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Author(s): BEN CLIFT

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# **Social Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: still a class act? The place of class in Jospinism and Blairism.**

Dr. Ben Clift, [B.M.Clift@Warwick.ac.uk](mailto:B.M.Clift@Warwick.ac.uk)

*Department of Politics and International Studies,  
University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.*

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## **Introduction**

For much of the twentieth Century, the interrelationship between class and social democracy was fundamental. Electorally, parties were originally rooted in the working class, which provided the bedrock of their political support, and the core of their identity. Programmatically, in the post-war era, Keynesian political economy provided the theoretical justification for redistribution towards workers as a core element of social democracy. The relationship was never *that* straightforward even in social democracy's 'golden age'. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it has become a good deal more problematic. This article explores the enduring relevance (or otherwise) of class, and in particular of the working class, to social democracy through comparative analysis of the British Labour Party and the French Socialist Party (PS - *Parti Socialiste*) at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In the wake of a widely touted decline in class voting, and socio-economic change undermining the traditional working class electoral base of social democracy, with the strength of class and partisan identification weakening, class identities fragmenting, and class structure becoming more complex and variegated, many amongst party elites became convinced of the need to pursue increasingly 'catch-all' strategies less rooted in the working class, or indeed in the concept of class. The strategy, whilst it has certain benefits, also has costs, in terms of

undermining the identification and loyalty amongst electors tied to a class identity which parties may now downplay. Furthermore, the 'top down' denial of class is not reflected in a 'bottom up' disappearance of all class cleavages. The reduced subjective emphasis on class characteristic of social democracy (New Labour much more than the PS) continues to confront objective obstacles. For example, both parties are confronted with a class-based electoral cleavage over European integration.

More fundamentally, a 'classless' social democracy has trouble carving out a coherent political economy. The neoliberal backlash in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century undermined faith in the Keynesian paradigm which formed the bedrock of social democracy's redistributive class-based politics in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The scope for redistribution appears subject to ever tighter 'external' constraints. At the same time, the Marxist paradigm, which had hitherto (albeit indirectly) underpinned the importance social democrats attached to class in understanding economic and social relations, was called into question, not least by the 1989 revolutions. In this context, the questioning of the centrality of class to social democracy can be seen as part of a wider search for a guiding set of principles around which to organise social democracy's redistributive instincts.

The problematic relationship between class and post-golden age social democracy is attested to throughout this article. There are two sections to this comparative analysis, the first exploring the place of class within each party's identity, and in turn its political economy. The focus of the article is on the elite-level conception of class, and elite-level perceptions of the relevance of class to party identity and political economy. The second section explores the importance of class to electoral strategy. Here again, the focus is primarily upon the elite-level perceptions of the relevance of class to social democratic electoral strategy. Thus emphasis is placed upon 'top-down' party elite strategy rather than 'bottom-up' socio-economic changes in the class structure.

We unearth significant differences in the importance attached to class by each party, and the role that class plays within the party's identity and analysis of the economy. New Labour has expunged class from its frame of reference. The resultant embrace of neoliberal economics has undermined the party's traditional identity. The party has become less recognisably social democratic as it seeks ever more accommodation with market outcomes. Conversely, the PS now seems firmly camped on social democratic territory it until recently shunned, retaining both an

emphasis on class (and divergent class interests), and also the need for political direction or mediation of market outcomes to attenuate the antagonistic outcomes of the free play of market forces.

Although the declining centrality of class as a structuring feature of electoral strategy is to an extent common to both parties, New Labour has gone much farther down this route than the PS. The class dimension pervades the genetic origins of Blair's party, yet he is deliberately eschews it, denying the existence of fundamental divisions in society. For all this, he paradoxically owes his success a cross-class electoral alliance which eluded Labour for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Conversely, Jospin's party is historically less 'organically' tied to class, but explicitly recognises the difference between classes – and of need to form a coalition between them. That said, his cross-class electoral alliance appears more fragile, given the context of party competition in France, and the number of suitors of the working class electorate. We begin, however, by setting out how the concept of class will be approached here.

### **The Concept of Class**

In this article our primary concern is to explore the way the term is used by the elites within the two parties concerned, but it would be wise to set out how class is understood in this article. This subject has provoked a heated psephological debate, and no single accepted definition of class exists. Evans, however, has rightly observed that the manual/non-manual dichotomy is a crude over simplification of the nature of the contemporary class structure, which 'impoverishes ... measurement of class position, and, by extension, obscures variations in the composition on manual and non-manual classes.'<sup>1</sup>

The Goldthorpe class schema avoids this degree of oversimplification. It distinguishes along lines of conditions of payment and employment, degree of occupational security, and promotion prospects. Erikson and Goldthorpe differentiate 'positions within *labour markets* and *production units* .... In terms of *employment relations* that they entail'.<sup>2</sup> The concept of employment relations distinguishes between employers, self-employed, and employees in a manner which, as

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Evans, 'Class Voting: From Premature Obituary to Reasoned Appraisal', in: G. Evans *The End of Class Politics?* Oxford 1999, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Erikson and John Goldthorpe, *The constant flux: a study of class mobility in industrial societies*, Oxford 1992, p. 37; emphasis in original.

Evan notes, ‘reflects the origins of the schema in both Marxist and Weberian traditions of class analysis’.<sup>3</sup> Goldthorpe identifies employees in a (longer term, more secure) ‘service relationship’ with their Employer, such employees tend to possess some expertise and enjoy a degree of autonomy in the workplace, and those in a (short-term) ‘labour contract relationship’, who tend to be supervised and whose labour contract is closely regulated.

Differentiated along these lines, Goldthorpe’s schema identifies the following class categories, the petty bourgeoisie (small employers and self-employed), the service class – or salariat (professional and managerial groups, subdivided into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’), the routine non-manual class (typically lower grade clerical ‘white-collar workers’), and the working class (subdivided into semi- and unskilled manual workers, skilled manual workers, and foremen and technicians).

This more differentiated conception of class is preferable, but we are constrained by data gatherers’ classifications.<sup>4</sup> Thus where we do seek to establish the enduring ‘objective’ relevance of class to social democratic electoral politics, we cannot always rely on our favoured conception of class. French National Statistics and Economics Research Institute (*L’Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* – INSEE) indicators, for example, are a valuable source of French data, but retain the manual/nonmanual dichotomy. Although unfortunate, this is not particularly problematic, since the task here is not primarily to establish the precise contours of the class structure and its impact upon voting behaviour, but to understand and critique how social democratic elites perceive the relationship between class and social democracy. The usage (or non-usage) of the term by political elites in speeches and documents, although it lacks the kind of precision set out above, is illuminating as to how social democracy is evolving at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Substituting Class? : From Labourism to New Labour**

Drucker’s classic study sets out the conventional understanding of the importance of class to the Labour Party through exploration of the party’s ‘ethos.’ Ethos ‘incorporates a set of values which spring from the experience of the British working class,’ its four core features are loyalty,

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<sup>3</sup> Evan ‘Class Voting’, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Not to mention the at best partial comparability of British and French class indicators.

sacrifice, attitude to money and a belief in explicit rules. Central to Drucker's ethos is the idea that, 'it arises out of a shared past, from a series of folk-memories or shared expression of exploitation, common struggle and gradually increasing power.' Deeply rooted in the past, ethos reinforces the influence of the party's 'own past and of the past of the Labour movement which produced and sustains it' on contemporary developments.<sup>5</sup> One should not see ethos as a purely constraining influence on party actors, 'it is possible to create or re-create a past which has never existed or which has ceased to exist...since such pasts are impervious to history, few are without some mythical elements.' Thus leaders may invent and evoke pasts at will to gain support for their programme so long as they proceed with subtlety and a firm grasp of the contours of Labour's ethos. Furthermore, given the British Labour Movement's centrifugal tendencies, ethos provides some pretty sturdy adhesive, 'a sense of a common past binds us together. Such a shared past is also the 'organisational glue' of the Labour Movement and of the party.'<sup>6</sup>

This centrality of the working class to the Labour Party finds organisational expression in the organic link with the trade union movement. 'Rules of affiliation to the Party produced a structure which was heavily weighted towards trade union dominance...Thus at the Labour Party Annual Conference - the sovereign body of the Party - the blocks of trade union votes soon dwarfed those available to the socialist and, later, constituency party organisations.'<sup>7</sup> The institutional development of the Party was thus shaped by its beginnings within 'the bowels' of the trade union movement. In financial terms, trade union input in the form of affiliation fees, donations and grants were the Party's life blood. Indeed, only in the mid 1990s did Trade Union funding dip for the first time below 50% of Labour's income.<sup>8</sup>

These 'Labourist' organisational particularities had a profound impact. Ideologically, Drucker notes, 'Labour is more closely tied to its trade unionists than any other major party in any major country. They set the tone of its thought.'<sup>9</sup> The historic class character of the party did not, however, *politicise* class antagonisms and the class struggle. Paradoxically, these roots within the exploited class had the opposite effect. Minkin identifies a 'deep ambivalence towards 'politics' within the British Labour movement, born out of 'a distrust of the state, an adherence to

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*, London 1979, pp 9-21 & p25.

<sup>6</sup> Drucker, p. 31, p. 34, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Minkin, *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, Edinburgh 1991, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Ludlam, 'New Labour and the Unions: the End of the Contentious Alliance?', in S. Ludlam & M. Smith (eds.) *New Labour in Government*, Basingstoke 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Drucker, p. 40.

customary rights and a tradition of independence.’ The *laissez faire* capitalism of nineteenth century Britain, it seemed, had left its mark on the union movement. ‘Self-reliance, the freedom to bargain collectively and, by derivation, the preservation of legal immunity from actions in tort granted in the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 were carried forward as fundamentals of free trade unionism.’<sup>10</sup>

Labour’s class-based origins have, if anything, been an impediment to radicalism. Citing amongst others the Social Democratic Federation, Minkin claims, ‘Marxist and socialist organisations have often found the union link too constraining and the Party too limited in its aims and strategy...[there are] several strands of the revolutionary Left who since the very inception of the Labour Party have seen its form, values and behaviour - Labourism, as some have defined it - as *the* great obstacle to the development of a socialist project.’<sup>11</sup> This dimension to the union link has been of enduring significance within the party, most recently appreciated by Blair when seeking to secure ‘his’ candidates for First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly and Labour candidate for London Mayor. As John Monks puts it, ‘most party modernisers now accept that the link is a strength, not least because the unions are vital in their role of counterbalancing the increasingly vocal leftwing of the party.’<sup>12</sup> Although this dimension of the union’s role in the party may demonstrate some continuity, most other aspects of the relationship between class and party have recently undergone radical overhaul.

The Blairite vision is shorn of any reference to the place of the unions, or indeed of any recognition of the working class as a distinct entity with a particular set of interests. Whilst this outright denial of class *does* represent a shift, the Labour Party has never been a ‘pure’ working class party. One ideological tradition within the party has long sought to transcend class divisions, entertaining aspirations for the attainment of a classless society.<sup>13</sup> The party has always embraced members, activists and leaders from diverse class backgrounds, and has been keenly aware of the need to extend its electoral reach beyond the confines of the working class. Indeed, in this sense, Jones sees Blair as a continuation of Labour’s revisionist traditions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Minkin, p. 7. See also Ben Clift, Andrew Gamble, and Mike Harris ‘The Labour Party and the Company in the Twentieth Century’ in J. Parkinson, A. Gamble & G. Kelly, *The Political Economy of the Company*, Oxford 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Minkin, p. xii.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Ludlam, p. 118.

<sup>13</sup> See Anthony Crosland, *The Future of Socialism*, London 1956, and *Socialism Now and Other Essays* London 1974.

Blair talks of people's equal worth 'whatever their background, capability, creed or race.'<sup>15</sup> Class is conspicuous by its absence from this list. In a series of speeches in early 1999, Blair explicitly distanced himself from Labour's deep-rooted working class identity. Blair celebrates the advent of 'a middle class characterised by greater tolerance of difference, greater ambition to succeed, greater opportunities to earn a decent living. A middle class that will include millions of people who traditionally may see themselves as working class, but whose ambitions are far broader than those of their parents and grandparents.'<sup>16</sup> This explains the familiar mantra 'we are all middle class now', and is presented as part of a secular, socio-economic shift, 'slowly but surely the old establishment is being replaced by a new, larger, more meritocratic middle class I believe we will have an expanded middle class with ladders of opportunity for those from all backgrounds, no more ceilings that prevent people from achieving the success they merit.'<sup>17</sup> This opportunity-oriented 'meritocratic' notion of class, which fails to recognise the propensity of capitalism to generate large scale inequalities in society' is linked to Blair's neoliberal analysis of capitalism, a point returned to below.

If anything, Blair sees the union movement as part of that old establishment, hence the 'loosening' of links with the trade union movement. Blair reconciles such changes to his interpretation of Labour's past, 'far from abandoning our traditional support, we are saying that in a modern Britain everyone must have the chance to fulfil their potential, whatever their background, age, sex or race.'<sup>18</sup> Here again, however, the absence of class exerts itself as a presence. This is a straw in the wind of a wider shift in the class character of New Labour. This redefines Labour's identity, away from a party seeking the advancement of a distinctive set of interests, and towards become a 'one nation' party offering 'fairness not favours' to its traditional working class constituency.<sup>19</sup>

New Labour refers to citizens, to individuals, or to communities, but never to classes, unless to deny the existence of class antagonisms and assert a homogenisation within an expanded middle class. It seeks to combat social exclusion, but shies away from the notion of an underclass. In this

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<sup>14</sup> Tudor Jones, *Remaking the Labour Party: From Gaitskell to Blair*, London 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Blair, *The Third Way: Politics for the New Century*, London 1998, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Speech at the Institute for Public Policy Research, London, 14 January 1999, Quoted in Michael White, 'Meritocracy to replace 'old establishment'', *The Guardian*, 15 January 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Andrew Rawnsley, 'The Working Class Can Kiss my arse – I've got the boss's job at last' *Observer* 17 January 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in White.

<sup>19</sup> See Ludlam, p. 128.



regard, a significant difference of style distinguishes Blair from, for example, Smith and Kinnock before him. Kinnock, and a thousand generations of Kinnocks before him, remained steeped in the working class ethos of the Party. Smith, too, was ‘tied by culture and background to the Old Labour universe’<sup>20</sup> and both were keen to reconcile the modernizing project to Labour’s traditional ethos. Blair, on the other hand, regards superseding of the Party’s working class ethos as a *sine qua non* of modernisation. The explicit articulation of such sentiments represents a shift in the relation between the Party’s leadership and the party’s class origins and identity.

This is evidenced most graphically in relation to Drucker’s fourth ‘pillar’ of Labour’s ethos - ‘attitude to money.’ Drucker remarks, ‘what is impressive is the opprobrium which attaches to some in the party who too openly flaunt a middle class salary or education.’<sup>21</sup> This contrasts rather starkly with that apotheosis of New Labour Peter Mandelson’s reassurance of a Silicon Valley audience in October 1998 that New Labour was ‘intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich’, which he followed up a month later with an conference aside disdaining, ‘blue-collar, working class, northern, horny-handed, dirty-overalled people.’<sup>22</sup>

These attitudinal changes arguably reflect a deeper shift. The frame of reference of economic analysis has changed. Categories such as ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ and ‘class’ are never heard in the context of New Labour’s ‘new economics’, which draws heavily on neoliberalism.<sup>23</sup> Formerly, Labour’s broadly Keynesian political economy could always be reconciled to a class based analysis of politics. As Rogers and Streeck put it, ‘through the alchemy of Keynesian economics, the particular interests of workers in redistribution towards themselves was transformed into a general social interest.’<sup>24</sup> But, at the level of economic ideas, the political economy of New Labour has shifted away from a reliance on Keynesian economics. As Gamble and Kelly have observed, ‘New Labour is seeking to develop its own distinctive political economy which is not rooted in the labour movement, aligned to a particular theory of macro economic management or instinctively redistributionist.’<sup>25</sup> Within New Labour’s analysis of economy and society, class

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Jacques quoted in Andy McSmith, *The Faces of Labour*, London 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Drucker, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Andrew Rawnsley, *The Servants of the People*, London 2000, p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> See Alan Sawyer and Phillip Arestis, ‘The Economic Analysis Underlying the “Third Way”’, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 6 No. 2/2001, pp. 255-279.

<sup>24</sup> Joel Rogers & Wolfgang Streeck, ‘Productive Solidarities’, in: D. Miliband, *Reinventing the Left*, Cambridge 1994, p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Gamble & Gavin Kelly, ‘The British Labour Party and Monetary Union’ *West European Politics* Vol. 23 No. 1/2000, p. 21. See also Dan Corry ‘Macroeconomic Policy and Stakeholder Capitalism’ in: Kelly, Kelly & Gamble *Stakeholder Capitalism*, Basingstoke 1997, pp. 185-202.

has no place. Nor does the instinct to redistribute to the 'working class', however conceived. This has undermined Labour's traditional political economy. The party has become much less recognisably social democratic as it seeks ever more accommodation with market outcomes.

An initial attempt to frame this multi-faceted desire to transcend of class divisions talked in terms of 'stakeholders' – a bid to escape, 'the outdated view of the relationship between employer and employee as one of master and servant, or the institutional conflict between unions and management.'<sup>26</sup> Since talk of stakeholding subsided from New Labour's rhetorical vocabulary, what prevails is an increasingly neutral characterisation of the market economy, reflecting Blair's at times enthusiastic embrace of neoliberal economics.<sup>27</sup> This embrace draws heavily on Giddens's analysis. As a result, it adopts the same weaknesses and omissions, most notably concerning the nature of capitalism. Finlayson observes, 'Giddens is not convinced that capitalism has structural tendencies towards exclusion and oppression. Indeed, he does not understand contemporary society through the prism of analysis of capitalism as such.'<sup>28</sup>

One implication of this is a denial of class-based antagonisms. New Labour does not recognise conflicting economic interests rooted in distinctions or divisions which are identified with what in now considers to be an out-dated economic paradigm. Another facet of New Labour weltanschauung is an increased emphasis on individualism and the abandonment of Labourism's collectivist approach.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, political conflict operating at a societal level, such as that between classes, forms no part of Giddens' or New Labour's individualised political world. These developments are part of a wider ideological shift away from an analysis of the economy which can be traced back (however indirectly) to the Marxist tradition, employing class as an analytical category. Mandelson and Liddle are scathing of the 'Marxist school', whose 'quasi-scientific view of the world rests on economic determinism and class analysis, propounded by those who claim to speak for 'the working class'.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the very notion of class is tarred with the same brush as Marxism, the assumption being that both are equally irrelevant to New Labour.

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Mandelson & Roger Liddle, *The Blair Revolution*, London 1996, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> See John Westergaard, 'Where does the Third Way lead?', *New Political Economy*, Vol. 4 No. 3/1999, and Ben Clift, 'New Labour's Third Way and European Social Democracy' in: S. Ludlam & M. Smith, *New Labour in Government*, Basingstoke 2000.

<sup>28</sup> A Finlayson, 'Third Way Theory', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 3/1999 pp. 271-9. See Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*, Cambridge 1998, and, for a critique, Westergaard, 'Where Does the Third Way Lead?' *New Political Economy*, Vol. 4. No. 3/1999.

<sup>29</sup> Giddens, pp. 34-7, p. 65.

New Labour, then, has shifted its identity, away from class, seeking to become more pluralistic, and take into account multiple dimensions of identity. In this sense, they have arguably become postmodern. As Gamble notes, the postmodern party realises, ‘there are no longer any such primary identities which define the political world ... parties have to assemble a coalition and develop a programme and style of operation which is sensitive to the multiple and changing identities which voters have.’<sup>31</sup> However, New Labour have gone further even than this, explicitly denying (or assuming away) the existence of class identity, and class divisions in society. New Labour’s expunging of class from its frame of reference has undermined the coherence of the party’s traditional identity. This threatens to sap the strength of its support within its traditional constituency, and thus, as we shall see later, has presented electoral dilemmas, as well as paradoxical electoral successes.

### **A touch of French Class: The Ideology and Political Economy of Jospinisme.**

Historically, French Socialism could never claim to be so firmly rooted within the working class movement as Labour once was. Until the Second World war, France’s socio-economic structure remained predominantly agrarian.<sup>32</sup> Manufacturing tended to be small-scale, with 70% of those manufacturing workers in plants employing less than six workers, where union membership was low, and the political consciousness of workers underdeveloped.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, French trade unions were deeply suspicious of political parties. The *Charte d’Amiens* of 1906 asserted that unions, ‘should not have dealings with parties and organisations which may elsewhere freely pursue the goal of social change.’<sup>34</sup> Union strategy was one of complete independence from any political party, and a refusal of parliamentary political means in the pursuit of the interests of the working class.

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<sup>30</sup> Mandelson & Liddle, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Gamble, *Politics and Fate*, Cambridge 1999, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Due to France’s drawn out, relatively recent, and only partial industrialisation, agricultural workers outnumbered industrial workers in France into the post-war years. It was only in the 1954 survey that manual workers finally outstripped agricultural workers, comprising 33.8% and 26.7% of the workforce respectively. Furthermore, the large-scale Fordist production plants, such as the Billancourt Renault plant were the exception and not the rule until well into the 1960s. In 1962, only 37% of the industrial workforce worked in 500+ plants. See Sue Milner, ‘France’ in: France S. Berger & D. Broughton, *The Force of Labour: The West European Labour Movement and the Working Class in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1995, pp. 211-244.

<sup>33</sup> See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*, Oxford 1994, p. 235.

In France, it was the 'mass' French Communist Party (PCF - *Parti Communiste Francais*), numerically stronger at both electoral and membership level than the Socialist Party, which formed the strong ties with the working class through its union links (with the CGT).<sup>35</sup> Paradoxically, these links so characteristic of 'Northern' social democracy eluded the (slightly) more moderate Socialist Party. The PS failed to gain mass working-class support, and still today lacks an 'organic' link with French trade unions, which neither contribute financial support, nor are they represented on the party's governmental and administrative bodies. This to a considerable extent explains the ambiguous class character of the PS in the twentieth Century.<sup>36</sup>

The detached relationship conveyed certain advantages, allowing the PS to develop its programme without requiring union assent. Indeed Kitschelt suggests the PS structure as the optimal organisation form of social democratic parties, offering greater flexibility for strategic responses to a changing environment.<sup>37</sup> Against Kitschelt's mooted benefit must be weighed the cost of a lack of a significant sources of funding<sup>38</sup>, and a failure to secure a firm implantation within the working class throughout the Fordist period. As Jospin puts it, 'we are less solidly anchored, but also less weighed down.'<sup>39</sup> The absence of a strong working class membership is reflected by the virtual absence of working class representation within the PS elite.<sup>40</sup>

This is not to say that French unionism is irrelevant to the study of the PS, after all 70% of PS activists are trade unionists<sup>41</sup>, but this largely reflects public sector white-collar unionism, particularly amongst teaching professionals. The absence of 'organic' ties means that, historically, the influence of the working class on the PS has been less prevalent. Jospin himself concedes that the French Socialists have never been a mass party. This has implications for relations with social partners, as well as electoral fortunes; 'we do not have in France a strong tradition of negotiation and social dialogue ... We can experience wide-scale electoral successes

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Jeff Bridgeford, *The Politics of French Trade Unionism*, Leicester 1991, p. 7. Organised interests were illegal in France from the revolution until 1884, when the *Loi Chapelier* was reformed.

<sup>35</sup> See Milner, p. 213.

<sup>36</sup> See Alain Bergounioux & Gérard Grunberg, *Le Long Remords du Pouvoir*, Paris 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*, Cambridge 1994.

<sup>38</sup> One upshot of this has been some very murky funding practices, notably the URBA and Carrefour scandals, which were a significant source of disaffection with 'governmental' socialism in the 1980s.

<sup>39</sup> Lionel Jospin, *Modern Socialism*, London 1999, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> David Hanley, 'The Parti Socialiste Francaise: Socialist Synthesis or Ambiguous Compromise?' in: S. Mazey *et al*, *Mitterrand's France*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> Philippe Marliere, 'The French Socialist Party', in: R. Ladrech & P. Marlière, *Social Democratic Parties in the European Union*, Basingstoke 1999, p. 68.

followed by major setbacks because we do not draw our support from specific social foundations.’<sup>42</sup>

It should not be inferred from this, however, that French Socialism has eschewed a class-based analysis of politics. The influence of Marxism has historically been much greater on French Socialism than on British Labourism. Indeed, perhaps in an attempt to compensate for the absence of a mass-class base, and in part spurred on by competition from the PCF, French Socialism has always been keen to affirm its ‘inter-classist’ profile within the context of its quasi-Marxist doctrine.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the most influential post-Epinay<sup>44</sup> exponent of a class-based analysis of politics, drawing on the Marxist tradition, was the late Jean Poperen. His concept of the ‘*front de classe*’ was widely embraced at the 1981 Valence Congress, where Poperen ensured that the idea of compromise between ‘social forces’ (the workers) and the *Patronat* (employers) was written into the (unanimous) motion. Poperen argued that the party itself ought to ‘organise’ balance of social forces.<sup>45</sup>

Poperen’s core idea was that concessions made to the *Patronat* in terms of subsidies, wage de-indexation, and state aids, should only be granted in return for social concessions for the workforce, secured through the co-ordinated action of the PS, unions, and groups representing the unemployed and socially excluded.<sup>46</sup> The influence of the *front de classe* on Jospin’s project today endures. Jospin claims, ‘our role is to mediate between the social classes, between those who are reasonably satisfied with society as it exists and are reluctant to be penalised the ‘cost’ of greater equality, and those for whom the furtherance of equality represents a fundamental goal.’ The existence of deep-rooted class cleavages in society is explicitly recognised within Jospin’s world-view. For Jospin, the ‘important political and philosophical point’, is that ‘socialists must aim to reconcile the middle and working classes, though their interests may differ and diverge. We must seek to advance their respective interests simultaneously.’<sup>47</sup>

In a reprise of Poperen’s *Front de classes* terminology of the 1980s, Jospin insists that, ‘our aim is to found a new alliance of classes, one that reflects both the sources of our support in society

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<sup>42</sup> Jospin, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> See Bergounioux & Grunberg, *Le Long Remords du Pouvoir*.

<sup>44</sup> The modern PS, which grew out of the *Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière* founded in 1905, was formally established at the Epinay Congress in 1971.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Marie-Therese Mutin, 23 September 1997.

<sup>46</sup> Jean Poperen, *Le nouveau contrat socialiste: socialistes et liberté*, Paris 1985.

and the interests of the country as a whole.’ He cites as one of the three core principles of socialist thinking that ‘social classes can be brought together through equality of opportunity.’ Jospin talks of the need to rally the middle classes, as well as those whom society has left behind, to the ‘cause of equality and social integration. The Socialist Party is an inter-class party; its sociological base is broad and heterogeneous, and has been widened in recent years. The left today enjoys a significant and increasing support among the middle classes.’<sup>48</sup>

The ‘new class alliance’ is a recurrent theme of PS discourse at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Jospin notes that ‘French society remains structured by classes, even if their barriers are less distinct and they are more mobile’. Jospin’s project and policies aim to forge a new alliance between ‘the excluded, the *classes populaires*, and the middle classes’. These classes, Jospin accepts, ‘certainly have some specific, and at times divergent, interests, but they also have common concerns. They have the same aspirations for the improvement of the employment situation, for the reduction of job insecurity, the improvement of the education system, and the consolidation of social protection. They can thus unite within our project of social transformation.’<sup>49</sup>

Class is thus important not only to the PS’s identity, but also to its political economy. Jospin’s Government continues to use the analytical categories of ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ and an at least partially class-based analysis of the economy. For example, in reference to ‘fiscal reforms which promote greater equality’, Jospin talks of them ‘starting to build a better balance between the taxation of capital and labour.’<sup>50</sup> Its redistributive aspirations are still couched in the broadly Keynesian and class terms New Labour eschews, highlighting the need for redistribution of wealth between classes, towards those with a greater propensity to spend, to increase both social justice and demand in the economy.<sup>51</sup> This is one indicator of the frame of reference for thinking about the economy within ‘Jospinism’ – which is still rooted in an altogether non-neoliberal

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<sup>47</sup> Jospin, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Jospin, p. 14 & p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Jospin, closing speech to the PS Universite d’Ete, 29 August 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Jospin, p. 14. This reflects widespread view that an iniquitous and regressive redistribution occurred, ‘on the Socialists watch’ in the 1980s, when workers share of added value dropped dramatically as a result of de-indexation of wages, whilst capital profitability rates soared.

<sup>51</sup> See Ben Clift, ‘The Jospin Way’, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 72 No.2/2001, pp. 170-179. On redistributive record see Jonah Levy, ‘France: Directing Adjustment?’ in: F. Scharpf & V. Schmidt, *Welfare and Work in the Open Economy: Volume Two*, Oxford 2000, pp. 337-344.

world view.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, we can say that the PS's economic strategy retains a touch of class. There remains within French Socialism an underlying resonance of notions of class conflict rooted, indirectly, in a Marxist analysis of the economy.

However, for all this rhetorical attachment to a cross-class analysis of society, the PS elite has been criticised, both by Left wing factions such as the Gauche Socialiste *within* the party, and by Unions (in particular CGT and FO) and the Communist Party. Critique follows the lines of not being sufficiently critical in its questioning of the neoliberal paradigm, and failing to speak up for the *couches populaires* – or the working class, most vulnerable to advancing neoliberal globalisation. In December 1995, railway unions triggered a series of strikes, sufficient in scale to be described as a *Mouvement sociale* – conjuring up comparisons with May 1968. The catalyst for the strikes was in part hostility to the *Plan Juppé* – a swingeing social security cuts package justified as essential austerity measures to prepare the French economy for economic and monetary union. The PS faced criticism, both internal and external, for remaining too distant from the *mouvement* and failing to support the worker's efforts - unwilling as it was to become too implicated in such 'bottom-up' action.<sup>53</sup>

*Poperenistes* offered a more general critique of the PS mainstream's 'accommodation' with the de-indexation of wages and flexibilisation of the labour market, arguing that the PS had failed to stand up for 'their' people – the *couches populaires*. Poperen felt his conception of the class front had been emasculated, with adaptation to neo-liberalism, and accommodating to *Patronat* demands replacing the intended combating of both neoliberalism and *Patronat*. One *Popereniste* regretfully observes, 'we did not rely on, or mobilise, the *mouvement social*, we succumbed to economic constraints, but we never created a balance of power to oblige the *Patronat* to succumb to the social constraints.'<sup>54</sup>

The enduring relevance of class to the PS' analysis of economy and society lends a degree of coherence to its political economy. This association with a class based analysis is subject to criticism from within the party, both on the grounds of being an antiquated relic (from 'Blairites'

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<sup>52</sup> See Pierre Moscovici, *A La Recherche de la Gauche Perdue*, Paris 1994, and *L'Urgence: Plaidoyer pour une autre politique*, Paris 1997.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Harlem Désir, national secretary in charge of relations with social movements in 1995, and a member of the *Gauche socialiste* faction, 23 November 1997. See also 'Gauche de lutte et gauche de pouvoir: entretien avec Lionel Jospin', *Temps Modernes*, No. 587/1996.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Marie-Therese Mutin, 23 September 1997.

such as Bockel), and, more cogently, from Poperenistes, the Gauche Socialiste, and Emmanuelli, along the lines set out above. Nevertheless, such a referential provides a framework for advocating the need to redistribute wealth to the poorer members of society. This is couched in terms of both social justice and the need to reconcile the divergent interests of middle classes and *couches populaires* in the interests of social peace. Paradoxically, although it is today considered one of Europe's more authentic exponents of the political tradition, until the 1990s, the PS shunned the term 'social democracy'<sup>55</sup>, and Jospin still prefers 'Socialist'.<sup>56</sup> However, the PS accepts that it now operates on the ideological territory of social democracy<sup>57</sup>, and the class dimension to its analysis of the economy lends to the PS a recognisably social democratic element to its identity. As we shall see shortly, in terms of electoral strategy, the PS is again a class act.

## Section 2: Class and Social Democratic Electoral Strategy since the 'Golden Age'

'Up to the end of the sixties ... the industrial proletariat was numerically the largest component of the electorate, structurally the best organised, morally the most authoritative....it was what Italian theorists termed *centralita operaia* - the 'centrality of the working class' - that welded together an array of forces of the left. Typically, this is no longer so today.'<sup>58</sup>

Przeworski and Sprague's *Paper Stones* attempts to rigorously demonstrate social democracy's 'electoral dilemma', namely that a 'pure' working class strategy will not succeed, because the working class was deemed to be shrinking. On the other hand, cross-class strategies aimed at courting the middle class involve alienation of some working class support – seen by the authors

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<sup>55</sup> The term Social democrat accepts the notion of a compromise with capitalism, which, until the 1983 U-turn, the PS firmly rejected, at least rhetorically. 'Social democrat' was used as term of abuse of abuse within the party, for example, by Chevenement to denounce Rocard. Social democratisation, formally accepting for the first time capitalism as the 'new horizon' within which the PS would operate, took place at the Arche Congress in 1991. See Parti Socialiste, *Un Nouvel Horizon*, Paris 1992.

<sup>56</sup> He notably *always* prefers the terms Socialism and Socialist to Social democracy and social democrat in his speeches, see <http://www.psinfo.net/>.

<sup>57</sup> See the final text of the 1997 Brest Conference, *Réussir à Gauche*, and the 2000 Grenoble Conference, *Ensemble, réussir aujourd'hui pour convaincre demain*, and Jospin's *Modern Socialism*, which, whilst expressing reservations about the term (p. 5), nevertheless situates his Government and his party's project within the European social democratic tradition.

<sup>58</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Introduction', in: P. Anderson & P. Camiller, *Mapping The West European Left*, London 1994, p. 11.



as more or less a zero sum trade-off. The thesis is ‘proved’ through extensive statistical analysis of European electoral results.<sup>59</sup>

Although intuitively plausible, this theory is problematic, as a number of writers have pointed out. Firstly, the definition of working class employed by Przeworski & Sprague is rather narrow, ‘manual wage earners in mining, manufacturing, construction, transport and agriculture and their inactive household members’, thus excluding manual workers in ‘unproductive’ sectors, routine non-manual and all white collar workers.<sup>60</sup> Secondly, it is at variance with the facts, ignoring both working-class Conservatism, and the conspicuous successes of cross-class appeals in both Britain and France. More helpfully, Marlière’s typology of post war social democracy identifies *both* ‘a strong working class anchoring as far as membership and the electorate were concerned’ *and* ‘an interclassist profile which combined strong support among working-class segments of the population with the ability to attract significant proportions of the middle and even upper segments of salaried employees’ as core features.<sup>61</sup>

Crude causal relationships between a shrinking industrial manual worker population and fewer socialist voters are difficult to sustain. The reason for this mismatch between theory and facts can be traced to the flawed, sociological deterministic assumptions made about the ‘micro-foundations’ of the model – i.e. voter choice. ‘Analysis of electoral politics voter preferences are implanted from outside so that workers becomes dupes of macro-actors, in particular, of parties and trade unions.’<sup>62</sup> A similar level of sociological determinism informed ‘social structural’ electoral analyses on both sides of the channel, which saw class as a determinant of voting behaviour in Britain and France.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Adam Przeworski & John Sprague, *Paper Stones : A History of Electoral Socialism*, Chicago 1986, pp. 25,31, 50-62.

<sup>60</sup> This is another round in an ongoing debate about the appropriate measures of class for psephological analysis. At its heart are concerns that the manual/non-manual dichotomy blurs more than it clarifies. See Evans, ‘Class Voting’. Specifically on Przeworski and Sprague’s arguments see Herbert Kitschelt, ‘Class Structure and Social Democratic Party Strategy’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 23/1993, pp 299-337 and Desmond King & Mark Wickham-Jones, ‘Social Democracy and Rational Workers’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 20/1990, p. 390.

<sup>61</sup> Philippe Marlière, ‘Introduction’, in Ladrech and Marlière, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Buraway, quoted in King & Wickham-Jones, p. 391.

<sup>63</sup> See e.g. David Butler & David Stokes, *Political change in Britain: the Evolution of Electoral Choice*, London 1974, and Guy Michelat & Michel Simon, *Classe, Religion et Comportement Politique*, Paris 1977, although Michelat and Simon account recognises the *interaction* of religion and class. They highlight the role that Catholicism played in shielding workers from class consciousness. They show that Catholicism and atheism were the single most important determinants of political class consciousness.

Taking on board the above critique, many analysts argue the impact of these sociological variables is declining, counteracted by 'economic' voting, the declining *strength* of party identification,<sup>64</sup> heightened electoral volatility, and declining satisfaction with the political system in general and 'governmental' parties in particular. Both French and British studies contend that the relationship between class and voting is complicated by two factors. Firstly, macro-changes in the class composition of the French and British electorates, with a fragmentation of homogenous electoral blocs of support which arguably characterised the left electorate in the Fordist period. Thus, for example, analysts chart the increasing salience of 'sectoral location' as opposed macro-social class in determining voting behaviour pointing to a fairly strong correlation between public sector employment and propensity to vote for the Left.<sup>65</sup> Others saw a blurring of class boundaries brought about by the 'Taylorisation,' in particular of service sector work, bringing about a 'proletarianisation' of white collar workers.<sup>66</sup> Still others identified a decreasing salience of class as a predictor of voting behaviour, for example with a shift from 'closed class to open elections', and 'the decline of class and the rise of issue voting'.<sup>67</sup> Crewe's class dealignment thesis argues that, undermined by amongst other things 'mixed class environments', the causal connection between class and party loyalty had withered away.

These theses have not gone unchallenged. Some argue that, whilst the class structure has become more complex, class has not diminished in its relevance for the individual voter.<sup>68</sup> However, whatever the rights and wrongs of the psephological debate, party elite's *perceptions* about the nature of the class structure and its impact on voting behaviour *were* changing. Przeworski argues that 'the relative salience of class as a determinant of voting behaviour is a cumulative consequence of strategies pursued by political parties of the left.'<sup>69</sup> Regardless of the precise nature of 'bottom up' changes in the class structure and its relevance to voting behaviour, the

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<sup>64</sup> For example, 87% of the electorate in 1995 still classed themselves closer to one party than any other, and 75% of those retained the same party loyalty as their parents, however, whilst this influence still conditions voting behaviour, it by no means determines it, as declining party loyalty demonstrates. See Daniel Boy & Nonna Mayer's 'Introduction' in: *L'Electeur A Ses Raisons* Paris, 1997, p. 15

<sup>65</sup> Patrick Dunleavy & Christopher Husbands, *British Democracy at the Crossroads*, London 1985; see also Daniel Boy & Nonna Mayer, 'Que Reste-t-Il Des Variables Lourdes?' in: *L'Electeur A Ses Raisons*, p. 131.

<sup>66</sup> See David Weakliem and Anthony Heath, 'The Secret Life of Class Voting: Britain, France, and the United States since the 1930s', in: Evans *The End of Class Politics?*, esp. pp. 102-6.

<sup>67</sup> See Boy & Mayer, Richard Rose & Ian McAllister, *Voters Begin to Choose*, London 1986, and Mark Franklin, *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain*, Oxford 1985.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell and John Curtice, *Understanding Political change: The British Voter 1964-1987*, Oxford 1991. Michael Lewis-Beck *et al*, *How France Votes*, London 2000.

<sup>69</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge 1985, p. 100-1.

'top-down' cognitive frameworks of party elites in the two countries accepted (to different degrees) an evolution in the relationship between class and voting.

### **New Labour Electoral Strategy: Transcending Class?**

Labour's position as the party of the working class was long a given of the British electoral scene. Butler & Stokes once noted that class was 'pre-eminent among factors used to explain party allegiance in Britain.'<sup>70</sup> The implications for Labour of changes in socio-economic structure were captured in the gloomy predictions of Hobsbawm's widely disseminated *The Forward March of Labour Halted*.<sup>71</sup> This impressed upon Labour the need to examine the impact of a declining Fordist paradigm on its electorate, with the likelihood of a majority built on a working-class electoral base decreasing as societal change advanced.

Commentators saw Labour swimming against the tide of history. Wedded to a declining manual working class, and no longer even sure of their loyalty, Labour was seen as trying (unsuccessfully) to run up a downward escalator. In truth, both the nature of evolutions in class structure, and the link between Labour Party and working class voters posited in some of these writings is an oversimplification. The British working class have not always been the loyal supporters of Labour folklore.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, for all the pitfalls identified by Przeworski & Sprague with such a strategy Labour has long been in the business of courting middle class support. For example, in the 1950s, Crosland was steeped in the psephology of his age, and was uneasy with the staunchly working class 'cloth cap' image of Labourism. This unease was predicated on an analysis of a changed social structure which demanded a concomitant change in social democracy. Believing 'society as a whole [to be] less and less proletariat', and that the working class 'subjectively are seeking to acquire middle-class status in life.'<sup>73</sup>

In the mid-1980s, Labour Party electoral strategy documents again began to recognise the need to 'widen our appeal to embrace new occupational groups.'<sup>74</sup> By the mid-1990s, Labour's strategy sought to *transcend* class, indeed to deny its existence. Whereas once the Labour Party

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<sup>70</sup> Butler & Stokes, *Political change in Britain*.

<sup>71</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour halted?*, London 1981.

<sup>72</sup> See e.g. Frank Parkin, 'Working Class Conservatives: a theory of political deviance', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 18/1967, pp. 278-90, and R.E. Pahl and C. D. Wallace 'Neither angels in marble nor rebels in red: privatisation and working class consciousness', in: D. Rose *Social Stratification and Economic Change*, London 1988.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Mark Wickham-Jones, *The Labour Party and Economic Strategy*, London 1996.

could accurately be characterised as a predominantly class-based party in terms of its ‘political communications strategy’, today, reference to class is explicitly rejected. As we saw earlier, Blair reformulates Labour’s class identity, and celebrates ‘a new, larger, more meritocratic middle class’.<sup>75</sup> The party’s evolution since 1983 seems to conform in many respects to Kirchheimer’s transformation thesis,<sup>76</sup> Pattie observes that the Labour Party ‘has moved from a ‘mass’ party based in a declining, and decreasingly loyal social group, to something closer to the ‘catch-all’ party, drawing support broadly.’<sup>77</sup>

This is as much a result of ‘top-down’ party elite strategy as it is of any ‘bottom-up’ socio-economic changes in the class structure. As Sartori noted, the salience of factors such as class depends on the willingness of parties to *politicise* them, since ‘the party creates the ‘subjective’ class (class consciousness).’<sup>78</sup> The novelty lies in the fact that New Labour has explicitly avoided not only the politicisation, but even the *recognition* of class, assuming instead that ‘the class relations that used to underlie voting and political affiliation have shifted dramatically, owing to the steep decline in the blue-collar working class.’<sup>79</sup> Reflecting the assumed homogenisation of class, an insider remarks of the pre-Blair party, ‘Labour had failed to understand that the old working class was becoming a new middle class: aspiring, consuming, choosing what was best for themselves and their families ... by 1983, 53% of working-class fathers had sons in non-manual work ... they had moved on and Labour hadn’t ... there was a new majority in Britain – new working class voters, new middle class voters. And year on year Labour and the new majority were parting company.’<sup>80</sup> This analysis oversimplifies a complex reality, and is highly questionable, notably for its reliance on a manual/non-manual dichotomous conception of class which is questioned by many scholars,<sup>81</sup> but it nevertheless came to underpin Labour’s strategic vision.

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<sup>74</sup> Labour Party National Executive Committee, 1987.

<sup>75</sup> Speech at the Institute for Public Policy Research, London, 14 January 1999, quoted in Michael White, ‘Meritocracy to replace ‘old establishment’’, *The Guardian*, 15 January 1999.

<sup>76</sup> Otto Kirchheimer, ‘The transformation of West European party systems’, in: J. LaPalombara & M. Weiner *Political Parties & Political Development*, London 1966.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Pattie, ‘New Labour and the Electorate’ in Ludlam and Smith *New Labour in Government*, p. 52.

<sup>78</sup> Giovanni Sartori, ‘From the sociology of politics to political sociology’, in: S. M. Lipset, *Politics and the Social Sciences*, Oxford 1969, p. 84.

<sup>79</sup> Giddens, p. 20.

<sup>80</sup> Phillip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, London 1998, pp. 4 & 22.

<sup>81</sup> See most recently G. Evans (ed.) *The End of Class Politics?*

Strategically, for Labour elites, the Union link came to be seen as a major electoral millstone. As Ludlam notes, ‘the link [was] condemned as the last major obstacle to rebranding Labour as a classless progressive electoral vehicle.’<sup>82</sup> Although the link has, so far, survived, there has been a very conscious assertion of Labour’s autonomy from the unions, as captured in the ‘fairness not favours’ stance. The repositioning of Labour, now not tied to any class, can be seen in the rewriting of Clause IV. This removed reference to ‘the workers by hand or by brain’, in favour of ‘all of us as a community ... the many, not the few’. Within the Blairite world view, conflicts of interests are not readily recognised, as a result of a broadly neoliberal view of the economy outlined above. This acted in concert with a desire for an ever broader appeal. The culmination of Labour’s consciously pursued strategy of ‘declassifying’ its image and electoral appeal was that, by 1997, only 19% of voters perceived Labour as representing a sectional working class interest, compared with 64% in 1987.<sup>83</sup>

The approach is not, however, unproblematic. Although Przeworski & Sprague overstate their case, they do highlight a dilemma, and a tension in Labour’s relationship with its mixed-class electoral base. As Kenny & Smith note, ‘a convincing electoral victory requires the votes of its core working-class supporters as well as significant middle-class voting. The coalition that Labour needs to marshal through the ballot box has only been successfully stitched together on three occasions – 1945, 1966, and 1997.’<sup>84</sup> The party elite attempts to resolve the tension (in the form of potential incompatibilities of appeals to the ‘traditional’ working class and the middle class) of its ‘inter-class’ electoral appeal by assuming away class-based antagonism. This has not been a consistently winning strategy. Some interpreted disappointing mid-term results, with Labour gaining only 36% in Council elections in May 1999, just three points ahead of the Conservatives, in this light. This election saw the fall of some Labour Town Halls formerly seen as bastions of its core support, such as Sheffield. As Pattie notes, ‘New Labour looked vulnerable, and there was worrying evidence that support was falling most in its former industrial heartlands.’<sup>85</sup> Concerns were voiced, for example by former cabinet Minister Peter Kilfoyle, who left the Government in a bid to ‘reconnect’ the Party with the grass roots.

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<sup>82</sup> Ludlam, p. 111.

<sup>83</sup> Pattie, p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Kenny and Martin Smith, ‘Interpreting New Labour: Constraints, Dilemmas and Political Agency’, in Ludlam and Smith *New Labour in Government*, p. 246. We may now, of course, add a fourth instance in 2001. Unfortunately, the in-depth analyses of the 2001 result have not yet been published, hence that election cannot be discussed in detail here.

One possible explanation of the New Labour elite's strategy, which is not without pertinence, is that Labour's traditional core working class constituencies 'have nowhere else to go', and that such mid-term trends at second order elections will be reversed at general elections. Record abstention levels in 2001, especially high in working class areas<sup>86</sup>, suggests New Labour's expunging of class from its frame of reference may have undermined the loyalty of the party's traditional support. Furthermore, in the context of a devolving British constitution, the nature of party competition is changing amidst semi-proportional electoral systems and an evolving party system. Labour's comforting logic, rooted in the First Past The Post norms of the Westminster Model, is being at least partially undermined, notably in Scotland.

The loss of working class support is problematic for the Labour party since, despite its catch-all aspirations, it continues to rely disproportionately on the support of the working class. Labour's success rests upon what Curtice calls 'a two-pronged coalition. There is no doubt that it needs the support of middle-class and less radical voters. But it needs to retain its traditional voters too'.<sup>87</sup> For example, in 1992, 70% of Labour's vote came from manual employees, whilst 80% of those voting Labour thought of themselves as working class. Webb characterises Labour as, 'a catch-all party which nevertheless enjoys particularly heavy support within the working class.'<sup>88</sup> Paradoxically, for all Labour's distancing itself from a class based appeal, one remarkable feature of Labour's landslide in 1997 was the recovery of working class Labour support to almost 1960s levels – 60.2%.<sup>89</sup>

### **PS Electoral Strategy: The 'Class Front'**

Despite the evolutions charted above, the French electorate continues to be 'structured' by the pertinence of the left/right divide<sup>90</sup>, and Boy & Mayer argue that class still strongly influences voting behaviour. Using INSEE class indicators, they note, 'the principal electoral cleavage today opposes independent earners, who vote mainly for the Right, with salaried workers, who

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<sup>85</sup> Pattie, p. 53; see also Ludlam.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Whiteley *et al*, 'Turnout', in: Norris *Britain Votes 2001*, Oxford 2001, pp. 214-5, although, as they note, 'aggregate analysis cannot identify if this was due to abstention by Labour supporters or to some other effect.' p. 214.

<sup>87</sup> John Curtice, 'Class Acts', *The Guardian*, 22 March 2000.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Webb, 'The British Labour Party', in: Ladrech and Marliere, p. 103, 104.

<sup>89</sup> Pattie, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> See Michael Lewis-Beck, 'Introduction: The Enduring French Voter' in: M. Lewis Beck *How France Votes*, London 2000, pp. 1-14.

vote more often for the Left.’<sup>91</sup> However, these sociological factors do not tell the whole story, as one glance at recent French electoral history illustrates. Counteracting trends are at work, with volatile voters display an increasing propensity to vote ‘economically,’ shift allegiance or abstain. Although relying on the questionable manual/non-manual dichotomy, Boy & Mayer do unearth a shift in the relationship between class and vote. The proportion of manual workers voting for the left has dropped significantly from 68% in 1988, to 52% in 1995, whilst the number of non-manual workers voting for the Left fell from 56% in 1988 to 46% in 1995. Whereas in 1978, 70% of manual workers voted for the Left, by 1995 that proportion was down to 52% of manual workers (and 51% of non-manual workers).<sup>92</sup>

Given this volatile French electoral context the PS finds itself obliged, at every election, to attempt to ‘reconstitute’ its electorate, bringing together diverse ideological orientations and people from widely differing social classes. In recognition of a more complex class structure, and a less sociologically deterministic French electoral context, less reducible a bipolar world between proletariat and *Patronat*, Bergounioux has characterised the PS’s dilemma thus, ‘the cleavages are numerous. The class cleavage is no longer on its own a determinant of political cleavages.’<sup>93</sup> Yet despite recognition of the limits to class based appeals class remains, within the PS elite, an important dimension of its political offering. Indeed, in the context of ‘bottom-up’ socio-structural trends which suggest that, if anything, class is becoming a slightly less reliable foundation on which to base electoral support, the ‘top-down’ elite-level formulation of electoral strategy perspective, the PS remains conspicuously attached to class based electoral appeals.

According to PS grandee Louis Mermaz, the PS electorate, ‘is composed of working class voters ... but we also have a large middle class electorate ... it is a ‘class front’, but the classes are very different. We extend from the proletariat, and the unhappy left-voting unemployed, to the relatively comfortable middle classes, and who – intellectually – vote Left through a concern for liberty and justice, and a desire to change society.’<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Daniel Boy & Nonna Mayer, ‘Que Reste-t-Il Des Variables Lourdes?’, pp. 114, 108. INSEE indicators distinguish between ‘independent’ earners (Farmers, Artisans, Traders, the self employed), salaried manual workers, and salaried non-manual workers, and thus do not escape the manual/non-manual dichotomy.

<sup>92</sup> Boy and Mayer, p108-110.

<sup>93</sup> Alain Bergounioux, ‘L’Avenir de la Social-Démocratie’, *Nouvelle Revue Socialiste*, No. 11/1990, pp. 109-116.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Louis Mermaz, 1 October 1997.

One reason for this continued insistence upon class is the nature of party competition in France. Until the split in 1998, the FN's populism, successfully targeting of the *couches populaires*, made the FN a repository for working class voters disaffected with governmental socialism.<sup>95</sup> This in part explains the PS's affirmation of its cross-class appeal explicitly including the working class. As Le Gall noted of the 1993 defeat, 'The FN, who totalled 12.6%, is markedly more successful [than the PS] among workers, employees, amongst the young, and even more so among those classing themselves as 'underprivileged'.<sup>96</sup> The PS's inability to replace the PCF in urban areas with large immigrant populations has considerably aided FN progress, and undermined PS support with the working class.

Dissatisfaction with the PS spanned all socio-economic barriers. Le Gall, writing here in his capacity as the PS's foremost electoral strategist claims that, 'on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 'inter-classist' socialism gave way to a sociological quasi-indeterminism.' According to BVA polls, amongst the lower middle class, 41% voted for the mainstream right and only 21% for the PS and '*divers gauche*'. Nor was the performance amongst the workers much better. 'At the level of its electorate, the PS has performed a 'super-Bad Godesburg', but sadly without social democracy: only 20% of white-collar and blue-collar workers voted for it.'<sup>97</sup>

The 1995 presidential election proved the resilience of the left/right divide in France, due in no small part to the systemic pressure exerted by the presidential electoral system. The election saw, 'a partial return of the Left's electoral base (industrial and clerical workers, teachers, middle managers) after the nadir of 1993.' Yet the sociological profile of the 1995 Jospin electorate continued to display worrying traits of a desertion by industrial workers (only 21% support) and lower clerical workers (only 23% support).<sup>98</sup> The benefactor of blue and white collar worker desertion seemed, once again, to be the FN. The FN outpolled every other party amongst industrial workers, and the mapping of local FN strongholds correlates closely with some lost PS bastions, notably the Mediterranean coast and the Nord/Pas-de-Calais areas. Despite such

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<sup>95</sup> In addition to the Cote d'Azur, where the FN has long challenged the PS, new areas of socialist weakness emerged in 1993 from which the FN benefited. See Gérard Grunberg, 'Que Reste-t-il du Parti d'Epinay?' in P. Perrineau & C. Ysmal, *Le Vote Sanction : Les elections legislatives des 21 et 28 mars 1993*, Paris 1994, maps 4 & 5 show the FN outstripping the PS vote From East of Marseilles to the Italian Border.

<sup>96</sup> Gérard Le Gall, 'Une repetition des elections de printemps 1992', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, No. 964/1993, pp. 6-19, p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> Le Gall, 'A la Recherche des electorats perdus' *Vendredi Ideas*, June 1993, pp. 21-22.

<sup>98</sup> Alistair Cole, 'La France pour Tous? – The French Presidential Elections of 23 April and 7<sup>th</sup> May 1995', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 30/1995, pp. 338 & 343.



‘sociological indeterminism’, and the ‘super-Bad Godesberg’ of 1993 and – to a lesser extent – 1995, class remained central to Jospin’s ‘top-down’ construction of his electoral appeal after he took the helm of the party as First Secretary in 1995. As noted above, Jospin’s aim is ‘to found a new alliance of classes’<sup>99</sup> reconciling the excluded, *couches populaires* and middle class, whilst recognising the potential conflicts between their interests. This has been a hallmark of the PS electoral strategy.

In 1997, Jospin aimed explicitly to reach parts of the PS’s target electorate which had proved elusive in the early 1990s. Analysis of the first round seems to confirm some of the PS strategist’s hopes regarding the reconquest of parts of their old core constituencies. ‘According to SOFRES, the PS made its most significant progress among the young (+11%), white collar workers (+18%), and blue collar workers (+11%). Similarly, according to BVA, the PS considerably increased its influence among those classifying themselves as ‘lower middle class’(+10%), and as ‘underprivileged’(+14%).’<sup>100</sup> The SOFRES post-electoral survey – in identifying the sociological composition of the *gauche plurielle* electorate in the second ballot – was encouraging evidence of the strategy’s success. The Left and the *Verts*, ‘won an absolute majority of support ... among middle management and the intellectual professions, and the ‘intermediary’ professions (52%). They also won the support of one blue collar worker in two, as well as a majority of support among the ‘salaried’ (52%). They received 57% support among public sector workers, and the vote of one in two of the unemployed.’<sup>101</sup>

The fragility of the PS recovery was, however, underlined by the growth of the FN’s working class vote. The first round ballot of May the 25<sup>th</sup> continued to display the enduring strength of the FN.<sup>102</sup> In sociological terms, the FN electorate is revealed to be groups targeted by the PS electoral strategists. ‘FN support continues to develop among the working class, with the support of one in four manual workers ..... Le Pen’s party made their most significant advances among those subjectively identifying themselves as ‘underprivileged’ (+9%).’<sup>103</sup> The second biggest advance was among those calling themselves ‘working class’ (+5%).

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<sup>99</sup> Jospin, p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Gérard Le Gall, ‘Legislatives 1997 : Un scrutin singulier pour la gauche plurielle’, *Recherche Socialiste*, 1/ 1997, p. 22.

<sup>101</sup> Le Gall, ‘Legislatives 1997’, p. 33.

<sup>102</sup> Having won local successes in Orange, Toulon and Marignane in 1995, the FN added to its localised power base in Provence-Cote d’Azur with a local election victory at Vitrolles, outside Marseilles, in February 1997.

Within the PS, some are increasingly prepared to abandon the concept of two core electorates, believing attempts to impose such coherence on a complex reality are artificial.<sup>104</sup> On balance, there is an enduring attachment to old 'core' constituencies, but at the same time heightened awareness that phenomena such as the FN's advance, socio-economic change and electoral volatility require the PS to always be looking beyond such groups for support. With the implosion of the FN, and its dismal scores in the 2001 municipal elections (where both the FN and the *Mouvement Nationale Républicaine* scored less than 1.2% of the vote<sup>105</sup>) it remains to be seen whether the hitherto strong affirmation of class was born out of strategic expediency or ideological attachment. In this context the degree of emphasis on class within the PS' political 'offering' for 2002's 'decisive' elections will be instructive.

## Conclusion

One pillar of post-war social democracy's relationship with class, namely the instinctive propensity to redistribute wealth to the workers, appears to be under threat. Programmatically, New Labour's abandonment of Keynesian political economy, and concomitant embrace of a neoliberal view of the economy, assuming away the existence of class. Blair denies the existence of fundamental class-based divisions, proclaiming a meritocratic 'classless' society. The propensity of capitalism to generate large scale inequalities in society is underplayed, and New Labour accordingly confines its redistributive urges to elements of the 'working poor'. The class identity of Labour pervades the party's history, yet Blair deliberately shuns it.

On the other hand, Jospin's party, whilst historically less 'organically' tied to class, explicitly recognises the difference between classes – and of need to form a coalition between them. PS's analysis contrasts sharply with 'Blairism' in its more sceptical engagement with neoliberal economics and its explicit recognition of class-based conflicts of interest in society. Yet even the PS mainstream, for all its enduring 'neo-Keynesian' emphasis, has been criticised for not being sufficiently robust in its defence of the *couches populaires* – for example when it recently introduced tax cuts targeted the whole of society, including high earners.

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<sup>103</sup> Le Gall, 'Legislatives 1997', p. 32.

<sup>104</sup> A sentiment expressed by numerous PS National secretaries in interview with the author.

<sup>105</sup> See the Interior Ministry Website, <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/elections>

This is symptomatic of a more general malaise within 21<sup>st</sup> Century social democracy. It is grasping for a new political economy – a new guiding set of principles to inform an egalitarian economic strategy. In the post-war era, Keynesian economics and a class-based analysis of society provided both intellectual coherence, economic rationale, and an electoral constituency. With Keynesianism undermined, and class decreasingly central to social democratic analysis of economy and society, the road ahead is an uncertain one. The PS are much less inclined to cut loose the ties with class, yet even their instinctive propensity to redistribute wealth to the workers is subject to ever tighter constraints.

The enduring reliance of both formations upon a traditional working class electoral base is demonstrated by the degree of consternation within the PS in the 1980s and 1990s over desertion of the *couches populaires* to the FN, and (milder) anxieties within New Labour about diminishing support in ‘the heartlands’. Nevertheless, class is seen by electoral strategists in both parties as a less solid foundation for electoral appeals (albeit to different degrees). Paradoxically, for all Blair’s conscious choice to depoliticise the class issue, his electoral coalition of 1997 is built upon very considerable success within the working class. Due in part to the French party system, Jospin, despite his affirmation of a class-based appeal, presides over a considerably more fragile electoral coalition, with much less loyal working class support. The next decisive elections in France may hinge on how those sections of the working class which the PS lost to the FN in the 1980s and 1990s will vote in the wake of the FN’s apparent marginalisation.

Yet Blair’s ‘top down’ denial of class is not matched by a ‘bottom up’ disappearance of class cleavages. For all the substantive differences of electoral context and electoral strategy between PS and New Labour, both parties face similar problems in their attempts to resolve tensions over Europe, where a class cleavage seems to exist which divides both parties’ cross-class appeal, and which may prove increasingly problematic as Europe becomes an increasingly salient electoral issue as integration advances. Voting on European issues, according to Bergounioux & Grunberg ‘reinforces the cleavage between the middle and working classes.’<sup>106</sup>

In Britain, New Labour achieved a derisory 28% in the June 1999 European elections – eight points behind the Conservatives. Opinion polls unearthed a schism which, for all the talk of dealignment and the declining relevance of class, seemed to operate along class lines. Labour’s

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<sup>106</sup> Alain Bergounioux & Gérard Grunberg, *L’Utopie A l’Epreuve*, Paris 1996, p. 292.

working class voters were much more anti-single currency than its 'middle England' support.<sup>107</sup> As Evans notes, this problem has emerged since Labour's U-turn on Europe between the 1983 and 1987 elections. Anti-European sentiment 'fitted rather well with the 'Old Left' and euro-sceptic character of [Labour's] working class support base.' Analysis shows that, 'class differences in attitudes to Europe are extremely stable ... Labour's traditional working class support base was and is consistently more Euro-sceptic even in the era of new Labour.'<sup>108</sup>

In France, the pitiful 14.5% Rocard's official PS list received in the 1994 European elections was anticipated by Grunberg, for many years a Rocard advisor, who saw the split in terms of social cleavages which emerged in the Maastricht referendum as an ominous portent. '70% of *cadres supérieurs* .... and 57% of 'intermediary' professions voted yes, whereas 57% of white collar workers, 58% of blue collar workers ... voted no.' Although in part explained by the rival Tapie list splitting the Left vote, the European election results represented for the PS, 'a worrying situation, because its electoral success of the 1970s and 1980s was built on a synthesis of the values and expectations of the *classes moyennes supérieures* and '*couches populaires*.'<sup>109</sup> A synthesis between these increasingly divergent constituencies over the European question would at best prove elusive.

Le Gall's analysis of the European election results seem to suggest that the cleavage anticipated by Grunberg did indeed materialise, 'globally, the crisis of support for the socialist lists of 1994 confirms the weak credibility of the PS among the young, white and blue collar workers; phenomena observed in the 1992 regional elections, and accentuated in the 1993 legislative elections.'<sup>110</sup> The PS fared considerably better in the 1999 European elections, France, increasing its vote share rose from 14.5 per cent to 22 per cent, within an overall *gauche plurielle* showing of 38 per cent. Nevertheless, Grunberg's analysis suggests the need for careful handling of the European issue so as not to offend the working class. Jospin successfully achieved this in 1997, with his four conditions on the Euro. However, his hand was forced at Amsterdam, and his bid to reorient the process of European construction in a more jobs and growth oriented direction was undermined. In the event of welfare retrenchment which could plausibly be blamed on the

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<sup>107</sup> Pattie, p. 53. See also Paul Whiteley, 'Quids in – or out', *The Guardian*, 22 June 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Geoffrey Evans, 'Europe: a new electoral cleavage?', in: G. Evans and P. Norris, *Critical elections*, London 1999, pp. 209 & 214 & tables 11.3 & 11.4.

<sup>109</sup> Gérard Grunberg, 'Les français et l'Europe', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, No. 970/1994, pp. 20-26.

<sup>110</sup> Gérard Le Gall, 'Europeennes 1994 : des elections de politique interieure', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, No. 971/1994, p. 6.

Growth and Stability Pact, or an economic downturn which could plausibly be blamed on the ECB, the European schism within Jospin's cross-class appeal could re-emerge.

As European integration advances, and with it, potentially, the salience of European issues in deciding domestic British elections, similar caution will be needed by New Labour. Although New Labour no longer recognises the fact, both parties rely on successfully stitching together an electoral coalition combining working and middle class voters. Thus the electoral fortunes of both the PS and New Labour will continue to be crucially affected by the enduring class cleavage in the years ahead. Furthermore, the class-based electoral cleavage over European integration, which attests both to the increased salience of 'issue voting', *and* to the enduring relevance of class voting, threatens to further alienate eurosceptic working class voters from pro European social democratic parties, fragmenting their cross class electoral coalitions. This could present electoral socialism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century with an electoral dilemma akin to that outlined by Przeworski and Sprague's analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> Century socialism.