constituency votes for any of their candidates (Ashley, Hattersley, Radice and Shore). It was a reminder of the distance Solidarity had to travel that the top-placed (Ashley) got only 219,000 votes to the lowest elected's 259,000. Solidarity's Chairmen attracted just 176,000 and 183,000 – reflecting the Left's pre-eminence on GCs where votes were decided.

The Eightieth Conference of the Labour Party opened in Brighton at 5.30pm on Sunday 27 September 1981, chaired by Alex Kitson of the TGWU. The outcome of the Deputy Leadership ballot was still unknown but the result, 3 hours later, was to mark a turning point for the party. Before the conference, Grant predicted that if Benn won, “some people who have been supporting us will just pack up and go. I am not sure they will join the SDP .. it is more likely they will just walk off the pier”⁸². Elsewhere, there was talk of a “UDI” within the PLP, with MPs electing their own Deputy Leader⁸³. It remains the view of many that a different result “would have made the divisions in the party even more bitter. There would have been more defections”⁸⁴; “Terminal disaster”⁸⁵; Healey considered that if Benn “had become Deputy Leader there would have been a haemorrhage of Labour defections to the SDP .. I do not believe the Labour Party could have recovered”⁸⁶. Electorally, “The Conservatives, the Liberals and the SDP [had] been denied their most wanted prize”⁸⁷.

The overwhelming response at 8.31 pm was relief, despite the narrowness of the margin (as Radice said: One is enough in politics⁸⁸). The Healey camp installed themselves in the Old Ship Hotel to savour a rare victory. The abstaining MPs (who had denied Benn victory) had a harder time, Kinnock being attacked as “Judas” and Lestor being on the receiving end of Beckett's sharp tongue⁸⁹. For Solidarity, however, the result marked just the beginning of its work. Conference was noted for the 5 seats won on the NEC (though credit belongs to the unions) plus highly successful fringe meetings (with 800 at

⁸² *The Times*, 24 September 1981.

⁸³ *Guardian*, 28 August 1981; *Sunday Times*, 30 August 1981.

⁸⁴ Ken Woolmer interview.

⁸⁵ John Gyford interview.

⁸⁶ Denis Healey, *op cit*, p.482.

⁸⁷ Peter Shore, *The Times*, 1 October 1981.

⁸⁸ Giles Radice interview.

⁸⁹ Robert Harris, *op cit*, p.165.

one) which offered mutual support and encouragement to delegates who were isolated within their own constituencies. Solidarity was in the vanguard of preserving the Shadow Cabinet's role in the manifesto, a major defeat for the Left.

Despite the newness of the organisation, helped by the unions, Goudie established an office in the Old Ship Hotel from which daily briefings were distributed to delegates by teams of volunteers. The mastheads on these read: Monday :“A Vital Victory”; Tuesday “The Tide has turned”; Wednesday: “Clause V: The Case for Partnership”; and Thursday “Drive to Victory”. The following day, Hattersley used a speech to Lambeth Solidarity to invite defectors to return, as the conference victories had shown there was “not even a plausible excuse for desertion .. Now that the Labour Party can be seen as a broad based party once again, I hope that they will come back home and work with us”⁹⁰ – an unrequited hope.

Conference over, MPs returned to the harsh realities of Westminster. The immediate task was the Shadow Cabinet election, the first since the SDP defections had removed a chunk of Manifesto votes, so the Tribune slate might well benefit. The 1980/81 Parliamentary Committee (to give it the correct title) had seen 4 elected outwith the Manifesto slate, with a fifth (Benn) joining when Rodgers defected. The 1981/82 balloting began with the Chief Whip, when Cocks comfortably beat the Left's Martin Flannery by 156:51. Mikardo (whose 1974 election had led to the formation of the Manifesto Group) ran for the Chairmanship but was easily defeated by Jack Dormand⁹¹. There had been controversy about Benn's candidature for the Shadow Cabinet, with Foot warning him that, if elected, he would have to accept collective responsibility⁹². Despite this, the “Left within the Left” – led by Benn – signed an “oath of loyalty” expressing “a commitment to the constitutional changes and central policies agreed at Labour conferences” and claiming their right “to advocate the whole range of such policies” including unilateralism and withdrawal from the EEC⁹³. This indicated that, even in the Shadow Cabinet, Benn would assert his right to support policies contrary to the agreed line. Solidarity worked hard to maximise support for its candidates. Whilst five MPs from outside its original “List of 150” were elected, the three top positions

⁹⁰ *Financial Times*, 3 October 1981.

⁹¹ PLP papers, November 1981.

⁹² *Financial Times*, 3 October 1981.

⁹³ *Guardian*, 31 October 1981.

were held by Solidarity's Shore, Kaufman and Hattersley; Benn was joint 20th, well below the elected fifteen⁹⁴.

Solidarity began discussing: Where Now? Spellar wanted to widen the group beyond parliament, and proposed a "National Solidarity Organising Committee" comprising two MPs, two general secretaries, one person from the NEC and one from the co-operative movement⁹⁵. Field also drew up some "First Ideas for the Campaign" which recommended focusing on "a blocking mechanism for the PLP in the choice of leader or deputy leader", OMOV in each part of the Electoral College and a concerted effort to get Solidarity supporters onto the NEC⁹⁶. Shore summoned the troops immediately after Brighton, writing: "There is no possible alternative for those who oppose Bennism to fight back. This fight must be stronger, more formidable and better thought out and organized than anything attempted so far"⁹⁷. Others believed that the structure of the Campaign had to change. The Lambeth Group stressed "If Solidarity is going to have any effect at all in the country then it must stop being run by the PLP. Senior trade unionists must be brought on to the Committee and space made available for constituency and area groups of Solidarity. .. It is vital that the Solidarity Campaign takes itself out of Parliament within days rather than weeks". Lambeth members were critical of the newsletter which, whilst they understood its *per force* pro-Healey stance, regretted its "strident manner" which appeared close to "reds under the beds. There is far, far, too much at stake in terms of the future of the Party to allow anyone to be alienated from Solidarity – whether Left or Right – who supports a democratic socialist position"⁹⁸.

Another submission⁹⁹ wanted Solidarity to campaign for OMOV and the creation of "a new political image which is identified with the democratic spectrum of Left and Right, with additional [Members] .. from the Tribune Group" and a national committee to include representatives from CLPs and unions, plus activities for supporters and some full-time staff. This note identified Solidarity's right-wing image as an obstacle and called for a new statement of aims which stressed "the desire to .. work with the democratic leftwing" and the recruitment of left-wingers to positions in the

⁹⁴ PLP papers. Healey was on as Deputy Leader.

⁹⁵ Undated discussion paper, JSA.

⁹⁶ 23 September 1981, JGP.

⁹⁷ Peter Shore, *The Times*, 1 October 1981.

⁹⁸ Letter from Cllr Nick Grant, Chairman, Lambeth Solidarity, to Woolmer, 9 October 1981 (NBP).

organisation. The author asked for a week-end meeting of contacts from around the country "within the next month".

There was much soul-searching amongst the committee. Hattersley tabled a paper on whether Solidarity should adopt policies so as to give the Group a positive purpose¹⁰⁰. He ruled out anything on unilateralism or Europe (as that would "destroy Solidarity both in the House .. and, perhaps more important, in the country"). Instead he proposed opposition to illegal or extra-parliamentary action combined with advocacy of "genuine democracy" within the party, which he defined as (a) OMOV in CLPs and consultation in the unions for Electoral College votes; (b) CLP choice as to whether to go for full reselection; (c) PLP and local government seats on the NEC and a change in the women's seats; and (d) "the exclusion of .. [people] who are members of organisations which are inimical to the Party's aims". Clinton-Davies questioned the value of "a witch-hunt .. [re Militant] because some of the soft-left groups would probably not continue to give us their support". Keeping the more left-wing MPs on board was a priority for those who saw Solidarity's right-wing image as its biggest handicap. However, if it could not agree on the EEC, unilateralism or Militant, it left the Group with little but OMOV in common. Nevertheless, some did want a position taken on policies although Hattersley reiterated that this would force some members out.

Above all, the electoral impact of the party's polling position was jeopardising their own livelihoods. The Liberal and SDP successes in London's Croydon North West and St Pancras North¹⁰¹ made unhappy reading. At a Solidarity meeting in Rotherham, Shore warned that "our party faces its gravest crisis since the 1930s. .. the SDP alliance with the Liberals faces us with a challenge that is now truly formidable". He criticised Foot for keeping Benn as chairman of the NEC Home Policy Committee¹⁰² and said the party "had inflicted hideous wounds on itself". He was determined to take on the far-Left, declaring "No longer can we allow organized infiltration and organized conspiracy"¹⁰³.

⁹⁹ Possibly by Peter Archer, 20 October 1981.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of 28 October 1981 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁰¹ On 22 and 29 October respectively. The SDP also won local government by-elections.

¹⁰² With the new 5 right-wingers on the NEC, this could have been changed with the votes of Foot and his allies. It upset Shore that his old friends was failing to address the issue he took so seriously, the onward march of Bennism.

¹⁰³ *The Times*, 31 October 1981.

Continuing bad news¹⁰⁴ led Woolmer to warn that “outside the PLP the situation is very serious – we don’t have several years to play with”. Dewar reported that within the PLP “we have lost ground last week or two. A lot of people depressed or gone to ground. .. Going to see more defections”. Radice concurred: “Morale is very low. Losing members of the party. It is not right wing to object to Militant”. Robertson concluded “it is slipping away”. While the MPs despaired, Godsiff chided them that the unions “want to see your leading lights reassert yourself – time is not on our side”¹⁰⁵.

Following the discussion, Godsiff drafted a paper on the “Future of Labour Solidarity Campaign” which recalled that Solidarity was set up to “counterbalance the unrelenting activities of the ‘hard left’ within the Party” and, given the “limited” objectives the Group set, assessed that it had achieved “a reasonable success” although this had been “based on reacting to issues .. precipitated by the hard left .. therefore the Solidarity response has been perceived as negative .. The need now is for the Campaign to rethink its role and to take a more positive approach .. while acting as an umbrella organisation” for the Manifesto, Labour First and other groups, which could pursue their own viewpoints on policy. He wanted the organisation strengthened so it could influence individual CLPs¹⁰⁶.

The paper was debated by the committee, which confirmed that Solidarity would continue in existence, but better organised and with a drive to build contacts in CLPs and unions, more fringe meetings, a reinvigorated newsletter and model resolutions. In the discussion (which started with news of Grant’s resignation from the newsletter and the party), Shore described how “things are getting worse” and stressed the need to “broaden their appeal and muster democratic socialists against the authoritarians. There are people seeking to make us into a vanguard party. They are much more of a danger because there are many more of them than the Trots. Our immediate objective ought to be to put the NEC under pressure”. Golding reminded them that “Solidarity existed to stop the drift and to keep people in the party. Winning seats on the NEC. .. But it was Foot who holds the balance”¹⁰⁷. The amended paper replaced phrases such as “hard left” with “undemocratic left” and firmed up the proposals. Whilst recognising that the

¹⁰⁴ In addition to the by-elections, the NEC endorsed a 12-month timetable for withdrawal from the EEC, and the TUC General Council supported withdrawal without a referendum; Williams was fighting Crosby and the Left was mounting a pro- Tatchell campaign.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of 28 October 1981 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁰⁶ Roger Godsiff, “Future of Labour Solidarity Campaign”, 4 November 1981.

organisation had seen a more representative NEC, the retention of Clause V and the maintenance of “the balanced leadership of Foot and Healey”, nevertheless “The crisis facing the Party is clearly deepening .. substantial numbers of voters are now deserting [Labour] .. the changes on the NEC have not resulted in a clear or decisive majority for common sense”; the nature of the party had not been clarified and the Electoral College remained unchanged. Furthermore, the internal struggles meant that policy was not being addressed. The paper concluded that the Group had “to counter attack and expose the whole political philosophy that lies behind the attempts to distort and undermine the traditions of democratic socialism .. We have to expose and overcome Trotskyism in all its many forms and disguises within the Party”. Its priority was the defence of democratic socialism, the parliamentary process and the role of elected representatives. The Group’s objectives were: (1) further gains on the NEC; (2) tackling infiltration, starting with an NEC-instigated inquiry; (3) exposure of party policy-making weaknesses; (4) increased CLP and union activity; (5) OMOV; (6) modernise the NEC and conference and reconsider mandatory reselection and the electoral college procedures; and (7) attack the government and win the election.

A week later (by which time Peter Tatchell had been selected for Bermondsey, Spellar having been kept off the short-list), it was agreed to hold a Recall Meeting of MPs, tabling the new paper, to raise morale within the PLP (though Warburton warned that “the Newsletter makes Solidarity look like ‘a self-protection society for MPs’ and they should .. get other names on it”)¹⁰⁸. However, before any Recall Meeting could be arranged, Field resigned and the Group reconsidered whether press coverage of their document was advisable on the eve of the Crosby by-election¹⁰⁹. Field’s resignation followed his plea that Solidarity should be wound up because “its great weakness is that it hasn’t managed to build an effective bridge with the democratic left”. However, his reason for going was that the key issue, “of fundamental importance to the Labour Party’s future”, OMOV, was “the only constitutional change which can now prevent the Party being turned into a vanguard party”. Since its achievement depended on getting support “from all sections of the Party” and not “allied exclusively to any particular

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of Steering and Organising Committees meeting, 4 November 1981 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of 11 November 1981 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of 18 November 1981.

group”, he intended to devote his efforts to campaigning for OMOV¹¹⁰. His resignation did not prevent him collaborating with the Group and he pursued his OMOV campaign in the newsletter¹¹¹.

Swirling around the depleted Group was more bad news. McNally had left the party in October, Grant in November, with George Cunningham and Douglas-Mann to follow before the end of the year. While the Right slipped away, left-wingers were selected for safe seats, while existing MPs faced difficult reselection battles. Clinton-Davies, for example, scraped home in Hackney Central by a narrow margin¹¹², Hamilton faced a second ordeal in Fife Central when he tied with challenger Henry McLeish, and Ilkeston’s Ray Fletcher was de-selected¹¹³. Even the Chief Whip was not safe: Cocks faced a vociferous challenge in Bristol. Meanwhile AUEW General Secretary John Boyd protested to Foot over the exclusion of moderate candidates from shortlists¹¹⁴. All of this fuelled the MPs’ desire to see CLPs allowed to choose whether to go through a full reselection. However, the 1981 conference having failed to halt mandatory reselection, the Group fell back on offering “shoulders” for those in trouble. “Life was a misery. People can’t imagine now the malevolence, and often violence, that went on against people. When one went to your monthly constituency meeting – your stomach was churning. A perpetual sense of stress. Deep anxieties. It was a time when – unless you were a fighter – the easiest thing was to back-off”. The friendly shoulder helped and “Quite a few stayed in the party because of Solidarity. It gave them a home and a sense of belonging. There was a fight. Vast majority of people faced by a crisis are frightened”¹¹⁵. Even John Silkin – no friend of the grouping – recognised the role it played: Solidarity “gave many MPs an opportunity to affirm their support for Labour governments .. it gave some MPs a feeling that .. they were not completely alone as with heavy hearts they headed towards their constituencies and confrontation with their detractors”¹¹⁶. Reselection and activist hostility towards politicians were taking a heavy toll.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Field to Woolmer, 10 November 1981. Field had already written on the importance of OMOV (*Labour Solidarity*, October 1981).

¹¹¹ *Labour Solidarity*, November 1982.

¹¹² *Sunday Times*, 15 November 1981.

¹¹³ *Labour Weekly*, 11 December 1981.

¹¹⁴ *Guardian*, 21 December 1981.

¹¹⁵ Ken Woolmer interview.

¹¹⁶ John Silkin, *op cit*, p.38.

Meanwhile, in Bermondsey, Tatchell had been selected to replace Bob Mellish, supported by many of the younger members though not – despite Foot’s allegations – Militant. He seemed to London activists more radical and energetic than the old guard¹¹⁷, but to the PLP Tatchell was a reminder that the party was changing and they were losing out. On 3 December, Foot (unwisely) told the House of Commons that Tatchell was “not endorsed” and would not be, starting a struggle with the local party he was to lose and creating more damaging attacks in the press¹¹⁸. Foot was pushed into this partly to stop MPs defecting. He failed in this and in stopping Tatchell.

Whatever doubts Solidarity had about re-fuelling internal debates, they felt that a fight-back was the only option. After the SDP’s success in Crosby they decided to press ahead with the new document, as “a concerted and nationwide counter attack against the undemocratic left as part of a determined drive to save the party”¹¹⁹. This was not their only statement. Grant had ghosted the lead article in the post-conference edition of *Solidarity*¹²⁰ as well as one under his own by-line on the outcome of the conference. The former vowed “We shall stiffen our Campaign”. In claiming Brighton as “a watershed for the Labour movement”, it nevertheless warned “we cannot afford to be complacent”. Radice added: “Now is the time to win the hearts and minds of the activists” whilst Warburton reviewed the NEC elections, the newsletter coining the term “a solidarity of trade union leaders” to describe Boyd, Duffy, Grantham, Jackson and Sirs who joined John Smith on the Solidarity platform at Brighton¹²¹.

However, a wider audience was needed for Solidarity’s message. They therefore arranged a centre spread in the *Mirror*, authored by Callaghan, on “Here’s How we can Save Labour”¹²². Repaying the loyalty his Deputy had given him¹²³, Callaghan had remained loyal to Foot as Leader but now wrote that “The Crisis in the Labour party is caused by small, single-minded (and narrow minded) groups. Until they are defeated there will be no peace or unity within the party and its standing with the voters will continue to decline”. He welcomed the NEC decision not to endorse Tatchell (little knowing he would soon re-emerge as the official candidate) and the moves to establish

¹¹⁷ Matt Tee interview.

¹¹⁸ Peter Tatchell, *op cit*.

¹¹⁹ *Times*, 19 November 1981.

¹²⁰ Draft article, JGP.

¹²¹ *Labour Solidarity*, October 1981.

¹²² *Daily Mirror*, 10 December 1981.

¹²³ Especially during the IMF crisis, and the Winter of Discontent (Roy Hattersley interview).

an inquiry into Militant. He outlined what had to be done: expel Militant, disaffiliate the YS, improve the system of electing the leadership, adopt a new process for reselection and have a meeting between the NEC and the Shadow Cabinet “to re-establish confidence in each other and to place on record that each has its own responsibilities and that neither is subordinate to the other”. Such a meeting would take place in January 1982, leading to “the Peace of Bishops Stortford” which promised an end to constitutional changes.

1981 ended with mixed news. The NEC voted not to endorse Tatchell, and to set up an inquiry into Militant. But Douglas-Mann defected and the unhappiness within the PLP was palpable. Solidarity had ensured – albeit by a whisker – Healey’s re-election and seen 5 places change on the NEC (though, lacking Foot’s support, without the hoped-for changes in sub-committee chairmanships). Benn had failed to be re-elected to the Shadow Cabinet. The outside world was stormy. Williams had returned to the Commons from Crosby whilst Jenkins – flushed with his Warrington performance – was encircling other seats. The SDP were winning local by-elections, and holding continuous a lead in the opinion polls. A final Recall Meeting of MPs before Christmas gave unanimous backing to the statement of objectives and endorsed Shore’s resolution that Solidarity “believes that actions to re-affirm and reinforce the truly democratic and parliamentary traditions of the Labour Party must be fully and unequivocally supported, and calls on all members of the Party to unite behind the Leadership of Michael Foot and Denis Healey .. to defeat the Tories and return a Labour Government”¹²⁴. Not every intervention was in harmony. Campbell-Savours thought their attacks “have been too hard and that some of our comrades are having to look over their shoulders .. The main thing of the future must be the danger of Militant”. Underhill believed “It’s in the CLPs that we must make ground and must direct the work of Solidarity” and Weetch warned “If we do not get this Party into some sort of order shortly more decent people will be leaving the Party and some of us will not be here any longer”. An interesting exchange followed non-Solidarity member Stan Newens urging Solidarity “to disband because we are making matters worse and that it would be our fault if we lose the .. Election” and pledging “he would always be a Marxist”. From the chair, Shore responded: “We respect you .. for coming to this meeting and saying what you have to say to us, but it is

¹²⁴ Minutes of Recall Meeting, 16 December 1981 (DRH/1/2).

those who are Marxist/Leninists who we have to worry about”¹²⁵. This encapsulated the challenge that Solidarity faced – the desire of many Labour voters and members to expel Militant but a denial on the soft-left that it posed any threat.

By early 1982, Solidarity’s place in the struggle was assured; its newsletter, advertising meetings in North Wales, Cheshire, London, South Wales, Lambeth and Teesside, foretold a year of activity¹²⁶. Its front-page leader, “An Unpleasant Necessity”, signalled determination, calling for support for Foot in his conflict over the Tatchell candidature. Inside, it renewed calls for OMOV in the Electoral College. CLPD, London Labour Briefing and the IMG (whose efforts led to the deselection of councillors, divisions and defections) were lambasted. “The Solidarity Campaign exists to destroy the SDP, defeat the Tories and help Labour back to power” it proclaimed – which needed compromises, although not at the expense of leaving Militant untouched.

In January, straight after the Bishops Stortford conclave (with the Shadow Cabinet, unions and NEC brokering a peace accord), Foot spelt out “My kind of Socialism” in two long *Observer* articles¹²⁷, taking on Benn’s arguments and giving comfort to Solidarity. He staunchly defended past Labour Cabinets (in which he and Benn had served) against Benn’s charge of betrayal, and reasserted the role of parliament in achieving democratic socialism. Meanwhile, Hattersley was calling for Militant to be thrown out of the party¹²⁸. The following week the Solidarity-supporting Leeds SE MP, Stan Cohen, was replaced by the (then) left-winger, Derek Fatchett – the sixth such deselection¹²⁹.

Solidarity sent out model resolutions, together with invitations to “Key Workers” to a Forum at the end of February in Swinton House. The Committee wanted to focus on priorities for the party in the light of Bishops Stortford¹³⁰, preparing for an election, and priorities for Solidarity. Particular questions were whether to run a slate for the NEC, the newsletter, and plans for a wider national meeting of supporters. Shore opened this first meeting of 50 Solidarity activists – including a dozen MPs – recalling the

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Labour Solidarity*, January 1982.

¹²⁷ 10 and 17 January 1982 (and reprinted for wider distribution).

¹²⁸ *Observer*, 14 February 1982.

¹²⁹ *Guardian*, 22 February 1982.

¹³⁰ Whilst deciding to continue to push for OMOV, the committee agreed to “try not to be seen to be the first to break the Bishops Stortford agreement”, Steering Committee minutes, 20 January 1982 (DRH/1/2).

“appalling” Wembley and other conferences¹³¹. He saw Bishops Stortford as “at best a truce .. [as] the lion won’t lie down with the lamb”. As for the NEC, speaking just days after it accepted Tatchell’s candidature, he despaired. It was “Shocking that NEC should have agreed to endorse Militant candidates. Should have postponed it pending inquiry. .. First aim is to make further gains on NEC. NEC has the power”. His co-Chairman agreed that “Gains on NEC are .. absolute necessity: but the whole campaign will take years. We have to win arguments and not just rely on organisation. We have to win over to us the idealists and sentimentalists who hope the trouble will go away”. There was little disagreement amongst the dozen others who spoke, with warnings that it was the working-class who were leaving the party whilst middle-class membership was holding up. Good councillors were being lost, Liverpool council was a disaster. Contributors recommended activity in constituencies, the garnering of evidence for the Militant inquiry and more effort to increase union delegations to GCs. Goudie’s report from the Forum identified 16 points including the need for firm, positive leadership; a move away from a Westminster-based organisation; liaison with CLPs and unions; agreement for a slate; higher public profile; and to “encourage support from the soft-left”¹³². Larger meetings were planned for the summer.

The March newsletter argued that nothing in the Bishops Stortford truce¹³³ precluded moves towards OMOV, whilst the inquiry remained important to “defend the constitution as it stands”. In vain, the newsletter advised “If the NEC insists .. on endorsing candidates who are open supporters of Militant, they will be making a serious mistake”¹³⁴. The following month, the newsletter reported that Jenkins’ Hillhead victory witnessed the electorate voting “against what many saw as the leftwing drift in the Labour Party”, Benn’s name having “cropped up every day on the doorstep”. However, the Group’s aim was not to denigrate party members but to show the “SDP’s true colours”, pointing out that Jenkins had defended private health and independent schools whilst Rodgers (formerly GMWU-sponsored) now confessed “his dislike of Trade Union sponsorship”. Jenkins and Williams had “fought a shrill and unpleasant campaign” which repeatedly “misrepresented and abused” their former party. The newsletter attacked the Tories but found time to highlight the speech of Militant

¹³¹ All quotes from 28 February 1982 meeting from David Bean notes.

¹³² DRH/1/49.

¹³³ The agreement to no further constitutional changes.

¹³⁴ *Labour Solidarity*, March 1982.

supporter Pat Wall (about to become the Bradford North candidate) to his SWP¹³⁵ branch, concluding there was no place for his like in the Labour Party. The NEC, it said, had “a duty to act”¹³⁶.

Meanwhile, responses to a questionnaire¹³⁷ to Solidarity supporters had been analysed¹³⁸. These showed an activist membership (over 60% holding office in their CLP or union), half under 51 years of age and with a strong preponderance of men. Their views on politics made grim reading. Just 8% were happy with the state of the party (against 90% not), 2% believing Labour was certain to win the election (a further 9% in the ‘probable’ camp and 38% ‘possible’). 47% had written off that eventuality. Asked the reason for the poor electoral prospects, 83% cited the party’s own divisions (particularly the activities of the undemocratic left). 90% saw the SDP/Liberals as a threat. Half thought Militant infiltration was already a problem. Only 3% thought Trotskyism was compatible with Labour’s aims and objectives (although 27% agreed with Newens’ view¹³⁹ that Marxism was compatible).

Between February and June 1982, the political map of Britain changed. While Labour continued to falter (despite an opinion poll hike after Bishops Stortford¹⁴⁰), Jenkins swept to victory in Hillhead¹⁴¹. But on the day he took his seat, 30 March, the first statement on South Georgia was made in the Commons¹⁴². By 2 April the Argentinians had invaded the Falkland Islands. Mrs Thatcher’s determined response, and the despatch of the task-force, restored Conservative fortunes and saw the SDP vote slide in the May local elections, the 27 May Beaconsfield by-election (with its young Labour candidate, Blair) and, notably, at Mitcham and Morden on 3 June when the SDP’s only MP to resign, Douglas-Mann, lost his seat to the Conservative Angela Rumbold¹⁴³. By the Falklands victory on 14 June, the SDP/Liberal poll lead had melted away.

Despite – or perhaps because of – their despondency, Solidarity supporters were keen to meet, key workers assembling in early June and over 200 activists later that month.

¹³⁵ Socialist Workers’ Party.

¹³⁶ *Labour Solidarity*, April 1982.

¹³⁷ John Gyford papers.

¹³⁸ By Shore’s advisor, David Cowling, now BBC’s head of polling (DRH/1/33).

¹³⁹ See on page 185.

¹⁴⁰ *Observer*, 21 March 1982.

¹⁴¹ 25 March 1981. Jenkins (SDP) 10,106; Conservatives: 8,068; Labour 7,846.

¹⁴² Margaret Thatcher, *op cit*, p.177.

¹⁴³ Conservatives: 13,306; SDP: 9,032; Labour: 7,475.

Mutual encouragement helped compensate for their isolation within CLPs. As one recalled: "It created a focus for individual party members who had just had enough. So it helped [people] realise there WAS a constituency out there who were loyal, and moderate. It held the tide against the SDP"¹⁴⁴.

On 6 June, the eve of the final Falklands battle, Shore reminded the key workers that "the Falklands factor has acted to detriment of SDP rather than of Labour – so no comfort from that. A clear majority on the NEC this year [was] essential. Militant is a Leninist party – primitive, pre-democratic. The great temptation will be for the NEC to fudge. If they do, they will face an onslaught from us. The NEC has power to enforce rules by expulsions"¹⁴⁵. Hattersley pointed to a dichotomy: "On the one hand the public want us to stop fighting; on the other, they reject the hard left". However, "The hard left certainly know now (if they have canvassed anywhere) that it is they who lose us doorstep support". For the rank and file attendees, there were local imperatives, with Lambeth's Nick Grant¹⁴⁶ stressing "Solidarity has got to come out of Westminster: as it promised that it would. The Steering Committee must have TU and CLP members. We must NOT become another CLV. We must get people like Kinnock and Rooker in, even on their terms. Our leading speakers must .. come to local meetings". Scotland's Bob Eadie called for work with regional councils of trade unions¹⁴⁷. The pragmatic Secretary, Woolmer, noted that nothing could be done without money; there was only £9,500 left and the Group needed £30,000 p.a. Hattersley acknowledged the need to set up a Committee of CLP representatives to meet quarterly, in addition to the weekly Parliamentary meetings. Local groups should be created with help from MPs. There might also be a councillors' group and a trade union input. The Westminster weekly meeting could act as an Executive, subject to direction of the quarterly meetings. He pledged a willingness for the Group to be guided from outside but in fact it was to remain Westminster-driven.

¹⁴⁴ Chris Savage interview.

¹⁴⁵ All 6 June 1982 quotes from David Bean notes.

¹⁴⁶ Later to become the party's Director of Communications (prior to fellow Lambeth councillor, Peter Mandelson).

¹⁴⁷ Scottish Solidarity did not mince its words. Its newsletter included "We say to the leeches, the Bennites, the vulturous S.D.P. and the people of Britain, THE LABOUR PARTY IS NOT DEAD!!", together with a cartoon of a bed-ridden, invalid party, with Symptoms of "Militant and Benn" and the prescribed Cure: "Surgery!" (Bob Eadie papers).

A larger crowd of Solidarity supporters gathered, under the chairmanship of John Smith, on 19 June. Hattersley and Shore gave major speeches, the latter savaging the Conservatives' disastrous record – particularly on the economy – before pointing to “the Great Paradox” whereby, despite Gallup showing people “overwhelmingly” hostile to government policies, Labour had a mere 25% support against the Conservatives' 45%. The Falklands was no excuse, he said. After Wembley, Labour had shed 11 points in a single month. Even at the pre-Falklands conference (October 1981), Labour was only on 28%. His conclusion: “the Party is sick”. That was why they had created Solidarity – to cure the party – though, over 12 months later, “the fever [and delirium] is still there”. Blaming Labour's post-May 1979 “Cultural Revolution” and the loss of comradeship, Shore pointed to the current malaise: Militant. Welcoming the Hayward/Hughes' view that the Tendency “would not be eligible to be included on the proposed register”, he pleaded for the party to have “frontiers” beyond which membership would not be appropriate. The NEC had a “duty to enforce [*his emphasis*] the constitution”. It was not a witch-hunt but a duty to police those frontiers. As “a body of ideas .. Marxism [had] always been one of the streams that flow into the broad river” of the party. But Leninism, Trotskyism, with their concern for revolution and “the creation of a disciplined and elite, Vanguard party” was “unacceptable to democratic socialists”. Their adherents “despise [*his emphasis*] the democratic process” – witnessed in Pat Wall's call “to his ‘comrades’ to prepare for civil war, should Labour win the next election”¹⁴⁸.

Hattersley identified the “Imperatives” for the party as being to: stress realistic manifesto commitments rather than fantasies; stop attacking the leadership – otherwise people would not vote for them; repudiate the “cuckoos in the nest” with the NEC acting against Militant; plus OMOV, to give the party back to the members from the hands of caucuses¹⁴⁹. It was just 4 days later that the NEC endorsed the Hayward/Hughes report and agreed to establish a Register, but also endorsed Militant candidates (Pat Wall becoming the prospective candidate for Bradford on 28 July).

The speeches were well covered in the media whilst the atmosphere led to successful collection – topped up by a percentage from sales of Susan Crosland's biography of

¹⁴⁸ Text of speech by Peter Shore to Solidarity Meeting, Camden Town Hall, 19 June 1982.

¹⁴⁹ David Bean papers.

Tony¹⁵⁰. Perhaps more significant than the donation was her presence on the platform, illustrating its Croslandite rather than Jenkinsite genesis¹⁵¹. Members asked for more literature and advice, increased organisation amongst unions, quarterly meetings for key workers and the repeated plea for supporters from around the country to feed into the Steering Committee “as [had been] agreed at the two previous meetings with key workers. If we do not fully implement this Solidarity will collapse as our key workers will lose faith in the committee, and its intention to be less Westminster based”¹⁵². The organisation felt “too top heavy”, with not enough grass-roots input¹⁵³.

The officers then applied to go on the “Register of Non-Affiliated Groups of Labour Party Members”. Whilst this was created to isolate Militant, it required other organisations to comply. Solidarity’s application showed 5,265 members/supporters, no full-time but 2 part-time paid staff, a full-time volunteer (Goudie) and 2 part-time unpaid staff. Its finance came entirely from its supporters with its modest assets comprising just six chairs, three desks, 2 typewriters, a filing cabinet and one table¹⁵⁴. It was, in its own words, operating “on a shoestring”¹⁵⁵.

Goudie had written to supporters outlining the recommendations of the Hayward/Hughes report, with a model resolution welcoming the lead given by Foot and the NEC¹⁵⁶. She circulated the full application in September¹⁵⁷, together with copies of *You, the Labour Party and the Militant Tendency* which had been sent to MPs in July¹⁵⁸. This 4-page, A5 Solidarity leaflet described Militant’s history and current activities (undertaken by some 60 employees), detailing how the ‘Editorial Board’ was actually the organisation’s Central Committee. Quotes from the Tendency’s private document, *British Perspectives and Tasks*, included those foretelling how unions would be replaced by “worker soviets” when the revolution arrives, and plans for taking over constituencies to transform them on Marxist lines.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Crosland, *Tony Crosland*, Jonathan Cape, 1982.

¹⁵¹ John Gyford, interview, 16 November 2003.

¹⁵² Report to Steering Committee (DRH/1/2).

¹⁵³ Glen Barnham, quoted by John Gyford.

¹⁵⁴ Solidarity Application to be included on the Labour Party Register, submitted 21 July 1982 (DRH/1/17).

¹⁵⁵ *Labour Solidarity*, November 1982.

¹⁵⁶ 26 June 1982 circular (Dianne Hayter papers.).

¹⁵⁷ Bob Eadie papers.

¹⁵⁸ DRH/1/17.

The August newsletter focused on the Hayward/Hughes report and the importance of conference endorsing its conclusions¹⁵⁹. It included the NEC slate¹⁶⁰ and an article by Hattersley scrutinising *Labour's Programme 1982* which "contains much which is both genuinely radical and relevant" (the sections on social policy, industry and the economy) though he disagreed with its proposals for withdrawal from the EEC and for unilateral nuclear disarmament. Given that this *Programme* was to give rise to what Kaufman later termed "the longest suicide note in history"¹⁶¹, the Shadow Home Secretary's attitude was remarkably relaxed.

At the September TUC in Brighton, Solidarity held a successful fringe meeting at which both Chairmen spoke together with NEC member Dunwoody and trade unionist Bryan Stanley. Labour's conference in Blackpool's (the *Programme* aside) was a success for Solidarity. Its Rally, chaired by John Smith, heard rousing speeches from Callaghan, Hattersley, Shore and Boothroyd, whilst a lunchtime reception for supporters offered mutual encouragement. The additional seats on the NEC, announced on the Tuesday¹⁶², were to deliver a working majority (and the key sub-committee chairmanships) on the NEC, whilst Solidarity's call to "BACK MICHAEL – BAN MILITANT" was gleefully followed the next day with "MASSIVE VOTE FOR REGISTER"¹⁶³. Hattersley claimed to have witnessed members experiencing at last "the will to win"¹⁶⁴ despite his doubts over the "overwhelming and unequivocal majority" in favour of unilateralism, lessened only by the 5:1 majority in favour of NATO. There was no attempt to amend the Wembley formula. Apparently Basnett did not want any change and it seemed unlikely that Foot did¹⁶⁵. There being no challenge to Foot or Healey on the horizon, the issue was kicked into touch. Meeting in Blackpool after the Militant vote and the NEC results, Solidarity's Steering and Organising Committees agreed that Hattersley and Shore should tell Foot "that we wanted a very firm line taken on expelling the eight parliamentary candidates, the editorial board and the shareholders and organisers of the

¹⁵⁹ *Labour Solidarity*, August 1982.

¹⁶⁰ Ashley, Hattersley, Barry Jones, Kaufman, Radice, Shore, John Smith (for the first and only time) plus Boothroyd, Anne Davis, Dunwoody and Summerskill.

¹⁶¹ John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, p.289.

¹⁶² *Report of the 1982 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.66.

¹⁶³ Slogans on Solidarity Handbills. The text continued: "The Vote on the Register is not a left-right issue. The decision of the TGWU and the Mineworkers to support it make that point. Militant are in breach of the party constitution .. They want to use the party, not fight for it. Support Michael Foot and the NEC" (DRH /1/35).

¹⁶⁴ *Sunday Times*, 3 October 1982.

¹⁶⁵ Nick Butler, "Task Force Bulletin", 6 September 1982 (NBP).

Militant tendency”¹⁶⁶. They were to wait many years before achieving all of these demands.

Whilst Solidarity was heartened by the NEC changes wrought by the unions, they were conscious of their own lack of success in the CLP section where all their candidates fared badly. Even the best placed, Shore, with 179,000, lagged more than 100,000 behind the lowest-elected’s 301,000¹⁶⁷. Goudie suggested that the reasons were (i) the increased number of constituencies not affiliated or not sending delegates; (ii) the slate being agreed too late; (iii) insufficient contact with constituencies in summer (when the office was preoccupied with the Militant evidence and the application for registration); (iv) increased activity by CLPD, including regular letters to GMCs, on policy as well as constitutional issues¹⁶⁸. However, she failed to mention either the political gulf between Solidarity and party activists, or the absence of OMOV for determining CLPs’ votes. She did, though, re-emphasise the need for meetings of key supporters whilst also “Broadening membership of [our] Committees, so as to avoid being regarded as an MPs’ organisation”. Her work on recruitment produced good results: in November, she reported 6,798 supporters. However, she questioned the future of Solidarity after the anticipated election, and whether it could attract sufficient funding to continue. Her paper stressed the need to “respond to the underlying wishes of our members in the CLPs for a more direct influence on the organisation of Solidarity. We are subject to great pressure to hold another key workers’ meeting. Unless we respond .. some of our most important supporters will lose heart and interest. However, we cannot hold a meeting without making proposals .. for a new Solidarity constitution”. The sensitive nature of the paper led to all copies being returned at the end of the meeting, which agreed OMOV and reform of the NEC as their priorities¹⁶⁹.

A further meeting again saw Goudie stressing that key workers had called for “an input .. into the Steering Committee” as agreed at two previous meetings.

“If we do not fully implement this, Solidarity will collapse, as our key workers will lose faith with the Committee and its intention to be less Westminster based. We should be working towards the setting up of a National Advisory Council .. made up from our key workers, and

¹⁶⁶ Minutes of 29 September 1982 (DRH/1/1).

¹⁶⁷ John Smith garnered a mere 36,000; *Report of the 1982 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.66.

¹⁶⁸ Paper for Steering Committee (DRH/1/2).

¹⁶⁹ Steering Committee minutes, 9 November 1982 (DRH/1/2).

nominations from our Solidarity Groups in the country .. the Steering Committee should .. remain the executive authority .. At least 12 people, none of whom are MPs, should be co-opted .. [from] the T U movement .. [and] local authorities .. unless we take some immediate steps, .. severe damage will be done to .. Solidarity”¹⁷⁰.

It was therefore agreed that the January meeting become the inaugural meeting of Solidarity National Advisory Council (NAC). Every proposal demanded finance, so in addition to agreeing to the inaugural NAC, and the production of an OMOV pamphlet, the Steering Committee set up a Finance Group, chaired by Denis Howell. Finance was a constant problem for the Group, which endlessly – but largely fruitlessly – sought donations for their work. Well-heeled business people perhaps doubted that Labour would ever become electable.

The Trade Union Group was keen for Solidarity to concentrate on OMOV. By December, Haines had knocked the draft pamphlet into readable shape, whilst a model OMOV resolution was circulated to the mailing list¹⁷¹. Wider distribution was not always straightforward, one reprimand from a CLP Secretary complaining that Solidarity had sent, “unsolicited”, its newsletter and the Militant leaflet to members. “The N E C has informed me that they are seriously concerned about the incident .. [and] asked me to make enquiries into how a list of my membership became available to you”¹⁷². Goudie coolly replied that she had not heard from the NEC¹⁷³. OMOV caused similar hiccups, with Stan Crowther MP demanding “When did OMOV become Solidarity Policy?” The response was “December 1981, when it was adopted by both the Steering Committee and at a Recall Meeting of Solidarity MPs”¹⁷⁴.

There was good and bad news for Solidarity in two by-elections in October. The good was Spellar’s victory in Northfield – the first Labour by-election success for 11 years. The bad was the choice of the hard-left Harriet Harman – confirming the growing trend in the PLP – although in public, Solidarity could only bemoan the low turn-out in Peckham¹⁷⁵. 1982 ended on a regretful note, with Campbell-Savours writing:

¹⁷⁰ Steering Committee minutes, 17 November 1982 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁷¹ Steering Committee minutes, 8 December 1982 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁷² Letter from Robin Page, South Herts Secretary to Goudie, 20 December 1982; Hughes (National Agent) letter to Page, 24 November 1982 (DRH/1/27).

¹⁷³ Goudie to Page, 11 January 1983 (DRH/1/27).

¹⁷⁴ Crowther letter to Goudie, 3 December 1982; Goudie to Crowther, 11 January 1983 (DRH/1/24).

¹⁷⁵ *Labour Solidarity*, November 1982.

"Earlier this month I .. terminate[d] my standing order to Solidarity. I did so as I feel that having seized the initiative on the issue of Militant and with an NEC poised to act, the party is .. better equipped to deal with the problems .. I have never regarded Solidarity as a permanent exponent of more liberal forms of party democracy. I .. support its aims recognising that whilst the party was in difficulty a clear case should be put for tolerance. I now perceive a .. readiness in the party to challenge intolerance. .. Solidarity should disappear as fast as it was given birth, claiming credit for action on Militant .. and re-formed only if the need were again to arise"¹⁷⁶.

Woolmer thanked the MP for his "financial and moral support .. and straight talking", but recalled: "OMOV is still to come"¹⁷⁷.

Pressure on MPs remained strong. Joe Ashton wrote "I am a 'Tribune' supporter of Solidarity and because of this I would like to keep a low profile and not accept any speaking engagements"¹⁷⁸. Even Robert Kilroy-Silk, under strong Militant pressure, felt it necessary to write "You are aware, aren't you, that I'm not a member of Solidarity but a member of Tribune"¹⁷⁹; Dobson similarly protested "I am not a member or supporter of Labour Solidarity. You send me your literature, but that's up to you"¹⁸⁰ despite both having been on the original list of 150 signatories.

The 16 January 1983 inaugural meeting of Solidarity's National Advisory Council, NAC, began with a briefing on Militant by James Goudie, Mary's lawyer husband and a Chambers' colleague of Derry Irvine and Tony Blair. He outlined how the party had chosen to deal with Militant as an organisational rather than an ideological question. The 1982 Conference had not actually declared Militant ineligible, following Irvine's advice that the NEC had to do so before proceeding to any expulsions¹⁸¹. The difficult question was defining who were members of Militant, beyond the obvious editorial board and sales organisers¹⁸². The meeting also heard a hint of what later became evident – Golding's acceptance of *Labour's Programme* as the 1983 Manifesto. Golding would "support EEC withdrawal and unilateralism because the Party wants

¹⁷⁶ Letter to Woolmer, 27 December 1982.

¹⁷⁷ Letter of 16 January 1983 (DRH/1/24).

¹⁷⁸ Letter to Alison Butler at Solidarity, 2 May 1983 (DRH/1/24).

¹⁷⁹ Letter to Goudie, 21 April 1983 (DRH/1/24). When Kilroy-Silk left the Commons for television, causing a by-election, Austin Mitchell wrote: "Letting down those who helped him against Militant is inconsiderate" (*New Society*, 8 August 1986).

¹⁸⁰ Letter to Goudie, 5 May 1983 (DRH/1/24).

¹⁸¹ David Bean, together with Nick Butler and Rosaleen Hughes, had met with Underhill, who suggested that Solidarity should obtain legal advice to put before the NEC (Bean notes of 29 April 1982 meeting, David Bean papers). A subsequent phone call to Goudie was taken when she was at Irvine's house, which led to his involvement (Mary Goudie interview).

them” and “canvass for Tatchell after losing the vote on the NEC!”¹⁸³. The importance of control of the NEC was evident and the meeting agreed that a full slate was needed¹⁸⁴. The NAC endorsed the OMOV strategy and model resolutions, subsequently distributed as an A5-leaflet “One Person, One Vote – True Democracy”¹⁸⁵. One resolution was on OMOV for the CLP section of the Electoral College, the other in the selection of candidates.

The NAC having stressed the need to work closely with unions, Goudie wrote to friendly unions asking them to double their advertising rate in the newsletter to £300¹⁸⁶. Meanwhile, Solidarity in Scotland led by Dewar moved up a gear in response to increased Militant activity¹⁸⁷. The Moderates were not just fighting Militant, but also the new “Labour Against the Witch-hunt”, formed to support Benn’s attempt to halt action against the Tendency¹⁸⁸. Militant was a major pre-occupation, with evidence continuing to arrive in Goudie’s postbag¹⁸⁹. The party appeared more sanguine, its house journal, *New Socialist*, accepting Militant advertisements¹⁹⁰, leading to protests to Headquarters¹⁹¹.

Solidarity continued with fringe meetings at regional conferences, whilst the NAC met again on Sunday 27 March. Afterwards, Goudie reported to an absent Dunwoody that members were upset that the NEC had endorsed Militant candidates – a more visible presence of the Tendency than the Editorial Board, and thus rewarding the beneficiaries of infiltration. This was symptomatic of the new NEC failing to live up to Solidarity’s expectations¹⁹². Members also wanted to see Shadow Cabinet members at NACs¹⁹³.

A Recall Meeting of MPs organised for May was cancelled as MPs fanned out for the election, to campaign in the most hostile of climates. Much has been written about this election and its effect on the party, and will be not repeated, save to note that two Solidarity stalwarts, Woolmer and the recently-elected Spellar, forfeited their seats in

¹⁸² Bean notes of 16 January 1983.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Goudie report to Steering Committee (DRH/1/2).

¹⁸⁵ The first draft read: “One Man, One Vote – True Democracy” (DRH/1/55).

¹⁸⁶ Goudie to Godsiff, APEX, 27 January 1983.

¹⁸⁷ List of meetings, Bob Eadie papers.

¹⁸⁸ DRH/1/27. CLPD headed its campaign “Resist the Purge” (*New Socialist*, January 1983, p.40).

¹⁸⁹ DRH/1/28.

¹⁹⁰ *New Socialist*, May 1983, p.21.

¹⁹¹ Letter to Party Headquarters (DRH/1/28).

¹⁹² Goudie letter to Dunwoody, 29 March 1983 (DRH/1/24).

Labour's tally of losses. The 1983 election was led by Foot, whose poll ratings continuously trailed Thatcher's. Healey remained loyal to him but few others in the Shadow Cabinet respected his "voter appeal". Alone amongst them, Kaufman had the courage personally to urge Foot to step aside¹⁹⁴. But this most romantic of Leaders had been saved by Ossie O'Brien's by-election victory¹⁹⁵ over a hapless SDP candidate at Darlington on 24 March, at a time when national opinion polls had Labour on 32% to the Conservatives' 44% (and the Alliance 22%)¹⁹⁶. Labour fared much worse in the June election – the trigger for all the policy, organisational and presentational changes which were to follow over the next decade. Without the Falklands, however, the crest of Thatcher's wave might have been lower, and it is unlikely that the SDP surge would have subsided so much. For the Labour Party, and for Solidarity, it was not just the final tally which caused despair, but the haemorrhaging of their own supposed core support, with trade unionists and skilled manual workers deserting in even greater numbers than in 1979¹⁹⁷.

After the election, Solidarity had to pick itself up – at first fearing that a further leftward shift in the PLP¹⁹⁸ would make its work harder. In fact, in the subsequent Shadow Cabinet elections, Solidarity won 9 of the 15 seats, Healey topping the poll (with 136 out of 209 votes) followed by Kaufman, Shore, John Smith and Jack Cunningham¹⁹⁹. In contrast Solidarity polled poorly in the NEC elections, where they failed to win a single seat in the CLP section, their top-placed candidate (Kaufman) securing just 180,000 votes to the 280,000 of Audrey Wise (the lowest successful candidate)²⁰⁰ – demonstrating the gulf between the PLP and local activists.

Before either the NEC or Shadow Cabinet elections could take place, the party needed a new leadership following the resignations of Foot and Healey. From the outside, it appeared that:

“Solidarity was controlled by a secret caucus behind its public façade and that caucus had an intense loyalty to Roy Hattersley .. The most powerful

¹⁹³ Steering Committee minutes, 27 April 1983 (DRH/1/2).

¹⁹⁴ Dick Clements interview.

¹⁹⁵ Labour: 20,544; Conservatives: 18,132; SDP: 12,735. O'Brien lost the seat in the general election.

¹⁹⁶ *Sunday Times*, 27 March 1982.

¹⁹⁷ Only 39% of trade unionists voted Labour (Frank Chapple, *op cit*, p.202).

¹⁹⁸ Predicted, for example, by the *Daily Telegraph* (23 May 1983) though not by Channel Four's *A Week in Politics* (11 June 1983).

¹⁹⁹ PLP papers. The other Solidarity members were Archer, Jones, Radice and Dunwoody.

²⁰⁰ *Report of the 1983 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.100. Only three MPs were elected to both bodies: Dunwoody (courtesy of the unions), plus left-wingers Heffer and Meacher.

people who backed Solidarity did so on the clear assumption that Hattersley would be the next Leader .. [He] had the Right's support guaranteed"²⁰¹.

Though writing well after 1983, Silkin failed to notice that Solidarity did not uniformly plump for Hattersley. Golding had intended to, but the candidate's behaviour switched him to the Kinnock camp²⁰². Of the other 26 main Solidarity activists, four voted for Kinnock and four for Shore, Solidarity's co-Chairman, whom Howell and Hattersley had brought into the organisation specifically to prevent it being seen as a Hattersley campaign²⁰³. It was for this reason that Solidarity was studiously meant to avoid taking sides²⁰⁴ although its co-ordinator booked the Old Ship Hotel for a late night party after the ballot, presumably for Hattersley supporters to celebrate²⁰⁵. Given the predominance of Solidarity MPs in the Hattersley camp, whereas Kinnock won overwhelmingly elsewhere in the party, this is further testimony of the distance between Solidarity and party (and union) activists.

While MPs were preoccupied with the leadership contest, others were looking to the future. One local member stressed that "The 9 June result seems to make Labour Solidarity's role ever more critical if we are to rescue the Party over the next 3 to 4 years .. There is an enormous amount to be done in the CLPs where the hard and naïve left groups still hold sway"²⁰⁶. Others continued to press for OMOV, assisted by branch members' increasing demand to have a say in their CLPs' choice in the leadership poll. The OMOV leaflet was widely distributed and the subject chosen for the Sunday rally at conference. Solidarity held a fringe meeting at the TUC in Blackpool, and publicised its NEC slate, although the organisation "kept a low profile over the summer"²⁰⁷ because of the contest between its two leading lights. Some nevertheless entered the fray for the deputy leadership, Bristol's members claiming that "The election of

²⁰¹ John Silkin, *op cit*, p.40.

²⁰² Godsiff, who had the union figures, and Golding, with the MPs', went to Hattersley's home to break the news, which the candidate took badly. Godsiff said "You have to decide whether you want to be Deputy to Neil Kinnock" to which the renowned author retorted: "Why should I be Deputy to that Welsh windbag? I could be Deputy Editor of the Observer at £40,000 a year". The amazed messengers left. Golding had gone intending to tell Hattersley that he would support him regardless of the figures, but after that reaction went straight over to declare for Kinnock (Roger Godsiff interview, John Golding, *op cit*, 2003, pp.320-321).

²⁰³ Roy Hattersley interview.

²⁰⁴ For example, a handwritten letter from Anne Davis to Goudie, dealing with both Solidarity and Hattersley, then says "(I am sorry to mix Solidarity business with Roy's campaign – sorry. I know I shouldn't!)" ; 21 September 1983 (DRH/1/33).

²⁰⁵ Letter to the hotel (DRH/1/33).

²⁰⁶ Peter Jones to Goudie, 14 June 1983 (DRH/1/27).

²⁰⁷ *Labour Solidarity*, August 1983. Only two issues of the newsletter were produced in 1983.

Michael Meacher .. [would] be an unqualified disaster .. he represents the Hard Left-Zany Left combination whose antics and dogmatism lost us millions of trade union votes at the General Election”²⁰⁸.

In the autumn, a serious look at the future of Solidarity took place. Its finances could not sustain an office, so notice was given to terminate the Charles Lane lease from the end of December, returning the operation to Goudie’s home²⁰⁹. MPs were asked for £20 each to keep even a skeleton structure in place²¹⁰. Significantly, the post-election parliamentary party finally saw the amalgamation of the three Moderate groupings – the Manifesto Group, Labour First and Solidarity MPs – into one: Parliamentary Solidarity²¹¹. Hitherto, the “Recall” meetings appear to have been the only gathering of MPs, but now this body took on a life of its own, complete with bank account, standing orders, cheque book and Officers. The Chairman was Brynmor John, with Vice Chairmen Dunwoody, David Clark (Labour First), Terry Davis (Solidarity) and Weetch (Manifesto Group)²¹². The Secretary was the new MP Stuart Bell²¹³. The merger also brought Manifesto Group funds into Solidarity²¹⁴. A joint grouping would not be without problems – Howell, for example, taking umbrage and resigning as Treasurer when he was not elected by Parliamentary Solidarity to be on their slate for the Shadow Cabinet²¹⁵.

Towards the end of 1983, a number of papers were prepared for the NAC on 14 February 1984. One recommended a new “supporter membership” (replacing the mailing list), together with encouraging the adoption of “reputable” candidates for parliament and local government, and improved representation on regional executives. An EETPU paper pointed to the leftward shift in the PLP (Meacher having attracted more PLP votes in 1983 than Benn in 1981), a number of retired MPs having been replaced by hard left-wingers, taking the Campaign Group from a dozen to 30 or more, although the split on the Left (between the Campaign and Tribune Groups) produced “good” Shadow Cabinet results. Some ground had been lost on the NEC, whilst

²⁰⁸ *Bristol Labour Solidarity*, 1983.

²⁰⁹ Steering Committee minutes, 16 November 1983 (DRH/1/2).

²¹⁰ Steering Committee minutes, 14 December 1983 (DRH/1/2).

²¹¹ Steering Committee minutes, 14 December 1983 (DRH/1/2).

²¹² List (DRH/1/24).

²¹³ Notes of NAC meeting, David Bean papers.; Stuart Bell, *op cit*, p.93.

²¹⁴ Accounts (DRH/1/3).

²¹⁵ July 1984 (DRH/1/24). This seems never have taken effect as the papers show his continued activity in the Group.

Militant were still active (their meetings advertised in *Labour Weekly*) and the soft-left dominated the Leader's office²¹⁶. The paper concluded "our supporters feel isolated and under siege .. an occasional newsletter will not be enough to sustain them", and therefore called for better organisation, especially in CLPs, and a renewed push on OMOV²¹⁷. In November, a paper for the Steering Committee concluded that "among key supporters there is a strong desire that Solidarity should be kept" with at least a newsletter, model resolutions, NAC meetings and the Sunday rallies at conference but an end to regional fringes and the speakers' service.

1984 opened with further evidence of the Westminster/membership tension that plagued Solidarity. The NAC was set for mid-week, 6.30 to 9 pm "in London to facilitate the attendance of MPs whose absence from .. Sunday meetings may be understandable but is still constantly criticised"²¹⁸. The reaction was immediate, Spellar commenting that it "yet again demonstrates the way in which ordinary party members in the regions feel they are disregarded". He criticised Solidarity activities for being "stultified by national political events of all-consuming interest to parliamentarians, but of only relative interest to those in the constituencies" and predicted that a weekday meeting would "deprive the NAC of much needed voices from the regions"²¹⁹. Barbara Hawkins remonstrated that the "SNAC is the best assembly for the non-Parliamentarians .. But mostly they do have jobs and mostly a long way from London. Teeside Solidarity urges a return to the week-end, whole-day, forum which can be truly representative of workers from the regions"²²⁰. Goudie "had already received a number of apologies and complaints because the meeting was being held mid-week"²²¹. Nevertheless the meeting went ahead, Godsiff hoping "that the outcome will be that the Labour Solidarity Campaign will continue .. because it still has an important role .. to combat the activities of the 'illegitimate left' at constituency level"²²².

The Valentine's Day meeting was cheered by the increased vote for Ashley and Kaufman in the NEC ballot, although Hattersley (appearing for the first time as Deputy Leader) reported difficulties in CLPs where the Left continued to organise, admitting

²¹⁶ Presumably a reference to Charles Clarke, Patricia Hewitt and Dick Clements.

²¹⁷ "Consolidating our Progress", JSA.

²¹⁸ Goudie letter to NAC members, 19 January 1984.

²¹⁹ Spellar letter to Goudie, 24 January 1984, JSA.

²²⁰ Letter to Goudie, 7 February 1984 (DRH/1/28).

²²¹ Steering Committee minutes, 1 February 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²²² Godsiff letter to Goudie, 6 February 1984 (DRH/1/28).

that Solidarity had “done nothing since conference”²²³. This seems unlikely, as 9 of the 15 elected 1983/84 Shadow Cabinet places were held by Solidarity. Nevertheless, given that Hattersley had joined the NEC for the first time, and with a workable (albeit fragile) majority, it seems strange that a coherent plan of action was not more evident. The February NAC established a new Steering Committee, including 11 representatives from Parliamentary Solidarity, 3 from the unions and representatives from CLPs; Hattersley and Shore became Vice-Presidents, and Goudie took the title of Secretary (Woolmer having lost his seat)²²⁴.

At the subsequent NAC, Hattersley stressed the importance of Solidarity existing independently in CLPs and unions, rather than dependent on a few senior MPs, whilst also becoming more positive and moving into policy areas. There were mixed reports from around the country, Solidarity not having been very active since the election. Attention focused on reselection, with Bean emphasising the need to get OMOV through the NEC, for which “we need to be very subtle in our approach”. In particular, unions needed to be reassured about their nomination rights under OMOV. It was important not to concentrate just on saving MPs but also selecting new candidates. CLPs wanted early re-selection which meant that work on OMOV must commence quickly. Up to 25 MPs were at risk so they should emphasise to the NEC “the appalling damage to our electoral credibility if de-selection happens causing internal rows”. New officers were elected with Terry Davis becoming Chairman²²⁵. Meanwhile, from outside the meeting, an indication of disquiet with Solidarity appeared in the pages of *Forward Labour* with a “snippet” reading: “LSC: Where Art Thou? Where is Labour Solidarity Campaign: You’d think they’d be hard at it in the constituencies. In case they don’t know it, the Barmy Brigade is at it”²²⁶.

The first new-style Steering Committee took place in April, with attention to the “drastic state of the finances”. It was agreed to approach supporters in the Lords for funds. By May, 52 parliamentarians had signed standing orders, although the bank account was still £1,000 overdrawn in July²²⁷ - a situation only saved by one £5,000

²²³ David Bean notes, David Bean papers.

²²⁴ Steering Committee minutes, 29 February and 21 March 1984 (DRH/1/3). See annex 6.

²²⁵ Minutes of National Advisory Council, 25 March 1984 (DRH/1/3). See annex 6.

²²⁶ *Forward Labour*, April 1984.

²²⁷ Steering Committee minutes, 29 February, 9 and 25 May, and 18 July 1984 (DRH/1/3).

donation raised by the new Treasurer's persuasiveness²²⁸. Politically, the priority was OMOV; the Committee agreed that Parliamentary Solidarity's Chair (John) and Secretary (Bell) should meet Kinnock to press for this and to express continuing anxieties over reselection²²⁹.

Discussions on the NEC slate took place in the spring, with names agreed earlier than previously and work with CLP contacts (which showed some support for Kaufman and Dunwoody but little for anyone else). The new Steering Committee immediately faced complaints that the MPs were failing to attend. It appears that Parliamentary Solidarity was fulfilling their needs, and there remained an unwillingness to engage with the wider grouping. Furthermore, when those present questioned what was going on in the House (such as on EDMs or Shadow Cabinet elections), Brynmor John slapped them down with the reminder "that these and other matters were the business of Parliamentary Solidarity"²³⁰. The MPs' attendance continued to be variable: John and Davis both made 7 meetings, Robertson and Clark 5, Bell and Weetch 4 each, whilst the other MPs ranged from zero to 3²³¹.

There were also complaints about the lack of visible activity. Boothroyd reported that members in her area had received nothing for a considerable time²³², and Helen Eadie wrote about the absence of any newsletter, contrary to the NAC decision. She said that MPs seemed to believe that:

"Solidarity [could] easily be re-kindled if there are pressing needs in the future" whereas "it is not easy to turn on the tap and come up with accurate records of where our support lies .. By maintaining a very weak national machine, the most Solidarity can realistically hope to achieve will be influencing slightly the NEC elections but little or no influence [over] reselection .. Many MPs will not be reselected and that will have been a high price to pay".

She warned that the current route could see Solidarity slipping away – in which case it would be preferable to wind it up. Davis's reply agreed on the effect of no newsletter, but claimed it was finance which prevented its appearance²³³. Whilst acknowledging her views on reselection, he felt that Solidarity should be more than an "MPs' protection

²²⁸ Figure in the accounts and note from Goudie (DRH/1/24 and DRH/1/27).

²²⁹ Steering Committee minutes, 4 April 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²³⁰ Steering Committee minutes, 5 July 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²³¹ NAC paper, October 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²³² Letter to Goudie (DRH/1/24).

society” and urged Eadie to remain with it²³⁴. *Forward Labour*’s David Warburton wrote more openly: “The sooner LSC realises that its job is to get to work in the CLPs the better. Any organisation, whether LSC or the Hard Left Campaign Group, which relies on pearls of wisdom from sympathisers in the Palace of Westminster tolls its own death knell”²³⁵.

Eadie was rather optimistic in thinking they could influence the NEC elections. They were “a disaster”²³⁶. In the CLP section, the lowest-elected (Wise) was nearly 100,000 votes clear of Kaufman²³⁷. More ominously, there were only two names on Solidarity’s slate²³⁸. In the union section, Golding and Howell were defeated²³⁹. However, the Sunday rally and two fringe meetings were successful. The NAC, in Blackpool, amended the Group’s name to Labour Party Solidarity Campaign and introduced a £1 annual membership subscription (when this appeared as a supporter’s subscription to the newsletter, there were complaints that yet again members would have no say over the organisation). Nevertheless, 137 subscribed²⁴⁰.

Reviewing the conference, Spellar bemoaned the constant appearance at the rostrum of Militant²⁴¹ and “the conduct of delegates” which shocked voters. Even before former Prime Minister Callaghan began to speak, Heffer in the chair had to call for good behaviour, saying “I don’t want anybody .. hissing, shouting or booing”²⁴². For Spellar, this made it essential to re-produce a “sensible” party, and to concentrate on the selection of candidates. Without a change, he warned of the suffering of those who would “bear the brunt of our failure: the old, the poor, the sick, the homeless and the ill-housed”²⁴³.

²³³ In fact, the next issue – a simple two-sided photocopied version – did arrive in July, largely funded by the EETPU, her husband’s employer! (JSA).

²³⁴ Letters of 26 June and 8 July 1984, Bob Eadie papers.

²³⁵ *Forward Labour*, October 1984.

²³⁶ Steering Committee minutes, 24 October 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²³⁷ 330,000 to 141,000. Ashley did slightly better with 183,000; *Report of the 1984 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.69.

²³⁸ *Labour Solidarity*, July 1984.

²³⁹ *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Steering Committee minutes, 28 November 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²⁴¹ He suggested that Liverpool’s Heffer in the chair explained the selection of both Militant and scouse delegates.

²⁴² *Report of the 1984 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.150. Similarly when Hammond spoke, interruptions forced Heffer to plead “This is a Labour Party conference, not a rabble .. there is a tradition of this movement which is basic tolerance” (*ibid*, p.40). By contrast, a “standing ovation and prolonged applause and cheers” greeted Arthur Scargill (*ibid*, p.35).

²⁴³ Undated paper, JSA.

Before the 1984 conference, Solidarity had seemed optimistic about the “Year of Progress”, pointing to the party’s improved fortunes following the arrival of the Kinnock/Hattersley leadership and the successful European elections (Labour seats near doubled to 32), whilst still affirming the need for increased efforts – particularly on OMOV (on which Kinnock had yet to commit) and entryism. But by November, its publication (reduced to A5-format) was calling for “active and efficient campaigning against .. those who preach intolerance and whose success would cut the Party off from its support in the country”. It professed itself “sad” to see the new MP for Chesterfield²⁴⁴, Benn, sharing a platform with the outlawed Militant (though this probably contributed to his poor Shadow Cabinet showing). However, the Group took comfort from Kinnock’s recent conversion to OMOV²⁴⁵ for selections and his assessment that “We won the argument but lost the vote” (by half a million votes). Its editorial line was that “It is not so much a question of ‘if’, but ‘when’ victory comes”. On the other hand, the organisation was dismayed by those seeking “defiance of the law” in their fight with the government on local government. Solidarity feared that non-compliance with the law won little sympathy with the electorate and conflicted with the party’s history and philosophy. It feared that illegality – rather the Conservative cuts – would become the story²⁴⁶.

Parliamentary Solidarity meanwhile won two-thirds of the Shadow Cabinet places (taking 8 of the top 10 places, plus two others, as well as the PLP Chairman and Chief Whip²⁴⁷). The Left were unhappy: the “Shadow Cabinet elections were a disaster for Tribune. Solidarity stood a full slate (so much for Party unity) and was well organised. Ten of its members were elected (a net increase of one)”. Whilst Campaign Group member Meacher was elected with many Tribune votes, “By not voting for the Tribune members, Campaign damaged the left as a whole .. preventing .. ‘inside left’ candidates such as Rooker and Straw from being elected. .. Too many left wingers stood” (there were 51 candidates – a quarter of the PLP – of whom 29 were from the Left)²⁴⁸. The outcome was a measure of Solidarity’s discipline, tactics and underlying strength.

²⁴⁴ Elected in the 1 March 1984 by-election.

²⁴⁵ or ‘One Person One Vote’ as it appeared in the newsletter.

²⁴⁶ *Labour Solidarity*, November 1984.

²⁴⁷ PLP papers.

²⁴⁸ *Clause IV*, December 1984.

Before the year ended, a further NAC took place, with 35 present, which reiterated the importance of getting reliable candidates selected, as well as a good NEC slate²⁴⁹. The threat of deselections was much in evidence prior to the 1985 round, with Field, Shore, Kaufman (and even left-wingers such as John Silkin) facing difficult challenges²⁵⁰, although the worries proved unfounded. The predicted purge of Moderates did not take place. Some MPs no doubt retired a little earlier than planned but elsewhere Militant was pushed out of contention (by Adam Ingram in East Kilbride and Steve Bassam in Brighton)²⁵¹.

Despite patchy reports of local activity, some Solidarity groups were functioning, London's having met in the Commons, a West London group in Ealing, and others in Scotland, the Wirral, West Midlands and Teeside. There were regional fringe meetings, in Wales, Scotland and across England²⁵². Student Solidarity was set up during 1985 "as a rallying point for moderate Labour students, and to counter hard-left student groups within the party". It had a place on the main Steering Committee (held by Andrew Cook, from the EETPU) and was given £100 to get underway. It held at least one fringe meeting and produced newsletters but did not continue for much more than a year²⁵³.

The Steering Committee's preoccupations in 1985, finance apart, were OMOV, resolutions for conference and the NEC slate. Joe Haines redrafted the OMOV leaflet, whilst the cause was helped by a split on the Left when the LCC gently distanced itself from CLPD and the hard-left. The LCC move towards OMOV was surprising given its role in helping defeat the 1984 amendment which would have offered constituency parties the option of allowing every individual member a direct vote²⁵⁴. CLPD opposed too great an extension of the franchise, calling the "right wing proposals for one member one vote" an "attempt to dilute the party's policies through media influenced results. This is unacceptable – particularly the postal ballot". (Though CLPD did acknowledge that perhaps members who had attended one third of their branch

²⁴⁹ NAC Minutes, 25 November 1984 (DRH/1/3).

²⁵⁰ *Guardian*, 10 December 1984.

²⁵¹ *Observer*, 17 March 1985.

²⁵² Handbills (DRH/1/26 and 27).

²⁵³ Letters and newsletters (DRH/1/26 and DRH/1/3).

²⁵⁴ *Guardian*, 20 June 1985.

meetings, and had at least a year's membership, might be allowed to vote for a candidate at a meeting²⁵⁵.)

The NEC's role in taking OMOV (and the isolation of Militant) forward was going to be crucial, so attempts for an attractive slate continued. However, one of the best known of Solidarity's standard-bearers was unwilling to help, John Smith writing "I have given some further thought to the NEC elections and I have come to the firm view that I do not wish to be a candidate"²⁵⁶. Despite this, a slightly longer list than 1984 was offered (Ashley, Kaufman, Radice and Robertson)²⁵⁷. It had no more success. The last-elected (Wise) had 317,000, with Dalyell the runner up; best-placed Solidarity member Kaufman polled 214,000 – a full 100,000 short. (The moderates did less well on the union side too, Anne Davis losing to Beckett.)²⁵⁸

Parliamentary Solidarity continued its activities, with 48 MPs and 5 Lords in membership and re-electing its officers in January 1985. Relations between the two parts remained distant, Goudie having to ask to address the Parliamentary Group as "it's over a year since I last came formally"²⁵⁹. Attendance by the MPs at the Committee was variable, a list for 29 February 1984 to 16 January 1985 indicating that whilst Brynmor John had managed 10 meetings, and Davis and Robertson 8 and 7, seven of the others had made either 3, 2 or even just one meeting. The Steering Committee asked the "Secretary to send a stiff note with the next notice because of the bad attendance"²⁶⁰.

The weekend meetings were no greater attraction. Seven MPs did not attend a single NAC, though Chairman Davis made 3, Hattersley 4, and John, Dunwoody, Robertson, Clark, Shore, Dewar, Smith, Millan and Radice between 1 and 2. The mismatch between the parliamentarians and supporters was continuing. At the January 1985 NAC, there were proposals for a restructured – and smaller – Council, presumably to give it more teeth, but little seems to have changed. The 35 attendees concentrated on a major concern – matching reliable candidates with receptive CLPs – and on the traditional issues (OMOV and Militant) plus model resolutions on the economy and law

²⁵⁵ Neil Rhodes, in CLPD circular.

²⁵⁶ Letter to Goudie, 9 May 1985 (DRH/1/26).

²⁵⁷ List of names (DRH/1/38).

²⁵⁸ *Report of the 1985 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.85.

²⁵⁹ Letter of 10 November 1985 (DRH/1/26). A date was set up for January.

²⁶⁰ Steering Committee minutes, 20 February 1985 (DRH/1/3).

and order²⁶¹. NAC meetings were arranged for February, June and September – a difficult period for the party with the miners' strike at the beginning of the year, the failure to re-take Brecon and Radnor, the loss of the supposedly safe Lambeth Vauxhall GLC seat, local government problems, and Militant activity. In parallel to Solidarity and St Ermins, Spellar was meanwhile engaged on the establishment of yet another group (Mainstream), taking Solidarity into friendly unions, some not affiliated to the party²⁶². There was an NAC at the end of the year, when 22 of the 74 present were MPs including Hattersley, Shore, John Smith, Cunningham, Kaufman, Dewar and Radice from the Shadow Cabinet, plus Boothroyd and Dunwoody from the NEC²⁶³.

Whilst 1984 had seen just two issues of *Labour Solidarity* (one 2-sided A4, one eight-page A5, both photocopied), there were three issues in 1985, albeit still photocopied rather than the red-bannered, typeset versions of the first two years. In January, the miners' strike – which caused the party so much trouble – was covered, with an attack on the Campaign Group for seeking a debate in the House which would have embarrassed Kinnock (a man “growing in stature every day”)²⁶⁴. Solidarity took too much heart from the party's performance in the May local elections, which indicated that Labour could “be the largest party after the next Election .. [with] every chance that Neil Kinnock is heading for No 10”. Whilst OMOV remained centre stage, the Group also argued against black sections – a type of apartheid²⁶⁵. The Student newsletter hailed Kinnock's Bournemouth anti-Militant speech as “brilliant and courageous” and welcomed the enthusiastic response from delegates²⁶⁶. Solidarity's newsletter applauded the NEC's decision to launch an inquiry into Liverpool, and reported that applications to join the party had flooded in after Bournemouth, along with a surge in opinion poll ratings. The Group, having made the case for parliamentary socialism for so long, felt vindicated by Kinnock's re-assertion of “the democratic, reformist roots of our Party. His condemnation of impossibilism .. was a vital return to the fundamental principles of Labourism. The traditional pragmatic majority in the Party can now feel that they are on the offensive with an ideology which .. is popular”²⁶⁷. Although the

²⁶¹ National Advisory Committee notes, 20 January 1985 (DRH/1/3).

²⁶² *Labour Solidarity*, May 1985.

²⁶³ Handwritten notes (DRH/1/28).

²⁶⁴ *Labour Solidarity*, January 1985.

²⁶⁵ *Labour Solidarity*, May 1985.

²⁶⁶ *Student Solidarity News*, October 1985.

²⁶⁷ *Labour Solidarity*, December 1985.

OMOV motion (moved by Spellar, seconded by the NULSC and supported by Robertson) had been remitted, it seemed its day would come²⁶⁸.

Kinnock did not rest after Bournemouth, penning an "Open Letter to the people of Liverpool" describing how "My patience has run out on Tendency tacticians"²⁶⁹. He then delivered a Fabian lecture in London's Friends Meeting House, where he attacked

"Democratic centralism (which employs the most undemocratic methods).. Vanguardism ... [of a] self-appointed elite" and the dishonesty of those who "opt for a parasitical life inside the mass Labour movement .. [which] involves systematically abusing the open and tolerant .. Labour Party". Worse, their belief that "the ends .. justify the means, a neat and nasty tactic called 'revolutionary truth' provides a licence to lie about their organisation, their funding and their aims". Anyone committed to Militant should be "put out of the party .. Democracy must always defend itself and democratic socialists cannot permit their Party to be defaced by a secretive group whose whole purpose is to contradict the values, feed off the vitality of and disgrace" our party²⁷⁰.

This was music to Solidarity ears and the sweeter from the left-leaning Kinnock, who was clearly intent on change.

However, the divide between party activists and the PLP remained. So whilst Benn, Heffer, Meacher, Richardson, Skinner and Wise were all elected to the CLP seats on the NEC (plus Beckett and Maynard for the women's places) alone of these Meacher was also elected by fellow MPs to the Shadow Cabinet²⁷¹. On the Left, there was similarly no congruence between MPs' and activists' views, Robin Cook and Denzil Davies being chosen in the MPs' ballot but failing to make the NEC (for which other left-wing Shadow Cabinet members, such as Prescott, were not even candidates). Benn was more than 20 votes adrift of one of the 15 Shadow Cabinet places, in contrast to Kaufman's top position with 122 votes. Solidarity's slate took 9 seats (losing Dunwoody)²⁷².

1986 saw a more concerted campaign to win an NEC place – building on Kaufman's existing vote²⁷³ and, it was hoped, John Smith's public profile. However, Smith would

²⁶⁸ *Report of the 1985 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, pp.190-194.

²⁶⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, 29 October 1985.

²⁷⁰ Text of Kinnock Fabian Lecture on "The Future of Socialism", 12 November 1985.

²⁷¹ *Report of the 1985 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.85, and PLP papers.

²⁷² Stuart Bell, who organised the slates, recalls that Dewar was elected by 1 vote when Bell got John Gilbert out from his Lisbon hotel late at night to fax through his proxy in time (Stuart Bell, *op cit*, p.99, and PLP papers).

²⁷³ Bell and the EETPU having identified the 106 CLPs which supported him, JSA.

not commit himself, Bell writing that "Some of the senior figures, however, such as John Smith & Jack Cunningham would wish to reserve their position to see how well a national campaign can develop around their candidatures"²⁷⁴. This did not facilitate the development of such a campaign. Meanwhile, Shore was unable to get the necessary nomination from his CLP. By June it was clear that Smith would not stand²⁷⁵. The slate therefore comprised: Ashley, Bell, Kaufman, Mitchell, Radice and Robertson²⁷⁶. Whilst none were successful, Heffer was defeated – replaced by Dalyell – with Ashley and Kaufman as two of the three runners up²⁷⁷. (On the women's section, the unions replaced Beckett with Jeuda, to the delight of the Moderates.) At the year end, Solidarity was again producing slates, for the new National Constitutional Committee²⁷⁸, but whilst the St Ermins Group delivered both women's seats and 4 of the 5 union places, Solidarity made no impact on the 3 CLP places, attracting, at most, 43 constituencies.

Solidarity remained active in 1986, and held fringe meetings at various regional conferences²⁷⁹. The main event was the Sunday rally at Blackpool when Hattersley's speech won wide publicity²⁸⁰. The NAC continued to meet, with Anne Davis replacing husband Terry as Chairman at the January AGM. The tighter system of subscriptions saw 594 supporters in January (rising to 665 by September) – not enough to provide the necessary finance and at the beginning of the year Goudie and Hattersley had to guarantee a £1,000 overdraft²⁸¹. The NAC met in April and then at the October conference, when the subscription was doubled to £2. Its final meeting in 1986 was due to discuss the future of the organisation but postponed this until February while continuing to experience the difficulty of running activities without funding.

Local meetings may have been declining, but Solidarity's great cause, OMOV, was gaining ground, with the party launching a consultation on Extending the Franchise for selection and re-selection as a result of the EETPU motion remitted in 1985. Haines revised the pamphlet into "They Say It Can't be Done: One Person One Vote",

²⁷⁴ Bell letter to Goudie, 6 January 1986 (DRH/1/28).

²⁷⁵ Steering Committee minutes, 21 May and 4 June 1986 (DRH/1/3).

²⁷⁶ *Labour Solidarity*, July 1986.

²⁷⁷ *Labour Weekly*, 3 October 1986.

²⁷⁸ Steering Committee minutes, 19 November 1986 (DRH/1/3).

²⁷⁹ *Labour Solidarity*, June 1986.

²⁸⁰ *Labour Solidarity*, October 1986.

²⁸¹ Notes of NAC, 25 January 1986 (DRH/1/26); Steering Committee minutes, 22 October 1986 (DRH/1/3).

complete with model resolutions and rebuttal arguments against the opponents' case. The issue was promoted in the Students' newsletter, as "real, grass-roots democracy", and the Steering Group circulated another resolution on OMOV for the Electoral College²⁸². Solidarity took heart from the expulsion of the Militant Eight from Liverpool though recognised that the fight was far from over. In London, the party was still in trouble so a number of members launched "Londoners for Labour" at the end of 1986, including the ever-organising Spellar and, as Secretary, Godsiff²⁸³.

Electoral, Labour was doing better, holding every council (except Liverpool) in the May elections and with their overtly "family man", moderate Nick Raynsford, taking Fulham from the Conservatives, the first good news since the 1983 debacle²⁸⁴. Everything the government did heightened the desire for victory, from its abolition of the GLC, and allowing US planes to take off to bomb Libya, to the disregard for the niceties of protocol when Thatcher alone of European leaders chose not to attend Olof Palme's funeral. She had survived Westland and the miners' strike and helped marginalise the 5-year old SDP (whose third party presence in the House never allowed them to land a blow on the government). However, Labour's problems continued, its hapless far-left candidate in the Greenwich by-election, Deirdre Woods, losing spectacularly to the SDP's Rosie Barnes.

This was the atmosphere in which Parliamentary Solidarity organised for the final Shadow Cabinet contest before the election. Benn's vote fell even further (from 62 to 50) while Kaufman and Smith took the two top places (113 and 103 respectively), being joined by 8 others from their slate (as well as the Chief Whip and PLP Chairman)²⁸⁵. Solidarity clearly represented the bulk of the PLP, its leading lights seen as the workhorses on the opposition front-bench. There was some friction between the two arms of Solidarity, not least because the parliamentarians had money whereas the main Group did not. In parliament, paper and photocopying were free, notices of meetings could be distributed internally, and there were neither staff to pay nor newsletters to print. Despite this, some 50 parliamentarians paid £10 a year, allowing the build-up of a useful reserve. On one occasion, when the central organisation had difficulty

²⁸² Steering Committee minutes, 19 March, 21 May and 4 June 1986 (DRH/1/3); *Student Solidarity News*, March 1986.

²⁸³ DRH/1/3.

²⁸⁴ By-election 10 April 1986: Labour 16,451; Conservatives 12,948, SDP (Roger Liddle) 6,953.

²⁸⁵ PLP papers, 29 October 1986.

financing the Conference Rally, Goudie asked the MPs' treasurer, Weetch, for £300 for this, leading to a "cool" exchange of letters, a meeting of the respective officers, and – finally – the cheque²⁸⁶.

In late 1986, there was more discussion on the future of Solidarity, with another Spellar paper which identified current work as: OMOV, Militant and Shadow Cabinet elections. The Group comprised: an NAC, Steering Committee, Parliamentary Solidarity, trade union group²⁸⁷ and some regional groups. He attributed the fall-off in local activity to the fact "that as the NEC is dealing with Militant and that the Party is getting its act together". Nevertheless, he saw "the need for an organisation to determine the slate and to send out information". Solidarity had kept many people in the party who had been "disillusioned and horrified" (especially 1981 to 1983), and these members were now putting their effort back into the party. Spellar therefore posed the future as concentrating on local groups or on providing information²⁸⁸.

With Militant having been defined as ineligible for membership, and its leading lights expelled, the party set up the NCC in response to a judicial ruling that the NEC should not be both 'prosecutor' and 'judge/jury' in cases of alleged breach of rule. The NCC started work early in 1987, with a healthy Solidarity/St Ermins majority. However, some in the Group (such as Dunwoody) remained concerned about other groups which could replace Militant and mused over reintroducing a 'proscribed list' as had existed until 1973 (members of any organisation on that list were automatically barred from party membership). A paper was prepared for the Steering Committee²⁸⁹, but attention turned to the forthcoming election and the future of Solidarity, especially in view of its funding problems²⁹⁰. While the future of the Parliamentary Group seemed assured (and possibly increasing in influence²⁹¹), without a higher profile and regular newsletter, the main Solidarity Campaign was not viable (although it had notably longer tentacles into the party than the rival Campaign Group).

²⁸⁶ Letters from Goudie to Weetch, 8 November and 18 December 1986 (DRH/1/3 and DRH/1/26).

²⁸⁷ Actually the St Ermins Group's members.

²⁸⁸ JSA.

²⁸⁹ JSA.

²⁹⁰ Solidarity 1987 AGM papers (DRH/1/3).

²⁹¹ "If the split between the Tribune and Campaign Groups continues, the next PLP will see the broad Left majority .. whittled away from the soggy end of the Tribune group until the Centre/Right absorbs enough of that to take control", Ken Livingstone, *Tribune*, 28 November 1986.

At the 1987 AGM, no fundamental decisions were made, although Hattersley's stress on the need for^{or} higher profile was endorsed and with it the continuation of a newsletter. Dunwoody replaced Anne Davis as Chair, an organiser (Andrew Cook) was added to the Secretary (Goudie) and a reformatted Steering Committee agreed, with 4 regional representatives, 4 from the parliamentary group, 2 from unions and one from Student Solidarity. The group dispersed, not to meet again until after the 11 June election.

The election results were sorely disappointing, Labour gaining only 20 seats, leaving the Conservatives on 372 with Labour well behind on 229. There was not much to celebrate after eight hard years of opposition. The Moderates knew that further changes were needed within the party, not least in collaboration with the soft-left. Within a month, Spellar was pressing for closer discussions – even “amalgamation” – with sections of the LCC²⁹². The Steering Committee met as soon as the House was back, organising for the Shadow Cabinet. This was when disaster struck Solidarity: it lost 5 of its 10 places²⁹³ and was even shifted from its long-held pole-position. Bryan Gould, having masterminded the party's election campaign, topped the poll, with 163 of the 220 votes, with Prescott and Meacher second and third. Solidarity managed only 4th, 5th, 9th, 11th and 14th place²⁹⁴.

Thus not only was the general election worse than had been anticipated but: “We have a real crisis. For the first time in thirty years or more, the old, as distinct from the actual, Centre Right of the Party is not in control of the Shadow Cabinet”²⁹⁵.

Throughout the Manifesto Group's history, its majority was assured, a situation continued under Solidarity whose slate had comfortably filled the bulk of the seats. Now the soft-left had eclipsed it. “On the NEC and on the Shadow Cabinet having the backing of Solidarity is now meaningless and both the Left and the Leadership can afford to ignore us” wrote a desperate Robertson. Not only had they lost 5 seats, but they had gone to those he characterised as “almost identikit Solidarity types – Gould, Brown²⁹⁶, Dobson, Straw”. Robertson felt the time had come to wind-up Solidarity. Given his key role first in the Manifesto Group and latterly Solidarity, it is worth quoting at length from his analysis of its successes and weaknesses.

²⁹² Steering Committee paper, JSA.

²⁹³ Shore, Archer, Jones and Radice lost their seats (Healey did not stand).

²⁹⁴ PLP papers.

²⁹⁵ George Robertson, “The Future of Solidarity”, September 1987 (author's papers).

²⁹⁶ Gordon Brown - arriving there ahead of Tony Blair.

Recalling that Tribune had orchestrated the hounding of “honest, decent party members” when “the last Labour Government was being rewritten as worse than Ramsay McDonald” (*sic*), he went on:

“Solidarity grew out of the .. revulsion in the PLP .. at the vicious, irrational, irresponsible climate in the post 1979 period. It built on the work of the Manifesto Group ..[and CLV and] as a defence organisation for beleaguered MPs, councillors and sane Party members. .. It stiffened people at a time of unprecedented pressure and vitriolic attack. Amid the defections to the SDP it kept the broad church of the Labour Party intact. Reselection would have been much bloodier without it, the SDP might have had other recruits, Benn would certainly have beaten Healey, the NEC would not have been regained [so] early .. and the ‘dream ticket’ would not have triumphed. .. Without Solidarity .. [the party] would barely have existed... During all that time .. the Tribune Group campaigned for mandatory reselection, against purging Militant, for Tony Benn (with the very ‘bravest’ voting for John Silkin), for giving the NEC the final say on the Manifesto, for the Electoral College and for the 40% to the unions... Times have changed .. what was the soft Left, and which now controls the Leader, the NEC and the Shadow Cabinet, .. have assaulted Militant .. pushed ahead with OMOV and established [the NCC].. The real division .. is now between the Hard-Left and the rest... So, what is there left for us in Solidarity to do? With a number of our supporters slithering over to Tribune .. and .. espousing a line identical to ours, what is the point of us remaining simply as a ‘Right’ wing rump to prove that they are in the Centre?.. There is still a role and a future for our people. If Solidarity had not existed .. the Left would have ruined the Party. If we were to give up then the resolution of the new image makers would soon fade”²⁹⁷.

However, unsuccessful slates and small meetings were no response so he advocated a return “to the pre-1976²⁹⁸ position where there was no formal Centre-Right organisation”, just a newsletter, links with the unions and *Forward Labour* and co-operation with some in LCC and Tribune to isolate and defeat the hard-left (particularly on OMOV).

This was heady stuff but followed Spellar’s suggestion of collaborating with the once-hated LCC. A Steering Committee was called for mid-September but, despite its importance, attendance was low²⁹⁹. Robertson’s paper was leaked to the *Sunday Times* which ran it as “Labour right admits defeat”³⁰⁰. Brynmor John reassured members that the Group was “alive and well” although, 10 days later, the Steering Committee agreed

²⁹⁷ George Robertson, *op cit*.

²⁹⁸ Shorthand for the creation of the Manifesto Group, though it actually operated from 1974.

²⁹⁹ Steering Committee minutes, 16 September 1987 (DRH/1/3).

³⁰⁰ *The Sunday Times*, 18 October 1987.

to propose to that week-end's NAC that Solidarity "be dissolved ..[as] its objectives have been achieved", being replaced with a regular publication³⁰¹.

Spellar chaired what became the final NAC on Sunday 1 November at Swinton House when Goudie reported on the Steering Committee³⁰². Most participants saw a continuing need for an organisation, Willy Bach warning "If we disbanded, we would be back to where we were in the 1970s". The Group represented the majority of Labour voters and needed to maintain contacts. There were internal elections – and reselections – to be organised. (There were reports that Prescott might challenge Hattersley as Deputy, which may have influenced people.) Whilst some felt that, as Militant was receding, a looser grouping around a newsletter would suffice, others hankered after a machine which could organise. Former Number 10 staffer (and daughter of an MP) Jenny Jeger warned "If we close down the other groups will not" and stressed the need for a link between Westminster and what goes on outside. Spellar thought a re-emergent "Labour First" could encompass Solidarity and *Forward Labour* as a source of information to "our people". A lengthy debate led to agreement on: (1) a newsletter; (2) a skeletal national organisation meeting twice a year; (3) local groups where desired; (4) CLP mailings; (5) Parliamentary Solidarity for slates, and (6) Conference fringe meetings. A smaller Executive was agreed with representation from the unions (Spellar), NEC (newly re-elected Anne Davis) and PLP (Robertson) plus the newsletter editors and officers.

The old Steering Committee endorsed those decisions the next day – though nothing more is recorded for 1987 other than the winding up of the West London Solidarity Group (its funds being sent to the centre). In February, the final bullet was placed in the barrel of the gun, with a letter from Dunwoody and Goudie to the mailing list. This sums up the achievements of the Group for which they had worked so hard:

"Solidarity was born out of .. revulsion against the vicious and irresponsible climate .. Tolerance was under siege, moderation was under attack and the SDP was draining away support .. Solidarity stiffened the resolve of decent Party members at a time of unprecedented pressure and vitriolic attack. In many ways it was the decisive factor in keeping the broad church of the Labour Party intact"³⁰³.

³⁰¹ Steering Committee minutes, 28 October 1987 (DRH/1/3).

³⁰² NAC minutes, 1 November 1987 (DRH/1/3).

³⁰³ Letter to Supporters, February 1988.

The letter repeated Robertson's list of achievements, adding the case for OMOV, and continued: Solidarity "has never been .. an alternative to the Party. Our success has been as a pressure point for sanity. .. Realignment .. is already under way and most of us want to be part of it". The letter invited views as to whether to continue or suggest ways to maintain "the pace of progress".

The press picked up the story, quoting an unnamed member: "Our dilemma is that there are no battles left to fight. Kinnock is moving our way on defence, Europe and the economy and we've clobbered the nasties"³⁰⁴. Replies poured in, voicing the grass-roots' views of the organisation which was, almost to the day, celebrating its 7th birthday. All but 5 of 29 responses called for Solidarity to continue, some prompted by the Benn-Heffer challenge to Kinnock and Hattersley:

"as there is to be a struggle for the Leadership I hope it will remain active .. Whilst I cannot envisage leaving the party, should the superannuated nobleman and/ or the *ancien terrible* have any success .. my activity may be confined to paying the minimum sub".

"I would hope .. Solidarity .. continues its tolerance and moderation .. we have now seen the intentions of the left-handed supporters as envisaged by Benn and Effer (*sic*) ... it is imperative that Solidarity remains .. to counteract these".

"although we have won some important battles the war has still got to be won! The leadership campaign .. emphasises the need for fresh support for Neil Kinnock .. against the hard left Campaign Group".

"I was of the opinion that it would be better to wind up .. as we had won the battle against the 'head-bangers' but .. it would be better to keep the public informed until after the contest".

"PLEASE KEEP GOING".

"the threat from infiltration and Militant remains .. 'Eternal Vigilance is the price of Liberty' .. continue".

"Solidarity is still useful as a pressure group for .. OMOV. (How many party members will feel frustrated that they have no vote in the forthcoming leadership/ deputy contests?) .. Will it not be necessary to support Roy Hattersley's candidature?"

"carry on .. We have always to watch the 'far-left' and we have to be .. ready to challenge them .. It would be .. a sad day" if Solidarity ceased.

"Now Benn and Heffer have decided to contest the leadership .. Solidarity should continue .. to ensure victory for Kinnock and Hattersley".

"Labour Solidarity is needed .. the hard-left are mobilising".

"there is a need for more solidarity .. to rally support against the attack .. from Benn, Heffer and their Militant supporters. We should not sit back and count our successes. .. continue .. for tolerance, moderation and above all sanity".

³⁰⁴ *Sunday Times*, 21 February 1988.

“The NEC changed because some unions have become ‘less left’ .. but the heart of the .. Movement .. has hardly changed .. mainly ‘left orientated’ .. Solidarity must be re-vitalised”.

“we can feel .. pride in what has been achieved .. in thwarting the attempts of those who sought to hijack our Party. It is .. easy to forget the threat which faced us in 1981 when the infiltration from Militant was very real. To the eternal credit of those who formed Solidarity that the threat has receded. However it has not been routed .. The decision of Tony Benn and Eric Heffer .. could give a boost to the extreme left. Therefore .. remain .. and .. support Kinnock and Hattersley”.

A CLP women’s section “admired the efforts put into the Solidarity for the benefit of the Labour Party. It .. must .. carry on”. From Liverpool, where Militant had pushed out members,

“these people are still in charge .. Now we have a leader who is bringing the Party back to its senses and we are proud to call ourselves Labour .. We all want to see .. OMOV .. we see once again the stupid antics of the left in proposing Benn and Heffer .. they don’t want .. a Labour Government”.

Two long-standing party members had similar views, W. M. Herbison hoping it would continue as “I have found the info it has provided helpful at GMC”. Marjorie Durbin wrote “its excellent work should not yet be abandoned .. Its main objective (one member, one vote) has still to be attained”.

Two Steering Committee stalwarts also wrote, Anne Davis saying “I thought the AGM had agreed that we should continue with the newsletter and occasional meetings and support for local activity .. I don’t think we can sit back and feel secure”; Barbara Hawkins wanted to: “continue .. as a broader federated structure of like minded groups .. the battle for sanity has still to be won”.

Sandwell Solidarity’s view was that:

“We must continue .. Our task is far from complete, witness the Benn, Heffer challenge .. The left are waiting to seize the reins of power .. The left must be swept aside or the possibility of becoming the Government will never be achieved .. The Kinnock/ Hattersley support within the N.E.C. is not because of a change of heart among party members .. but because some T Us have become less left .. the left is still .. predominant. So the need for Solidarity .. is greater”.

Four MPs favoured continuing, with defeated Shadow Cabinet member Archer, ruefully acknowledging that: “the Solidarity ‘slate’ no longer has a function in PLP elections .. However .. there is a need for a forum within the PLP for discussions [for] those who .. would not be at home in the Tribune group. .. Secondly.. there is still a job to do at

constituency level we need some mechanism by which MPs visit .. areas where mainstream Labour people feel isolated". Boothroyd wrote "I would like to see it remain .. as would other Blackcountry friends"; Bruce Millan: "I have been very reluctant to accept the proposition that Solidarity .. should be wound up". Finally, Parliamentary Solidarity Chairman Brynmor John: "I cannot accept the relatively benign view you have taken of the Party". Solidarity's problem was that some of its leading lights were more concerned about "who" rather than "what" the party was about and found themselves "in positions which they do not want to jeopardize and in which they feel perfectly cosy. That is why they feel the Party is in a much better state". He dismissed any idea of "realignment" especially when "the Tribune Left, and particularly the leader, is constantly humiliating people in the Right and Centre .. the Labour Party is becoming jelly. No one knows what we believe in". The Group should contest the battle for ideas as "there is still a large element .. wedded to unreality".

In addition, there were five letters in favour of winding up, two drawing different conclusions from the Benn/Heffer challenge. One felt that ending Solidarity would "put the current leadership election challenge in its proper perspective" whilst David Bean wrote "the time has come .. with dignity and honour, to call it a day. The .. leadership elections make this more .. urgent. If Roy is to win it can only be as the candidate of the whole Party, not as a factional candidate". The remaining letters read: "the Labour Party has overcome most of the difficulties .. [so] there seems little point in continuing"; "the job has been just about done", and lastly "Solidarity has done a fine job and achieved much .. it should stand in abeyance with 'trustees' .. to call it together should the need arise"³⁰⁵.

Solidarity's luminaries gathered in Hattersley's room to review the responses. A paper³⁰⁶ summarised these as:

We should go into "abeyance".

There is a need for an information network so that like-minds can know what is going on.

There is a need for new thinking.

There is a reluctance to keep a high profile organisation, the objectives of which are not clear.

We should team up with non-Solidarity people who now accept what we set out to do.

³⁰⁵ All letters: March 1988 (DRH/1/4).

³⁰⁶ 11 May 1988 (DRH/1/4).

Some people want to keep an organisational structure – of slates, plans – but are hazy about how it could operate.

Much of what Solidarity was founded for has been achieved – although some think more needs to be done, especially on OMOV.

The paper proposed:

That Solidarity be formally wound up and this (and this alone) be announced.

That in 1 to 2 months a newsletter would be started with (a) news and gossip from the party; (b) articles on stimulating issues.

That it have a new name.

That it have an editorial committee, with a broad membership.

That it organise meetings at annual and regional conferences.

That this be announced at least one month – maybe more – after the wind up of Solidarity.

The work of some core activists did continue, under the banner of a new “Labour First”, which still exists today. At this stage, the then “owner” of that title – Brynmor John – had, by some misunderstanding, failed to receive his invitation to this crucial meeting. It was doubly unfortunate, given his firm views, that he was therefore absent when the decision to wind up Solidarity was taken³⁰⁷. But taken it was, with the Secretary writing to the party’s General Secretary for a form “to de-register Solidarity”³⁰⁸. She and Dunwoody wrote to all their supporters³⁰⁹, with thanks for their responses from which they concluded (despite the evidence above, but presumably based on discussions with the MPs):

“the consensus was that now was an opportune time for a change of approach. We were created when the Labour Party seemed very likely to tear itself apart. Now – despite the conduct of a small unrepresentative minority – the overall determination is to re-create Labour as a party of government and to rally round the leadership .. We have therefore decided to dissolve the Labour Solidarity Campaign”.

After more thanks, they asked recipients to cancel their standing orders. Some money remained - £200 - which Goudie then sent to the party³¹⁰.

That was not quite the end of Solidarity. The parliamentary wing had long held its own funds, in a separate bank account, where it then lay dormant for some years, recalled just in the memory of its last officers. Then something rather strange happened. One

³⁰⁷ John letter to Goudie, 17 May 1988 (DRH/1/4).

³⁰⁸ Goudie to Whitty, 17 May 1988 (DRH/1/4).

³⁰⁹ Letter of 28 June 1988.

³¹⁰ Acknowledged by the party’s head of finance, 25 July 1988 (DRH/1/4).

day, Dewar asked Bell³¹¹ whether he would mind using the residue to help fund the bust of Nye Bevan, as the PLP had failed to raise the required £5,000. These two, plus Robertson and Weetch, agreed and so they – and Blair – in addition to the traditional Bevanites were present for the unveiling (which made “some people – notably Dick Clements – very cross”³¹²). The £885 made all the difference and the story is deliciously summarised in a note from Alan Haworth, the PLP secretary: “Thus did the heirs of Gaitskell contribute massively to the bust of Bevan”³¹³.

Is that the greatest achievement of “the heirs of Gaitskell” – funding the bust of the once-reviled Bevan? Solidarity’s brief life – 1981 to 1988 – witnessed a fundamental turnaround in Labour’s internal dynamics, not yet obvious to the electorate, but encompassing the underlying changes which, I suggest, were needed to create what became, within 10 years, an election-winning machine. Solidarity could not claim sole credit. It was the St Ermins Group which produced the change on the NEC, although both helped defeat Benn for Deputy Leader. Before ranking Solidarity’s achievements and failures, it might be useful to summarise its strengths and weaknesses.

Its major single strength was (until 1987) its widespread support within the PLP. 150 of the 251 MPs signed the post-Wembley statement, attacking its composition. Whether this number, the 102 who attended the launch meeting, the 80 to 90 who consistently voted the Solidarity slate, or the 37 who paid their £10 to Parliamentary Solidarity, is the correct gauge of its strength, Solidarity was the clear voice of the bulk of Labour’s elected representatives. Added to this, the Group had support from most of the unions, was led by two acknowledged parliamentary performers (Hattersley and Shore), and was blessed with the ever energetic, dedicated (yet unpaid) Goudie. It abstained from policy and could therefore encompass a wide spectrum of opinion.

Some its strengths were also its weaknesses. Its lack of policy denied it a cutting edge in the hurly-burly of political debate. The rivalry of its co-chairmen for the party leadership in 1983, as well Shore’s refusal to campaign for Healey in 1981, left it devoid of clear direction. Other weaknesses stemmed from its lack of finance, early defections to the SDP, obstruction from party staff, and the timing of the Deputy Leadership election: too early in its existence to have reached a settlement with the

³¹¹ Stuart Bell, interview, 22 January 2003, and Bell, *op cit*, p.100.

³¹² Alan Haworth, 26 February 2003, communication to the author.

'soft-left'. Its biggest handicaps, however, were its right-wing image and the gulf between its views and those of party activists. It also had an internal weakness, never resolved, in the split between MPs and its ordinary members which reduced its ability to win hearts, minds or votes locally. It was hindered by the failure of its star names – Smith, Shore and Hattersley – to stand for the NEC. Even where CLPs could deliver a Solidarity vote, there was no slate to compete with the attractions on the Left. It had no figurehead to compare with the charismatic Benn.

Furthermore, some of the trade unionists, in particular, who were working so hard in the unions – and sometimes courting unpopularity for it – questioned the effort made by the MPs. Kinnock reflected this: "They really didn't like way politicians, or some of the politicians, took stances and got attention but took no risks. That was one thing. But the main thing was what was common to Solidarity people other than [Giles Radice, George Robertson, Phillip Whitehead] and one or two others, they didn't put the work in. I repeatedly thought that was quite sensible, especially when I was driving to some meeting on a Friday night, and other people were putting their kids to bed. They didn't cover the ground. The other outfit [Solidarity] wouldn't do the work. No-one could ever accuse Giles or Phillip of not doing the work. Even if they weren't doing the GCs, they were writing the pamphlets and doing all the rest of it. But there were too many others who were dinner party and armchair – that's no bloody good to anybody"³¹⁴.

Given these strengths and weaknesses, what were its failures and achievements? It failed in its initial aim – to reverse the Wembley formula. It failed to halt mandatory reselection and was unable to get its candidates elected to the NEC (or NCC) – though Kaufman finally made it in 1991. It did not stop the NEC endorsing Militant candidates, nor see OMOV achieved in its lifetime. It neither won the "hearts and minds" of activists nor built bridges with the soft-left.

Solidarity's achievements, however, were rightly acclaimed by Robertson and others in 1987 and 1988, especially measured against the state of the party in 1981. It stemmed the flow of defectors to the SDP, offered succour to beleaguered MPs and helped reduce the impact of reselection. It contributed to Healey's success in the Deputy Leadership contest, and to making the case for the retention of Clause V, leaving the Shadow

³¹³ Memo for PLP officers on "Nye Bevan Bust", September 1996.

³¹⁴ Neil Kinnock interview.

Cabinet (or Cabinet) an equal say with the NEC over the manifesto. It articulated – at first virtually alone – the case for OMOV, and won that argument (its implementation coming later). Alone and against formidable opposition, it argued against Militant and maintained pressure for action.

Its publications, fringe meetings – particularly its rally at conference – and regional activity helped keep otherwise isolated members within the party, reassured they were not alone. With a mailing list at one point over 6,000 (and later some 500 subscribers), it provided a presence on the ground, even if it could not compete with the long-established CLPD. Within parliament, Solidarity helped isolate Benn between 1981 and 1983, and regularly won 9 or 10 places on the Shadow Cabinet from 1981 to 1986. By articulating the moderate case, it gave cover and rationale to what the unions were delivering on the NEC. Without continued pressure and authority from Solidarity, and the speeches of Hattersley and Shore, the union-created majority on the NEC would have struggled to push through the changes (including dealing with Militant) which were vital to Labour's re-emergence.

So who is right in their quotes which open this chapter: Golding or Mitchell? The former ignores the role Solidarity played in keeping members in the party and the political cover it gave to the changes wrought by the unions, without which general secretaries might have found it hard to carry their executives. Mitchell is nearer the mark. The Manifesto Group failed to hold the PLP together, but at that stage had no "St Ermins" to effect the changes on the NEC – and no support from the likes of Mitchell. Before the SDP, it was those, like Mitchell, who refused to fight the hard-left who helped produce the schism which finally woke the party from its slumbers. It is clear whom Labour Leaders thank, as the names of today's Lords (Clark, Goudie, Graham, Woolmer, Radice, Robertson) testify. However, what both Mitchell and Golding omit is any recognition of what was happening in the constituencies, where it was the soft-left which was to mellow and take the reins, producing the PLP which shunned Solidarity for a younger, pragmatic, Kinnockite majority. Perhaps, without Solidarity, there might have been no party for the Kinnockites to inherit.

Chapter 12 *Forward Labour*

At the start of the Right's post-Wembley fightback, the only public indication of union activity was *Forward Labour*. Written, edited, produced and mailed by GMWU Official David Warburton¹, some 18,000 copies of this gestetnered, stapled 4 to 10-page, near-monthly newsletter were distributed over the its lifetime, to a mailing list growing from under 100 in 1981 to over 800² by its final, 36th issue in January 1988. Despite Pearce's implication that *Forward Labour* was an organisation³, in fact it was Warburton – albeit with a faithful group of about 20 party activists and trade unionists – who spread the message.

Warburton's story is typical of many of the Right's stalwarts. As a young activist, he was a constituency secretary and agent, then rose to become a union national officer, retaining strong party links throughout his union career⁴. He was staunchly pro-Europe (and Treasurer of the "Trade Union for Europe" Group, alongside President Vic Feather and Secretary Grantham) and thus close to Jenkins and Williams from the 1975 Referendum. Despite not being a general secretary, he was active in TULV (set up at the instigation of his own general secretary, Basnett), serving on the TUFL⁵ national, organisation and finance committees. He was thus well known to trade unionists and politicians, and would have been a prime catch for the fledgling SDP.

That was not his style. Instead, as with his friends in St Ermins and Solidarity, he set out to help regain the party for his type of Labour. His method was the written word, producing a populist newsletter to encourage members both to stay and to keep active in the party. He provided a mixture of information and intelligence, the listing of slates to be championed locally, together with large doses of humour – particularly trained on the "mindless left". Above all, he helped recipients of his – sometimes slightly scurrilous – yarns know that they were not alone in their despair at the party's fortunes.

¹ Son-in-law of Frank Tomney, one of the first MPs deselected (in favour of Clive Soley).

² 800 were distributed directly but recipients in unions photocopied it, bringing the circulation up to over 2,000, according to its editor (David Warburton, interview, 7 December 2001; *Forward Labour*, Issue 32, March 1987).

³ Edward Pearce, *op cit*, p.557.

⁴ And remains a Labour councillor today.

⁵ It changed its name in 1983.

The intelligence comprised polling data and analysis⁶, usually from David Cowling⁷, together with what was happening in unions⁸, TULV or the TUC⁹, and a breakdown of conference votes¹⁰. Warburton also monitored the Left's activities, revealing how "Labour Liaison 82" was pushing Atkinson and Wise for the NEC in an attempt to remove Kinnock and Lestor¹¹. Individuals were singled out – such as Diane Abbott¹² for saying "We are not interested in reforming the police, the armed services, judiciary and monarchy. We are about dismantling them and replacing them with our own machinery of class rule"¹³. Militant was well covered, with pieces on their activities, War Chest, record in Liverpool and the Left's "Greenwich Amendment" which sought to undermine the Register set up to deal with the Tendency¹⁴.

Fire was also turned on the Conservatives, with campaigning material on the cost of unemployment, inflation, the Falklands War, the Franks Report into its origins¹⁵ and "Big Business funding of the Tory Party"¹⁶. Former colleagues, now in the SDP, did not escape Warburton's pen¹⁷. If his target was the government, and Labour's far-left, he could not resist the odd swipe at his own side. He chided Solidarity for being too Westminster-based and on one occasion accused the union-centred "Mainstream" of "paranoia"¹⁸.

The satirical style clearly gave the author great pleasure, with snippets such as "Winning elections isn't all that important" (quote from a CLP delegate at Wembley), "Can we afford so Broad a Church?", "Labour Councillors: Fellow Socialist or Puppets on a String", "The Invisible Miners" (noting that the NUM affiliated to the Yorkshire region of the party on 105,000 members – some 45,000 more than the number of miners in the Yorkshire coalfields), "Double Talk from Benn" (comparing what he said with

⁶ For example in issues 3,6,9,10,13,16,19,20 and 22.

⁷ David Warburton interview.

⁸ The AUEW in issue 2, TGWU in issue 19.

⁹ Such as tipping Norman Willis to succeed Len Murray as General Secretary (issue 22).

¹⁰ Issues 12, 18 and 23.

¹¹ Issue 10.

¹² Then a prospective parliamentary candidate.

¹³ Issue 30.

¹⁴ Issues 8,10,11,12,18, 21, 29 and 30.

¹⁵ Issues 6,7,12 and 13.

¹⁶ Issues 12, 15 and 19.

¹⁷ Issues 13 and 14.

¹⁸ Issue 26.

what he did), “God Bless the Sense of Wales” (the party’s Welsh Conference having voted for an enquiry into Militant)¹⁹.

Some was more knock-about: “Labour is OUR Party. 1982 must be the year to stop the Rot! There are 3 million²⁰ reasons why we must stop the wreckers”, “Everybody’s No 1 Carpetbagger – Leslie Huckster²¹”, “The Gospel According to St Mullins²²”, “Varley Vaults Ahead as Meacher stumbles” (the challenge for the treasurership), “Putting Teeth into Labour’s Bite”, “Fight Like Tigers – Against the Snakes”; “TRIB – ULATIONS! Yuk! Tribune Gets Worse” and “Hark the Herald” (about Ken Livingstone’s *Labour Herald*)²³.

Warburton enjoyed indulging his taste in humour: “Militant is an objective voice in the Party. I believe that it is genuine in its support for Labour and seeks to influence views in the traditional style of socialism. I also believe in fairies and that the moon is made of cheese”; “Make Thatcher Governor of Falklands”; “I’ll now ask Neil to give us a short address; Neil: 10 Downing Street”; “Mullin it Over”; “Twit of the Month”. His “Small Ads Section” included offers of “The Smallest Book in the World - *Democracy and the Militant Tendency*”, “Wanted: An Understandable Defence Policy. Send to SDP/Liberal Alliance Quickly”; “Lost: Grassroots support. Can you help the Rank and File Co-ordinating Tendency Faction” and “Rare Books – *Around Europe on 60p a Day* by Roy Jenkins and *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by A. Scargill”²⁴. It helped cheer up “the troops” and was surprisingly well received by local activists.

From the start, Warburton used his journalistic contacts to best advantage, giving them early copies of each edition so that, retold on their pages, his ideas - and particularly the slates – reached a far wider audience than he could manage²⁵. The slates in *Forward Labour* were similar to those of the St Ermins Group²⁶ and Solidarity – but this was the only outlet for the former which operated in secrecy. The slates proved vital in the 1984

¹⁹ Issues 1, 2, 3 and 10.

²⁰ A reference to the number unemployed.

²¹ A reference to Les Huckfield busily touring the country in search of a safe seat.

²² A reference to Chris Mullin, Editor of *Tribune*.

²³ Issues 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 17.

²⁴ Issues 2, 3, 5, 11, 13, 18 and 23.

²⁵ David Warburton interview. See, for example, *The Scotsman*, September 1981, *The Times*, 31 August 1982, *The Guardian*, 10 August 1984.

²⁶ So much so that Diana Jeuda’s name, habitually mis-spelt in the St Ermins papers, similarly appears as “Jueda” in *Forward Labour*.

battle for Treasurership, when *Forward Labour* was an early supporter of McCluskie²⁷ (hitherto seen as a bit too left for some). Given that McCluskie's margin over the Left's Albert Booth was a tiny 48,000²⁸ (or 48 constituencies), he would not have won without the CLP support which Warburton helped build up. Nevertheless, only one in four CLPs voted for McCluskie²⁹ and his position remained tenuous for some years. In 1986, Warburton styled himself "Convenor of Forward Labour Campaign for McCluskie" when the Treasurer faced challenges from Gavin Strang and Livingstone³⁰. Even in 1987, with a near 5 million majority over Strang, the CLPs still voted for McCluskie's opponent by 311,000 to 272,000³¹ – albeit an improvement on the 1984 result.

At times, *Forward Labour* ranged politically wider than the other moderate Groups – for example adding Lestor and Kinnock to its 1982 slate³², when the Left was trying to remove them for having abstained in the 1981 deputy leadership contest. In 1984, whilst endorsing Solidarity's Ashley and Kaufman, it suggested that Dalyell, Blunkett, Gould and Cook "might also be supported"³³. This was the first year *Forward Labour* had given support to Blunkett – according to Warburton, making this the first slate on which the future Home Secretary's name appeared³⁴. However, by 1985 Blunkett was firmly on the slate, alongside Ashley and Kaufman. At other times, there were bigger differences with Solidarity (Joan Ruddock³⁵ appearing on Warburton's list in 1986, for example, in preference to Solidarity's Radice and Robertson³⁶). Success in NEC elections was widely trumpeted, though even as he celebrated Kinnock having the sort of majority on the NEC that Wilson, Callaghan and Foot as Leaders could only have dreamt of, Warburton nevertheless warned NEC members not to "rubber stamp" proposals emanating from Westminster³⁷.

Organisationally, Warburton played a key role in Healey's 1981 campaign, not least by assiduously courting the 19 small unions which had escaped the Bennites' attention, 18

²⁷ Issue 20.

²⁸ *Tribune*, 12 October 1984.

²⁹ Issue 23.

³⁰ Circular to *Forward Labour* mailing list, 1 August 1986, and *Tribune*, September 1986.

³¹ Issue 35.

³² Issue 11.

³³ Issue 23.

³⁴ David Warburton interview.

³⁵ Then Chair of CND.

³⁶ Issue 30.

of which voted for Healey. The Deputy Leader embarked on the campaign with virtually no organisation (as Radice, one of the only two other major players, confessed “otherwise I’d have hardly got involved. I’m an unlikely campaigner”³⁸). The *Forward* mailing list was the main source of contacts, especially as Solidarity was hesitant in backing Healey for most of the contest³⁹. *Forward Labour* was the only overt supporter for Healey – proclaiming “It’s Got to Be Healey” straight after the Benn challenge emerged⁴⁰. During the campaign, Warburton would meet Healey in the latter’s Sloane Square flat every Wednesday to go through the figures, particularly adding knowledge from CLPs gleaned from *Forward Labour* contacts⁴¹. Healey rated his organisational abilities⁴², as did Kinnock for whom he also campaigned: “He was bloody good at organising. Pleasant bully with good left-wing background. Which he never relinquished. What a shame he’s not got a bigger country to run – ‘cos this guy is ultra capable”⁴³.

In the main, however, *Forward Labour*’s strength was propaganda, not organisation⁴⁴ as it was very much a one-man-band. Its first issue, in March 1981, was sub-titled “Bulletin for Democratic Socialists”⁴⁵. The theme of its first article was “The Road to Recovery”, identifying its audience as the “main core” of the party who “share a commitment to defeating the Tories .. by, first of all, re-gaining our Party from those who have used it as a battleground for their own aims since May 1979”. With a touch of self-flagellation, Warburton blamed his soul-mates as allowing the problem to develop by having “sought consensus whilst others relished conflict. We preached tolerance while others pursued intolerance. We sought rational discussion while others practised arrogance”. The call to arms was to fellow members: “We – who represent the basic heart of the Labour Party – must put a stop to the nonsense which has done us so much harm”. In a style more in common with the *Mirror* than the *Guardian*, a 2-inch square box simply urged: “If you think like a Socialist, Speak Out Like One!”. Headed “Naughty! Naughty!”, another snippet ironically chided left-wing MPs for criticising the Right for writing in “the capitalist press” whilst some of their own

³⁷ Issue 35.

³⁸ Giles Radice, interview, 26 November 2003.

³⁹ See chapter on Labour Solidarity.

⁴⁰ Issue 3.

⁴¹ David Warburton interview.

⁴² Denis Healey interview.

⁴³ Neil Kinnock interview.

⁴⁴ It never organised fringe meetings at conference, for example.

number were simultaneously using “such pro-socialist papers as the *Times* or the *Guardian*”⁴⁶.

Forward Labour's ambition had been to reverse the Wembley formula; its launch issue detailed the voting pattern which led to the 40:30:30 outcome, which the majority of unions opposed, and indicated the shift needed to amend the proportions to 50% for the PLP⁴⁷. As that objective disappeared, *Militant* became its prime target. This attracted widespread support, including from 56 MPs on its mailing list⁴⁸ although it was initially coy to name them. Nevertheless, gradually names appeared, starting with Callaghan, John Smith and Shore and adding Boothroyd⁴⁹, Dunwoody, Ashley, Jack Cunningham, Robertson, Summerskill, Golding, Varley, Woolmer, Archer⁵⁰, Hattersley, Radice⁵¹ and half a dozen others, together with Gordon Adam MEP⁵². In addition, some senior trade unionists were content to be named, including Duffy, Sirs and Tuffin. By the time Kinnock formed his first Shadow Cabinet, *Forward Labour* boasted that it was read by 7 of them⁵³.

Forward Labour was not slow to comment on political events, whether Warburton's own favoured cause of the Palestinians, or developments within the party. A central thrust throughout, though, was the need to win an election. Writing of the size of this challenge in 1985, he stressed that the party had to gain 117 seats, and increase its share of the vote from 28% to 40% - at a time when the opinion polls had Labour on 34-37%⁵⁴. Even after Kinnock's Bournemouth speech, with the Conservatives on 32%, Labour only managed 38%⁵⁵. Following the 1987 election, when Labour won 229 seats, the newsletter emphasised that the party had come second in just 153 and third in 245, taking less than one third of the total vote⁵⁶.

Internal party issues – especially finance and publications – were regularly covered, with ideas for an elected Party Chair (chosen by conference) and a reformed NEC

⁴⁵ Changed to “Against Extremism” in issue 2.

⁴⁶ Issue 1.

⁴⁷ Issues 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ Issue 5.

⁴⁹ An old family friend of Warburton, a GMWU-sponsored MP and a member of the NEC.

⁵⁰ All these by issue 9.

⁵¹ By issue 19.

⁵² Issue 20.

⁵³ Issue 19.

⁵⁴ Issue 28.

⁵⁵ Issue 27.

structure floated, and comments made on political fund ballots and the campaign strategy⁵⁷. However, OMOV was only fully embraced after the 1987 election, and even then with some hesitation due to its impact on the union role in the selection of candidates⁵⁸.

Perhaps *Forward Labour*'s most newsworthy achievement was its instigation, in the immediate aftermath of the 1983 election, of what became the Kinnock-Hattersley "dream ticket". Although this expression did not emanate from its pages, *Forward Labour* was the first to advocate that the two front-runners should stand for both Leader and Deputy Leader – each supporting the other for the number two position. Within days of the election, a new edition appeared headed "Labour needs a New Leadership" and balloting readers on their choice of candidate. The questionnaire polled views on all the likely candidates⁵⁹ and offered a two-way balanced ticket of Hattersley/Kinnock or Kinnock/Hattersley. The 284 responses showed 232 (82%) in favour of the Unity Ticket option (with, on a straight choice, 43% for Kinnock, 38% for Hattersley and 13% for Shore – surprising for this anti-Left grouping). Of the 23 MPs responding (12% of the PLP), 10 went for Hattersley, 7 for Kinnock and 5 for Shore. Trade unionists voted 42 for Kinnock, 39 for Hattersley and 8 for Shore. *Forward Labour* then pushed for the balanced-ticket, which united soft-left and moderate-right, carrying advertisements for both and criticising Meacher for opposing this Left-Right settlement, judging his election as Deputy to Kinnock would be "an unmitigated disaster"⁶⁰.

Despite the help given to Healey in 1981, and the support for Kinnock-Hattersley in 1983, it was all to end in tears for *Forward Labour* and Warburton's own career in 1988. At the end of 1987, as usual, Warburton gave an advance copy of the January issue to journalists. The *Telegraph* ran a major article on its "attack on Kinnock's leadership"⁶¹. *Forward Labour*'s – for once signed – front-page story, "Make or Break Year?", criticised Kinnock for making no major speech since the election and taking no initiatives, evidence of the distance between the leadership and movement which was "demoralising". The *Leader*'s "low key" strategy was, the piece opined, an example of

⁵⁶ Issue 34.

⁵⁷ Issues 27, 28, 29 and 33.

⁵⁸ Issue 33.

⁵⁹ Hattersley, Heffer, Kinnock and Shore for Leader, plus Denzil Davies, Kaufman and Meacher for Deputy.

⁶⁰ Issues 16, 17, 18 and press release of 27 July 1983.

⁶¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 29 December 1987.

either “bad advice or an excuse for lethargy”⁶². Warburton’s remarks attracted attention not simply because it was the post-Christmas quiet period, but because they emanated from such a Kinnock loyalist. An onslaught fell on *Forward Labour*’s editor, well out of line with the mild rebukes of the offending article. It was just the excuse the new GMWU General Secretary, John Edmonds, needed to trim the wings of his number two and take political affairs out of his hands. Warburton resigned the editorship (which Basnett had tolerated and even encouraged) and resumed industrial, rather than political, responsibilities in the union. For a time after June 1988, the title continued under what was to become Labour First (mark two) which, based in theory at Brian Nicholson’s address, took over the remnants of the dissolved Solidarity, continuing the numbering from the original and casting Warburton in the role of President.

The original *Forward Labour* was never an organisation, so in some ways sits uneasily with the other chapters of this thesis. But it was the main communication between those Moderates seeking to change the party and a largish group of supporters within the wider movement. It helped promulgate slates, passed on intelligence, played a key role in the 1981 and 1983 leadership contests, added vital extra votes to those being amassed by the union general secretaries and “flew the flag” for party members for whom winning an election was central to their membership. As such, it was a tool in the armoury of the Moderates.

⁶² Issue 36.

Chapter 13 Conclusion

In 1979 when Labour lost the election after 5 years in power, few would have foreseen its internal wars and the electoral ravages that were to mark the latter years of the 20th century. Indications of future fissures were in view, but little to signal the dimension of the coming eruptions. The May 1979 election – following the Winter of Discontent – was portrayed in the media more as a result of a Labour Party-trade union rupture than as an indicator of an internal Party conflagration. Yet it was an internal re-formation that was occurring, with a sharp disparity between the PLP (where the moderate Manifesto Group held sway) and the activists (pushing a left-wing agenda) – and with no over-arching structure, encompassing the entire party tradition, to maintain equilibrium or to shape a constructive path forward.

Earlier party splits – whether in the 1930s (over the government's response to the depression), in the 1960s (when CDS rode to the rescue over defence), in the 1970s (over Europe) – had been about policy. By the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the Left had decided that the very nature of being in office, which caused leaders to betray the led, required constitutional changes to bring the government into line with party demands by making it accountable to the party at CLP and national level. Whilst the Left was not alone its is disappointment with the 1974-79 governments (about which the former Chairman of the Manifesto Group despaired both then and since¹), its recipe for change struck at the parliamentary/non-parliamentary settlement within the Labour Party and served to fuel the self-serving and careerist tendencies of individual MPs, steering a number of them to choose their own future rather than the party's interests. A climate of fear developed which weakened the parliamentarians' response to the party's move away from electorally attractive policies and conduct. Whilst the constitutional proposals reducing the MPs' role encompassed the Electoral College and control over the Manifesto, it was reselection which had the greatest effect. This undermined the authority, job security and hence confidence of each MP. They were, in a word, frightened. The Manifesto Group was weakened by being right-wing, and pro-Europe; then the climate of fear forced it (and Labour First) to keep its membership list secret. This only added to the pressure on any MP identified with such a grouping. Some of Manifesto members even resented the creation of its CLP-based sister organisation, CLV, as this drew attention to the Moderates' existence.

After the loss of office in 1979, any semblance of party unity fell away. A downward spiral led to more public disagreements, further weakening the standing of the PLP. Then, as the trigger to the biggest split the Labour Party has ever seen, the adoption at Wembley of an Electoral College to select the party leadership drew the (unpopular) unions into a more public parliamentary role whilst downplaying the responsibility of elected MPs. The aftermath of Wembley is seen in the Limehouse Declaration and the SDP, but away from the media's gaze equally significant groupings (as far as the Labour Party's internal dynamics were concerned) were being created within a mile of the House of Commons. One was the St Ermins Group, the other Labour Solidarity Campaign. Both were unlike what had gone before and both have been virtually airbrushed out of history books. Philip Gould² claims that it was the "modernisers" who saved the Labour Party³. One of those modernisers, Peter Mandelson, believed "it was the transformation, the rebirth of the Labour Party over the last two or three years" that finally clinched the victory for Blair"⁴. More recently, the Fabian Society's then Chair, Paul Richards, whilst chastising those who date Labour Party history from 1997 (or just possibly 1994⁵) claims that "Kinnock began the long march back to electability" in 1983⁶. Neither Gould/ Mandelson nor Richards give us the full story. Gould fails to distinguish the party's presentation and policy modernisation from the earlier requisite political changes which facilitated these. Richards is nearer the truth, though Kinnock's modernisation owes much to the traditional Right (his opponents in his earlier incarnation). This thesis does not argue that the Groups studied here were the sole saviours of the Labour Party as an electoral machine. It does argue that they made their crucial – necessary if not sufficient – contribution to saving the Labour Party between 1981 and 1987: a contribution which has hitherto been undervalued and underestimated. As the preceding chapters relate, the march on Militant, the changes in the composition of the NEC (which delivered for Kinnock the majority he required for his reforms) – and indeed the delivery of Kinnock over Hattersley – were all begun before 1983 and

¹ Giles Radice interview.

² Pollster, and adviser to Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair, now Lord Gould of Brookwood.

³ Even subtitling his book "How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party" – this being code for Blair, Brown, Mandelson and, of course, himself; Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, Little, Brown, 1998.

⁴ Anthony Bevens, *Independent*, 2 May 1997, p.1. (However, in 1990 Mandelson said "We have now effectively completed the building of the new model party .. now geared to the realities of government rather than the illusions of opposition", *Guardian*, 16 February 1990.)

⁵ When Blair was elected Leader.

⁶ Paul Richards, "Why study Labour history" in *Labour History*, 2003 (Autumn 2003), p.3.

owe more to a band of trade unionists than to the pollsters, advisors or parliamentarians who subsequently closeted themselves around Kinnock, Smith and Blair. Alone amongst these three leaders, Smith had spoken up against the Electoral College and other constitutional changes and participated in “saving” the party during its darkest days. Even Smith played his most notable role only later when, as Leader, he oversaw the final introduction of OMOV. Earlier, he failed to exploit his popularity, declining to stand in the annual beauty parade of the NEC elections. Instead, it fell to the heirs of the 1900 trade union leaders, who had in their time recognised the need for power in the House of Commons, to re-assert the centrality of the need to win power into the party’s thinking and to provide some leadership. Both the NEC and the parliamentary leadership had failed to give this lead, the parliamentarians concentrating initially on being in government and subsequently on opposing Thatcher, dealing with the Falklands and the miners’ dispute, and responding to the SDP challenge in the Commons.

The major change that happened to the Labour Party – the new political make-up of the NEC leading, *inter alia*, to action on Militant – resulted from the St Ermins Group’s work and was neither conceived of, led by or, initially, even blessed by the party leadership. This is in contrast to CDS in the 1960s which worked on behalf of the Leader, and it is at variance with some of the academic writing on party dynamics and change⁷. The St Ermins Group’s intervention stems partly from the particular roots of the Labour Party, secured as they are outside of Parliament, from the desire of unions to have an elected presence in the Commons. Thus there was an external force on the party willing it back to electability and, when the party machine failed to respond, taking action to make the necessary changes.

The group of trade unionists who rose to the challenge in the 1980s had much in common with their 1900 predecessors (and indeed with Ernest Bevin who played a similar role in 1931). Most left school at 14 years of age and made their way up through their trade and trade union, being dedicated to the well-being of their fellow workers. In the preceding decades, old fashioned deference, allied with the unwritten “rules” of the Labour Party, meant that in the main such trade unionists left high politics, and policy, to the politicians. That changed during the Wilson and Callaghan

years, when NEC-government relations worsened, as the union movement (with its own disappointments in those governments) ceded influence to the left-wing MPs on the NEC, allowing the party machinery (kept under leadership influence under Gaitskell and initially under Wilson) to slip away.

Partly under pressure from radicals in their own unions, the 1970s generation of union leaders failed to discern within CLPD a more fundamental attack on the party structure and dynamics than mere expression of left-wing policy. Furthermore, from 1979, union leaders' attention was focused on industrial priorities as Thatcher's privatisations, public sector contraction and increased unemployment created a full-time agenda for them. However, from the late 1970s, a newer group of union leaders, who were to metamorphose into the St Ermins Group, were beginning to meet even before the cataclysmic events following the Wembley conference. Wembley was less the trigger for the organisational response⁸ than was the creation of the SDP with its *electoral* threat. This gave rise to the SDP's subsequent claim that it took their defection to bring the party to its senses. In fact, Foot's election as Leader in 1980 – when the moderate majority in the PLP failed to deliver for Healey – was the trigger for the party's electoral misfortunes and hence the unions' organisation.

It is, perhaps, surprising that the PLP – which was to experience *directly* the electoral consequences of the party's troubles – was so ineffective at halting the whirlwind. The history of the Manifesto Group demonstrates how the Right controlled the PLP – except where their votes were obvious to CLPs and where reselection meant that MPs could not ignore their activists' views. Thus in the 1976 deputy leadership and 1980 leadership ballots and in 1980/81 when the PLP gave way over the Electoral College (though opposed to the device, neither the PLP nor the Shadow Cabinet took on the arguments), the moderate majority was unable to capitalise on its advantage. Indeed, its success in internal elections only emphasised the disjunction between the PLP and the NEC, there being almost no overlap between the MPs elected by their colleagues, and those chosen by CLPs for the NEC. The NEC/PLP divide, which started under Wilson, worsened by the year. Thus from 1979, the PLP's standing in the wider party and its internal insecurities meant it was near neutered, whilst the unions' attention was

⁷ For example: "political parties do not respond with changes unless their leaders order them to do so", Frank L. Wilson, *op cit*, p. 275.

elsewhere. It took some outside force – in this case the moderate unions – to have the courage and determination to break the impasse, as the MPs were not up to the task.

Labour Solidarity – created after Wembley and the loss of MPs to the SDP – sought to make up for the shortcomings of the Manifesto Group. It was politically more broadly based (including Shore, Mitchell and O'Neill), had a higher public profile (spear-headed by Hattersley and Shore), a membership beyond parliament and a programme of events outside Westminster. Unlike the Manifesto Group, its public profile was evidence that it was fighting back, the former's few writings being more academic than polemic, more persuasive than rallying.

However, Solidarity contained weaknesses: the absence of policy (a severe handicap in a party of policy and at a time requiring a positive agenda); a "re-tread" image as it lacked young spokespeople; insufficient local presence; and, above all, a political stance out of line with the activists in the wider party. Its inability to engage with and persuade party activists – key to any grouping seeking to lead a political party – repeated the shortcomings of the Manifesto Group and denied it any success in the CLP section of the party's NEC. Solidarity failed to achieve even its first objective – to reverse the Wembley Electoral College formula – partly because Benn's challenge saw it used so quickly and partly because Healey won under the very formula reviled by its opponents (largely thanks to those unions whose influence had been so feared but whom, in reality, were no Bennites). However, Solidarity largely failed in this original objective because there was no appetite for change. Solidarity had other weaknesses, such as the lack of a single, charismatic figurehead coupled with the disadvantage of having to promote the unpopular Healey in 1981, and it was weakened up to 1983 by its two co-chairmen fighting for the ultimate crown. Its concentration on Westminster and Shadow Cabinet elections rather than the party in the country made its relations with the all-important unions difficult. As one of the key players in St Ermins, Godsiff, has commented "the vast majority of subscribers to the Solidarity Group were MPs who were fearful of their own political careers rather than actually wishing to organise the fightback at a local level against the Bennites and Militant or to offer an intellectual position to challenge the hard-left's view of the world"⁹. Solidarity MPs, like their

⁸ The significance of the Electoral College, now universally accepted, was at the time much exaggerated.

⁹ Roger Godsiff, interview, 27 November 2003.

colleagues in the Manifesto Group, also failed to understand the depth of hostility of younger party members to the old guard, whether in parliament or in the unions. The very strengths of trade unionists (long serving, loyal, cohesive) were seen as the weaknesses of “old, white, men” by the post-1960s student generation now active in inner city parties¹⁰. It was a dialogue of the deaf, with old and new barely talking, much less understanding each other’s perspective. Solidarity showed itself as unable to treat with these new circumstances as was the older parliamentary leadership. It was therefore not able to provide the dialogue so needed by the party.

Despite these handicaps to Solidarity’s success, it did have a number of achievements even if not quite those summarised described by some MPs¹¹. It did succeed in offering support to Moderates and provided the only public arguments against Militant and in favour of OMOV (which would in due course transform the party). Unlike the Manifesto Group, it did attempt to take the debate outside Westminster, and it did furnish grassroots members with ammunition and courage to take on the Left, though it is possible that *Forward Labour*’s 18,000 copies did more to raise morale than the 24 issues (perhaps 20,000 copies) of Solidarity’s slightly more staid newsletter.

The Group of Ten¹² was not able to carry this coalition forward nor was Solidarity; it had to await the 1983 electoral disaster¹³ for even Labour First, let alone the Tribunites, to join Solidarity. Even then it failed to attract new MPs to its ranks. It is notable, for example, that Blair and Brown joined Tribune, not Solidarity in 1983 (particularly surprising in Blair’s case as he had been an early Solidarity supporter, was a close legal colleague of James Goudie and Derry Irving, a family friend of Mary Goudie and has not emerged since as a typical Tribunite). However, this might be explained by old fashion ambition and careerism. Even a serial “non-joiner”, like Bryan Gould, realised he had to be on someone’s slate to get elected to the Shadow Cabinet; so he signed up for Tribune¹⁴. He, Brown and Blair were all to achieve rapid success in this ambition, further proof of the need to hunt with the pack.

¹⁰ Sue Goss, *op cit*; Matt Tee interview.

¹¹ see Austin Mitchell’s quote at the start of the Solidarity chapter, for example.

¹² See p.36.

¹³ When Labour gained the lowest level of support since 1918, with only 27.6% of the vote, giving the Conservatives a 144-seat majority.

¹⁴ Bryan Gould, interview, 16 December 2003.

Because Solidarity could not break the Left's hold on the party machinery, it was left to those outside Westminster to make the changes. We therefore return to our story of those trade unionists who started meeting before Wembley but, immediately afterwards, congregated in the St Ermins Group and decided that the priority was taking control of the NEC and then to fashion the party outside of the House into an election-winning entity. This would mean expelling Militant, changing head-office personnel and concentrating on winning back public support. Their first service to the party was not to defect in the aftermath of Wembley; their second had been to take control of the NEC by 1982; their third was to help deliver the leadership to Kinnock in whom they saw someone equally committed to the task of returning to government. The story told here shows how much effort went into this venture – at least 100 hours of business meetings between 1981 and 1987 – but also demonstrates the trust, discipline and organisational planning needed to deliver the conference votes. This was done in secret and for no ulterior motive. Whilst some of their number do now sit on the red benches, most of the names remain unfamiliar to even the Cabinet let alone the wider world.

Whilst, as documented in the thesis, there was a phalanx of union leaders whose determination allied with their standing in the union movement enabled them to amass the necessary votes, there were two other elements which assisted the process. One was the undoubted arithmetic clarity and accuracy possessed by APEX researcher Roger Godsiff, who supplied the tactical path for his union masters to tread. The other was the particular role played by the EETPU. Frank Chapple (having already seen off the communists in his own union) and later Eric Hammond provided clear direction, as well as their boy Friday in the shape of John Spellar. The latter, backed by the support of his bosses, was able again and again to deploy the resources of the EETPU to service or subsidise the activities of the various groups described in these pages. Whilst the ISTC provided the venue for the St Ermins Group (as well as for the Solidarity National Advisory Council, Labour First Mark Two and Londoners for Labour), it was the EETPU which provided the envelopes, postage, printing and equipment for Solidarity, plus staff time and postage for Londoners for Labour, Labour First Mark Two, Mainstream and another small grouping (not covered here), Labour Defence and Disarmament. APEX similarly provided printing, supplies and staff time for Solidarity, St Ermins, Londoners for Labour and the reborn Labour First. Godsiff and Spellar often despaired of the politicians in Solidarity but never refused the wherewithal for them to do their job. In addition, each put in hours of their own time to contribute to

Solidarity's successes. Whilst Spellar has reached high ministerial office, Godsiff has been ignored by the party – perhaps partly embarrassed by the role many of its current leading lights were playing whilst he was contributing to the saving of the Labour Party.

The St Ermins stalwarts had another characteristic: they did not believe in taking prisoners. Just as one of their number, John Golding, was content to allow the party to fight the 1983 general election on as left-wing a manifesto as Benn wanted, so that blame for the ensuing defeat could be comfortably hung round the Left's neck (true vengeance for the 1979 defeat having been blamed by the Left on Callaghan's timid manifesto), so others believed that dealing with the soft-left was time wasted¹⁵. In other ways, they were flexible and could deal with the union Left, being willing to vote for even far Left candidates in NEC elections where this could produce resulting votes for their marginal candidates, or where such a vote would make no difference to the outcome. The centrality of each decision was the outcome. Having decided that control of the NEC was crucial, they set about amending the way the TUC General Council was elected (partly as a good thing in itself, but partly to free up the negotiation of votes and particularly to release unions' dependence on the left-wing TGWU), whilst targeting the NEC seats controlled by the unions: the treasurership, the women's seats and the union section. They would if necessary support a left-wing candidate (such as Glenys Thornton in London) to untie another group (in this case the Co-op) from an alternative, and then use traditional practices – such as support for an incumbent – to lock other unions into position. Occasionally they would break unwritten rules, such as when the AUEW supported Eric Varley against their own member, Norman Atkinson. Once, when one of their number “went solo” and broke another tradition by failing to support the Triple Alliance, he was to pay the price of his own job as General Secretary of the NUR. The fact that many years afterwards Weighell still believed he had done the right thing for the needs of the party, is testimony to the group's conviction that the future of the Labour Party was more important than any single individual. This concentration on the sole aim of bringing the party back to “sanity” so that it could win elections enabled

¹⁵ Godsiff commented that the Solidarity MPs spent “interminably long” trying to keep O'Neill - of whom he had never heard – on board while “the whole world was crashing around our ears”, a priority he failed to understand, Roger Godsiff interview.

the group to function as a tight knit team despite their varying views on items of policy, from Europe and defence, to the Middle East¹⁶.

The St Ermins unions thus achieved a crucial change in the NEC composition which was then used, firstly, to push through action on Militant, and subsequently to support the leadership which it had helped deliver to Kinnock. Would the Labour Party have survived without the Group and its accomplishments? It is easy to forget, when the current government has a majority of nearly 200, how close the Labour Party – with a mere 200 MPs and ongoing internal feuds – was to melt down. In the words of Bryan Gould: “There was a moment when it was touch and go. The Labour Party was at real risk at one point”¹⁷. In 1983, it came within a whisker of being eclipsed electorally by the SDP-Liberal Alliance. The implication was serious; as one respected commentator wrote at the time, outside of the big cities, the party “faced something that looks appallingly like terminal collapse in its support in much of the rest of Britain”¹⁸. To get some perspective of what happened to the Labour Party after that 1983 defeat, it is useful to look at the Conservative Party which faced a similar electoral disaster in 1997¹⁹. However, without the equivalent of the trade unions to ride to its rescue and to insist on the party re-focusing away from its core vote and existing members, and on to the wider electorate, the Opposition remained more like a rabbit fixated by car headlights. Having made no meaningful changes by 2001, the car ran over it all over again. By comparison, therefore, it is possible to argue that without the unions forcing the Labour Party to change, it could have continued its downward path. Certainly, more MPs would have peeled off had Benn – as was the wish of party activists – won the deputy leadership in 1981, a result denied them by the St Ermins Group of unions, Labour Solidarity, *Forward Labour*, and the soft-left abstainers. That further defection could have fatally wounded the party’s chance of subsequent electoral revival.

In other ways, the Traditional Right was much less successful in impacting on the party. They failed in the period covered to alter the party’s policy on withdrawal from Europe and defence, and they remained unable to win constituency support for their NEC candidates. Solidarity also failed to match CLPD’s tactical skill in using resolutions to

¹⁶ Warburton was highly involved in the Palestinian cause; Clarke and Spellar equally devoted to Labour Friends of Israel.

¹⁷ Bryan Gould interview.

¹⁸ Peter Kellner, *New Statesman*, 17 June 1983.

¹⁹ With just 31.5% of the poll.

force its issue (OMOV) onto the conference agenda. Both this and the policy changes had to await Kinnock and Smith's leaderships. However, given the short timeframe over which these groups operated, and lacking support from the soft-left, it is perhaps forgivable that they failed to undo a decade's damage to the party structure. This thesis does not argue that the Groups studied here were the sole saviours of the Labour Party as an electoral machine. It does argue that they made their crucial – necessary if not sufficient – contribution to saving their Labour Party between 1981 and 1987 when it was desperately unpopular even to say aloud the things they believed in, let alone embark on the tasks they set themselves. Without a majority on the NEC, Kinnock would probably not have made his 1985 Bournemouth speech. Without their determined work on Militant, the expulsions might not have taken place. And without their clear focus on the need to win elections, for the sake of their members and the good of the country, it is doubtful whether the party, within a decade of the 1987 election, could have soared to its electoral heights.

Annex 1 MPs, MEPs and Peers

Diane Abbot	MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington
Frank Allaun	MP for Salford East
Peter Archer	MP for Warley West (now Lord Archer of Sandwell)
Jack Ashley	MP for Stoke-on-Trent South (now Lord Ashley of Stoke)
Joe Ashton	MP for Bassetlaw
Norman Atkinson.	MP for Tottenham
Willy Bach	Now Lord Bach
Richard Balfe	Labour MEP for London South Inner (now Conservative MEP for London Region)
Michael Barnes	Former MP for Brentford and Chiswick
Steve Bassam	Now Lord Bassam of Brighton
Robert Bean	MP for Rochester and Chatham
Margaret Beckett	MP for Lincoln (now MP for Derby South)
Stuart Bell	MP for Middlesbrough (now Sir Stuart Bell)
Tony Benn	MP for Bristol South East (later MP for Chesterfield)
Andrew Bennett	MP for Stockport North
Tony Blair	MP for Sedgefield (Labour Party Leader from 1994, Prime Minister from 1997)
David Blunkett	MP for Sheffield Brightside
Albert Booth	MP for Barrow-in-Furness
Betty Boothroyd	MP for West Bromwich West (now Baroness Boothroyd)
Tom Bradley	MP for Leicester East (and TSSA President)
George Brown	MP for Belper (later Lord George-Brown)
Gordon Brown	MP for Dunfermline East
Janey Buchan	MEP for Glasgow
Norman Buchan	MP for West Renfrewshire
James Callaghan	MP for SE Cardiff and Labour Party Leader from 1976 to 1980 (Prime Minister 1976–79). Now Lord Callaghan of Cardiff
Dale Campbell	MP for Workington. Now Lord Campbell-Savours of Allerdale
Savours	
Robert Cant	MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central
John Cartwright	MP for Woolwich East
Barbara Castle	MP For Blackburn. Later Baroness Castle of Blackburn
David Clark	MP for South Shields. Now Lord Clark of Windermere
Charles Clarke	MP for Norwich (former Head of Kinnock's office)
Bob Clay	MP for Sunderland North
Ann Clwyd	MEP for Mid and West Wales. Now MP for Cynon Valley
Stanley Clinton-Davies	MP for Hackney Central. Now Lord Clinton-Davis
Michael Cocks	MP for Bristol South (former Government Chief Whip; later Lord Cocks)
Stan Cohen	MP for Leeds SE
Donald Coleman	MP for Neath
Robin Cook	MP for Edinburgh Central
Jack (John) Cunningham	MP for Whitehaven
James Craigan	MP for Glasgow, Maryhill
Tony Crosland	MP for Grimsby
Stan Crowther	MP for Rotherham

Tam Dalyell	MP for West Lothian
Arthur Davidson	MP for Accrington
Denzil Davies	MP for Llanelli
Terry Davis	MP for Birmingham Stetchford
Donald Dewar	MP for Glasgow Garscadden
Frank Dobson	MP for Holborn and St Pancras South
Jack Dormand	MP for Easington (later Lord Dormand of Easington)
Bruce Douglas-Mann	MP for Mitcham and Morden
Pat Duffy	MP for Sheffield Attercliffe
Gwyneth Dunwoody	MP for Crewe
Tom Ellis	MP for Wrexham
David Ennals	MP for Norwich North
John Evans	MP for St Helens North. Now Lord Evans of Parkside
Frank Field	MP for Birkenhead
Terry Fields	MP for Liverpool Broadgreen
Martin Flannery	MP for Sheffield Hillsborough
Ray Fletcher	MP for Ilkeston
Michael Foot	MP for Ebbw Vale and Leader of the Labour Party, 1980-83.
Ben Ford	MP for Bradford North
John Fraser	MP for Norwood
Hugh Gaitskell	MP for South Leeds; Leader of the Labour Party, 1955-63
John Gilbert	MP for Dudley. Now Lord Gilbert
Roger Godsiff	MP for Birmingham Small Heath
John Golding	MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme
Bryan Gould	MP for Dagenham
Philip Gould	Lord Gould of Brookwood
Ted Graham	MP for Edmonton. Now Lord Graham of Edmonton
Bernie Grant	MP for Tottenham
John Grant	MP for Islington Central
Peter Hain	MP for Putney
Willie Hamilton	MP for Fife Central
Harriet Harman	MP for Peckham
Judith Hart	MP for Lanark
Roy Hattersley	MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook. Now Lord Hattersley.
Lord Haworth	Alan Haworth, Secretary of the PLP
Denis Healey	MP for Leeds East. Now Lord Healey of Riddlesden
Eric Heffer	MP for Liverpool Walton
Patricia Hewitt	MP for Leicester West, former adviser to Neil Kinnock MP, Leader of the Labour Party.
John Horam	MP for Gateshead West. Now Conservative MP for Orpington
Doug Hoyle	MP for Warrington
Denis Howell	MP for Birmingham Small Heath (later Lord Howell)
Les Huckfield	MP for Nuneaton
Cledwyn Hughes	MP for Anglesey (later Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos)
Adam Ingram	MP for East Kilbride
Sydney Irving	MP for Dartford
Margaret Jay	Baroness Jay
Roy Jenkins	MP for Stechford and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party (later Lord Jenkins of Hillhead)
Brynmor John	MP for Pontypridd

Barry Jones	MP for Flint East (now Lord Jones of Deeside)
Gerald Kaufman	MP for Manchester Ardwick
Frazer Kemp	MP for Washington
Robert Kilroy-Silk	MP for Ormskirk
Neil Kinnock	MP for Bedwellty
Arthur Latham	MP for Paddington
Joan Lester	MP for Eton and Slough
Harold Lever	MP for Manchester Cheetham (later Lord Lever of Manchester)
Helen Liddell	MP for Airdrie & Shotts
Ken Livingstone	Leader of GLC, later MP for Brent East. Now Mayor of London
Edward Lyons	MP for Bradford West
Dickson Mabon	MP for Greenock
Rod MacFarquhar	MP for Belper
Gregor Mackenzie	MP for Rutherglen
John Mackintosh	MP for Berwick and East Lothian
Bob MacLennan	MP for Caithness and Sutherland
Bryan Magee	MP for Leyton
Peter Mandelson	MP for Hartlepool
David Marquand	MP for Ashfield
Edmund Marshall	MP for Goole
Roy Mason	MP for Barnsley
Joan Maynard	MP for Sheffield Brightside
Tom McNally	MP for Stockport South. Now Lord McNally
Michael Meacher	MP for Oldham West
Alan Meale	MP for Mansfield
Bob Mellish	MP for Bermondsey
Bruce Millan	MP for Glasgow Govan.
Ian Mikardo	MP for Bethnal Green and Bow
Austin Mitchell	MP for Grimsby
Bob Mitchell	MP for Southampton, Itchen
John Morris	MP for Aberavon
Chris Mullin	MP for Sunderland South (former editor of <i>Tribune</i>)
Dave Nellist	MP for Coventry South East
Stan Newens	MP for Harlow (subsequently an MEP)
Martin O'Neill	MP for Clackmannan and East Stirlingshire
Stan Orme	MP for Salford West
David Owen	MP for Devonport. Now Lord Owen. Former Foreign Secretary, member of the Gang of Four which created the SDP in 1981.
Arthur Palmer	MP for Bristol North East
John Parker	MP for Dagenham
Colin Phipps	MP for Dudley West
Reg Prentice	MP for Newham North East (later Lord Prentice of Daventry)
John Prescott	MP for Hull East
Reg Race	MP for Wood Green (former NUPE official)
Giles Radice	MP for Chester-le-Street. Now Lord Radice
Nick Raynsford	MP for Fulham. Now MP for Greenwich & Woolwich
Merlyn Rees	MP for Leeds South. Now Lord Merlyn-Rees
Joan Ruddock	MP for Deptford (former Chair of CND)
Jo Richardson	MP for Barking
Ernie Roberts	MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington

George Robertson	MP for Hamilton. Now Lord Robertson of Port Ellen; former Secretary General of NATO.
Bill Rodgers	MP for Stockton. Now Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank
Jeff Rooker	MP for Birmingham Perry Barr. Now Lord Rooker of Perry Barr
John Roper	MP for Farnworth. Now Lord Roper
Neville Sandelson	MP for Hayes and Harlington
Tom Sawyer	Former General Secretary of the Labour Party. Now Lord Sawyer
Peter Shore	MP for Stepney and Poplar
Clare Short	MP for Birmingham Ladywood
Renee Short	MP for Wolverhampton North East
Ted Short	MP for Newcastle Central (Later Lord Glenamara)
John Silkin	MP for Deptford
Sam Silkin	MP for Dulwich
Denis Skinner	MP for Bolsover
Chris Smith	MP for Islington South
John Smith	MP for North Lanarkshire; Labour Party Leader, 1992-1994
Clive Soley	MP for Hammersmith North
John Spellar	MP for Birmingham Northfield. Now MP for Warley West
Michael Stewart	MP for Hammersmith (later Lord Stewart)
George Strauss	MP for Vauxhall
Jack Straw	MP for Blackburn
Shirley Summerskill	MP for Halifax
Ann Taylor	MP for Bolton West
Jeffrey Thomas	MP for Abertillery
Mike Thomas	MP for Newcastle-upon-Tyne East
Roger Thomas	MP for Carmarthen
Glenys Thornton	Baroness Thornton
Syd Tierney	MP for Birmingham Yardley
James Tinn	MP for Teeside Redcar
John Tomlinson	MP for Meriden. Subsequently an MEP. Now Lord Tomlinson
Frank Tomney	MP for Hammersmith North
Tom Urwin	MP for Houghton-le-Spring
Eric Varley	MP for Chesterfield. Now Lord Varley of Chesterfield
Pat Wall	MP for Ilkeston
David Watkins	MP for Consett
Ken Weetch	MP for Ipswich MP and former PPS to Bill Rodgers
James Wellbeloved	MP for Erith and Crayford
Phillip Whitehead	MP for Derby North. Now MEP for East Midlands
Fred Willey	MP for Sunderland North
Alan Lee Williams	MP for Hornchurch
Charles Williams	Now Lord Williams of Elvel
Shirley Williams	MP for Hertford and Stevenage. Later MP for Crosby. Now Baroness Williams of Crosby
Harold Wilson	MP for Huyton and Labour Party Leader from 1963 to 1976. Prime Minister 1966-70 and 1974-76. (Later Lord Wilson of Rievaulx)
Audrey Wise	MP for Coventry South West (later for Preston)
Ken Woolmer	MP for Batley and Morley. Now Lord Woolmer of Leeds
Ian Wrigglesworth	MP for Teeside, Thornaby. Now Sir Ian Wrigglesworth
Wayland Young	Lord Kennet

Annex 2 Trade Unions and Trade Unionists

Trade Unions

Many of these unions changed their name during the period covered by the thesis, or subsequently. The names used in the text are those in use as at 1979.

ACTT	Association of Cinematographic, Television and Allied Technicians
ASBSBSW	Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers (later part of GMWU)
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
APEX	Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff
ASTMS	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees
CONFED	Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions
CPSA	Civil and Public Services Association
EETPU	Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union
FBU	Fire Brigades' Union
GMWU	General and Municipal Workers' Union
IRSF	Inland Revenue Staffs Federation
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers
NGA	National Graphical Association
NUDBTW	National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers (later merged with the TGWU)
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
NULO	National Union of Labour Organisers
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUS	National Union of Seamen
NUTGW	National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers
POEU	Post Office Engineering Union
SOGAT	Society of Graphical and Allied Trades
TASS	Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Staff
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TSSA	Transport Salaried Staffs' Association
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UCW	Union of Communication Workers
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

Trade Unionists

Alf Allen	General Secretary, USDAW (subsequently Lord Allen of Fallowfield)
Cyril Ambler	COHSE
David Basnett	General Secretary, GMWU
Rodney Bickerstaffe	General Secretary, NUPE
Fred Binks	UCW
Arthur Bonner	NGA
Tom Bradley	TSSA President (and MP for Leicester East)

Tom Breakell	EETPU
Keith Brookman	General Secretary, ISTC. Now Lord Brookman
Ray Buckton	General Secretary, ASLEF
Chris Bulford	Research Officer, POEU
Tom Burlison	Regional Secretary (Later Deputy General Secretary), GMWU. Now Lord Burlison
Ken Cameron	General Secretary, FBU
John Chalmers	ASBSBSW
Frank Chapple	General Secretary, EETPU. Now Lord Chapple
Tony Christopher	General Secretary, IRSF
Eric Clarke	NUM
Tony Clarke	Deputy General Secretary, UCW, NEC member. Now Lord Clarke of Hampstead
Gordon Colling	NGA
Ken Cure	AUEW
Lawrence Daly	NUM
Garfield Davies	General Secretary, USDAW. Now Lord Davies of Coity
Rose Degiorgio	APEX
Bernard Dix	NUPE
Geoffrey Drain	General Secretary, NALGO
Terry Duffy	President, AUEW
Bob Eadie	EETPU
Helen Eadie	GMWU. Now Member of the Scottish Parliament for Dunfermline East
Moss Evans	General Secretary, TGWU
Roy Evans	ISTC
Sandy Feather	ISTC
Vic Feather	General Secretary, TUC (later Lord Feather)
Alex Ferry	General Secretary, CONFED
Alan Fisher	NUPE
Eric George	NCU
Ken Gill	General Secretary, TASS
Derek Gladwin	Regional Secretary of the GMWU. Chair of the party's Conference Arrangements Committee (later Lord Gladwin of Clee)
Roger Godsiff	APEX (later MP for Birmingham Small Heath)
John Golding	POEU
Joe Gormley	NUM
Nick Grant	COHSE. Later Director of Communications at the Labour Party
Roy Grantham	General Secretary, APEX (formally CAWU)
Walter Greendale	TGWU
Alan Hadden	ASBSBSW, later GMWU
Eddie Haigh	NUDBTW, later TGWU
Eric Hammond	EETPU
Dianne Hayter	GMWU, later Fabian Society, NCC and NEC.
Neville Hough	GMWU
Douglas Hoyle	ASTMS and MP for Warrington
(Sir) Ken Jackson	EETPU
Tom Jackson	General Secretary, UCW
Clive Jenkins	General Secretary of ASTMS

Diana Jeuda	USDAW
Jack Jones	General Secretary of the TGWU, 1969- 1978
Charles Kelly	UCATT
Bill Keys	General Secretary, SOGAT
Alex Kitson	TGWU
Jimmy Knapp	General Secretary, NUR
Gavin Laird	AUEW
David Lea	Assistant General Secretary, TUC. Now Lord Lea of Crondall
David Lipsey	Former research assistant, GMWU (Special advisor to Tony Crosland MP; political advisor at 10 Downing Street). Now Lord Lipsey of Tooting Bec.
John Lloyd	EETPU
Sam McCluskie	General Secretary, NUS (Treasurer of the Labour Party)
Len Murray	General Secretary, TUC (later Lord Murray of Epping Forest)
Ted O'Brien	SOGAT
Jenny Pardington	TGWU
Alan Quinn	TGWU
Reg Race	NUPE
Jack Rogers	UCATT
Richard Rosser	General Secretary, TSSA. Now Lord Rosser
Gerry Russell	AUEW
Tom Sawyer	NUPE. Later General Secretary of the Labour Party. Now Lord Sawyer
Hugh Scanlon	General Secretary of the AUEW(Later Lord Scanlon)
Arthur Scargill	NUM
William Sirs	General Secretary, ISTC
Alex Smith	NUTGW
John Spellar	EETPU. Later MP for Birmingham Northfield; now MP for Warley West
Bryan Stanley	General Secretary, POEU
Ken Thomas	General Secretary, CPSA
Syd Tierney	USDAW, and MP for Birmingham Yardley
Ron Todd	General Secretary, TGWU
Russell Tuck	Assistant General Secretary, NUR
Alan Tuffin	General Secretary, UCW.
Charles Turnock	Assistant General Secretary, NUR
David Warburton	National Officer, GMWU
David Ward	NCU
John Weakley	AUEW
Sid Weighell	General Secretary, NUR
William (Bill) Whatley	General Secretary, USDAW
Larry Whitty	Former Research Officer, GMWU, former General Secretary of the Labour Party. Now Lord Whitty of Camberwell.
David Williams	COHSE
Norman Willis	TGWU. Subsequently, General Secretary, TUC
Bob Wright	AUEW

Annex 3 1981 NEC Elections – Comparison between Roger Godsiff predictions for the St Ermins Group, and the actual results.

	<i>thousands</i>		
	<i>Godsiff prediction¹</i>	<i>Result²</i>	<i>Discrepancy</i>
Roy Evans	3,537	3,564	0.76%
David Williams	3,462	3,433	0.84%
Denis Howell	3,218	3,258	1.24%
Betty Boothroyd	3,740	3,793	1.41%
Tom Breakell	2,670	2,374	12.46%
Gwyneth Dunwoody	3,593	3,725	3.67%
Eric Varley	3,521	3,839	9.0%
Norman Atkinson	3,454	3,252	6.2%
Average			4.4%

¹ October 1981 paper, EGA.

² *Report of the 1981 Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, p.95.

Annex 4 St Ermins Group Meetings and attendances

<i>Date</i>	<i>Attend ance</i>	<i>Location</i>			
1981				1985	
10 February	17	Charing Cross Hotel.		22 January	10
24 March	9	St Ermins Hotel		26 February	n/a
15 April		St Ermins Hotel		26 March	n/a
24 June		St Ermins Hotel		7 May	7
25 August		St Ermins Hotel		18 June	9
13 October				23 July	8
25 November		Swinton House (ISTC head office)		10 September	10
				22 October	8
				26 November	12
<i>All subsequent meetings at Swinton House, Grays Inn Road.</i>					
1982				1986	
26 January	11			28 January	9
25 May	9			25 February	8
6 July	8			25 March	9
27 July	14			22 April	7
24 August	10			20 May	8
14 September	n/a			22 July	11
16 November	12			19 August	10
				23 September	11
				21 October	9
				25 November	7
1983					
11 January	15				
22 February	16				
29 March	n/a				
10 May	n/a				
23 June	10				
26 July	14				
13 September	12				
1 November	13				
1984					
24 January					
21 February	12				
27 March	13				
9 May	11				
12 June	12				
24 July	n/a				
17 September	12				
23 October	8				
18 December	n/a				
				1987	
				27 January	14
				24 February	11
				24 March	9
				28 April	10
				23 June	8
				21 July	12
				22 September	12
				27 October	8
				24 November	9
				Average attendance	10.5
				From: Minutes of Meetings, St Ermins Group archives.	

Annex 5 Analysis of 1981 Deputy Leadership CLP Ballots

60 CLPs undertook some sort of consultative ballot¹.

Of the 22 located by the researchers, the turnout figures were as follows:

Postal ballot

Belper	87%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	74.6%
Sutton & Cheam	70.8%
Tonbridge & Malling	55%
Woking	77.8%
Average	73.04

Personal Delivery to and collection of ballot papers from all members

Epping Forest	85%
Ludlow	92.2%
Average	88.6%

Branch ballot

Bromsgrove and Redditch	24%
Carshalton	20%
Derby North	53%
Derby South	47%
Durham	n/a
Pembrokeshire	30%
Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles	40%
Average	35.67%

Branch ballot plus postal votes

Aldershot	27.6%
Newcastle North	50%
Richmond (Yorks)	78.6%
South Dorset	66%
Average	55.55%

¹ From David Cowling, "One Member, One Vote: Deputy Leadership election 1981", NBP.

Mass Meeting

Altringham & Sale	32.2%
Cleveland & Whitby	33%
Average	32.6%

Mass Meeting plus postal votes

Tiverton	45%
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Polling stations plus postal votes

Wimbledon	39.6%
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Annex 6 Membership of Groups

Manifesto Group Officers

Chairmen:

Dickson Mabon MP (1974 to 1986)
John Horam MP (1976)
Sydney Irving MP (1976 to 1977)
John Cartwright MP (1977 to 1980)
Giles Radice (1980 to 1983)

Vice Chairmen:

James Wellbeloved MP (1974 to 1976)
Tom Urwin MP (1976 to 1983)
John Cartwright MP (1976 to 1977)
Giles Radice (1977 to 1980)
John Tomlinson (1978 to 1979)
John Horam (1979 to 1981)
Arthur Palmer (1981 to 1983)

Secretaries:

John Horam MP (1974 to 1976)
Ian Wigglesworth MP (1976 to 1979)
George Robertson MP (1979 to 1983)

Treasurers:

Neville Sandelson MP (1974 to 1980)
Ken Weetch MP (1980 to 1983)

(Parliamentary) Labour First Members¹

Donald Anderson MP
Peter Archer MP
Lord (Bill) Blease
David Clark MP (Treasurer)
Jack Cunningham MP
Stanley Clinton-Davies MP
Stan Crowther MP
Arthur Davidson MP
Terry Davis MP
Bruce Douglas-Mann MP
Gwyneth Dunwoody MP

¹ Edmund Marshall interview Lord Clark of Windermere interview, David Watkins letter to author, 19 April 2004; and JGP.

Harry Ewing MP
George Foulkes MP
John Grant MP (Vice Chairman)
Lord Gregson
John Home-Robertson MP
Frank Hooley MP
Brynmor John MP (Chairman)
Barry Jones MP
Gerald Kaufman MP
Tom McNally MP
Edmund Marshall MP (Secretary)
Austin Mitchell MP
Alf Morris MP
Charles Morris MP
John Morris MP
Martin O'Neill MP
Barry Sheerman MP
Roger Thomas MP
David Watkins MP
Ken Woolmer MP

Solidarity Initial Steering Committee (February 1981)²

Roy Hattersley MP (Co-Chairman)
Peter Shore MP (Co Chairman)
Ken Woolmer MP (Secretary)
Austin Mitchell MP (Treasurer)
Joe Ashton MP
Stanley Clinton-Davis MP
Arthur Davidson MP
Donald Dewar MP
Frank Field MP
John Golding MP
John Grant MP
Denis Howell MP
Gerald Kaufman MP
Martin O'Neill MP
Giles Radice MP
Brynmor John MP.

Added in March 1981:

Jack Cunningham MP
Ted Graham MP
Barry Jones MP
George Robertson MP
Ann Taylor MP

² Steering Committee papers, February 1981 and 30 March 1981 (DRII/1/2).

Solidarity Organising Committee, February 1981³

Jack Brooks (Chairman)
Arthur Davidson MP
Terry Davis MP
Frank Field MP
John Grant MP
Denis Howell MP
Austin Mitchell MP
Giles Radice MP
Ken Woolmer MP
Roger Godsiff (APEX)
John Spellar (EETPU)
David Warburton (GMWU)
Les Goodram
Mary Goudie

Solidarity Committee, March 1984⁴

Vice-Presidents

Roy Hattersley MP
Peter Shore MP

PLP

Donald Dewar MP (Newsletter Editor)
Joe Ashton
Stuart Bell MP (Secretary, Parliamentary Solidarity)
David Clark MP (Vice Chairman, Parliamentary Solidarity)
Donald Coleman MP
Terry Davis MP, *Chairman* (and Vice Chairman, Parliamentary Solidarity)
Gwyneth Dunwoody MP (Vice Chairman, Parliamentary Solidarity)
Brynmor John MP (Chairman, Parliamentary Solidarity)
Barry Jones MP
George Robertson MP
Ken Weetch MP (Vice Chairman, Parliamentary Solidarity)

From the regions

Barbara Hawkins
Paul Tinnion
Richard Tomlinson, *Vice Chairman*

From the unions

Sandy Feather
John Golding MP
Denis Howell MP, *Treasurer*

Mary Goudie, *Secretary*

³ JGP.

⁴ Steering Committee minutes, 29 February and 21 March 1984 (DRH/1/3); letter from Spellar to Goudie, 24 January 1984 (DRH/1/28); Minutes of National Advisory Council, 25 March 1984 (DRH/1/3).

Parliamentary Solidarity⁵

Chairman

Brynmor John MP

Vice Chairmen

Gwyneth Dunwoody MP

David Clark MP

Terry Davis MP

Ken Weetch MP (and *Treasurer*)

Secretary

Stuart Bell MP

The "Group of 10"⁶

Andrew Bennett MP

Jack Cunningham MP

Robert Kilroy-Silk MP

Martin O'Neill MP

Giles Radice MP

Jeff Rooker MP

Jack Straw MP

Ann Taylor MP

Phillip Whitehead MP

Ken Woolmer MP

⁵ List (DRH/1/24); Notes of NAC meeting, David Bean papers., Stuart Bell, *op cit*, p.93.
⁶ Giles Radice interview.

Annex 7 Interviews

Peter Archer MP	Labour First; Manifesto Group. Now Lord Archer of Sandwell
David Bean	Advisor to Peter Shore; Solidarity member. Now Sir David Bean
Cllr Jeremy Beecham	Solidarity. Leader of Newcastle City Council. Now Sir Jeremy Beecham
Stuart Bell MP	Secretary, Parliamentary Solidarity. Now Sir Stuart Bell
Stephen Bird	Labour Party archivist
Arthur Bonner	Londoners for Labour, TUFL
Chris Bulford	POEU
Steve Bundred	Former GLC member
Nick Butler	Solidarity. Advisor to Peter Shore.
Roger Carrol	Former No 10 Advisor
John Cartwright	Former MP, CLV, Chairman of Manifesto Group, Member of NEC
Jim Cattermole	Former Labour Party Regional Organiser; CDS
John Charlton	CLV and Solidarity
Patrick Cheney	Political Advisor to Denis Howell MP
David Clark MP	Labour First Vice Chairman, and Solidarity. Now Lord Clark of Windermere
Tony Clarke	St Ermins Group, NEC. Now Lord Clarke of Hampstead
Dick Clements	Michael Foot's office; Neil Kinnock's office; former Editor of <i>Tribune</i>
Gordon Colling	St Ermins Group; NEC, Labour Party Chairman
George Cunningham	Former MP
Jack Cunningham MP	Solidarity; former PPS to Jim Callaghan
Jim Daly	CLV and RCDS
Richard Faulkner	Advisor to Sid Weighell; Solidarity. Now Lord Faulkner of Worcester
Sandy Feather	St Ermins Group
Frank Field MP	OMOV; Solidarity
Roger de Freitas	Beaujolais Group
Derek Gladwin	GMWU. Later Lord Gladwin of Clee
Roger Godsiff	APEX; St Ermins. Now Roger Godsiff MP
Robin Gordon Walker	
Mary Goudie	Labour Solidarity. Now Baroness Goudie
Bryan Gould MP	Tribune Group
Mrs John Grant	Widow of John Grant, former MP.
Nick Grant	Lambeth Solidarity; former Head of Communications at Labour Party
Roy Grantham	St Ermins; TULV
John Gyford	CLV, Solidarity
Alan Hadden	St Ermins, NEC, NCC
Roy Hattersley	Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, 1983-1992; Co-Chair of Solidarity, NEC, Manifesto Group. Now Lord Hattersley
Alan Haworth	PLP Secretary. Now Lord Haworth
Denis Healey MP	Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, 1980-1983. Now Lord Healey of Riddlesden

Richard Heller	Advisor to Gerald Kaufman MP and to Denis Healey MP
Joycelin Hobman	Labour Defence and Disarmament Group
John Horam MP	Manifesto Group Chairman
Norman Howard	TUPO; St Ermins Group, Solidarity
David Hughes	Former Labour Party National Agent; author Hayward/Hughes Report
Chris Inman	Solidarity employee
Neil Kinnock MP	Leader of the Labour Party, 1983-1992.
John Lloyd	EETPU
Dickson Mabon MP	Manifesto Group Chairman
Edmund Marshall MP (by letter and phone)	Secretary of Labour First
Tom McNally MP	Now Lord McNally
Prof Lewis Minkin	
Brian Nicholson	TGWU, Londoners for Labour; Labour First
Gerry O'Brien	Former Labour Party Regional Officer, Solidarity
Martin O'Neill MP	Solidarity
Tony Page	Advisor to Gerald Kaufman MP
Jenny Pardington	TGWU, TULV
Reg Race	NUPE Official and subsequently MP for Wood Green
Giles Radice MP	Former GMWU official, subsequently MP and Manifesto Group Chairman; Solidarity, St Ermins Group. Now Lord Radice
George Robertson MP	Manifesto Group Secretary, Solidarity. Now Lord Robertson of Port Ellen
Roger Robinson	Labour Party staff
Jeff Rooker MP	"Group of Ten". Now Lord Rooker
Chris Savage	Solidarity employee
Sherpas	Political Advisors to the Shadow Cabinet, 1979-83: Tony Page [Eric Varley MP], David Cowling [Peter Shore MP], Richard Heller [Denis Healey MP], Patrick Cheney [Denis Howell MP]
Mrs Peter Shore (by phone)	Widow of Peter Shore MP
Bill Sirs (by letter)	ISTC, St Ermins Group
Bryan Stanley	POEU, St Ermins Group
Neil Stewart	Neil Kinnock's office
John Spellar	EETPU, St Ermins Group; Solidarity, Londoners for Labour. One time MP for Birmingham Northfield. Now MP for Warley West
Matt Tee	Tatchell Campaign Team, Bermondsey
Bill Thomas	National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs
Mike Thomas MP	Manifesto Group
Richard Tomlinson	CLV, Solidarity, Co-Op Party
Charlie Turnock	St Ermins Group; NUR
Alan Tuffin	St Ermins Group; UCW
John Wakefield	Manifesto Group Research Officer
Peter Walker	Red Wellies Club
David Warburton	Forward Labour; GMWU, TULV
David Watkins MP	Labour First
Mike Watts	Labour Party staff

Ken Weetch MP	Manifesto Group Treasurer; Solidarity
James Wellbeloved MP	Manifesto Group
Alan Lee Williams MP	Manifesto Group
Phillip Whitehead MP	Manifesto Group. Now Member of the European Parliament
Clive Wilkinson	CLV Chairman; Solidarity
Ken Woolmer MP	Secretary, Solidarity. Now Lord Woolmer
Ian Wrigglesworth MP	Manifesto Group Secretary; CLV. Now Sir Ian Wrigglesworth
Phil Wyatt	John Silkin Deputy Leadership Campaign

Titles given in the left hand column refer to the positions held at the time of the events described in the thesis.

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With only one or two exceptions, the interviews were recorded and have been transcribed. The recordings and full transcriptions will be lodged at the Labour History Archive at the John Rylands Library, Manchester University.

Annex 8 Abbreviations

CDS	(1960s) Campaign for Democratic Socialism
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CLV	Campaign for Labour Victory (1977 to 1981)
Clause Four	Soft Left non-parliamentary grouping and newsletter
CLPD	Campaign for Labour Party Democracy
EC	Executive Committee (sub committee of a General Committee)
EDM	Early Day Motion (in Parliament)
EGA	St Ermins Group Archives
GMC/ GC	The General Management Committee (later called the General Committee) of local Constituency Labour Parties
IMG	International Marxist Group
IWP	Sir Ian Wigglesworth's Papers
JGP	John Grant Papers
JSA	John Spellar/ EETPU Archives
LC	Liaison Committee (of the PLP)
LCC	Labour Co-ordinating Committee
LPA	Labour Party Archive (Labour Archive Centre, Manchester University Library)
LSC	Labour Solidarity Campaign
MGA	Manifesto Group Archives (Labour Archive Centre, Manchester University Library)
NAC	(Solidarity) National Advisory Council
NBP	Nick Butler Papers
NCC	(Labour Party) National Constitutional Committee
NCLC	National Council of Labour Colleges
NEC	(Labour Party) National Executive Committee (elected annually at Labour Party Conference)
NEDC	National Economic Development Council
NULSC	National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs
OMOV	One Member One Vote
PC	Parliamentary Committee, or Shadow Cabinet
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party (comprises Labour MPs)
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate
PPS	Parliamentary Private Secretary
RCDS	Radical Centre for Democratic Studies
R&FMC	Rank and File Mobilising Committee
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SNAC	Solidarity National Advisory Council
SWP	Socialist Workers Party
TUFL	Trade Unionists for Labour
TULV	Trade Unions for a Labour Victory
YS	(Labour Party) Young Socialists

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David Bean papers (private collection).
Nick Butler papers (NBP) (private collection).
Lord (David) Clark of Windermere papers (private collection).
Jim Daly papers (private collection).
Bob Eadie papers (private collection).
Sandy Feather papers (private collection).
John Grant papers (JGP) (private collection).
John Gyford papers (private collection).
Alan Haworth papers (private collection).
Dianne Hayter papers (private collection).
Mike Parker papers (private collection).
Charles Turnock papers (private collection).
David Webster papers (private collection).
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John Spellar/ EETPU Archives (JSA) (private collection).
Roy Hattersley/ Labour Solidarity Archives, University of Hull. Box numbers are
identified as DRH/1/2 etc.
Manifesto Group Archives (MGA) in the Labour History Archive, John Rylands
Library, Manchester University
PLP Archives in Labour History Archive at the John Rylands Library, Manchester
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Radical Centre for Democratic Studies Archives (private collection).
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