# YOUNG CONSERVATIVES, YOUNG SOCIALISTS AND THE GREAT YOUTH ABSTENTION: YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND NON-PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PARTIES.

by

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# **Abstract**

This thesis is an investigation into participation and non-participation by young people in British political parties. Falling turnout in British elections has lead to concern about the level of popular participation in the political system, especially amongst the young. Those between 18 and 25 are less likely to involve themselves in political activity than any other age group. This thesis argues that political parties and their grassroots members are still vital to British democracy and that the failure of both parties to recruit young members is leading to increasingly aged and inactive parties. Even measuring the extent of youth membership of the main parties is problematic due to a lack of accurate membership figures. The figures available show that whilst neither the Labour nor the Conservative Party has enjoyed unqualified success in recruiting young members, Labour has enjoyed comparative success in increasing its youth membership in the period 1970-2001 both absolutely and as proportion of the total membership. I have argued that whilst there is research on participation and non-participation there is little specific on the particular area of young people and political parties. I have suggested and evaluated competing explanations of this problem and I have been able to develop and test a youth-specific model of participation and non-participation. This model builds on the general incentive model developed by Seyd and Whiteley but provides a more comprehensive, and youth specific, model of both participation and non-participation. This new model builds considerably on our understanding of why young people choose to join, or not join, a political party.

However, a static sample only takes me so far. A study of the Labour and Conservative youth organisations also shows that they have contributed to their relative success or failure through popular perceptions of their image and through the relationship with their parent parties. My improved model of participation and non-participation is complemented by a consideration that the mobilisation model contributes to understanding trends in membership. Those youth organisations that are able to recruit actively with support from the parent party are more likely to succeed than those who are not. I have provided a detailed and critical study of the Labour and Conservative youth organisations, the first such study since 1970. From this study I have helped explain the comparative success of the Labour Party and the comparative failure of the Conservative Party in recruiting young members. Both party's youth organisations suffered from poor perceptions of extremism, infighting and unfashionability at certain times in the period under study which helped deter potential members. These problems were often compounded by a poor relationship between the youth organisation and the parent party. However, whilst, eventually, the Labour Party was able to solve these problems to a certain extent, the Conservative Party has yet to find a solution to its recruitment problems amongst young people.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Angel, to my father, for all his help and support, and to my mother, who is greatly missed.

# Contents

**<u>Tables</u>**

## Abbreviations.

**B.E.S.-** **British Election Survey.**

**C.C.F.-** **Conservative Collegiate Forum.**

**C.C.O.-** **Conservative Party Central Office.**

**C.F.-** **Conservative Future.**

**F.C.S.-** **Federation of Conservative Students.**

**L.P.Y.S.-** **Labour Party Young Socialists.**

**N.E.C.-** **National Executive Committee (of the Labour Party).**

**N.O.L.S.-** **National Organisation of Labour Students.**

**N.U.S.-** **National Union of Students.**

**Y.C.-** **Young Conservative.**

**Y.L.-** **Young Labour.**

**Y.S.-** **Young Socialist.**

# Chapter 1.

# Introduction.

The turnout of the 2001 General Election has once again brought the issue of political participation onto the agenda. The lowest turnout in modern democracy in the United Kingdom at 59.1% has lead to considerable discussion amongst politicians, political commentators and political scientists. The poor turnout in 2001 has led, once again, to a discussion as to whether we are facing a crisis of democracy. Some argue that poor turnout is an indication of disengagement and disillusionment with the political system and that an election in which the number of votes for the winning party was outweighed by those who did not bother to vote at all shows a deep malaise at the heart of our political system. Furthermore, poor turnouts in local elections (often between 30 and 40% but, plunging to below even that in some areas) and European Parliament elections (a turnout around 30% is normal, but the turnout fell to only 24% in 1999) have also become a cause for comment and concern with politicians casting about wildly in search of new and more 'convenient' ways to encourage the electorate to vote. [1]

It is important to note that concern about what were seen as falling levels of participation preceded the 2001 election. One of the driving forces behind New Labour's programme of radical constitutional change (the 'New Constitutionalism') was a perception that disengagement with the political system was partly caused by

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[1] See Broughton, D. 'Political Participation in Britain' in *Politics Review*, April 2000, page 12-15.
Curtis, A. 'The 2001 General Election' in *Politics Review*, January 2002, pages 3-6.

the centralised nature of the British state. The advent of devolution, the introduction of electoral reform (at least in the new devolved institutions), the greater use of referenda on constitutional and local issues (such as the one in Bristol in 2001), the introduction of directly elected mayors and the continued reliance on focus groups can be seen as an attempt to improve the link between the citizen and the government. Through the use of these channels, the government could claim to be communicating directly with the voters and handing down power from the centre to a more local level as a way of reinvigorating the democratic process.[2]

It is worth commenting however that not everyone sees the low turnout in General Elections such as in 1997 and 2001 in such apocalyptic terms. Others argue that the low turnout does not indicate dissatisfaction with democracy or the political system but instead it shows a broad level of satisfaction with the existing status quo. Economic prosperity, political stability and unprecedented wealth ensure that some voters are broadly happy with the way things are and will only vote if they feel a change to the existing government is needed, which in 2001 many thought was not. This explanation is often used to help explain poor turnout in American presidential and congressional elections.[3] Nonetheless, low and falling turnout must be a cause for concern for politicians who claim a democratic mandate for their actions based on the strength of their electoral support. As that support falls away into non-voting and apathy, for whatever reasons, our politicians have a far weaker claim to legitimacy.

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[2] See Mair, P., 'Partyless democracy: solving the paradox of New Labour', *New Left Review,* 2, 2000 and Smith, N. 'New Labour and Constitutional Reform', *Talking Politics,* Volume 4, Number 1, 2001.
[3] See McKeever, R. *Politics USA,* Prentice Hall, London, 1999, pages 204-207 and McKay, D. *American Politics and Society,* Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, pages 116-128.

It is also important to note that participation is not limited just to voting, although it is voting that is the most widespread participatory activity in the United Kingdom. Political participation covers a broad range of activities including signing a petition organised by a pressure group, lobbying at public meetings, voting or joining a political party, amongst many others. Political participation, even in a representative democracy like Britain where we choose others to act on our behalf, is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, participation is another channel by which our elected representatives can be made aware of the wishes of the people and respond appropriately. Secondly, participation is another way in which our representatives can be scrutinised and be held accountable for their actions in the period between General Elections. Thirdly, participation is an important act in itself. It is a social act which helps build the bonds between individuals and leads to a more enlightened, active and connected electorate. The opposite is a fragmented, atomised, alienated and apathetic people.

In the United Kingdom existing research has shown that the degree to which people participate in the political process varies enormously. A major study into participation carried out by Parry and Moyser in the 1980s found that 25.8% of citizens could be counted as 'almost inactive' when it came to the political participation, 51% restricted their activity to the process of voting in local, general and European elections and only 23.2% of the sample were involved in a variety of activities beyond voting such as membership of a political party or pressure group. Even then, this figure of 23.2% covers a variety of 'active' participation. Some paid up members of political parties

and pressure groups are happy just to pay their yearly membership fees whilst others are willing to commit hours of their spare time to political participation.[4]

Parry and his colleagues also discovered that those who are politically active are not typical of the population as a whole. In terms of class, gender, partisan identification and political outlook those who were most politically active were atypical of the wider population. Activists tended to be middle class, well educated and, in terms of their political views, more 'extreme' than the average voter. Overall, the research carried out by Parry pointed to a country where political participation was not, save in the periodic casting of a vote, particularly widespread.

Other research has also highlighted both the changing levels of participation (the falling turnout in general elections is one such indicator) and the changing nature of participation. Over the past 30 years the nature of participation has changed. In the thirty years following the Second World War people joined conventional political organisations like trade unions and political parties. Between 1945 and 1978 the number of people who joined trade unions grew from 7.87 million to 13.11 million. Between 1978 and 1996, however, the trend went into reverse, with membership of trade unions falling from 53% to 31% of the population. In a similar vein the membership of political parties has declined in recent years. The membership of the Conservative Party fell from 2.8 million in 1951 to 320,000 in 2001 whilst the

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[4] For a summary of these findings see Coxall, B and Robins, L. *Contemporary British Politics,* Macmillan, London, 1998 and for the full text see Parry, G., Moyser, G. and Day, N. *Political Participation in Britain,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

membership of the Labour Party fell from 1 million members in the early 1950s to 311,000 in 2001.[5]

This fall in membership of 'conventional' political organisations has been paralleled by increasing participation, especially amongst young people, in unconventional forms of political participation such as single-issue pressure groups. The attraction of these groups is often the fact that they focus on single, precise, issues and objectives and the belief that the group's objective is more likely to be met if efforts are concentrated on a narrow area of lobbying. For many, especially the young, this aspect of single-issue pressure group activity contrasts favourably with the broad interests of political parties and more traditional pressure groups like trade unions which inevitably lead to compromise and trade-offs.

It is also worth noting, as this sheds further light on the nature of participation in the United Kingdom, that concern over falling levels of participation is not limited to Britain. Falling turnouts in elections and falling membership of both political parties and pressure groups can be identified in many western democracies.[6] Falling participation has been a particular source of concern in the United States. Robert Putnam's *'Bowling Alone'* published in 1995 generated a debate about the extent and nature of participation in modern liberal democracies. Whereas the United States has never had the voting turnout figures of European democracies, this was always compensated for by the fact that Americans involved themselves in civil society in

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[5] Norris, P. 'Political Communications' in Dunleavy et al, *Developments in British Politics 5,* Macmillan, London, 1997, pg. 78. Membership figures from Social Trends, Office for National Statistics, *Social Trends 28,* HMSO, 1998. 2001 figures from 'Labour membership 'drops below Tories'', WWW.BBC.co.uk 8th September 2001.
[6] See for example: Children and Young People's Unit, 'Young People and Politics', The Children and Young People's Unit, 2002, pg 3.

many other ways including the PTA, the church, labor unions and charities. Putnam argued that, despite rising levels of education, a factor often connected with active participation, participation rates in the USA had fallen during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Falling political participation is clearly not just a British phenomenon.[7]

Membership of political parties in European Union counties also seems to bear mute testimony to a decline in formal political participation. According the Mair and Van Biezen (2001) only 1.92% of the total British electorate are members of a political party, in France only 1.57%, in Germany 2.93%, in Italy 4.05%. With the exception of Austria and Finland, the membership of political parties as a proportion of the total electorate does not rise above 7%. Furthermore, the authors point to a clear decline in membership over the past 20 years in EU countries. In the United Kingdom, membership of political parties fell by 50.39% between 1980 and 2000. In France the figure was even greater, a 64.59% decline. In Italy, a 51.54% decline. The only EU countries where membership had increased over the same period were Spain, Greece and Portugal which, of course, were under authoritarian or dictatorial regimes until the late 1970s and early 1980s.[8]

In this thesis I examine a particular kind of participation, political party membership, amongst a particular group of the population, the young.[9] In the recent debates about

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[7] For a summary see Ashbee, E. 'Bowling Alone' A civil or moral crisis in US society today?' in *Politics Review,* Philip Allen Publishers, September 2000. For the full text see Putnam, R.D. 'Bowling alone: America's declining social capital' in *Journal of Democracy,* Volume 6, Number 1, January 1995.

[8] Mair, P, and Van Biezen, I, 'Party membership in twenty European democracies, 1980-2000', *Party Politics,* 7 (1), 2001, pp. 5-21.

[9] The definition of the term 'young' is an imprecise one and one which is treated differently by different political scientists, political parties and politicians. For my intents and purposes I aim to

the falling levels of participation the young have been identified as a particular area of concern. Political apathy seems particularly high amongst the 18 to 24 age group. In 1992, 68% of 18-24 year olds voted in the General Election, by 1997 this figure had fallen to 60% and by 2001 the figure was only 38%. In May 2001 only 60% of those aged between 18 and 24 were registered to vote, with this age group being less likely to register than any other. A *Guardian* survey in 1995 showed that those in the age group 18-34 were more likely to agree with the statement "I'm not interested in politics" than any other age group. Membership of the youth wings of the main political parties is low and relatively few young people are involved in pressure groups. In a debate held in 2001 by the left-leaning think tank the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), the then Minister for Young People Paul Boateng told the audience of teenagers and twenty-somethings that this apathy was: "an indictment of us as politicians, which could become a danger to democracy".[10]

There is a counter argument. Evans (1997) argues that young people are interested in politics, but it is just that they choose to participate differently.[11] He points out that under 35s are interested in such issues as the homeless, the disabled, animal rights, increased funding for the NHS. Furthermore, young people have been at the forefront of campaigns for the environment and for civil rights. It could be the case, as we have noted above, that young people shun the conventional methods of participation, with the relative inertia and compromise that this entails, in favour of the more focussed and physical options provided by single issue and direct action groups. At the same

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concentrate on the age group 18-25 although some available data which uses the term young to describe a wider age range will sometimes be used.
[10] Figures from *The Guardian,* 24th October 1995, Roberts, D. *British Politics in Focus,* Causeway Press, London, 1999 and "Winning the youth vote", www.bbc.co.uk, 13th May 2001.
[11] See Evans, M. 'Political Participation' in Dunleavy et al. *Developments in British Politics 5,* Macmillan, 1997, pg 112.

IPPR debate Mark Thomas positively welcomed the perceived rejection by young people of conventional political participation such as political parties. Thomas suggested that young people were not interested in mainstream politics "because politicians by and large are uninterested in them." Thomas argued that young people considered politicians to be "lying, self-serving, greedy pigs." Far from regretting this disillusionment, Thomas said it was "absolutely brilliant" that young people were not interested in mainstream politics. Thomas argued that, while effecting change through party politics was a lengthy and often futile process, the immediacy of direct action and 'creative dissent' increasingly offered young people a real chance to feel empowered.

In my view we cannot afford to be so complacent. Political parties, despite the advances in technology and campaigning techniques, need ordinary grass-roots members. They need these members to stand as candidates, to take part in the process of policy formulation and to campaign at the local level for their party. Political parties are a vital part of British democracy and ordinary members are crucial to political parties. Unless they are able to recruit young members evidence indicates that the main political parties will become increasingly aged and increasingly inactive.

Seyd and Whiteley (2002) identified three reasons why ordinary members were important to a political party. Firstly, members provide 'clean' money- donations untainted by the suspicion that a donor might be trying to win influence. Secondly, they are important in promoting the party amongst friends, relatives and acquaintances by word of mouth. Thirdly, and most importantly, they are the vital foot soldiers in the local campaigns. Seyd and Whiteley argue that with a tightening

of restrictions on campaign finance in the UK, coupled with rules against political advertising on television, members become all the more important. Campaigning by grass roots members has an important and growing influence on voting behaviour. When party loyalty amongst the electorate is at its weakest for 40 years and electoral volatility growing, local campaigns are growing in importance. Political parties need active members like never before.[12]

Seyd and Whiteley (1992, 1994) have also produced the two definitive studies of Labour and Conservative Party membership and in an article in the *Guardian* in October 1999 they commented on the danger of failing to recruit young people to a political party. Seyd and Whiteley painted a picture of a Conservative Party which was shrunken (335,000 members on official figures), old (only 5% of its members below 35) and inactive (76% of members did nothing at all for the party save pay a membership fee). Seyd and Whiteley made the point that the inactivity and lack of younger members were connected. Whilst the Labour Party seemed in better shape, neither party could afford to be complacent.[13] This is why this is such an important issue in British politics and an important area of research. Despite the arguments of others, such as Evans, who claim that the decline in membership of political parties is not important, I would agree with Seyd and Whiteley that, in fact, political parties with a healthy grassroots membership is more important than ever before. Furthermore, without young members, political parties become inactive and unable to fulfil their vital roles of mobilisation, education and participation.

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[12] Seyd, C. and Whiteley, P. 'Left behind by the leavers' in *The Guardian*, 18th June 2002.
[13] For Seyd and Whiteley's full work see Seyd, C. and Whiteley, P. *Labour's Grass Roots: The Politics of Party Membership,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992 and Seyd, C. and Whiteley, P. *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994. The later work was in the *Guardian* article "Slow Collapse", October 5th 1999.

This thesis sets out to investigate young participation and non-participation in the two main British political parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party between 1970 and 2001. The year 1970 is used as a starting point for the thesis since this year marks the last comprehensive attempt, by Leyton-Henry, to look at the two parties attempts to recruit young members. I wanted to try to explain why young people did or did not choose to join a political party. The best way in which this could be achieved was two fold. Firstly, I decided that a sample of members and non-members would be surveyed on their reasons for participation and non-participation. This was because the best way of identifying why young people chose to join or not was to ask them to explain in their own words. I also wanted to see if their behaviour could be modelled so as to contribute to the research on participation and non-participation. The second way was to examine the youth organisations of the Conservative Party and Labour Party themselves. The main way in which the two main British political parties have attempted to recruit young members is through special, semi-autonomous, youth organisations. In the Conservative Party's case the organisations were the Young Conservatives (later to be replaced by Conservative Future) and the Federation of Conservative Students (later to be replaced by the Conservative Collegiate Forum). The Labour Party's youth organisations were the Young Socialists (later replaced by Young Labour) and the National Organisation of Labour Students. I wanted to see whether the way in which they attempted to recruit members, the way in which they ran their movements and their relationship with their parent parties had any effect on their success or failure at recruitment.

In chapter 2 I set out the extent of the problem. I set out to gauge the success or failure of the parties by examining the youth membership figures of the parties. From the

figures available it becomes clear that whilst neither party has enjoyed unqualified success it is the Labour Party which has managed to increase its youth membership, whilst the Conservative Party seems trapped in a spiral of decline with its youth membership.

With the extent and nature of the problem identified, Chapter 3 looks at the existing literature and research on youth and participation. Whilst there is considerable research on participation and on youth participation, all of which helps shed light on the issue, it becomes clear that the research on this particular aspect, youth membership of parties, remains sketchy and incomplete. In Chapter 4 I begin the process of explaining youth participation and non-participation by considering some of the alternative models of participation and in particular the civil voluntarism model, the rational choice model, the social psychological model and the mobilisation model. From a critique of these models comes Seyd and Whiteley's general incentives model which is of central importance for my thesis. The general incentives model provides what I believe is the most convincing explanation of party participation.

However, Seyd and Whiteley's model is flawed and in Chapter 5 I modify the general incentives model in order to produce a more comprehensive model of participation. This is done through the inclusion of disincentives as well as incentives, the emphasis that participation and non-participation can be explained by considering a 'package' of incentives and disincentives and the consideration that the unique nature of young people necessitates a youth specific model which emphasises and highlights certain costs and benefits which are particularly important to young people. Furthermore, I suggest that the role of the party youth organisations themselves can effect

membership which suggests that my improved model can be complemented by mobilisation considerations.

In Chapter 6 this model is tested using a sample of members and non-members. I wanted to ask a sample of young members and non-members to tell me, in their own words, why they chose to join or not to join a political party. For practical purposes I chose to do this by distributing a questionnaire to a sample of members and non-members. This sample was secured with some difficulty, especially the young members sample, and must be taken as indicative rather than wholly reliable but in the circumstances, with the non-cooperation of the parties themselves, it was the best that could be achieved. Analysis of the sample seemed to validate the model which I had proposed with the vast majority of responses as to reasons for participation and non-participation fitting into my improved model of incentives and disincentives. However, whilst the model had shed further light on the nature of youth participation and non-participation it was felt that a static, quantitative study could only take me so far. The membership figures of the two parties had shown periods of growth and periods of decline in their youth membership with the Labour Party enjoying greater success than the Conservative Party. A 'snap shot' quantitative survey could not explain these trends. In order to explain these changes a more qualitative study of the Conservative and Labour Party's youth strategies since 1970 was felt necessary to provide a more comprehensive explanation.

In Chapter 7, with the Conservative Party and Chapter 8, with the Labour Party I examine their youth organisations since 1970, the date of the last major comprehensive study. I had suggested that the mobilisation model of participation,

which suggests a positive correlation between attempts to mobilise potential voters and members and success in recruitment, could have a bearing on the success or failure of the party youth organisations. What becomes clear is that both youth organisations have suffered from internal problems which have hindered their efforts to recruit young members at a time when they were already struggling against a tide which was seeing young people turning away from formal political activity. Problems of poor image, perceptions of extremism and division coupled with a poor relationship with the parent party all damaged the attempts by the Young Conservatives and Young Socialists, amongst others, to recruit young members. However, whilst the Conservative Party is still struggling to find a winning formula, the Labour Party has made great strides to transform its youth organisation into a moderate, trendy and inclusive one, in harmony with the rest of the party. This seems to have delivered rewards with Young Labour boasting a healthy membership. It is important to sound a note of caution, however. There have been periods of recovery before in both parties and only time will tell whether this current success for the Labour Party will continue or whether it will prove a short term recovery in an otherwise downward trend. Chapter 9 completes the thesis with concluding remarks about the lessons learnt and the contributions that the thesis has made to the wider research, as well as reflections on the methodology and potential avenues for future research. [14]

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[14] Finally, I must admit a personal interest in the nature of this research. I am in the perhaps strange position to have been an active member and office holder of the Young Conservatives, Conservative Students, Young Labour and Labour Students. As a result I was able to observe from close range and from within the internal politics of these organisations, their relationships with their parent parties and the efforts they made to recruit members.

## Chapter 2.

## The membership of the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations, 1970-2001

The first task in this chapter is to examine the changes in membership of the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations over the period 1970-2001. This will give some indication of the success or failure of the youth organisations in recruiting young members. As the figures are being examined over such a period of time, more than 30 years, it will provide an excellent opportunity to observe and study changing and membership patterns. On the basis of this analysis, I can then proceed to identify possible reasons for the success or failure of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party and their youth organisations. It is important, of course, to understand that party membership, and the membership of the party youth organisations, is a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon. The best analogy is that of a bathtub, in the sense that water flows into the bath and adds to the existing water, in the way that members join a political party, at the same time as water also drains away through the plughole, in the same way that members leave or fail to renew their members.

## A preliminary observation: problems with the figures.

However, before we even examine the figures there are a number of important points to be made which qualify, in some cases radically, the figures that I have gathered and present.

In order to judge the success or failure of the main political parties in recruiting young members, what was needed were clear and accurate figures to show the number of young members of the Labour and Conservative Party between 1970 and 2001. These figures simply did not exist. Neither the Conservative Party nor the Labour Party had membership lists that stated accurately their youth membership. Furthermore, until relatively recently (1991 for the Labour Party and 1998 for the Conservative Party), neither party had national membership lists that could be described as being reliable. As a result, in order to come to some indicative youth membership of the main two parties I chose the only other alternative. This was to use the membership figures of their youth organisations, those organisations, such as the Young Conservatives and Young Socialists, which were the main parties primary vehicles of youth recruitment. However, a number of points need to made about these figures:

1.  The accuracy of the total membership figures.

In the tables, for the sake of comparison, I have listed the total membership figures for each party in a number of particular years. I have then expressed the size of the membership of the youth organisations as a percentage of the total membership figure for the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. The reason for this is important and whilst I will explain in more detail its importance later, it is important to briefly state the point here. One possible explanation of decline in the membership of the youth

organisations of the main political parties is that it merely reflects the broader decline in political party membership since the 1950s. By expressing the membership of the youth organisations as a percentage of the total membership it is possible to assess whether the Young Conservative has declined as a proportion of total Conservative Party membership. If the latter is the case then it could be argued that the failure of the Young Conservatives to recruit and retain members cannot just be explained by a wider decline in participation in political parties as a whole, but rather reflects in part factors particular to young people, the Young Conservatives, or both.

Whereas this may seem a relatively straightforward task there is a problem in actually finding accurate membership figures for the main two parties. With the Labour Party it is recognised that the official membership figures published during the 1960s and 1970s overstate the true membership of the party. This was due to a Labour Party ruling made in 1963 that in order to affiliate to the national party constituency parties were required to register a minimum of 1,000 members. Consequently, constituency parties registered a figure of 1,000 members when their true membership was nowhere near that figure. Various attempts were made during the 1970s to estimate the true individual membership and concluded that a figure of around half that of the published figures. Only in the early 1980s, when the party reduced the minimum affiliation for local parties, do the figures again become reasonably accurate.[15] The Labour Party did not create a truly accurate national membership database until 1989 which was not fully operational until 1991.[16]

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[15] Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. *Labour's Grass Roots: The Membership of Party Membership,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992. Pg. 14-15.
[16] Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. *The Party Membership Surveys: Does Social Science Research Have Any Impact?,* Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, 1998, pg 2.

With the Conservative Party the situation is equally complicated. For historical reasons, the Conservative Party, until very recently following the reforms of William Hague, did not actually exist as a legally recognised entity. One of the consequences of this was that whilst members of the Conservative Party may have been members of their local constituency association there was no actual centralised membership list until 1998 to set out exactly how many members of the Conservative Party there were. There are numerous sources to state how many members the Conservative Party has had at various points of time but they must all be treated as estimates, albeit in some case probably quite accurate ones. This takes us on to the second point to be made about the figures.

2. <u>The accuracy of figures for the youth organisations.</u>

There are similar problems with the figures for the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations. The Young Conservatives (YCs), prior to the internal reforms of William Hague, also had no centralised membership list and so once again there were problems with pinning down an exact figure as to how many members the YCs had. There were often claims that the estimated number of Young Conservative as stated by Conservative Party Central Office were largely inaccurate, overestimating the number of Young Conservatives for political reasons. For example in 1990, at the time of the bruising and divisive battle for control of the Young Conservatives between left and right, the claim from the incumbent chairman (and supported by Central Office) was that the YCs had 25,000 members, whilst the claim from his right-wing challenger was that the YCs had fallen to a membership of only 5,000.

This is an enormous discrepancy and one which is impossible to verify one way or another.

The membership figures for the Young Socialists are more reliable because of the Labour Party's centralised membership list. We can also feel safe to rely on the membership figures of the student organisation as both the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) and the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS) and its successor organisation the Conservative Collegiate Forum (CCF) were strictly speaking affiliated organisations to their respective parent parties with their own membership lists.

However, the problems with the figures do not end here. There are other considerations to bear in mind as the figures are examined. The first consideration is that whilst we regard these organisations as the youth wings of their parties, the term youth is a very elastic one. For example, the 'Young' Conservatives used to admit members between the ages of 16 and 35! The new Conservative umbrella youth organisation, Conservative Future, admits members between the age of 16 and 30. The Young Socialists had an age range between 16 and 30 but, in comparison, its successor organisation Young Labour has a membership age-range of 16 to 26. Once again, it is worth noting that internal Labour Party politics had a large influence on the setting of the age range for Young Labour. One of the problems that the Young Socialists suffered from was infiltration by members of extreme left groups who exerted a disproportionate influence within the organisation. It was noticed that these members tended to be the older ones. Therefore, by lowing the age of membership, it was hoped that such infiltration could be prevented. In fact, in 1988 the leadership of

the Labour Party lowered the upper age limit to membership to 21 in an effort to purge the influence of the extreme left within the movement. This lower age limit lasted until the Young Socialists were finally wound up in 1993. So, there is a problem in comparing the respective sizes of the young organisations and even comparing the same party organisation from one year to another because the definition of who could join the 'youth' organisation changed. We are not exactly comparing like with like.

This is further complicated by the fact that whilst it could be considered that the student organisations of the Labour and Conservative parties are part of the youth wing of their respective parties, the changing nature of further and higher education means that not all students are 'young'. Organisations like NOLS and the Conservative Students organise in universities and colleges of higher and, sometimes, further education. The only prerequisite for joining is for the individual to be a student. Whilst many students in higher and further education could be claimed to be 'young', perhaps more often from 16 up to 21, an increasing number of mature students are entering education, and therefore becoming eligible for membership of Conservative Students or Labour Students despite being in their thirties, forties or even fifties. Thus, this consideration complicates the idea of using the membership of student organisations as an indication of the level of young people's political party membership.

Another problem with the figures for the youth organisation is that it is perfectly possible to be a member of both youth organisations of a particular party. For example, it is possible for an individual to be a member of the Young Conservatives

and then to go on to join the Conservative Students at college or university. The same could go for a member of the Labour Party. However, in some cases, the individual could be a member of one but not the other. Consequently, in the figures which are presented, there is a certain degree of double counting with one member being both a member of the youth wing and the student organisation being counted twice. However, unfortunately, it is impossible to gauge the extent to which this happens.

Finally, there is a problem with the way in which the membership of the youth organisations is counted. The example of the Young Socialists and Young Labour will illustrate this point. Prior to the abolition of the Young Socialists and its replacement by Young Labour in 1993, members who joined the Labour Party had to make a conscious effort to join the Young Socialists. If you were a member of the Labour Party and within the age range covered by the Young Socialists you were not automatically counted as a member of the Young Socialists, you had to consciously set out to join. The obvious consequence of this is that the membership figures for the Young Socialists did not give a totally accurate picture of the number of young people in the Labour Party. What the figures indicated was the number of people willing to consciously join the Labour Party and then join the Young Socialists. If they did not join the Young Socialists or if, importantly, there was not an active branch in their constituency to join, they were just counted a part of the general membership of the Party.

Consequently, although the membership of the Young Socialists was a mere 250 in 1991 this does not mean that there were only 250 members of the Labour Party under 21, it just means that there were only 250 members under 21 who specifically joined

the Young Socialists. In contrast, when Young Labour was set up in 1993 it was decided that all members of the Labour Party within Young Labour's age range would automatically be counted as members of the organisation, they would not have to specifically join the organisation. As the internal Labour Party report on Young Labour, *The Next Generation* says:

> It is proposed…. That the new Labour Party Youth Structure would automatically include all young party members who are 26 years of age or younger. Those young members would then be automatic members of the new age structure. Automatic membership for the new youth structure will bring us into line with practice in other sister socialist parties such as France, Germany, Austria and Ireland.[17]

Consequently, the membership figures of Young Labour, although accurate, are counted differently to those of the Young Socialists and so seem comparably higher. For our purposes, this way of counting young members as being all those under 26 from 1993, means that the figures in Table 2.1 can be taken as an accurate record of the number of young people in the Labour Party. In comparison, for the student organisation, NOLS and the Conservative Students, and the Young Conservatives members have to consciously make the effort to join these organisations, they were not automatically counted as a member of the Young Conservatives, for example, just because they are a member of the Conservative Party under 30. This could mean that the membership figures under-estimated the number of young people in the Conservative Party. With the launch of Conservative Future in 1998, the Conservative Party announced that all members of the party under 30 would automatically be counted as a member of Conservative Future.

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[17] *The Next Generation,* The Labour Party, 1993, pg. 3.

All these considerations must be taken into account when examining the figures for party membership and the size of the youth organisation. These factors do not invalidate the figures, but they do mean that we should treat the figures with some caution. The figures should not be treated as a totally accurate and 100% reliable record of the youth membership of the main political parties and their youth organisation, but they are the best indication we have available to us in assessing the success of the Labour Party and Conservative Party in recruiting young members to their ranks.

**The Figures.**

The next task is to examine the figures we have and to make an initial assessment of them and any trends which can be identified. I shall start with the Labour Party:

**Table 2.1: Membership of the Labour youth organisations compared with that of the Labour Party as a whole.**

| Year | Young Socialists* | Labour Students | Total of youth groups. | Total Labour members | Youth as a % of total Labour |
|------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1970 | 10,000 | 4,000 | 14,000 | 680,000 | 2.1 |
| 1975 | 6,000 | 4,500 | 10,500 | 675,000 | 1.6 |
| 1979 | 6,000 | 6,000 | 12,000 | 666,000 | 1.8 |
| 1981 | 9,000 | 7,500 | 16,500 | 277,000 | 6.0 |
| 1984 | 10,000 | 8,000 | 18,000 | 323,000 | 5.6 |
| 1986 | 7-10,000 | 7,000 | 17,000 | 297,000 | 5.7 |
| 1988 | 7,000 | 8,000 | 15,000 | 266,000 | 5.6 |
| 1991 | 250 | 7,000 | 7,250 | 261,000 | 2.8 |
| 1994 | ** | ** | 17,400 | 270,000 | 6.4 |
| 1996 | ** | ** | 28,000 | 363,000 | 7.7 |
| 1997 | ** | ** | 37,000 | 405,000 | 9.1 |
| 2001 | ** | ** | 30,000 | 311,000 | 9.6 |

**\* 'Young Socialists' until 1993 then 'Young Labour'.**
**\*\* Only combined totals available. Figures are for all members aged 26 and under.**

The first observation to make is about the membership of the Labour Party as a whole. In the period of our study, 1970-2001, the membership of the Labour Party has declined from 680,000 in 1970 to 311,000 in 2001. However, the decline has not been steady and sustained. The membership of the Labour Party declined slowly in the 1970s but then went into a steep decline in the early 1980s in the midst of the Labour Party's internal battles. However, as I have already noted, this could be as much to do with the way in which membership was recalculated in the early 1980s to produce a

more accurate membership figure. Membership recovered slightly in the middle 1980s but then declined again in the late 1980s to 266,000 in 1988. Since Tony Blair has been the Leader of the Labour Party it has enjoyed a relative recovery in membership. In 1994, when Blair became leader of the Labour Party, the membership of the Party was 270,000. By the General Election of 1997 the membership of the Party had risen to the comparatively impressive level of 405,000. However, since the 1997 election victory total membership has fallen once more to 311,000.

The membership of the Labour Party youth organisations remain remarkably steady for much of the period under examination. The Young Socialists suffered a decline in members in the 1970s, albeit from a low base, made a modest recovery in the 1980s and then declined again in the late-1980s until the decline became extremely rapid and the organisation was wound up with a mere 250 members in 1991. In this same period the Labour Students enjoyed a modest success in recruiting members. From only 4,000 members in 1970 the organisation saw a slow, steady, if unspectacular, rise in membership until the mid-1980s when membership seemed to stabilise at around 7-8,000. After the creation of Young Labour in 1993 the best figures available are those for Young Labour because, as I have pointed out above, the organisation automatically includes all members 26 and under. Between 1993 and 1997 the Labour youth organisations seem to enjoy much greater success in recruiting members with a membership in 1991 of only 7,250 rising to an unprecedented 37,000 by the time of the general election. Young Labour could still boast of 30,000 members by 2001.

However, of course, this success in recruiting young members could be just part of a general increase in the membership of the Labour Party. It is important to try to strip

away other explanations of increased or decreased membership so we can establish why young people join the youth organisation of a political party. I have attempted to discover the real increase or decrease in membership of the youth organisations by expressing the membership of the youth organisations as a percentage of the membership as a whole. On this basis we can establish whether the increase in membership is due to the broader increase in membership or whether the Labour Party has been particularly successful in recruiting young people specifically.

As we can see from the figures, the youth organisations made up around 2% of the Labour Party membership in the 1970s. This proportion increased quite markedly in the 1980s when the figure increased to approximately 6%. However, as we can see, this was mainly due to the membership of the party falling dramatically (or the fact that the membership figures became more accurate and reflect the true level of party membership) whilst the membership of the youth organisations remained relatively stable. Of course, this stability in the context of the rest of overall membership decline could be seen as a success. The proportion of the total membership in youth organisation dipped sharply in the early 1990s but then recovered and rose to unprecedented heights by the time of the general election. By 1997 the youth organisations accounted for 9.1% of the total party membership and by 2001 9.6%. Therefore we can see that between 1991 and 2001 the Labour Party youth organisation were successful in not only increasing the size of their membership both in absolute terms and also as a proportion of the total party membership.

Next, we turn to the Conservative Party:

**Table 2.2: Membership of the Conservative youth organisations compared with that of the Conservative Party as a whole.**

| Year | Young Conservatives | Conservative Students | Total of youth groups | Total Conservative members | Youth as % of total |
|------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1950 | 160,000 | N/A | 160,000 | 2,600,000 | 6.1 |
| 1970 | 50,000 | 12,000 | 62,000 | 1,550,000 | 4.0 |
| 1975 | 40,000 | 15,000 | 55,000 | 1,400,000 | 3.9 |
| 1979 | 40,000 | 17,000 | 57,000 | 1,250,000 | 4.6 |
| 1986 | 30,000 | 30,000 | 60,000 | 1,100,000 | 5.5 |
| 1990 | 25,000 | 10,000 | 35,000 | 700,000 | 4.2 |
| 1995 | 5,000 | 12,000 | 17,000 | 500,000 | 3.4 |
| 1998 | 3,000 | 8,000 | 11,000 | 350,000 | 3.0 |
| 2001 | N/A | N/A | 9,000* | 330,000 | 2.7 |

**\*  Figures shown are for 'Conservative Future' the umbrella organisation for all Conservative youth groups.**

As we have already seen, assessing the size of the membership of the Conservative Party is a problematic due to the lack, at least until relatively recently, of any kind of centralised membership list. However, from the figures available it is possible to make some observations. The most obvious point to make about the total membership figures is the continuous decline in members. In 1970 the Conservative Party had 1,550,000 members, by 2001 the figure was a mere 330,000. In an age when all political parties across the western world are finding it difficult to recruit members this is still a dramatic collapse of a once mighty political party's grassroots membership. The figures from 1950, though outside the scope of our study and subject to the problems of accuracy, are provided to give some measure of this decline

from the Conservative Party's peak, which has been greater than that of the Labour Party.

The figures from 1950 also provide an illustration of the comparable decline in the size of the Young Conservatives. The statistics which measure the size of the youth organisations in comparison with that of the party as a whole reveal that this decline has been both absolute and relative. In 1950, the Young Conservatives, however measured, made up 6.1% of the membership, but by 2001 this figure had fallen to only 2.7%.

If we simply look at these figures, the Young Conservatives seemed to have suffered an almost continuous decline in numbers. With 50,000 members in 1970 the YCs were already clearly in decline from their heyday in the 1950s, but by 1998 the membership had fallen to less than 3,000. With the exception of a period in the mid to late 1970s when membership appeared to stabilise, the decline has been steady and continuous. The pattern is less clear cut with the Conservative Students whose numbers appeared to show a steady, if unspectacular, increase between 1970 and 1979 from 12,000 members up to 17,000. Then in the mid-1980s there was a dramatic increase in members, followed by an equally dramatic fall in membership in the late 1980s. From 17,000 members in 1979, the membership of the Conservative Students almost doubled to 30,000 in 1986. However by 1990 the Conservative Students had declined to 10,000 members and with the exception of a brief rally in members in the mid-1990s, the membership has continued to decline.

Overall, the youth membership of the Conservative Party, taken as a combination of the membership of the Young Conservatives and the Conservative Students has shown a decline in the period under study. There were brief periods of stabilisation and even recovery in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s but these were short lived. From this it is safe to say that the Conservative Party has, in general, proved unsuccessful in recruiting members to its youth organisations in the period 1970-2001. Before we leave the figures we need to worth consider whether the youth organisations has increased or decreased as a proportion of the broader Conservative Party membership.

Table 2.2 shows the membership of the youth organisations expressed as a percentage of the main party membership. Once again, the pattern is of decline between 1970-2001 followed by periods of stabilisation and recovery. As a proportion of total membership, the youth organisations declined in the 1970s, recovered in the late 1970s and mid-1980s and then declined again in the 1990s. Overall, in the period 1970-2001 whilst the membership of the Conservative Party has declined, the membership of the youth organisation has declined even more, with the youth organisations declining from 4% of members in 1970 to 2.7% in 2001. If we compare the 2001 figures with the figures from the golden age of the Young Conservatives in the 1950s, the failure of the Conservative Party to maintain a vibrant and healthy youth organisation is even starker.

**Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have examined the membership figures of the Conservative Party and Labour Party youth organisations in order to assess their success or failure in

recruiting young members for their respective parties. I identified a clear problem with the membership figures both of the youth organisations and of the Conservative and Labour Parties themselves. There was a lack of accurate membership figures for the Labour Party until at least 1991 and for the Conservative Party until 1998, due to a lack of centralised membership lists. Before that, figures were indicative at best and probably exaggerated the membership of both parties. The extent of this exaggeration was difficult to estimate. Similar problems existed with assessing the true membership of the youth organisations. Problems with the accuracy of membership lists in general was compounded by variations in who was counted as being a 'young' member, the possibility of double-counting and whether young party members had to make a conscious effort to join the youth organisation or whether they were included automatically. These problems ensure that the figures I have are indicative at best and must be regarded with some caution.

Both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party have seen their membership fall over the period under study. The Labour Party and the Conservative Party have also met with mixed fortunes in their attempts to recruit young members. On balance, it is the Labour Party that has been the more successful. Whilst the trend is not continuously upwards, the Labour Party has managed to increase the number of young people in its youth organisation both absolutely and as a proportion of its total membership. Young members as a proportion of the total membership of the Labour Party has risen from 2.1% to 9.6% in the period 1970-2002 which on the surface seems to be a dramatic increase. However, I would repeat the note of caution made earlier. The problem with the accuracy of membership figures for the Labour Party together with the varying ways in which membership of its youth organisations has

been calculated means that regarding the Labour Party as having successful solved the problem of youth participation could be seen as premature. The number of young members of the Labour Party is still small in absolute terms and it would be wise to wait and see whether the fall off in membership continues. Undoubtedly, the Conservative Party, on the other hand, has been less successful in comparison. The number of young members has fallen between 1970 and 2001 both absolutely and as a proportion of the total Conservative Party membership. Whereas neither Party has cause to be complacent in recruiting young members it certainly seems that the Labour Party has been comparatively successful, whilst the Conservative Party has cause for concern. It could be that youth non-participation is a particularly Conservative disease and the question then would be why? In the next chapter I intend to review the literature on this area to assess the extent to which the existing research explains these trends.

# Chapter 3.

## Youth Participation in Political Parties, 1970-2001: A review of existing literature.

In the last chapter I examined the membership figures of the Conservative and Labour youth organisations, and concluded that, whilst neither party had been wholly successful in recruiting largely numbers of young members, the Labour Party had been comparatively more successful that the Conservative Party. In this chapter, I will examine the existing literature and research on young people and political parties, to assess the extent to which existing research explains youth participation and non-participation in the main political parties.

## The literature.

There is little specific literature on young people and political parties. That which does exist is either out of date, incomplete or lacking in sufficient detail or critical vigour. However, in examining why young people do or do not join political parties and in attempting to explain the success and failure of the Conservative Party and Labour Party's in recruiting young members it is important to consider the existing literature on participation in general. It is important to understand that party participation cannot be divorced from participation in general and whilst there is little on youth participation in political parties *per se* the wider research on participation, of which there is a considerable amount, may help shed light on my particular area of

research. It could be, for example, that the failure of political parties to recruit young people is part of a broader trend in participation that affects all citizens and not just the young. However, that would not, for example, explain why the Labour Party has been comparatively more successful in recruiting young members than the Conservative Party.

The existing literature which may have relevance to my research falls into a number of categories. Firstly, there is research that aims to look at the general issue of political participation and non-participation and considers both normative literature on the advantages and disadvantages of participation as well as studies into the level of political participation in the United Kingdom. There is also a growing body of material on the changing nature of participation in Britain. Secondly, there is research which gives a broad overview of the whole topic of the relationship between young people and the political process and considers how young people feel about politics and the political process. This literature also considers the possible barriers to political participation which might hinder attempts by young people to participate. Thirdly, there is the literature which looks at the history and organisation of the youth wings of the main parties, the main instrument by which both the Conservative and Labour Parties have attempted to entice young people into their organisations as activists and consider their attempts to recruit young members.

## 1. **Participation and non-participation.**

Before I consider some of the empirical research into participation and non-participation it is worth reviewing the more normative material on the subject. My

thesis is based on a central premise that participation, and in my particular case youth participation in political parties, is a desirable activity. To start with I feel that it is worthwhile considering why participation can be seen as 'good' and looking at some of the normative literature on participation. Whilst many authors regard active participation in the political system as desirable, there are those who challenge this assumption.

Under the pure Athenian model of democracy citizens participated directly in the policy process and decision making of their political system. With the growth of industrialised mass society, western nations such as Britain have adopted a system of representative democracy whereby, for practical reasons, the responsibility for decision making has been taken out of the hands of the citizens and has been given to elected representatives who are chosen through free, periodic, elections. Some theorists, such as Edmund Burke, believe that with the advent of the representative democracy the participation of individuals should be limited to a trip to the polling station every five years. Decisions in the intervening period being deferred to those better placed, better educated and generally better equipped to efficiently run the apparatus of government.

Figures such as JS Mill (1861), on the other hand, believe that individuals should not only be allowed to participate in the political process between elections but that they should be positively encouraged to do so. There should be many points of entry into

the political process, such as pressure groups and political parties, and individuals should be equipped with the skills, knowledge and opportunity to get involved.[18]

Parry (1972) states that theories of participation under two broad headings. Firstly, there are 'instrumental theories' which see participation as an effective way of guarding against the growth of a government tyranny that apathy could unwittingly allow. Only by participating can individuals ensure that their interests are defended and promoted. Secondly, there are 'developmental theories' (as argued by figures such as Rousseau and JS Mill) which see participation as part of a process of political and moral education with the individual being educated on how to manage their own affairs. JS Mill believed that participation fostered in individuals an active, public spirited type of character.[19]

Beetham (1993) states that participation is important for the simple reason that without citizen participation no democracy is possible. He also argues that in a free society, such as the United Kingdom or other liberal democracies, the level of participation (be it voting turnout, membership of political parties or pressure groups) is a good indication of how much influence over the political process people think that they have and the extent to which they feel that those actions will make a difference to the decisions which affect them. Furthermore, the distribution of participation is a good indication of which groups in society participate and those which do not. Low turnout amongst certain groups in society would indicate a lack of connection and

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[18] For Mill's views on the importance of participation see Mill, J.S. 'Considerations on Representative Government' in *On Liberty and other essays,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.

[19] See Parry, G. *Participation in Politics*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1972.

engagement with the political system spurring the state to take remedial action.[20]

Beetham (2002) continues this theme of seeing participation in the political system as a desirable activity by stating that participation can play a role in ensuring that representative democracy works more democratically:

> through the government being made aware of citizen views and having to be responsive to them; through the testing of policy against independent sources of information and expertise from outside government; through citizen involvement in the implementation of policy; through the existence of an alert and informed citizen body as a check on government excess. In all these ways… participation can contribute to making government more democratic in the long periods between elections.[21]

I argue that participation in the political system is important that active participation in political parties is particularly important to the effective functioning of democracy. This argument is supported by Mair and Van Biezen (2001). They argue that the number of members that political parties can attract is important for several reasons. Firstly, they argue that parties have a direct interest in collecting membership fees from as many people as possible to provide party income. In a period during which large donations to political parties from rich individuals (such as Bernie Eccleston with the Labour Party) or corporations have been under close and critical scrutiny and the question of state funding of political parties has once again come onto the agenda it should not be forgotten that ordinary party members provide a steady and 'untainted' stream of of revenue for political parties. Secondly, numbers are important because members provide a willing pool of of volunteers who can be called upon to do the electoral donkey work of delivering leaflets, canvassing, standing as candidates and so on. In the era of the internet and modern communications it is easy to dismiss

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[20] See Beetham, D., *The Democratic Audit of the United Kingdom: Auditing Democracy in Britain,* The Charter 88 Trust, London, 1993.

[21] Beetham, D., *Democracy Under Blair: A Democratic Audit of the United Kingdom,* Politicos Publishing, London, 2002, pg 209.

these tasks but they are still important in guaranteeing that the electoral machine works smoothly. Thirdly, the parties see their members as a source of legitimacy: the members represent the aspirations of a large proportion of society. The larger the membership the greater the claim to speak for a large section of society. It was for this reason that Tony Blair's reinvention of the Labour Party included a pledge to recruit a million members.[22] Furthermore, as Beetham (2002) points out there is evidence (and I shall examine this in more detail later) that party members can make a contribution to party campaigning that is significant enough to make a tangible difference to electoral outcomes. Alternatives, such as more losely alligned 'supporters' or call centres hired to carry out telephone canvassing, both features of U.S. party campaigning, are unlikely to show the same commitment.[23]

Against participation.

It must not be automatically assumed, however, that the participation of individuals in the political process is a good thing. Libertarians, for example, say that freedom includes freedom to not participate if an individual chooses not to. Therefore apathy (which will be discussed in more detail later) is quite acceptable if the individual regards the energy and time required to be involved in politics to be a serious intrusion into one's private life. It could be argued that few people wish to participate and for this reason they elect others to act on their behalf.

Other objections to participation revolve around the idea that too much participation will lead to instability in the political system. It could undermine 'firm leadership'.

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[22] Mair, P., and Van Biezen, I., (2001), op cit, pp 1-5.
[23] Beetham, D. (2002), op cit, pg 114.

Pateman (1970) believes that, if this is not to happen, a political system is needed where the:

> level of participation by the majority should not rise much above the minimum necessary to keep the democratic method (electoral machinery) working: that is, it should remain at about the level that exists at present in the Anglo-American democracies.[24]

Similarly, participation can be objected to on technical or efficiency grounds; decision making should be in the hands of those who are equipped to do the job through experience or education. Participation takes time; as well as being potentially financially costly, there is an inherent tension between democracy and efficiency. Anthony Crossland, suggested reasons for lack of participation and argued that this was desirable:

> Experience shows that only a small minority of the population wish to participate... I repeat what I have often said- the majority prefer to lead a full family life and cultivate their gardens. And a good thing too. For if we believe in socialism as a means of increasing personal freedom and the range of choice, we do not necessarily want a busy bustling society in which everyone is politically active, and fussing around in an interfering manner, and herding us all into participating groups. The threat to privacy and freedom would be intolerable...[25]

Beetham (1993) also questions the widely help assumption that participation is necessarily a good thing for democracy. Beetham encourages caution to those who equate high levels of participation with a healthy democracy and points out that under this logic societies under communist rule were the most democratic because they had the highest levels of voter turnout and the most active and widespread involvement in party life and public affairs. Beetham argues that in this case there was a high level of participation but that, due to the system of government under which it took place, this

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[24] Pateman, C. *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970. Pg. 14.
[25] Quoted in: Griffiths, B. *Political Participation*, The Politics Association, 1996, Pg. 6.

participation did not lead to any meaningful control over the political agenda or the personnel of government.[26]

Beetham returned to this theme in 2002. In an updating of his work, Beetham says that political participation does not necessarily make democracy and in fact some participation can be damaging to democracy. Beetham highlights as examples the pseudo-participation of authorities which go through the motions of participation with no intention of taking notice of the results; participation which involves violence to others and there is the regimented and dragooned participation of authoritarian regimes. In addition Beetham argues that political participation can work against the democratic ideal of political equality. Much participation (such as through pressure groups) can be criticised in that it tends to favour sectional interests and the wealthy and articulate over the good of the wider society.[27]

Of course, I have already argued that participation in the form of the joining of political parties by young people is a desirable type of participation as the young activists of today become the activists of tomorrow. Members, and especially young members, are vital if political parties are to work efficiently and effectively.

Non-participation.

In this thesis I am not only concerned with participation but also non-participation. I am focussing on why a particular group of people, the young, either do or do not engage in a particular form of political participation, membership of a political party.

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[26] Beetham, D. (1993), op cit, pg 9.
[27] Beetham, D. (2002), op cit, Chapter 11.

I have already noted a degree of concern over the level of participation in the United Kingdom. This has been particularly focussed on electoral turnout with the historically low turnout at the 2001 General Election of little over 59%. In this section I will consider the material on reasons for non-participation in the political process in general.

There are various academics who put forward the argument that non-participation can be explained in terms in terms of alienation; individuals or a group of individuals do not participate because the believe that the existing political system and the way in which it works has nothing to offer them. Schattschneider (1960) argues, straightforwardly, that those who do not participate in politics do so because the present scope of political organisation does not speak to their needs. Schattschneider talks about a 'mobilisation of bias' which allows some issues to be 'organised' into the political arena whilst other issues are 'organised' out. So, in our example it could be argued that the issues which concern young people are simply not included on the political agenda, or that when they are they are given insufficient priority and this leads to alienation and, thus, non-participation.[28]

Schattschneider believes that viewing non-participation only in terms of ignorance or lack of interest is rationalising the present state and organisation of politics, thus ignoring the fact that this organisation excluded the concerns of a number of individuals and, consequently, ignoring the need to reform that political system. As Schattschneider argues: "Abstention reflects the suppression of the options and

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[28] Schattschneider, as cited in Deluca, op cit, pages 119-120.

alternatives that reflect the needs of the non-participants. It is not necessarily true that the people with the greatest need participate in politics most actively."[29]

Bachrach (1962, 1971) builds on Schattschneider's mobilisation of bias thesis and he also believes that there are groups, such as the young, who believe that the political system, in his case the political system of the United States, does not represent their views and concerns thus leading to alienation. Furthermore in the view of Bachrach the system rewards those, the middle age and middle class for example, most able to articulate and press for their preferences. Bachrach does not believe that this makes the system any less democratic but it does open the question of whether the political system provides adequate participatory structures to allow all groups, young and old, to articulate their interests. For Bachrach, this is the key criteria for democracy.[30]

An alternative explanation is that individuals do not participate in politics because they are generally satisfied. This means that with greater material affluence and a broad satisfaction with the way in which the country is being governed there is simply no incentive to campaign or get involved. A general culture of contentment leads many individuals to spend their time doing pleasurable things rather than campaigning to bring about social or political change.

This kind of idea was supported by research carried out in the United States in the 1950s. Berelson, Lazarfeld and McPhee (1954) attempted to investigate why Americans did not widely participate in politics. Berelson, Lazarfeld and McPhee firstly argued a point that we looked at earlier, that a modern democratic political

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[29] Ibid, pg 120.
[30] Bachrach, cited in DeLuca, ibid, pg 124-131.

system could not actually cope with widespread participation and so a certain degree of non-participation is not a cause for concern but is positively to be welcomed: "The apathetic segment of America probably has helped to hold the system together and cushioned the shock of disagreement, adjustment and change."[31]

The second point that Berelson, Lazarfeld and McPhee make is that a large degree of apathy and non-participation can be explained by the fact that individuals are content with their lot and that is why they do not get involved. The authors reject explanations emphasising alienation or ignorance and instead regard apathy as being normal and even healthy for the smooth running of a democratic political system. Their explanation of non-participation can be represented as thus: "X (a person) is apathetic with respect to Y (politics) if he or she is content with and/or uninterested in present political decisions or arrangements. X freely chooses not to vote or participate in electoral activity."[32]

The conclusions of Bereleson, Lazarfeld and McPhee can be criticised on a number of counts. Firstly, they ignore the educational and developmental benefits for the individual of participation as championed by figures such as JS Mill. Secondly, it must be dangerous simply to assume that all non-participation is caused by contentment and satisfaction with the system. How can we accurately identify those who do not participate because they are satisfied and those who do not participate because they feel alienated and rejected by a political system which they feel does not accurately fulfil or meet their needs? By mis-describing rejection of political activity as apathy motivated by contentment, Berelson and his colleagues may also miss the

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[31] Berelson, B., Lazarsfeld, P. and McPhee, W. quoted in Deluca, T, *The Two Faces of Political Apathy,* Temple University Press, New York, 1995, pg 78.
[32] Ibid, pg 78.

significance of what might actually be a principled and conscious rejection of the political system, perversely turning it into a silent vote of approval.

Parry, Moyser and Day.

In 1992, Parry, Moyser and Day published comprehensive research on political participation in Britain. Their research was based upon a representative sample of over 3,000 people in Great Britain. Parry, Moyser and Day attempted to discover why some people involved themselves in politics whilst others did not, what issues were people most concerned with and what activists got out of their involvement. They found that 25.8% of citizens could be counted as 'almost inactive' when it came to the political participation, 51% restricted their activity to the process of voting in local, general and European elections and only 23.2% of the sample were involved in a variety of activities beyond voting such as membership of a political party or pressure group. Even then, this figure of 23.2% covers a variety of 'active' participation.

Although their work offered a broad overview of political participation in Britain some interesting points were made about the younger age groups which concern me. Looking at the correlation between age and political activity, Parry, Moyser and Day found that participation was particularly low in the under-30 age group, rose steeply until the mid-40s and then dropped, not surprisingly perhaps, until old age, when participation rates ended up at the low level.[33]

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[33] Parry, et al (1992), op cit, pg. 154.

Parry, Moyser and Day were curious as to whether this pattern of participation was something to do with life-cycle or generational change (as people get older they just participate more), or whether it can be explained by a new set of attitudes that young people will retain even as they get older. The authors acknowledged that it would be difficult to separate the two explanations as it is possible that truth lies in a combination of both.[34]

Parry, Moyser and Day did suggest that it does seem true that young people are turning away from conventional party politics (for example they found that 7.4% of all adults were in a political party compared to only 2.9% of those under 30) but argue that this may not mean young people have a lower level of political activity but rather that their engagement may be in pressure and protest groups rather than political parties.[35]

Parry, Moyser and Day substantiate this idea by pointing to their own findings which indicate that whilst young people under-participate in 'conventional' party politics, they over-participate in direct action politics such as pressure group action. The authors comment that this might reflect a life cycle, that young people enjoy the physical vigour, the freedom from day-to-day responsibilities of career and family and have time to participate in the pursuit of the energetic kinds of political activity which are found more in pressure groups than in political parties. Parry, Moyer and Day speculate that: "Protest behaviour is therefore held to be primarily an outcome of the j'oie de vivre of youth itself."[36]

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[34] Ibid., pg. 156.
[35] Ibid., pg 157.
[36] Ibid, pg 160.

<u>The ESRC Democracy and Participation Programme.</u>

One of the major criticisms of current research into participation in the United Kingdom was that most of the information was incomplete or outdated. This is shown by the fact that Parry, Moyser and Day (1992) are still identified as the most comprehensive study of political participation in Britain despite the fact that the research was published more than a decade ago and that research in itself had been primarily carried out during the mid-1980s. As a result, and in response to concerns about the level of participation in the United Kingdom, in 1999 the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) began its Democracy and Participation Programme. The Programme which runs from 1999 to 2003 encompassed 21 projects from a range of discipline, including politics, sociology, social policy, geography and education.

The Programme was designed to address a number of key concerns about the current state of democracy and participation in Britain and was focussed on five core questions:

- Is there a crisis of participation and democratic legitimacy in Britain?
- Why do some people participate when others do not?
- What are the effects of a changing environment, particularly constitutional and political changes, on participation?
- What are the links between participation, governance and democratic accountability?
- What participation is taking place?

Whilst at the time of writing the Programme was not yet complete some preliminary findings were already entering the public domain. For example, Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2002) asked respondents whether, in the previous twelve months, they had engaged in any 'political influencing activity', such as signing a petition, contacting a politician or an organisation, boycotting goods, etc. They found that nearly three quarters of respondents had done so, with many involved in more than one activity. The research found, for example, that 41% of respondents had signed a petition in the previous 12 months, 30% had boycotted certain products, 28% had raised money for an organisation, 13% had contacted a politician, 5% had attended a political rally or meeting, and so on. Furthermore, they concluded that civic engagement and participation is multi-causal and that no single explanatory framework fully accounted for citizen activism. Access to resources, positive evaluations of the benefits of involvement, trust in state institutions, involvement in associational life and informal networks, and mobilisation all seem to be important correlates of most forms of civic engagement.[37]

Changing patterns of participation.

In considering participation and non-participation in the United Kingdom it is important to recognise that the nature of political participation is changing. I have already outlined the evidence which could be taken as pointing towards a potential crisis of democracy. The most obvious manifestations of this are the fall in electoral turnout in local, European and even general elections and also the fall in membership

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[37] See Pattie, C., Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (2002), op cit, 'Citizenship and civic engagement: attitudes and behaviour', Paper presented to the Politics Studies Association Annual Conference, University of Aberdeen, April 2002.

of political parties over the past decades. However, the sheer size of the protest marches over the issues of the countryside and the war on Iraq in 2002-03 clearly show that people are prepared to mobilise over political issue on which they feel strongly. Evans (1997) argues that rather than political participation diminishing, what is actually happening is that political participation is changing. Evans argues that there is a dramatic upsurge in single-issue protest activity and unconventional forms of political participation in the form of new social movements.[38]

Evans (1997), Mulgan (1994) and Jenkins and Klandermans (1995) point to the decline in membership of political parties and other 'conventional' vehicles of political participation and argue that this decline has been mirrored by a growth in unconventional participation. This is especially amongst the young, who Evans argues have become alienated from mainstream political processes, by, for example, the British electoral system, which tends to polarise political competition and inhibit the development of new parties.[39] Jenkins and Klandermans (1995) point out that during the 1990s these new social movements were particularly seen in the area of the environment. Combining a commitment to post-material issues and involved with a diverse range of political activities, those groups which made up 'environmental movement' saw a sharp upsurge in members. Focussing on roads policy in such examples as Twyford Down, Oxleas Wood, the M11 extension and the Newbury bypass, an alliance of local, radical and mainstream environmental groups used direct action to resist the building of these road projects with such figures as 'Swampy' becoming household names.[40]

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[38] Evans, M. (1997), op cit, pg 110.
[39] Ibid, pp 114-116.
[40] Ibid, pp 116-118. For a detailed discussion of new social movement see Jenkins, J.C. and Klandermans, B. (eds) *The Politics of Social Protest*, UCL Press, London, 1995. For a general work on

Margetts (2002) observed that these trends towards a growth in support for unconventional forms of political participation shows no sign of abating. The last years of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century have seen active protests and demonstrations against globalisation (through such anarchist organisations as 'Reclaim the Streets'), against rises in fuel taxes, against genetically modified (GM) crops, against what was perceived as ignorance of countryside issues by the mass marches carried out by the Countryside Alliance and most recently the huge protests against the war on Iraq. At a time when political parties were struggling to increase or even maintain their membership, it seems clear that a new era of political participation has emerged.[41] As Mulgan (1994) observes: 'As the central organising force of democracy, it is hard to see the decline of the party reversing'.[42]

So, why have these changes in participation taken place? Evans argues that one reason is what he terms 'globalisation theories'. This is the idea that there are new political opportunity structures which have expanded the opportunities for political action. These come in an institutional shape, for example, Britain's membership of the EU means that decision making is moving away from an exclusively nation-state focus towards a European level where participation is welcomed and protest and pressure group activity can be effectively targeted. The advent of globalisation also means that in some issues, protest at the international level (such as the protests which met the meeting of the World Trade Organisation at Seattle in 1999) is more effective than activity at the national level. Furthermore, developments in communications through

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the changing nature of politics see Mulgan, G., *Politics in an Anti-political Age*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1994.

[41] Margetts, H., 'Political Participation and Protest' in Dunleavy, P. (Ed), *Developments in British Politics 6,* Palgrave, London, 2002, pp 188-191.

[42] Mulgan, G. 'Party-free politics' in *New Statesman and Society*, 15th April 1994, pg 18.

such mediums as the Internet and mobile phones (used effectively by the so-called 'fuel protesters' in 2000) means that issue networks linking groups of actors to create new coalitions of interest are much easier to organise.[43]

Another explanation for the changes is put forward by Inglehart (1990) who argues a new post-materialist political culture has emerged in which western democracies have witnessed a 'culture shift' from materialist values, concerned with issues of economic and personal security, to post-materialist values, concerned with quality of life issues, such as the environment. This post-industrial thesis argues that a growth in education, an expanded youth cohort and an age of affluence has lead to a movement towards new social movements in pursuit of post-material values, such as single issue protest groups and away from traditional modes of representation and participation such as political parties.[44]

There is also the explanation that the changing nature of participation in Britain is in response to a crisis of legitimacy in the British state as a whole. Evans (1997), Dunleavy (1997), Mulgan (1994) and Jenkins (1995) all support a 'statist' explanation. They argue that Britain has always had a strong, centralised state. Furthermore, the British state became increasingly centralised under the Conservative government between 1979-97 with the weakening of local government and the gathering of power under a single dominant party in London (which never gained a majority of the electorate but which under the distorting effect of first-past-the-post was able to govern unchallenged for 18 years) or in unaccountable QUANGOs. The gathering of so much power at the centre lead to a crisis of legitimacy of the state by

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[43] Evans, M. (1997), op cit, pp 118-121.
[44] See Inglehart, R., *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990.

the mid-1990s. The constitutional agenda of the incoming Blair government was designed to restore the public's faith in the political system through such processes as devolution. In terms of participation, this crisis of legitimacy, in which the wishes of many were excluded, lead to the rise in unconventional political participation and protest as the only alternative.[45]

A 'new class thesis' argues that participation is also changing in terms of who participates. Political unrest and protest used to be the preserve of the lower classes. However this perspective argues that protest is now being carried out increasingly by the well-educated and professionally orientated middle class. This new group of university educated and affluent activists are now a major component of single-issue protest groups. Evans (1997) points to the example of the protests against the export of live animals during the mid-1990s. This witness a high proportion of middle-class activist involved in direct action. The same could be said of the socio-economic make-up of the Countryside Alliance marchers in 1998 where 47% of the marchers were in the AB class group and only 5% from the DE group.[46]

Finally, there are those who focus on the decline of political parties. Maloney and Jordan (1995) argue that party de-alignment and the convergence of the policies of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party since the mid-1990s means that people are more open to participation in single-issue groups. Dalton (1994) argues that political parties have now been replaced by groups as the principle vehicle of participation and

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[45] Evans, M. (1997), op cit, pg 122, Dunleavy, P., 'The Constitution' in Dunleavy, P. (Ed), *Development in British Politics 5*, Macmillan, London, 1997, pp129-154, Jenkins, S. *Accountable to None: The Tory Nationalisation of Britain*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1995, pg 15, Mulgan, G., (1994), op cit, pg 17.
[46] Evans, M. (1997), op cit, pg 118, Margetts, H. (2002), op cit, pg 191

points out that single-issue groups are more able to articulate views clearly than the broad churches of traditional political parties.[47]

Distribution of participation.

Research also points to differences in the distribution of participation between different social groups. Beetham (2002) and Margetts (2002) both consider how participation varies according to social class, age, gender and ethnic group. In terms of class Beetham claims that participation rates increase the higher the social class of respondents. A 1990 survey showed that the rates of involvement in pressure group activity was twice as high for professional and managerial groups as for manual workers, a proportion which was replicated in a further survey in 1997. Existing membership of an organisation is a key route into voluntary activity on its behalf, and higher social groups are more likely to be members and to live in communities with dense social networks.[48]

Of course age and the degree of participation of young people in the political process is a central feature of this thesis so I will not dwell on it in detail here but Beetham points out that those in the 18-25 age-group are less likely to vote than other age groups, and express themselves less interested in politics. They are also less likely to be involved in voluntary organisations, and they spend least time in their involvement. Young people are more likely to be attracted to doing so where the instrumental

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[47] Maloney, W. and Jordan, G. 'Joining Public Interest Groups: Membership Profiles for Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth', in Lovenduski, J. and Stanyer, J. (Eds), *Contemporary Political Studies 1995, vol 3,* PSA, Exeter, 1995, pp 1137-53, Dalton, R., *The Green Rainbow*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1994.
[48] Beetham, D. (2002), op cit, pg 218.

benefits are evident, such as the opportunity to learn new skills, to get a qualification or to achieve a position in the community.[49]

In terms of gender, research seems to show that women are as likely to be involved in voluntary activity than men although this might manifest itself in different activities. A 1997 study concluded that women were three times more likely than men to volunteer in schools, and also more likely to be involved in social welfare groups, while men were twice as likely to be involved in sports groups. Men were more active on committees, women in fund-raising. In terms of campaigning groups, women are more likely to be involved in public interest groups of all kinds than men, and to be disproportionately more concerned on issues of the environment, nuclear energy and the threat of nuclear war. Furthermore, as Margetts (2002) point out, women, after many years of under-representation in public bodies, are now enjoying greater levels of participation in the House of Commons as well as in the new devolved assemblies with their commitment to greater female involvement.[50]

The research on the participation of the ethnic minorities is contradictory. Some research highlighted by Beetham reported minimal involvement of black volunteers in mainstream voluntary organisation, with 40% reporting none at all. However, the 2000 Home Office citizenship survey reported black and Asian people to be as equally involved as white people in helping groups and organisations, and more involved in attending them. This seeming contradiction can be explained by the fact that ethnic minorities are mainly involved in their own organisations. Margetts points out that the ethnic minorities are less likely to vote than their white counterparts,

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[49] Ibid, pp 218-219.
[50] Ibid, p 219., Margetts, H. (2002), op cit, pp 191-192.

possibly due to a lack of sense of efficacy, and are under-represented in terms of participation as elected representatives at both a local and national level.[51]

## 2. <u>**Youth participation and non-participation.**</u>

The next set of literature to consider is that on youth participation in the political process. There is little here which related directly to participation in political parties but as well as some works which give a broad consideration of youth participation there is a large body of quantitative research into young people and their attitude to politics. Some of this material is contradictory and not without its critics, especially in terms of the methodology used to gather that data.

<u>Matt Cole's 'Politics and Youth'.</u>

Matt Cole's (1997) provides a useful overview of the issue of youth and politics and gives a concise, historical survey of the ways in youth participation through formal processes such as voting and political parties has been encouraged.[52] Cole comments that it was the Young Conservatives who would seem to have been best placed to take advantage of this new group of young voters enfranchised in the late-1960s, boasting a large and active membership. By the 1960s the Young Conservatives membership was already beginning to stagnate and the decades since have witnessed a terminal decline in membership, with the YCs striven with internal divisions and accusations of extremism. Furthermore, Cole puts forward the opinion that part of the explanation for the decline of the YCs has been changing youth culture. Whilst once the YCs was

[51] Beetham, D. (2002), op cit, pg 219, Margetts, H. (2002), op cit, pp 193-194.
[52] Cole, M. 'Politics and Youth' in *Politics Review*, Phillip Allen Publishers, February 1997, pg. 5.

regarded as 'Europe's largest dating agency', the obvious place to find a politically compatible partner, changes in society have taken this role away from political parties leaving the YCs; as Cole describes them, as: "an extremist bolt-hole with very little influence, even within the Conservative Party itself."[53] Cole points out that the experience of the Labour Party has been similar with falling membership and accusations of infiltration by extremists into the Young Socialists to the extent that in 1991 the organisation was closed down to be replaced by a organisation purged of militants and firmly under the control of central organisation.[54]

Cole is sceptical about the efforts of politicians from both main parties to attract young voters by using the medium of pop music. However, Cole argues that of all such schemes it was Labour's 'Red Wedge' series of concerts involving such singers as Billy Bragg which came closest to being a success in the run up to the 1987 General Election. Cole points out that 'Red Wedge' was ultimately a failure because there was a contradiction between supporters of 'Red Wedge', who saw themselves as playing an active role in policy making within the Labour Party, and the Labour leaderships vision of a more limited role.[55]

Cole furthermore comments on the lack of policy commitments by either of the main parties specifically aimed at young people. What is worse, according to Cole, is that some policies introduced by the Conservatives, such as the Criminal Justice Act, and other policies proposed by the then Labour opposition, such as the end of student grants and curfews for teenagers, will make the situation worse, further alienating

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[53] Ibid., pg. 6.
[54] Ibid., pg. 6.
[55] Ibid., pg. 7.

young people. Only fringe parties and politicians have made commitments in the policy field, such as the Liberal Democrat proposal to lower the age of voting to 16.[56]

Cole argues that ignoring young people in policy formation is compounded by the fact that most MPs are still relatively old and middle class; so Cole emphasises that in 1996 the average age of Labour MPs was 48 while that of Conservatives was 62. Although this situation had improved by the 1997 general election the average age profile of MPs still seems to invite cynicism from young people.[57]

Finally, Cole enlists the research of others, such as Parry, Moyser and Day to underline the fact that young people are opting out of party politics with a dismal record of recruitment of young people into the political parties. However, as Cole points out, this trend of youthful disillusionment with, and indeed ignorance about, politics has been apparent since at least 1970. A 1977 Hansard Society study on the political awareness of school leavers reported a "truly appalling" situation of ignorance and apathy. Ten years later, a study by Denver and Hands, repeated that the situation had hardly improved.[58]

In conclusion, Cole comments that young people have not found that their vote has granted them greater access to power in a more meaningful sense: "They have remained largely peripheral to parties, Parliament and the political agenda."[59] Furthermore, young people are equating the raw deal they have suffered from party

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[56] Cole, op cit., pg. 7.
[57] Ibid., pg 8. According to the *Times* (17th April 1997) by 1997 the average age of a Conservative candidate was 45 whilst that of a Labour candidate was 47, though, of course, this gives no indication of whether they were fighting winnable seats.
[58] Cited in Cole, Ibid., pg. 8.
[59] Ibid., pg 9.

politics with politics as a whole and, rather than seeking an alternative access to power through extra-parliamentary action, young people are: "..giving up on politics altogether"[60]

<u>Wilkinson and Mulgan.</u>

In a wider ranging piece of research Wilkinson and Mulgan (1995) looked at the attitudes and experiences of the 18-34 age group towards such things as values, working life, relationships and parenting, and finally, particularly relevant for my research: attitudes towards, and involvement in, politics.

Wilkinson and Mulgan began their chapter on 'Reconnecting Politics' by arguing that: "For many young people in Britain today politics has become something of a dirty word."[61] They pointed out that people under 25 were four times less likely to be registered than any other age group, less likely to vote for, or join, a political party, and less likely to be politically active. According to their research only 6% of 15-34 year olds described themselves as "very interested in politics." The overwhelming story which emerges from this research is of an historic political disconnection. As Wilkinson and Mulgan pointed out: "In effect, an entire generation has opted out of party politics."[62] Wilkinson and Mulgan were careful to emphasise that this is not a particularly British phenomenon. There seemed to be a similar pattern in other industrialised countries with the German, French, Canadian and American government all concerned about the young's attitude towards politics and voting.

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[60] Ibid., pg 9.
[61] Wilkinson, H. and Mulgan, G. *Freedoms Children,* Demos, 1995. pg. 86.
[62] Ibid, pg. 87.

Wilkinson and Mulgan, like others before them, pointed to the decline in the membership of the main British political parties and noted their particular inability to recruit considerable numbers of young activists. Whilst the Labour Party seems slightly more successful than the Conservatives in recruiting young activists, the size of both party's youth sections remains small, leaving an ageing group of activists to shoulder much of the electoral footwork.[63]

As the authors themselves point out, it is easy to paint a very negative picture of young people as apathetic and inward looking; 55% of women and 45% of men in the 18-34 age-group state that they are "not interested in politics", higher than in any other age-group. However, as Wilkinson and Mulgan point out, this image can be misleading for research reveals that young people do care about certain issues. Environmentalism, famine, animal rights and health issues such as AIDS excite commitment in a way that traditional politics does not.[64]

So, asked Wilkinson and Mulgan, if young people are evidently concerned about specific issues, then why are they being turned off traditional politics? This would seem especially surprising considering both that this generation of voters are better educated than their parents and grandparents and that research indicates that the more educated you are the more likely you are to vote.[65] Wilkinson and Mulgan point out that the most commonly used explanation is that people are generally satisfied; with greater material affluence there is simply no need to campaign. A general culture of

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[63] Ibid, pg. 89.
[64] Ibid, pg. 90.
[65] Ibid, pg 91.

contentment lead many to choose to spend their time doing pleasurable things, rather than campaigning to bring about social or political change. Life opportunities far beyond those imaginable a couple of generations ago diminish the appeal of dusty meeting halls, resolutions and fetes.[66]

Wilkinson and Mulgan were sceptical about this as an explanation and point to evidence of a growing cynicism about the institutions with power. For example, in the UK the number of people who express dissatisfaction with the way Parliament is working has doubled in four years since 1991. Trust in society's core institutions has steadily fallen, leaving national government (at 15%) and local government (at 25%) receiving only minority support. At the ballot box too, while abstentions have risen, governments have been elected with ever-smaller shares of electoral support.[67]

The most striking trend unearthed in Wilkinson and Mulgan's research, and perhaps an explanation of this political alienation amongst the young, is the extent to which many young people now take pride in being out of the system. The authors aggregated responses to a number of statements: agreement with statements "I do not feel that I'm part of the British system and I'm proud of it" and "If I had the chance I would emigrate" and disagreement with the statements "I feel that I really belong to this neighbourhood" and "On the whole I prefer to buy British". From this Wilkinson and Mulgan constructed a 'disconnection index' which showed that those in the18-24 age group feel more detached from British society than any other age group.[68]

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[66] Ibid, pg. 92.
[67] Ibid, pg. 88.
[68] Ibid, pg. 94.

In conclusion, Wilkinson and Mulgan made a number of suggestions to help reconnect young people and politics. In the first place, the authors suggested reshaping politics with elections held over a week or weekend, polling stations in places like shopping centres and far more active registration initiatives linked to driving licences, bank and other bodies- as *Freedom's Children* points out, one in five 21 to 24 year olds were not registered to vote.[69]

Wilkinson and Mulgan point out that ignorance about how the political system works is an important cause of youthful apathy towards politics. A survey quoted by the authors shows that 65% of respondents felt that they knew 'just a little' or hardly anything' about the way that Parliament works. They suggested that we make room for more civic and political education in our schools and perhaps follow the Canadian and Australian examples of using 'Electoral Education Centres' and Election simulation kits to foster in young people the idea of the importance of voting.[70]

They also argued for a system of compulsory voting for national elections and referendums- following the Australian model- whereby failure to vote would result in a small fine. The authors recommended this on the grounds that it is better to accept a small infringement of freedom every few years, than to accept that a large proportion of the population will become wholly disconnected from politics and power. To account for those who are disillusioned with politics, but whose only outlet for their feeling was either a spoilt ballot paper or abstention, the authors suggest including a 'none of the above' box on the ballot paper, together with a comment box. Finally, Wilkinson and Mulgan call for new technologies to be used to reconnect young

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[69] Ibid, pg. 103.
[70] Ibid, pg. 101.

people and politics; 70% of 18-34 year olds are keen to use TVs, telephones and computers to vote at elections.[71]

Other quantitative research.

As well as the general surveys, there is a large body of quantitative research into youth participation and non-participation. Existing research on non-participation, and non-participation amongst the young in particular, seems to concentrate mainly on why young people fail to vote. For example, at the 1992 General Election 18-25 year olds made up 1 in 6 of the electorate, but over 2.5 million of them, more than a third of this age group in the United Kingdom, failed to vote.  Curtis (2002) shows that by the 1997 General Election only 60% of that age group voted and in the 2001 the figure was a mere 38%.[72] Furthermore, Russell (2002) claim that the turnout rates of young people are likely to be an under-recording of the people not voting in the UK since reported figures do no usually take account of people who are not registered to vote. Young people are the most likely of all age groups not to be registered to vote.[73] However, the research into why young people fail to vote is useful as it could equally help explain why young people fail to join political parties.

Research by White (2001) which interviewed a group of 193 young people aged between 14 and 24 illustrates findings common to many studies of young people and political participation. The research demonstrated that simply to paint a picture of young people as being apathetic and uninterested is too simplistic as they cannot be

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[71] Ibid, pg. 104.
[72] Figures from "Winning the youth vote", www.bbc.co.uk, 13th May 2001 and Curtis, A. 'The 2001 General Election' in *Politics Review*, January 2002, pages 3-6.
[73] See Russell, A. et al, 'Voter Engagement and Young People', Electoral Commission, 2002, pg 6.

treated as a uniform group where politics is concerned. Young people are less politically apathetic than usually assumed. Even those with low levels of interest in politics had sometimes voted or, when an issue affected them personally, had participated in some other activity such as signing a petition or taking part in a demonstration. However, many young people viewed politics as dull, boring and irrelevant. Politicians were commonly cast in a negative light as remote and unrepresentative, untrustworthy, and self interested in their pursuit of politics. For a minority, politicians were believed to have integrity and to be dedicated to representing the interests of the electorate.

According to White (2001) part of the explanation for this apparent contradiction is the limited and narrow way in which the young viewed politics. It would seem that the mention of politics often conjured up images of endless party political squabbling which is viewed as being both boring and irrelevant to their lives at present. It was also found that young people were preoccupied with other interests and activities that dominate their lives leaving little time to participate in politics. As a consequence of a low boredom threshold, young people were unlikely to hear the issues being discussed by politicians and so remained unaware that politicians may share their interests and concerns. A lack of knowledge and understanding about politics, and the difficulties young people perceive in trying to grasp such a 'complex' and 'dull' subject, left them alienated from political matters. To take an interest in politics was seen to require a technical knowledge about concepts and ideas that they found difficult to fathom. The solution lay in making politics more interesting and relevant by framing

it in terms that were easier to understand and by ensuring that politicians were more responsive to young persons concerns.[74]

## Young people and apathy.

The first set of explanations as to why young people do not participate in the political system assume that young people are apathetic. There is a common assumption that young people fail to vote because they are apathetic; they simply don't care about politics, policies or the Parliamentary process. The existing evidence to back up this assumption is not clear and is, in some cases, contradictory. For example a 1995, poll of 1058 young people aged 15-35 produced for Radio 1 FM's Newsbeat found that their sample was less interested in politics than older people and this lack of interest was based on a perception that politics simply wasn't relevant to their own lives. The survey showed that 54% of 15-24 year olds were 'not very' or 'not at all' interested in politics. Only 47% of 15-21 year olds and 58% of 22-25 year olds defined politics as being 'about things that affect my life and how I live it'. Of the 27% of 15-24 year olds who had no interest at all in politics, more than half gave the reason of 'not knowing enough about politics to be interested.'[75]

A more recent survey also shows that political interest amongst young people is low and appears to be falling. Data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) suggested that interest rates among first time voters had halved between 1990 and

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[74] White, C. 'Young People's Politics' in Gibbons, V. (Ed) *The People have Spoken; UK Elections: who votes and who doesn't,* The Hansard Society, March 2001.
[75] 'Youth and Politics'; Report of a survey of 1058 young people aged 15-35 produced for Radio 1 FM's Newsbeat by NOP, January 1995.

2000- only 10% of 18-25 year olds reported being 'quite' or 'very' interested in politics, compared to over 20% of the comparable age group some 13 years earlier.[76]

A report from the Northern Ireland pressure group Democratic Dialogue entitled 'Politics: the Next Generation' found the opposite. According to its findings, 75% of those young people who it surveyed were interested in what was happening politically in Northern Ireland, with more than 50% saying they would like to be more involved in the political process. However, only 3% of their sample said that they were involved in a traditional political party compared with 12% involved in a campaigning group. Furthermore, the nature of Northern Ireland with its ongoing problems could help make young people more politically aware. Whilst the 1993 British Social Attitudes report found that 8% of the total UK population had no interest at all in politics, the Radio 1 survey suggested that 27% of 15-24 year-olds fell into this category.[77]

In May 1999 David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in the Labour Government, announced that he intended to introduce compulsory Citizenship lessons for all 11-16 year old which would include a substantial component on politics and the political process. The call for some kind of education in Citizenship has arisen precisely because it was perceived that young people had an unhealthy ignorance as to Britain's political institutions and process. However, a MORI survey of 3,529 pupils aged between 11-16 in 142 secondary schools found that only 6% of respondents felt that the subject was well covered at school. Only

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[76] See Park, A. 'The Generation Game', British Social Attitudes, Volume 17.
[77] Politics: The Next Generation, Democratic Dialogue, Northern Ireland, 1999.

28% of respondents wanted more emphasis on the subject compared with 48% who wanted more emphasis on such life skills such as managing money.[78]

There are also youth specific explanations which have been suggested to account for the lack of political interest among young people. Jowell and Park (1998) claim a 'life-cycle' effect. This is the idea that political interest increases with age. Therefore, today's 'apathetic' teenagers and young people will become more interested as the grow older. This is explained by the idea that as people become older, and therefore become taxpayers and mortgage-holders, they have more of a stake in society with more to lose and more to gain. Consequently they become more interested in politics.[79] The 'life-cycle' effect could also help explain why young people are likely to regard certain issues (such as unemployment, environmental issues and globalisation) more important to them than issues that are important to older voters, such as interest rates, the NHS or inflation. Young people are also more likely to hold more general or idealistic views about the world that may be marginalised as time moves on.[80]

Park (1995) suggests a second possible explanation; that of a cohort or 'generational' effect. This is based on the idea that today's young people differ from their older counterparts, and that they will retain these differences as they grow older, and that they will not necessarily become more interested in politics. Today's apathetic young could become tomorrow's apathetic older voters.[81] Cohort effects are more complex. Some experiences can be life-changing and affect political attitudes permanently.

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[78] MORI poll carried out for the QCA and published in *The Guardian*, 24th May 1999, pg 1.
[79] See Jowell, R. and Park, A., 'Young people, politics and citizenship- a disengaged generation?', CREST, 1998.
[80] Russell, A., op cit, pg. 11.
[81] See Park, A. 'Teenagers and their Politics', British Social Attitudes, Volume 12, 1995.

Those who grew up during or after the Second World War, shared the experience of rationing and the welfare reforms of the Labour government. This gave a generation of voters a view about the provision of welfare and a more communitarian set of values associated with the common wartime experience that persisted as they grew older. Russell, Pattie, and Johnston (1992) argue that those who were politically socialised in the 1980s and 1990s were affected by the Thatcherite stress on individualism and detachment from the state that will persist even as those voters age.[82] So, one of the reasons why young people might not join political parties today could be that due to the relative prosperity and security in which the general population has been socialised they lack the incentive to join political parties which earlier, less fortunate generations, would have had.

Park (2000) has used the British Social Attitudes surveys to argue that there has been a significant change in the attitude of young people towards politics. She argues that today's young people are more apathetic about politics than ever before, suggesting a 'cohort' effect. In 1986 over one-fifth of 18-25 year olds said that they were 'quite' or 'very' interested in politics. By 1999 this figure had halved to one-tenth. Park suggests that this apathy will not simply diminish with age as 'life-cycle' theorists claim, but could persist into older age with dangerous consequences for the health of democracy.[83]

Are young people apathetic?

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[82] See Morgan, K., *The People's Peace*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990 and Russell, A., Pattie, C. and Johnston, R. 'Thatcher's Children: Exploring the Link between Age and Political Attitudes', *Political Studies*, Volume 40, 1992, pp. 742-50.

[83] Park, A., 'The Generation Game', *British Social Attitudes,* Vol. 17, Sage, London, 2000, pg 11.

However, once all this has been said, when it comes to policies and issues, a rather different story emerges. Much has been made of young people's growing support for so-called single issues such as the environment, human rights, animal rights, racism, the third world and it seems likely that they have a greater interest in such issues than older people. But, it is also clear that pressure groups often provide an environment that makes young people feel that their opinions matter, that their involvement is valued and crucially that they as individuals can make a difference. This, in turn, encourages interest in issues leading to participation in campaigns. Could it be that young people in political parties are treated in such a way that they believe that their opinions are not valued which then leads to alienation, discouragement and apathy. For example, in 1996 only 1 member in 20 of the main British political parties was under 25 with the membership of the Young Conservatives being less than 5,000. In comparison membership of Amnesty International's youth section has increased from 1,300 in 1988 to 15,000 in 1996.[84]

Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Volunteer Centre UK in 1991 found that 55% of 18-24 year olds had done some kind of voluntary activity within the previous year, compared to 51% of the overall population. This age-group accounted for one of the biggest increases in voluntary activity since 1981. Similarly, Community Service Volunteers report a 30% increase in the number of 16 to 35 year olds becoming volunteers since 1990, of whom about 70% were aged 18-25. This seems to indicate that there is no lack of youth idealism and a wish to get involved, at least in some way.[85] Research by Weinstein and Wring (1998, 1999) also challenged a popularly held image of apathetic youth. Whilst the findings found that the young people in both

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[84] Cosmopolitan, October 1995; *The Independent on Sunday*, 24th September 1995; *No Turning Back, Demos*, 1994; *The New Fear of Youth*, Josh Blackburn, May 1995.
[85] Survey for the Volunteer Centre UK, 1991 and Youth Matters, Centrepoint, June 1994.

studies were skeptical of political institutions, professional politicians and political parties, they were nonetheless committed to the democratic process. The studies concluded that young people's disengagement from formal politics in Britain was more to do with their perceptions of how politics was conducted and organized, than with disinterest.[86]

An International Association for the Evaluation of Education and Achievement (IEA) survey of the views of 14 year olds across the European Union confirmed that young people were skeptical about traditional forms of political activity. 80% of those asked, including British respondents, said that they had no intention of participating in conventional political activities. However, the research found that the young people in the sample appeared to gravitate towards actions linked to more informal social movement and protest groups. Once again, this research seems to indicate that young people are not switched off from political issues but from the more traditional forms of political participation. Low levels of political activity are not necessarily the result of young people's apathy.[87]

Research at the University of Birmingham also questions the image of the apathetic young person. O'Toole, et al (2002) argue that research on youth participation is hindered by a number of problems which tend to distort the true nature of youth participation. Firstly, they argue that the 'mainstream' research tends to concentrate on a relatively narrow concept of 'political participation' (such as voting, joining a party or a pressure group) which is imposed on respondents by the nature of the

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[86] See Weinstein, M. and Wring D. 'Young People and Politics: A Pilot Study of Opinion in Nottinghamshire', Nottinghamshire County Council, December 1998 and Weinstein, M. and Wring, D. 'Young People and Citizenship: A Study of Opinion in Nottinghamshire', Nottinghamshire County Council, October 1999.
[87] See Kerr, D. 'Summary of IEA Citizenship Education Study, Slough NFER, 2001.

research method of using surveys and questionnaires. What young people in particular conceive as 'political' may differ to what the researcher conceives as 'political'. The second problem links in with the first. Non-participation in those activities deemed to be political by the researcher is sometimes taken to mean non-participation in politics *per se* and this is attributed to apathy. O'Toole, et al, argue that non-participation is caused by a host of factors which must be 'unpacked'. Furthermore, young people may be assumed to be apathetic because they do not participate whereas in fact they may participate, but in ways not picked up through 'mainstream' research.  So, a young person might be counted as being apathetic because s/he does not vote, for example, but instead that person might channel their 'political' activity through the boycotting of a multi-national, an activity that, because it does not fall within the mainstream conception of 'political', would be overlooked.

Thirdly, O'Toole, et al, argue that too much research into participation and non-participation sees young people merely as a subset of the population in general. This is a criticism that they level at 'mainstream' research into participation carried out by Parry, et al and Seyd and Whiteley. They argue, and I would agree with this, that, if we are to understand young people and political participation, we must develop a youth-specific explanation. Young people must be seen as a distinct group of people with unique pressures, concerns, problems and influences with their unique position in the life cycle having an important influence on their activities. Young people are in a transitional period in their lives educationally, politically, emotionally, physically, psychologically and legally and this is important to recognize when explaining their

behaviour in any field.[88] My research will help contribute towards clarifying why young people in particular do or do not join political parties.

Barriers to entry.

Other research into youth participation and non-participation focusses on barriers to entry. This research focusses on the various ways in which participation is made difficult or inaccessible to young people therefore discouraging them from getting involved in the political process.

As I have indicated previously research indicates that there is a belief amongst young people that the main political parties attach relatively low priority to those issues which interest young people and that this serves only to discourage these young activists from participating in the democratic process. Two opinions from a 1995 British Youth Council report illustrate this point. One young person questioned favoured single issue pressure groups because: "There are all sorts of other organisations that we can feel part of and we join them. You feel more empowered. I was attracted to pressure groups because they seemed to be doing things rather than talking about them. They are forcing the pace of social change." As for political parties, one person spoke of his alienation from tradition political party activity: "The things which concern me are not valued by Party leaders."[89]

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[88] See O'Toole, T. 'The Politics of non-participation: engaging with young people's conceptions of the political, The University of Birmingham, 2002 and O'Toole, T., Lister, M., Marsh, D., Jones, S., and McDonagh, A. 'Tuning Out or Left Out? Participation and Non-Participation Among Young People, The University of Birmingham, 2002.
[89] 'Politics and Voting', The British Youth Council, London, 1995. Pg 5.

However, despite the increasing involvement of young people in pressure groups, the evidence shows that most young people are primarily concerned with the same issues as everybody else; jobs, money, health and equality. In particular, it is unemployment which comes up time after time as an issue of great importance to young people throughout the 18-25 age-group. In a 1995 survey of 15-18 year old conducted by Gallup for Wrangler Jeans, unemployment was cited as by far the biggest concern for the future amongst 45% of those questioned. Similarly, polls of first time voters aged 18-23 produced by ICM for BBC radio in March 1987 and 1992 found unemployment/ jobs was seen by far as the most important issue facing the age group.[90]

This concern is understandable. Unemployment is generally twice as high among young people as among the general population; those young people who don't have work receive less financial support than their older counterparts and over a third of those in low paid work are young people. It is perhaps not surprising that young people feel let down by the traditional political process that is perceived as providing them with such limited opportunities to participate as equal members of society. Similarly, when legislation affecting young people is passed, their views, concerns and best interests are rarely taken into consideration, resulting in laws which have a direct negative impact on young people's rights. Recent examples of this include the Job Seekers Allowance, the Age of Consent and the Criminal Justice Act.

It could therefore be argued that, rather than young people being apathetic, it is in fact the politicians and parties which are indifferent, uninterested and complacent, as they

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[90] First Time Voters Poll. Report of survey of 779 adults aged 18-23 produced for BBC Radio 1 for ICM, March 1987.

do not seem to give consideration to the extremely difficult position young people are facing or contemplate how young people will be affected by the proposals and legislation they produce.

In fact, various research seems to indicate that young people not only feel alienated from the political process but also from society as a whole. A 1996 survey showed that only 23% of people aged 15-24 feel any sense of belonging to their local community and 27% can identify a good community spirit in their area compared with 42% and 38% of all adults respectively.[91] It's perhaps not surprising that research seems to suggest that some young people find institutions like Parliament and figures such as politicians as rather distant, even intimidating. Studies reveal that young people feel that their representatives are out of touch with their own experience of life. Furthermore, a 1994 study of the moral standards of young people aged 15-35 conducted by MORI for Radio 1 found that 52% felt that Parliament and politicians were doing a bad job of setting and upholding moral standards, as opposed to 4% who felt that they were doing a good job.[92]

Young people could be forgiven for looking at the decision makers at all levels and seeing people very different from themselves. In a 1993 study of the 5,000 names on the Cabinet Office's Central List of people recommended for seats on Non-Departmental Public Bodies, only 5% were under 40 and the average age was 55. Similarly, the study showed that the youngest member of the National Curriculum Council was 42, with an average age of 52; the youngest member of the Further

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[91] Barclays Sitesavers Press Release, January 30th 1996.
[92] Moral Values of Young People. Summary report of a survey of 1200 15-35 year olds produced for BBC Radio 1 by MORI, August 1994.

70

Education Funding Council (FEFC) executive was 44 with an average age of 53.[93]

After the 2001 General Election, only 5 of the 659 MPs in the House of Commons were under 30; while the average age of MPs was 49.[94]

Research indicates that young people regard politicians with great cynicism and that this cynicism extends to the view that they feel politicians have of young people. Whilst political parties do not seem to generate such a high level of suspicion, there is scepticism with regards to what parties can actually achieve; rather than join a political parties with their broad sweep of policies, some of which young people might not agree with, young people prefer to join single issue pressure groups. Similarly, many young people have little time for the slanging matches and political gamesmanship that makes up such a high proportion of Parliamentary proceedings (at least on television). As has already been highlighted, the low priority given by the political parties to issues of particular concern to young people and the lack of protection which is given to their rights and freedoms can only contribute to this sense of cynicism.

Perhaps the greatest source of disenchantment and frustration was that young people believed that local councillors, MPs and parties simple don't engage with young people enough. Evidence suggests that there is a genuine eagerness to contribute ideas to politicians and parties. Any opportunities to be consulted on policies and be part of a meaningful dialogue would clearly be welcomed. Given the opportunity to express their views young people grasp it with both hands.

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[93] Democratic Deficit, Young People and the Parliamentary Process, British Youth Council, 1993.
[94] Figures from Russell, A. Op cit, pg. 7.

This idea is borne out by the Democratic Dialogue group research. Their study showed that young people in Northern Ireland want representation and, moreover, that they value it. The young people surveyed indicated that they would welcome both the teaching of political education in schools and the creation of platforms upon which to practice this knowledge. In their view the problem at the moment is that, while we have a strong body of young people with sharp and defined emotions and perceptions about the politics of the society they live in, they don't have any positive avenues through which to contribute to its civic or political life. It is this which frustrates young people and which they wish to see addressed. They do not believe that they can sort it all out, but they do believe they have the right attempt to contribute, be it through 'youth coalitions' on the broader political agendas or political education in a new and practical form that is not wholly academic.

Political parties have recognised the problem of apathy and alienation among youth people and have made some efforts to engage young voters such as through the American inspired voter initiative 'Rock the Vote'. These have proved to be inadequate. Sometimes these attempts have been poorly conceived but often they suffer from their association with 'party politics' which, research indicates, put young people off politics in the first place. Many of the initiatives have been dismissed by young people as cynical attempts to gain their vote and the use of celebrity endorsements did not have a positive impact in 2001.[95] In fact, attempts to meet the youth agenda by using new media (for example text messaging and the internet) and from association with celebrities were met with derision:

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[95] Ibid, pg 8.

The use of out-of-fashion Chris Evans indicated that some Millbank address books required updating, Geri Halliwell's appearance on the [Labour] Party's first election broadcast suggested that more than a few needed throwing away.[96]

Young people are four times more likely to be missing from the electoral register than the rest of the population. It is clear that the registration process itself provides a significant obstacle to voting for many young people. The system is complicated, bureaucratic and inflexible, with various confusing deadlines and the requirement to register well in advance of any possible election. During the early 1990s fear about the poll tax discouraged some from registering and with the system being based on residency, many young homeless people are prevented from participating. Those young people in accommodation are traditionally an extremely mobile population with a high concentration in the private rented sector. It is a fact that one in four people who have moved in the previous 12 months failed to register to vote; 38% of those living in privately rented furnished accommodation are not registered to vote, compared to 2.6% for those in owner occupied accommodation. In 2001 only 60% of voters aged 18-24 were even registered to vote.[97]

Another issue is that lack of information about how to register is widespread. In 1995 central government spent only 1.2p per elector on promoting registration, which works out as less than £100,000 for all 18-25 year-olds. Compare this to the millions spent every year on health education programmes. It could perhaps be argued that the health of democracy could use a little more attention. However, there is also clear evidence that many young people have received next to no information about the wider issues relating to democracy, citizenship and Parliament generally through

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[96] Quoted in Fielding, S. 'No-one Else to Vote For? Labour's Campaign', in Geddes, A. and Tonge, J. (Eds) *Labour's Second Landslide,* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002, pg. 32.
[97] 'Winning the youth vote' on www.BBC.co.uk, 13th May 2001.

school, college, the youth service or the youth media. A 1995 study of 400 young people aged 16-19 found that the main reasons for not voting was lack of information; a majority did not know enough about the process, few knew that they had to register to vote and many had never even seen an electoral registration form.[98]

Bentley (1999) found that young people had little knowledge of how systems of government functioned. The young people asked felt largely ignorant about politics and the political process. When asked why they had not voted at the 1997 General Election the respondents claimed that they had not been contacted by the politicians, they did not really know what the parties stood for and they did not know how to vote.[99] In a survey for the Electoral Commission, MORI found that 40% of 18-24 year olds knew 'hardly anything at all' about the way the Westminster Parliament worked.[100] Molloy et al (2002) found that it was a lack of understanding that was behind many young people not voting. This lack of understanding manifested itself both in a lack of understanding of the political issues involved and in a lack of understanding of how to vote including how to register, where to go to vote and what to do at the polling station.[101]

As *The Times Educational Supplement* commented in December 1995: "This is one of the few developed countries in which it is possible for young people of all abilities to leave school knowing absolutely nothing about political systems, the parliamentary process or the basic mechanisms of government." Perhaps it is this ignorance which

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[98] Electoral Registration Research Project, Brighton Council/Brighton College of Technology, February 1995, reported in *The Guardian*, 24th April 1995.
[99] See Bentley et al, 'The Real Deal- What young people really think about government , politics and social exclusion, DEMOS, 1999.
[100] See MORI, 'Survey of Attitudes During the 2001 General Election Campaign', MORI, 2001.
[101] See Molloy, D. et al, 'Understanding Youth Participation in Local Government', DTLR, 2002.

leads to political apathy; certainly the British Social Attitudes Survey has revealed a sharp drop in interest in politics among 18-24 year olds between 1991 and 1994.[102] Annette (2000) argues that it is concern over the lack of knowledge amongst young people about politics and the political system which lies at the root of the 'problem' which lead the Labour Government to set up the 'Crick Committee' to look into the study of politics and the attainment of 'political literacy' for young people to boost their political participation. The Crick Committee produced a report in 1998, 'Education for Citizenship and the teaching of Democracy in Schools', which recommended that citizenship and democracy be taught as part of the national curriculum. The report was adopted by the Labour Government and 'political literacy' will be taught in secondary schools from September 2002.[103]

## 3.   The youth organisations of the main political parties.

The third set of literature to consider is that which looks at the youth organisations of the major political parties and considers their attempts to recruit members on behalf of their parent parties. The material is very patchy with the last comprehensive piece of research being carried out in 1970. From this point the material is extremely limited in scope and depth.

Zig Layton-Henry.

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[102] The 1995-96 British Social Attitudes Survey, SCPR, reported in 'The Party Pooper Generation', *The Times Educational Supplement,* December 15th 1995.
[103] See Annette, J. *Civic Participation and Education for Citizenship,* The School of Social Science, Middlesex University, 2000.

The most comprehensive previous research on the main youth organisation of the Conservative Party, the Young Conservatives, was carried out by Zig Layton-Henry (1973).[104] Layton-Henry recounts how what became the Young Conservative and Unionist organisation was the direct descendant of the Junior Imperial and Constitution League which was founded in 1906. Adopting a largely historical approach, Layton-Henry charts the rise and slow, but steady decline of the Young Conservatives between their birth and 1970.

Despite disruption by both the First and Second World Wars, the Young Conservatives were able to boast 300 branches and 100,000 members in 1914[105] and a peak of 2,375 branches and 160,433 members by 1949.[106] The YC's became well known for their social activities at a time when these were not easily available in many areas. The author recounts how the YC's received much publicity as the 'best marriage bureau in the country'; a description they welcomed as it suggested social success and this aided recruitment.

However, as Layton-Henry points out, social activities were successfully mixed with politics, so that many of the young people attracted by the social programme were persuaded to canvass and attend political meetings during election campaigns. The Conservative Party continually publicised its large youth organisation, contrasting it with the less successful efforts of the other parties to recruit young people into their youth movements. There were many references at the time to the YC's as "the largest political youth movement in the free world". As Layton-Henry comments: "During

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[104] Layton-Henry, Z. 'The Young Conservatives 1945-70', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, volume 8, number 2, 1973, Pg 143-154.
[105] Ibid., pg 144.
[106] Ibid., pg 147.

the 1950s [the YC's] helped to promote an image of the Conservative Party as youthful, progressive, and successful."[107]

Despite the social attraction of the YC's and the help it gave to the young politically ambitious to take the first step on the political ladder, by 1959 it was clear that membership was falling. Figures provided by Layton-Henry show how from a peak of approximately 157,000 members in 1949, membership of the YC's had fallen to 80,000 by 1959. Despite the best efforts of the Conservative Party leadership Layton-Henry charts a continuing decline in YC membership; down to 58,000 by 1964 and 50,000 by 1969. The Macleod report, published in 1965, found that the social and economic changes of the post-war years had influenced the behaviour of young people. The falling age of marriage and greater affluence were partly held responsible for the fall in membership.[108]

For the Labour Party's effort to attract the young we once again turn to Zig Layton-Henry (1970) for his comprehensive account of the development of the youth branch of the Labour Party from its muddled inception in the 1920s through to its internal strife in the early 1970s. Layton-Henry argues that the failure of the Labour Party, in this period, to organise a successful youth movement has been a long standing source of concern and embarrassment being manifestly less successful than either the Young Conservatives or the Young Liberals in attracting young people into the party organisation and providing them with a meaningful role. Furthermore, as Layton-

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[107] Ibid. pg. 147.
[108] Ibid., pg. 153.

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Henry comments: "The history of Labour youth is one of conflict, suppression and constant reorganisation."[109]

These problems which dogged the Labour Party in its efforts to build a successful youth wing had their origins in the attitude of the Labour leadership towards the role they actually foresaw for young people in the Party. Their view of this role was far more limited than envisaged by some of the ambitious young activists. For a party which claimed to want a young and vital socialist society the Labour Party was strangely slow and reluctant to set up a youth wing. The first of these, the Young Labour League, was established in 1920 mainly in the London area. However, approaches from the leaders of the Young Labour League, seeking party support to build a national organisation, were instead met by apathy and suspicion from a Labour Party leadership which saw the fledgling organisation as a detraction from Labour Party efforts rather than a vital addition.[110]

Layton-Henry recounts how reluctantly the Labour Party began to look into setting up an official Labour youth wing. According to Layton-Henry, the underlying cause of the NEC's apparent lack of interest in acquiring a strong youth section was fear that Marxist views might develop in the youth movement and that it might become a pawn in intra-party disputes or a focus of communist infiltration into the Labour Party.[111] Various attempts during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s to create a viable youth

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[109] Layton-Henry, Z. 'Labour's Lost Youth' in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 11, number 3, 1976. Pg. 275. Readers might also turn to Cole, H. *The British Labour Party: A Functioning Participatory Democracy*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1977, pages 37-42 for information on the Youth movement.
[110] Ibid., pg 276.
[111] Ibid., pg. 278.

organisation foundered as the Labour leadership failed to provide the encouragement that the young members wished and the autonomy the leadership feared.[112]

The shock of defeat in 1959 seemed to push the Labour Party into a urgent reappraisal of its youth wing and at the 1959 National Conference the NEC suggested a new organisation which was to become the Young Socialists. Whilst once again the national structure lacked both the autonomy and power some sought the structure, with an annual conference, a membership age of 15-25 and a national committee seemed to provide something on which to build. The early results of these efforts seemed encouraging; branches rapidly increased in number from the 262 youth sections in 1959 to 608 Young Socialist branches by October 1960.[113] However, internal fighting did the Young Socialists no favours and, between 1965 and 1969, the number of branches fell from 605 to 386.[114]

Layton-Henry concludes by emphasising the missed opportunities and the self-fulfilling prophecies of disaster by both the NEC and the leaders of the youth movement. The NEC's fears that young people attracted to the Party would be politically radical and irresponsible made it reluctant to create a youth movement and when one was forced upon it, the NEC ensured that the organisation remained firmly under its control. However the youth movement was expected to provide election workers and recruits for the Labour Party without being granted any real power or influence. Furthermore, as Layton-Henry points out, the Young Socialists were dominated by young ideologues who, once Labour gained power in 1964, became

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[112] See, for example, Ibid., pg 278-285.
[113] Ibid., pg 291-295.
[114] For the full details of this internal strife and the reaction of the Labour Party's NEC see Leyon-Henry, op cit, pages 295-304.

impatient with the pace of change necessary in a parliamentary democracy. This impatience lead to factionalism, extremism, falling membership and by 1970, the end of the article, to isolation from the social democratic mainstream of the Party.[115]

## Other works on the history of the Labour and Conservative Parties.

In general, the various histories of the main political parties make few, if any, references to their youth movements. Andrew Thorpe's *History of the British Labour Party* (1997) is a typical example. However, it does briefly discuss the Labour Party and its youth section during the 1960s and illustrates the point that problems with mobilising young activists is nothing new. As Thorpe points out, the 1960s was the decade when youth came more clearly onto the political agenda. However, the Labour Party was slow to respond and, when it did, it was often in a discouraging manner. According to Thorpe, little effort was made in the Labour party to understand modern movements or the feelings among young people.[116]

Furthermore, the experience of young people within the Labour Party in the 1960s seemed to promise future problems. The party's youth movement, the Young Socialists, had been disbanded for ultra-leftism in 1965 and reorganised as the Labour Party Young Socialists (the LPYS), with most of its (extremely limited) powers removed. Thorpe recounts how, at constituency and ward level, LPYS members were more likely to encounter suspicion and hostility than encouragement, except at election times when, unsurprisingly, their commitment to canvassing and committee room work meant a temporary reprieve.

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[115] Ibid, pg 304-306.
[116] Thorpe, A. *A History of the British Labour Party,* Macmillan Press, London, 1997. pg. 176.

According to Thorpe, in addition to these problems, the youth organisations began to crumble as the Labour Government of 1964-70 struggled with such problems as Rhodesia and devaluation, with the number of LPYS branches halving between 1962-69. Thorpe comments that government policies did little to stem the growing alienation of young people from the Labour Party. Youth protest movement's offended party leaders and many stalwart Labour voters.

Even Labour's decision to lower the age of voting from 21 to 18 in 1969, the point at which my research begins, is treated with cynicism by Thorpe. The decision, according to Thorpe:

> ...was less a principled commitment to young people than a piece of gerrymandering based on the assumption that young people were more likely to vote Labour than Conservative.[117]

For the rest of his book Thorpe makes little reference to the youth wing of the Labour Party, save in the context of describing Neil Kinnock's attempts to modernise the Labour Party, centralise power and marginalize those areas of the Party still dominated by the extreme-left. Once again, by the 1980s the LPYS had become dominated by the extreme left and, soon after Kinnock became Party Leader the budget of the LPYS was cut dramatically. However this was to prove just the beginning for during the policy review of the early 1990s LPYS was effectively wound up and replaced, as Thorpe, puts it:

> ...by a few short lived gimmicks, despite the fact that experience showed that even when young people might be attracted to Militant and Trotskyism when

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[117] Ibid., pg 176.

they first joined, they often developed into loyal and useful members of the party in later life.[118]

Rupert Morris briefly discusses the Conservative Party's student wing in his volume, *Tories: From Village Hall to Westminster: A Political Sketch* (1991). Morris recounts how the late 1970s saw a new breed of young political animal emerging; children of lower middle-class or working class origins, seething with familiar post-adolescent indignation and sharing the pet hatreds of their political heroine, Margaret Thatcher, of the establishment and the post-war consensus.[119]

Morris points out that, in the early 1980s, when the Young Conservatives were still controlled by the 'wets' of one-nation Conservatism and championed by Peter Walker, the Federation of Conservative Students was where you found the radical Thatcherites. The members of the FCS seemed to enjoy confrontation, forever provoking the wets and embracing a number of extreme right wing causes, such as the South African state or maverick US senators like Jesse Helms. Some on the libertarian fringe called for the legalisation of drugs. Eventually, by 1986 the FCS were becoming a liability for the Conservative Party and the Party Chairman, Norman Tebbit, was forced to close down the Federation of Conservative Students.

However, as Morris adds, these young Turks briefly disappeared to re-emerge as the Conservative Collegiate Forum. Within a few years they had won control of the Young Conservatives and, when the former agitators of the FCS formed themselves

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[118] Ibid., pg 224.
[119] Morris, R. Tories: From Village Hall to Westminster: A Political Sketch, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1991. pg. 25.

into Conservative Graduates, the Thatcherite take-over of the Party's younger generation was complete.[120]

Other histories or accounts of the Conservative Party which mention the Party's youth wing, and these are few, pick up on this theme of a decline in numbers coupled with a movement to the right during the 1980s. Andrew Davies in his book *We, the Nation: The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power* (1995), notes the steep decline in the membership of the YCs from 160,000 in 1949 to less than 3,000 in 1995. Davies claims, probably correctly, that the image of the YC's was not helped by a shift to the right which manifested itself at the 1986 YC Conference with delegates sporting badges proclaiming "Kill Wets" and "Hang Nelson Mandela".[121]

Attempts have also been made by politicians to enlist popular musicians in their efforts to mobilise young people both as activists and as voters. John Street (1990) looks at the connection between Politics and popular music. As Street notes, Politicians have enjoyed a very love/hate relationship with both pop music and with musicians:

> The emergence of "rock'n'roll" in America in the 1950s caused a wave of moral indignation from politicians who questioned the effect that this new medium would have on the teenagers of the new "youth culture." Some politicians were morally outraged by John Lennon in the 1960s, by David Bowie in the 1970s and by the Beastie Boys in the 1980s.[122]

Nonetheless, Street notes that, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increasing trend for pop music and musicians to be involved in politically sensitive "worthy causes."

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[120] Ibid., pg 26.
[121] Davies, A.J. *We the Nation: The Conservative Party and the Pursuit of Power*, Little, Brown and Company, London, 1995. Pg.152.
[122] Street, J. 'From Rebellion to Morality: A Political History of Rock Music', in *Talking Politics,* Spring 1990, Volume 2, number 3. Pg. 98.

In the 1970s the rise of the National Front was met with the organisation "Rock Against Racism" established in 1976 when musicians put themselves at the forefront of the struggle against the racist extreme right. Probably the most famous example of musician's involvement in a "worthy cause" was the 1985 Live Aid Concert at Wembley Stadium in which a whole host of musicians pooled their collective talent to raise money to alleviate the suffering in famine torn Ethiopia. This was followed by a concert in 1987 to draw attention to the plight of Nelson Mandela, whilst the same year Bruce Springsteen and other toured the world to raise money for Amnesty International. As Street notes, Famine, the environment, AIDS and many other topics have been concerns of an ever wider range of musicians who by becoming involved have in turn drawn their fans into areas of keen political debate.[123]

As Street points out, the most direct link between British politicians and pop music was Red Wedge. Here was an example of politicians realising the potential power of music to motivate and activate young voters in favour of, in this case, the Labour Party. Red Wedge was established in 1985 with the active co-operation of a number of left leaning performers such as Billy Bragg, Paul Weller and The Communards. The aim of Red Wedge, at least in the eyes of the party leadership, was to enhance the image of the Party, to make it look youthful and modern and thus hopefully attract young, disenchanted, voters. However, as Matt Cole (1997) pointed the members of Red Wedge were more ambitious in their aims. Street echoes Cole arguing that:

> Red Wedge's musicians were not just servants of Labour; they were involved as political activists. They wanted to change the party and its policies, to make it more aware of, and responsive to, youth. The changes they had in mind

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[123] Ibid., pg. 99.

included persuading the party to see the young as a constituency in its own right, one that had suffered at the hands of Mrs Thatcher's government.[124]

Street concludes by suggesting that the power of pop music to shock, the desire of pop music to take up good causes and the involvement of pop music directly with main stream political parties such as Red Wedge make popular music a suitable subject for study by political scientists. Street argues that popular music is becoming an increasingly important component of the political culture:

> If political culture includes emotions and feelings, as well as beliefs and values, then popular culture ought to feature more prominently on the political scientist's agenda. And insofar as pop music is part of popular culture then it too has to be viewed as a possible source and symbol for those emotions which animate political life.[125]

## Conclusion.

From a review of the existing literature I feel that I can conclude that whilst there is much material on participation and non-participation in general there is little on my particular area of study. Youth participation and non-participation in political parties is an area of research which seems to have been overlooked in existing research. This is all the more strange due to the fact that the membership of both the Labour and Conservative Party are a cause for concern and also because participation seems very much the flavour of the month within Political Science. Research into youth participation seems to be chasing where it is percieved young people are participating, in unconventional forms of participation such as direct action or single issue groups or even trying to pin down exactly what young people concieve as being 'political'. Youth participation in political parties seems to have been overlooked by much of the

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[124] Ibid., pg. 100.
[125] Ibid., pg. 101.

research. It is almost as if it is taken as read that this is not a way in which young people wish to participate and therefore can be ignored with little consideration of the entent to which this is true, why is might be so, and why it might be important to study this phenomenon. I believe that this is grevious oversight since I would argue that political parties are still important to British democracy and young members are important to political parties.

Whilst there is little specific research on party participation among the young there is considerable general literature on participation and on participation by the young in general. It is important to consider what this says about participation as I believe it helps inform my own research into a particular area of participation. The existing research on participation and non-participation could help me explain why young people do, or do not, join political parties. As I stated earlier I cannot divorce party participation from other areas of political participation as general trends in participation and variables which effect participation can be seen to have an effect on party participation.

I first considered the literature on participation and non-participation. The very desirability of participation is a contested concept but I would agree with Beetham (1993, 2002) that participation in the political process is a good thing. Furthermore, I support Mair and Van Biezen (2001) in their argument that healthy and active membership of political parties is also important for democracy. In considering participation I had also to consider non-participation since many young people choose not to join parties. The work of Schattschneider (1960) and Bachrach (1962, 1971) argues non-participation could be due to alienation. Berelson, Lazarfeld and McPhee

(1954) on the other hand argue that non-participation could be due to broad satisfaction with the status quo. The latter seems dangerously complacent but these theories could be considered in explaining youth non-participation in parties. Whilst Parry et al (1992) is now outdated in its overview of participation the the UK (and will now be superceeded by the Democracy and Participation Programme) their suggestion that young people are more likely to participate in more unconventional forms of participation is an important one and a variable to consider carefully.

Also important in informing my own research is the work from various authors on the changing pattern of participation in the United Kingdom. Evans (1997), Mulgan (1994), Jenkins and Klandermans (1995), Inglehart (1990), Maloney and Jordan (1995), Dalton (1994) and Margetts (2002) all point to trends in participation which have seen a movement away from conventional forms of participation such as membership of political parties and voting towards more unconventional forms of involvement in politics. Evans feels that this trend has particular appeal to the young. Once again this is a variable which I will consider, but in itself I feel that it cannot fully explain some of the trends which I have already identified. As I have said before, if these trends are leading towards a continuous decline in party membership why has the Labour Party been comparatively more successful in recruiting young members than the Conservative Party?

The second major set of literature which I examined related to youth participation and non-participation in general. There is some general overall literature on young people and the political process such as Cole (1997) and Wilkinson and Mulgan (1995). The latter research drew a number of conclusions which was supported by the other

quantitative research into youth participation such as White (2001) and Weinstein and Wring (1998, 1999). Wilkinson and Mulgan concluded that young people may seem apathetic about conventional politics but that this should not be taken as apathy towards politics *per se*. Whereas they might not be involved in voting, political parties or formal pressure groups research does indicate that young people are interested in issues like the environment, globalisation or, more recently, the anti-war movement and they may get involved in informal groups and community action. The problem is, and this is echoed by O'Toole, et al, (2002), these activities may not be picked up by traditional 'top down' research methods which might not consider them as 'political'. Jowell and Park (1998) also importantly suggest that young people might be subject to a life-cycle effect in that connection with formal politics might increase with age and they gain jobs, mortgages, children and pensions and so have a greater stake in society and a greater interest in how decisions are made. Once again, this is an important variable which could have some relevance to my own research in explaining party participation.

There is also the consideration of barriers to entry. There is a body of literature which suggest that the way in which formal politics operates in the United Kingdom effectively puts young people off participating. Politicians were regarded as distant and aloof, their language complex and anarchaic, the systems of registration for voting was seen as complicated and inflexible. Attempts by parties and politicians to engage with young people were widely derided and seen as clumsy and patronising. However, Street (1990) does note the success of the 'Red Wedge' tour during the mid-1980s. Bentley (1999) and Molloy et al (2002) pointed to a lack of understanding about the political process and what it involved. Once again, this variable could help

inform my own research and provide another insight into youth party participation and non-participation.

Finally, there is the existing material on the youth movements of the main parties and their attempts to recruit members. The material here is extremely thin and outdated. There has not been a comprehensive attempt to look at this area since the work of Layton-Henry (1970, 1973) on the Young Conservatives and Young Socialists. Whilst this material is comprehensive up to 1970 it is more historical and chronological in nature and is not suffiently analytical in explaining the failures of the two movements. Other work such as Thorpe (1997), Morris (1991), Davies (1995) is extremely thin and discusses the youth movements of the Conservative and Labour Party's only in passing and with no real anaysis and evaluation.

In conclusion, whilst the literature on my own specific area of research is lacking, the general work on participation and non-participation throws up a host of variables which will help inform my own research and which can be used as a basis, together with other variables, to explain youth participation and non participation in political parties. The next task is to set about constructing a model to explain exactly that.

# Chapter 4.

## Explaining participation.

In the previous chapter I examined the existing literature on this particular area of research and found that whilst there was considerable exisiting work on both political participation in general and young people and political participation in particular, there was little on explaining specifically why young people do or do not join political parties. It was now important to begin to develop a model which would help explain youth participation and non-participation in political parties. In this chapter I am going to begin the process of building such a model by examining the four general models of participation. These are the civil voluntarism model, the rational choice model, the social psychological model and the mobilisation model. From a critical evaluation of these four general models it becomes clear that whilst each adds something to the explanation of participation and non-participation, none, on their own, provide a wholly satisfactory model. Seyd and Whiteley have recognised this and have used the four general models to create their own model, the general incentives model, which builds upon and incorporates aspects of these four models to provide what they argue to be a more comprehensive model of participation. I, in turn, set out to build upon Seyd and Whiteley. Whilst I recognise that Seyd and Whiteley's model is a sound one, I feel that it does have its failings, and that in particular areas, such as the inclusion of disincentives as well as incentives, the consideration of a 'package' of incentives and disincentives, and the consideration of more youth-centric explanations and variables, I am able to build a new model which improves on Seyd

and White considerably and which provides a more satisfactory model of explaining youth participation and non-participation in political parties. I also believe that aspects of the moblisation model of participation, in particular the contribution that the party youth organisations make to the success or failure of recruitment, can be integrated into my new model as a further refinement.

## 1.  **The Civic Voluntarism Model.**

The first approach is known as the 'Civic Voluntarism Model' and is derived from the work of Sidney Verba and Norman Nie (1972) who carried out research into participation in the United States. The Civic Voluntarism Model argues that participation is influenced by three main factors; the time available to participate in political activities; the degree of psychological engagement with politics; and the degree to which the individual is within the recruitment networks which bring individuals into politics. Consequently, according to this model, it is the social status of a individual which determines whether and individual participates or not; middle class people are more likely to have the time, inclination and contacts to get involved in politics.[126]

*Critique.*

However, there are flaws in the argument that so-called 'high-status' individuals are more likely to be involved in politics than 'low-status' individuals. The first problem is that the model fails to explain why large numbers of 'high status' individuals do not

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[126] See Verba, S. and Nie, N. *Participation in America,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972.

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participate. Furthermore, whilst liberal democracies such as the United States and the United Kingdom have enjoyed unprecedented increases in wealth and prosperity and have seen large increases in the provision of higher education the evidence is that there has been no great increase in participation. In fact the opposite is the case: if anything participation has fallen. Finally, whilst the model may explain the resources that individuals may possess which make them more susceptible to participation, it does not explain the incentives why an individual may get involved.[127]

## 2.  **Rational Choice Theory.**

Another model of participation is one based upon Rational Choice Theory. Rational choice theory has been an important tool of political scientists since the 1950s and has been particularly important in the field of voting behaviour. Individuals are claimed to vote for the party which in their opinion will rule the country and deliver policies which will be of most benefit to them. This work was pioneered by political scientist, Anthony Downs.

Rational choice theory is derived, at least in part, from the work of economists, using similar methods as those used in standard micro economics, so called 'utility theory' or 'cost-benefit analysis'. Actors in the sphere of politics, as in other areas, will attempt to maximise the benefits to them from any action at the minimum cost. Whilst rational choice theory has become particularly popular in the field of political science since the war, the ideas that underpin the theory can be said to date back to the ideas of nineteenth century liberalism and Jeremy Bentham's 'utilitarianism' as well as

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[127] Whiteley, P. and Seyd, P. *High Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 2002. Pgs 25-27.

back to the work of political economist Adam Smith and authors such as Locke and Hobbes.

Under rational choice theory there is the belief than in political activities, as in other areas of life, choices are made following a rational assessment of the costs and benefits of any one action for the individual. Rational choice theorists do recognise that human beings are complex creatures, but at the heart of rational choice theory lies the assumption that all individuals are self-interested. The very concept of 'self interest' itself is open to interpretation because there is some debate whether self interest includes the less tangible and more nebulous benefits such as the warm feeling derived from giving to charity or fighting for ones country. These could be called 'moral motivations'; motivations derived from a feeling of what is right or wrong rather than from a cold assessment of what an individual will gain from an action. Some believe that these should be excluded from rational choice theory.[128]

Rational choice theory is therefore derived from the interests of individuals and that individual choices and goals are paramount motivations in determining actions. Rational choice theorists also assume that individuals have the rational capacity, time and emotional detachment to make the best decisions, even if the choice to be made is a potentially extremely complex one. Human beings may not be in full possession of all the facts, may be forced to make decisions rashly or their rational judgement may be clouded by all too human fallibility's such as envy, revenge or greed.[129]

*Critique.*

[128] Ibid, Pgs 27-32.
[129] See Hugh Ward's chapter on Rational Choice Theory in Marsh, D (Ed), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1995. Pg 76-93.

What we might call the 'mainstream' variant of rational choice theory as described above has come under attack from a number of different academic quarters and for a variety of reasons. Firstly, some, such as Herbert Simon, question whether individuals can be truly rational. Simon argues that with limited information, limited time and limited intellectual capacity to process the available facts it is hard to argue that individuals act 'rationally' in all circumstances. They simply are not in possession of all the facts and they cannot be totally sure about the costs and benefits of any action. In this circumstance, it is possible to argue that individuals are satisfiers rather than maximisers; sometimes an individual will carry out an action because under limited knowledge they believe it will bring them the greatest benefit for the least cost despite the fact there may be an action, which they are unaware of, which may yield greater utility. It is a dilemma. Assuming limited knowledge and uncertainty an individual may choose an action not necessarily because it is the best for him/her but because s/he is unwilling to risk waiting for a better opportunity which may, or may not come; s/he compromises.

There is also evidence that individuals overestimate their contribution to collective goods. Jordan showed that over 70% of their samples of members of Friends of the Earth and Amnesty thought that their involvement had an influence on the supply of the collective good, the policy goals and objectives of Friends of the Earth or Amnesty, whereas logic dictates that the involvement (or not) of one ordinary activist could not possibly have an effect on the provision of the collective good. Therefore,

individuals base their involvement on a false premise, that their individual involvement actually makes a difference. [130]

A second angle of attack has come from sociologists who question rational choice theories' emphasis on the individual as the key actor and on individual wants as the motivation behind individual decisions. Sociologists claim that individuals and their motivations are a product of the position within the social structure. Take the example of voting behaviour; a mainstream rational choice theorist might argue that an individual bases his or her decision about how to vote on a rational calculation of the costs and benefits of a particular political party. However, sociologists would argue that factors such as race, gender, class, religion, geographical location or sexuality could all effect the way an individual might vote. So, for example in the era of class alignment, an individual who could be classed as working class would be more likely to vote Labour. Even here rational choice theorists could argue that the reason why a working class individual might vote Labour or a middle class individual might vote Conservative is that they perceive that the interests of their class (or other social grouping), and thus of themselves, would be best served by voting for that party. There is evidence that voting behaviour is influenced by an individual's place within the social structure though it is only one factor; individuals could still consider individual costs and benefits. David Sanders had carried out research, for example, on the connection between perceptions of economic competence and support for the main political parties. Up until 1992, the voters indicated that they trust the Conservative Party rather than the Labour Party to run the economy; as Sanders has pointed out this situation was reversed after 'Black Wednesday' in September 1992

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[130] Ibid, pg 81.

and Labour's support soared. The probability is that something like voting behaviour is a complex combination of a number of factors.[131]

Sociologists would also argue that individual behaviour is influenced by social 'norms' or habitual patterns of behaviour which are approved, tolerated or even encouraged by society. We might not take part in certain behaviour, although rationally it might bring an individual great benefit at little cost, because it is frowned upon by society. However, some rational choice theorists try to bring the idea of social norms into their analysis and argue that even norms generate both costs and benefits which the individual weighs up before embarking on a certain activity. For example, why does an individual vote when logic dictates that one single vote is extremely unlikely to make any difference to the eventual outcome of an election. We could argue that this is because society encourages us to vote. An individual therefore gains from the process by gaining the approval of his or her peers and gains from the feeling that they have done their civic duty. There is still a balance of costs and benefits involved; voting is easy in a country like Britain and so we decided that the benefits outweigh the costs. We are more likely to conform to social norms if the process of conformity is of low cost.[132]

Thirdly, mainstream rational choice theory comes under attack from psychologists who argue that an individual's behaviour is not always driven by self-interest. Human beings are complex creatures who act because of a huge number of motives some of which are incompatible with self-interest and some of which the individual may

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[131] Ibid, pg 82-83.
[132] Ibid, pg 84-85.

pursue unconsciously. So, for example, individuals may act because of motive such as envy, greed, revenge, love, lust; all of which may act against their self-interest.

Psychologists are also concerned that mainstream rational choice theorists seem to ignore individuals being moved by feelings of altruism when considering actions. Altruism is of course the desire to put the interests of others before your own and so in many ways simply contradicts self-interest. It can be argued that altruism is particularly important in the sphere of politics. For example, a high wage earner may logically not vote for a political party which promises to tax the rich as they will materially lose out. However, a high wage earner may consider that it is right for individuals, such as himself/herself, to pay more in taxation to benefit those less well off in society. This could be said to be a simple case of altruism. Rational choice theorists are aware of the concept of altruism and argue that, therefore, rational choice theory should be restricted to the analysis of areas where self interest is the most important motive rather than philanthropic organisations such as charities or causal groups where motives of altruism can be important.

In addition, rational choice theorists argue that it is possible to include altruism by regarding it as prone to the same considerations of cost and benefits as any other action. So, although altruism is about putting another's interests before our own we still get something out of it; the 'warm' feeling of having contributed to the wider or greater good by campaigning for a political party or voting, or the satisfaction from giving to charity for example. It is possible that individuals weigh such potential benefits against possible costs in regard to altruism as they do with other benefits. Slightly cynically, some also argue that altruism could be motivated by a belief that

by giving now, or putting someone else first now, in the future, at some point, that person might reciprocate the action.

In general, psychologists are sceptical about the ability of individuals to have the necessary detachment to make truly rational decisions. Psychologists believe that human beings, being complex creature, have what might be called 'multiple selves', different perceptions of what individuals actually want and the extent to which they are willing to suffer uncertainty to achieve them, which conflict and prevent the individual from being truly rational.[133]

Rational choice theory has also come under sustained attack by political scientists who believe that it not only makes assumptions which are implausible but that it also fails in predictive terms. In the latter case whilst rational choice theorists would see voting or involvement in politics in narrowly self-interest terms the evidence seems to indicate that this simply isn't the case. Individuals get involved in politics for many other reasons including the opposite of self-interest: altruism. These criticisms do not mean that rational choice theory is of no use as a tool for political scientists, it just means that these criticisms must be taken on board and adjustments and changes made to the mainstream model of rational choice theory to take account of them. As we shall see below this is precisely what Seyd and Whiteley have done in their research into the membership of the main political parties.[134]

3. **The Social Psychological Model.**

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[133] Ibid, pg 87-90
[134] Ibid, pg 90-93.

The next model of participation is known as the Social Psychological Model and concentrates on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour with the latter being influenced by the former. Fishbein (1977) argued that behaviour, such as joining a political party, could be determined by two broad classes of factors: expected benefits and social norms. So, on the one hand an individuals behaviour is influenced by a personal calculation of benefits, whilst on the other society provides a set of standards and expectations which can push a persons behaviour in a certain way. Social norms can also be divided into private norms, or those beliefs and values private to an individual which motivates them to behave in a certain way (such a becoming involved in a protest movement because of a deeply held feeling of injustice), and public norms, the approval or disapproval of an individuals peers towards a certain action.[135]

*Critique.*

A similar criticism can be made of the Social Psychological Model as can be made of the Rational Choice Model; both models, although they make useful insights into participation, only provide half an explanation of participation. On its own the Social Psychological model fails to address the rationality of decision making. Those who argue in favour of rational choice theory as an explanation of party participation, for example, would question the assumption implicit in the model that individuals are driven equally by actions which are percieved to benefit the wider society and they are by action which benefit the individual. Furthermore, the social-psychology model ignores the objective fact that an individual can never on their own hope to make a

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[135] See, for example, Azjen, I. and Fishbein, M. "Attitude-Behaviour Relations: A Theoretical Analysis and Review of Empirical Research", *Psychological Bulletin 84,* 1977 and Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P (2002), op cit, pgs 32-35

difference to electoral outcomes by voting. The model assumes that people get involved in political action, such as voting or membership of a political party, because they have a sense of efficacy; they feel that they can make a difference. Rational choice theorists would argue that this subjective belief is mistaken in that objectively this simply cannot be true.[136]

## 4. **The Mobilisation Model.**

Linked to the Civic Voluntarism Model is the Mobilisation Model of participation which argues that individuals participate because of the political opportunities they are given and because of stimuli from other people which persuades them to get involved. For some individuals the opportunities and stimulus are greater than others and this explains differences in levels of participation between different people. As in the Civic Voluntarism Model those with a higher socio-economic status are more likely to be involved because it is in their communities that political institutions are likely to be found. Evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom found that participation in elections could be increased by the simple electoral stimulus from political parties of canvassing and campaigning.[137]

Most of the research to support the mobilisation model comes from work carried out which examines the relationship between canvassing and electoral turnout. In the United States several studies such as Cutright and Rossi (1958) and Cutright (1963,

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[136] For more discussion on the shortcomings of the Social Psychological Model see Seyd, P and Whiteley, P. (2002), op cit, pgs 35-37.

[137] See Cutright, P. 'Measuring the Impact of Local Party Activity on the General Election Vote', *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 27, 372-85, 1963. and Bochel, J. and Denver, D. 'The impact of the campaign on the results of local government elections', *British Journal of Political Science*, 2, 239-260, 1972.

1974) have suggested that canvassing the voters (in other words the act of a canvasser for a political party going and specifically asking a voter to go out and vote) had a significant effect on turnout. It has been suggested that up to 5% of vote in a presidential election may be due to local party action. This figure may reach 10% of the vote if both parties differ markedly in membership and activity at the local level.[138] A more recent piece of American research by Gerber (2000) confirms these findings that various forms of mobilisation, in this case canvassing, telephone calls and direct mail, have a distinct effect on turnout in elections.[139]

Furthermore, research from Britain supports these findings. Studies by Pattie, Johnson and Fieldhouse (1995), Pattie and Johnson (1998, 2001), Bochel and Denver (1971, 1972) which examine such factors as canvassing and the amount of money spent on campaigning by political parties show that attempts at mobilisation by political parties have a clearly positive effect on participation, in this particular case, when it comes to voting.[140] Seyd and Whiteley (1992) support both the mobilisation model and underline the importance of political parties. Their research clearly shows that a thriving party was an electoral asset to the Labour Party and that a significant number of Labour seats (in this case at the 1987 General Election) would not have been won

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[138] See Cutright, P. and Rossi, P. 'Grassroots Politicians and the Vote', *American Sociological Review,* 28, 1958, pg 171-179, Cutright, P. 'Measuring the Impact of the Local Party Activities on the General Election Vote', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 27, 1963, pg 372-386., Cutright, P., 'Activities of Precinct Committeemen in Partisan and Non-Partisan Communities', *Western Political Quarterly*, 17, 1974, pg 93-108.

[139] See Gerber, A., 'The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment', *American Political Science Review*, September 2000.

[140] See Pattie, C.J., Johnson, R.J. and Fieldhouse, E.A. 'Winning the local vote: the effectiveness of constituency campaign spending in Great Britain' , *American Political Science Review,* 89, 1995., Pattie, C.J. and Johnson, R.J., Voter turnout at the British General Election of 1992: rational choice, social standing or political efficacy?', *European Journal of Political Research*, 33, 1998., Pattie, C.J. and Johnson, R.J., 'A low turnout landslide: abstention in the British General Election of 1997', *Political Studies*, 49, 2001, Bochel, J. and Denver, D., 'Canvassing, turnout and party support: an experiment', *British Journal of Political Science*, 1, 1971, Bochel, J. and Denver, D., 'The impact of the campaign on the results of local government elections', *British Journal of Political Science,* 2, 1972.

were it not for active local campaigners. Furthermore, they argue that a party without an active grass-roots membership "would be eliminated as a major electoral force without that membership".[141]

In one of the most recent pieces of research, carried out as part of the Citizen Audit, Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2002) examined the mobilisation model of participation and they concluded:

> It is indeed mobilisation that emerges… as the most consistant 'civic voluntarism' influence on civic engagement. The total number of activities engage in and involvement in each of the three types of civic activism rises as mobilisation pressures are increased. Being asked at all is an incentive to activism, and being asked by a close friend or family member is a particular goad to action, whether we are looking at the 'consumer', 'contact' or 'protest' forms of civic engagement.[142]

The mobilisation model clearly makes a link bewteen an outside stimulus (such as being canvassed) and political activism. In the same way as the research clearly points to a connection between the two (stimulus and voting) so could it be claimed that people could be induced to join political parties by being positively recruited by those parties. I would argue that one possible reason why young people do or do not join political parties could be the efforts made to do so by the major political parties. It might only be one factor amongst others, but the existence of an active and well supported youth organisation seeking to recruit young members could be claimed to have a positive impact on recruitment. Conversely, a poorly supported and inactive youth organisation (or, of course, no youth organisation at all) would have the oppositve effect, failing to recruit young members.

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[141] Seyd and Whiteley (1992), op cit, pg 175. For more details on this aspect of their research see Seyd and Whiteley (1992), Chapter 8: Membership, Activism and the Labour Vote, pp174-200.
[142] Pattie, C., Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (2002), op cit, Pg 18.

*Critique.*

The mobilisation model, however, is not without its critics. For example, rational choice accounts of participation would argue that individuals would have already made a cost-benefit calculation of participation and would have already decided on whether to participate or not. It seems unlikely that the efforts of canvassers or political party activists, who by their nature would be bearing bias information and would therefore be rationally taken with caution, would induce those non-participants to participate. It is possible, however, that they might bring some new information which could be important to the cost-benefit calculation. For example, if it was perceived that party membership was expensive or time consuming, a recruiting member of a political party could inform the rational actor that this might not be necessarily the case, thus changing the cost-benefit calculation.[143]

Those who support the social psychological account might also be dubious about the mobilisation model as whilst they see the impact of social norms and values as being important on influencing behaviour these would be triggered by close friends and family rather than a stranger approaching you in the street or on the doorsep. I, however, feel that the mobilisation model makes a potentially important contribution to the research on particiaption, and I suggest that the ability of political parties to recruit members, in my case young members, can be effected by the effectiveness of those parties, and in my case the effectiveness of their youth organisations, as vehicles of mobilisation.

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[143] Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P (2002), op cit, pgs 39-40.

## 5.  <u>Seyd and Whiteley.</u>

It is the recognition that the models which I have outlined above have their strengths, but also their shortcomings, which lead to the development of a model which builds on their ideas and yet provides a more comprehensive explanation of participation. In their volumes *Labour's Grass Roots: The Politics of Party Membership* and the Conservative Party in *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* Seyd and Whiteley (1992, 1994) set out to create a model of participation which met the criticisms of the models detailed above. Seyd and Whiteley have thus constructed a theory of political participation which they term a theory of 'general incentives'. This model is derived from both rational choice (in particular, Mancur Olson and his influential 1965 book *The Logic of Collective Action)* and social psychological models of participation. [144]

Seyd and Whiteley suggest that a common sense answer to the question as to why individuals might join a political party could be the response 'because they want to help to promote the goals of the party- to help it get elected so that it can implement the policies which they favour'.[145] However, Olson argued that this would be wrong. The thrust of his argument was that if individuals are rational actors, they would not join a political party because Olson claims that joining a political party would not promote the goals of their chosen political party. Indeed, Olson makes the point that

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[144] For full details of Seyd and Whiteley's methodology and findings see Seyd, P. and  Whiteley, P. *Labour's Grass Roots: The Membership of Party Membership,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992 and Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994.
[145] Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (*Labour's Grass Roots)*, Pg 562.

the question should be not why people do not join political parties but why in fact they do.[146]

Olson's model is based on Rational-Choice Theory and makes a great deal of the distinction between 'collective' or 'public' goods and 'private' goods. 'Public' goods involve the 'jointness' of supply and the impossibility of exclusion. This means that everyone has access to a public good once it is provided, even if they have not contributed to its supply. The textbook example of a 'public' good is defence. It is impractical for national defence to be provided on an individual basis and so the state levies taxation in order to be able to provide defence at a national level. So, because defence is a public good, firstly, one person's consumption does not reduce the consumption of anybody else and, secondly, once it is provided it is impossible to deny it to any person even though they have not contributed to its supply. Due to these characteristics, and assuming individuals are self-serving individuals who will try to get out of paying if they can, the state has apparatus to ensure that individuals are coerced into paying their share. This is the so-called 'free-rider' problem.[147]

Olson argued that most of what political parties provide can be classed as public goods, especially the national policies they are seeking to enact. This means that, if individuals favour the policies of a particular party, they will get the benefit from those policies whether or not they helped get that party elected; they cannot be excluded. This is one disincentive to joining a political party. A further disincentive is provided by the fact that, even if an individual were to join a political party and become actively involved, the actual contribution one person could make to a national

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[146] Ibid, pg 56.
[147] Ibid, pg 57.

result, that is to achieving the collective good is extremely small and will, in all probability, make no difference at all. Olson points to these disincentives as reasons why a rational actor would not join a political party. Why should someone join a political party and then give up their spare time in the thankless work of canvassing and leafleting, if they could equally benefit from the victory of their chosen political party by staying at home, secure in the thought that their contribution would have made no difference either way.[148]

Nonetheless, individuals seem to defy this logic and join political parties and then become active. Olson argues that this is because political parties offer more than just public goods, they also offer what Olson terms 'selective incentives', which are in effect private goods in that if you do not participate you do not receive them An example could be the company or camaraderie an individual receives as a member of a political party and which an individual would not receive if s/he merely stayed at home. In this way, Olson explains the paradox of why rational actors join political parties; it is not to gain from the party's national policies, its public goods, but to benefit from the selective incentives, albeit limited, which membership of a party provides.[149]

Whilst Seyd and Whiteley note that there is a temptation to dismiss the Olson theory as being unrealistic, as individuals do not act in the abstract rational sense as described by economists, they do say that his theory has some merit and set out to use it as the basis of their own model; the 'general-incentives theory'. Despite believing that Olson's theory does have its shortcomings, Seyd and Whiteley accept the central

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[148] Ibid, pg 58.
[149] See Olson, M. *The Logic of Collective Action*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1974.

premise that individuals respond to incentives in their political activities, as they do in any other aspect of their lives. Therefore, individual perceptions of costs and benefits are important in understanding political actions.[150]

Seyd and Whiteley set out to divide incentives which might induce individuals to join a political party into a number of categories. Firstly, there are what can be termed 'selective incentives'. In politics selective incentives can be divided into two types: process and outcome incentives. Process incentives refer to motives for political involvement which are not linked with outcome, but with the process of participation itself. Joining a political party and becoming active can be an enjoyable experience with the opportunity to meet like-minded people. This incentive is not diminished whether the party wins or loses or is successful or unsuccessful in its efforts; it is the process of taking part which provides the rewards. Seyd and Whiteley do make the added point that by their very nature process incentives are more likely to be enjoyed by those who not only join a political party but become active in that party.[151]

Selective outcome incentives refer to motives concerned with achieving certain goals in the political process but which affect the individual only, rather than benefiting the group. An example could be if an individual had the ambition of becoming a politician, whether it be as a local councillor or as a Member of Parliament, and so, in order to achieve this the individual will need to join a political party to gain its support. Once again Seyd and Whiteley point out that this incentive would have to be accompanied by the desire to be an active party member.

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[150] Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (1992), op cit, pg 59.
[151] Ibid, pg 60.

Both these incentive are examples of why an individual might want to join a political party; because they as individuals gain something from it, either from the process itself or the outcome. This could be in line with Olson theory of rational choice with individuals weighing up costs and benefits before committing themselves. However, Seyd and Whiteley say that Olson's theory only deals with individuals, it does not account for individuals thinking in solidaristic terms, i.e. Olson tends to think that individuals are concerned with 'what is good for me' whereas Seyd and Whiteley argue that, when it comes to political participation, individuals can make decisions based on 'what is good for us'. This idea is an important contribution to rational choice theory and helps to modify the model in light of the criticism that rational choice theory is based on the calculated self-interest of the individual. Seyd and Whiteley introduce the idea that, sometimes, when making decisions about their actions individuals think collectively.[152]

Therefore, in their model Seyd and Whiteley take account of the fact that individual might join a political party not because membership benefits themselves individually but because collectively, with other members of their party, they can make a difference. Seyd and Whiteley still accept the Olson premise that a calculation is made of costs and benefits but believe that it is focused at the level of the party rather than at the individual. If they estimate that the party can make a difference to them and people like them, they will join. If not, they will not.[153]

Seyd and Whiteley refer to 'collective incentives' which could be the collective goals of the particular party; for example for the Labour Party a collective incentive could

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[152] Ibid, pg 61.
[153] Ibid, pg 62.

be for the Labour Party to achieve its collective goal of the reduction of poverty. For the Conservative Party the collective goal could be to 'roll back the state' or to fight the influence of the trade unions.[154]

These collective incentives for joining the party can be of two kinds according to the model of general incentives; positive and negative incentives. Seyd and Whiteley argue that individuals will participate in political action not only because they want to help achieve collective goals but also because they might want to change the policy goals of the incumbent government. So, an individual might have joined the Labour Party because they believe that their membership can help the Party achieve a collective policy goal but they might also have joined before the 1997 General Election to fight a Conservative policy such as student loans, the Criminal Justice Act or the 'Poll Tax'. A member of the Conservative Party might join to 'roll back the state' but might also have joined because that individual might want to fight the Labour Governments' move towards a single European currency.

Another consideration which Seyd and Whiteley put forward as a possible incentive for joining a political party is that of altruism. Potential members may realise that their individual contributions to the collective goals of the party might be negligible, or even that the party itself might not make much difference, but they still join out of a sense of loyalty or affection for the party. They might ask themselves the question 'what if nobody got involved?' and, realising the answer would be that nothing would get done, they see it almost as a duty to become a member, retain their membership or become active. This addition by Seyd and Whiteley to Olson's theory of rational

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[154] Ibid, pg 63.

choice is very important because this reason for joining is based on an emotional attachment to the party, rather than a cold, calculating and rational assessment of costs and benefits. Some members of political parties might indeed find it hard to quantify why they have joined the Labour Party or the Conservative Party other than because they feel it is 'the right thing to do.' As Seyd and Whiteley note, altruistic concerns are usually expressed in lofty and emotive terms; so a member of the Labour Party could be 'fighting for socialism', whereas a member of the Conservative Party could be 'fighting for Britain's interests.'[155]

Seyd and Whiteley admit that it is possible to argue that even altruism could be brought within a cost-benefit theory of rational choice with the familiar weighing up of costs and benefits. However, they argue that their idea of altruism influencing an individual's decision to join a political party lies outside traditional cost-benefit analysis. Even if an individual realises that his or her idealistic goals can not be achieved, s/he will not be deterred from seeking them. A similar sentiment is found in religion where proof of God is not required for individuals to continue to work for the church. Patriotism is a similar feeling; it is a sentiment, a loyal emotional attachment which can induce individuals to participate in activities which logically, or rationally, they might not be expected to carry out.[156]

Once again this is an important contribution to rational choice theory by Seyd and Whiteley particularly in the light of some of the criticism offered by psychologists who argued that, rather than acting strictly in terms of self interest, individuals might act because of altruism; putting the interests of others before themselves. As we have

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[155] Ibid, pgs 63-64.
[156] Ibid, pg 64.

already discussed, mainstream rational choice theorists tend to emphasise that an individual actor is motivated by what is good for him or her. Seyd and Whiteley recognise, and make allowance for, the fact that, in politics, an individual might act out of altruism or because they believe that their action is morally right rather than because it leads to material benefit for the individual. Of course, as we have seen, it is still possible to examine altruism in terms of rational choice theory as, whilst we might not gain materially from giving, we might gain the inner satisfaction from having taken part in a moral act.

Finally, Seyd and Whiteley add one other strand of their own to the traditional concept of rational choice theory but one which differs from their idea of altruistic concerns. These identify motives which are derived from social norms which might favour political participation. So, for example, an individual might join a political party or become involved in political activity because social norms bestow a certain degree of kudos or approval on those individuals who do so. Social norms are similar as a motive to altruistic ones because neither are outcome-orientated and neither rely on individual calculations of the cost and benefit of political action. The difference however is that, whilst it can be said that altruistic motives fulfil some 'inner' desire to participate, some deep emotional feeling or belief in the ideological goals of the party, social norm motives are more likely to be triggered by a desire to conform to certain norms and thus win the approval of others.

So, for example, if an individual is raised in a family with a long tradition of activity within the Conservative Party or the Labour Party, then these values are likely to be passed down from generation to generation. Research seems to indicate that, at least

initially, young people's voting behaviour can be influenced by their parent's political leaning and so why not with party membership?[157]

Here again, Seyd and Whiteley are meeting some of the criticism levelled at mainstream rational choice theory. Sociologists, who are often concerned with the way in which individuals interact with one another within society, argue that mainstream rational choice theorists make the mistake of viewing the individual as somehow existing in a vacuum free from the influence of outside social groupings or social norms. Rational choice theory is said to ignore the social pressures and forces which actually help to shape preferences in the first place. Seyd and Whiteley make some attempt to meet this criticism by allowing for social norms, such as family pressure or the approval of peers and friends, to explain why an individual might join a political party.

All in all I believe that Seyd and Whiteley have constructed a model for membership of a political party which, although it is derived from rational choice theory, goes beyond the mainstream model and sets out to modify it in the light of the criticism from sociologists and psychologists which has been aimed at rational choice. Of particular importance is the allowance for motives of altruism and the influence of social norms and social groupings on determining individual behaviour and motives. I therefore believe that Seyd and Whiteley's model could be used by myself in my research to investigate why young people join political parties. Nonetheless, as I will explain later on, there are some variables which we might want to add (or existing variables we might want to emphasise) into their model of selective incentives more

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[157] Ibid, pgs 64-65.

accurately to reflect some of the motives which could particularly influence young people in their decision to join a political party.

Seyd and Whiteley use their model of general-incentive theory in their research into why an individual might join the Conservative and Labour Party. In both studies the respondent to a questionnaire was asked to explain in detail what was their most important motive for joining the Labour Party or the Conservative Party. The responses were then divided amongst the categories of motives which Seyd and Whiteley had drawn up for their general incentive theory. For the Labour Party they set out the various incentives thus;[158]

**A.** *Altruistic concerns.*

- To create a more equal or compassionate society.

- A belief in Socialism or left-wing politics.

- A desire for social justice.

- To help the working class.

- To help the Labour Party financially.

- To get the Labour Party into power.

**B. Collective positive incentives.**

- Unemployment.

- The National Heath Service.

- Social policy or social services.

- Unilateral nuclear disarmament.

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[158] Ibid, pg 74.

- Education.

- Public ownership or nationalisation.

- The redistribution of wealth.

- Economic policy.

- To help minorities and women.

- A concern with local issues.


### C. Collective negative incentives.

- To get rid of Thatcher (sic) and the Conservatives.

- To oppose the Social Democrats/Liberals.

- To oppose extremists in the Labour Party.


### D. Selective outcome incentives.

- As a job requirement (e.g. MP's assistant).

- To be selected as a local candidate.


### E. Selective process incentives.

- To work with like-minded people.

- To be politically active.

- As a continuation of trade-union work.

- As a result of involvement in elections.

- As a result of specific political events (e.g. The miners strike).


### F. Social norms.

- The influence of parents.

- The influence of a spouse or children.

- The influence of friends and work mates.

One of the ways in which Seyd and Whiteley tested the validity of their general incentive theory is by asking members of the Labour and Conservative Party why they joined in the first place, susequently examined the answers to see if they could be classified according to the various categories of the theory (the example of the Labour Party used by Seyd and Whiteley is shown above). Seyd and Whiteley included in both their surveys of party members the open ended question 'What was your MOST important reason for joining the Conservative/Labour Party?' They regarded this as a better measure of motives for joining the Labour of Conservative Party since it does not restrict responses to predefined categories; respondents could write in anything they wanted. For this reason, Seyd and Whiteley considered this as providing important information about the reasons for joining.

In the cases of both the Conservative and Labour Parties the responses given fell easily into the categories of incentive theory. Only 5.3% of the responses from Conservative members and a mere 1.4% of Labour members were counted as unclassified in that they did not fall into any of the categories.

The first set of incentives were 'Altruistic concerns' and 42.3% of Labour Party members and 29.7% of Conservative Party members offered this as their most important reason for voting. A point to make here is that in their study of the Conservative Party 'Altruistic motives' and 'Expressive attachments' are listed as separate categories whilst in the study of the Labour Party members these are drawn

together under Altruistic concerns. For purposes of comparison I have drawn the two Conservative categories together. Seyd and Whiteley quote a Labour member from this category as giving the typical response of "I wanted to show my commitment to Socialism" (pg 75), whilst a Conservative counterpart said "If we do not contribute towards society- we have no right to criticise others who devote themselves to the service of the community" (pg 95).

In the case of 'Collective positive incentives', the policy goals of the Labour or Conservative Party, 7.5% of Labour members and 20.2% of Conservative members said that these were their main incentives behind their decision to join their party. So, for example, a Labour member wrote "I joined because of my views on nuclear disarmament" (pg 75), whilst a Conservative member wrote "They try to control immigration- the country cannot cope with all those immigrants." (pg 97)

With 'Collective negative incentives', an aversion to one of the other parties for example, 17.4% of Labour members and 15.4% of Conservative members wrote than this was their main incentive. A typical Labour members response was: "I could not sit at home any longer with the cruelty of the Thatcher Dictatorship; I felt I had to do something." (pg 75) Feelings of extreme aversion were also marked in a typical Conservative member's response; he was motivated to join by "loathing and disgust at the Socialists who are the party of envy and spite." (pg 97)

It was particularly noteworthy that in both studies very few members claimed that 'selective outcome incentives', joining in order to build a political career for example, were the main motive for joining either party; only 0.3% for the Labour members and

1.4% for the Conservatives. Seyd and Whiteley suggest that this could be because those who join purely with career in mind could be viewed with suspicion as being cynical, especially within the Labour Party where 'career' politicians are not viewed very highly. Nonetheless, Seyd and Whiteley quote a Conservative member who is unabashed; he joined the party "to become a school governor". (pg 97)

As for selective process incentives, such as the opportunity to meet like-minded people for social reasons, 23.9% of Labour members and 14.4% of Conservative members wrote that this was the most important reason for joining their respective parties. A Labour member emphasised "Originally it was to gain membership of the Labour club, and to mix with people who shared my views" (pg 75) A Conservative member had a similar motive for joining the party: "I joined in order to make contact with fellow Conservatives locally." (pg 98)

Finally, there were so-called 'Social norms', reasons for membership which stem from cultural reasons or membership of a social grouping such as a family, a class or a gender. In this case 7.2% of Labour members and 13.6% of Conservative members stated that this was their primary reason for joining their respective party. A Labour member gave a representative answer by stating that he joined because: "My family always voted Labour, so you could say that I was brought up Labour." (pg 75) A Conservative member was "talked into it by a friend who was already a Conservative member." (pg 98)

In an analysis of the results from both studies into Conservative and Labour Party members there are both difference and similarities in the order in which the various

categories have been ranked. Amongst both Conservative and Labour members, it is the altruistic concerns which are the most important reason for joining the respective party, underlining the importance of Seyd and Whiteley's decision to add this concept to mainstream rational choice theory. For Labour members the second largest category was the selective process incentives category, which describes motives for participation in terms of enjoying the political process for its own sake. Thirdly, came the negative collective incentives and, fourthly, the positive collective incentives. As Seyd and Whiteley predicted, collective incentive categories were less important combined constituting only 25% of the motives cited in the table.

For the Conservative members, after altruistic and expressive motives, came collective positive incentives and collective negative incentives. It is an interesting fact that 17.4% of the Labour members and 15.4% of Conservative members joined a political party not for any positive reason but because they wanted to fight the 'opposition'; dislike is clearly a powerful emotion and powerful motivation. Fewer Conservative members are motivated by selective process incentives, but Seyd and Whiteley argue that this is perhaps not surprising, bearing in mind that selective process incentives are only available to those who not only join but become active; fewer Conservative members are active than Labour members and so those who merely pay their membership fees once a year would not get the benefit from the 'fun' of active involvement.

In addition, Labour, and particularly Conservative members, also report policy considerations or collective incentives as important reasons for joining. This supports Seyd and Whiteley's prediction that many members rather than thinking in the narrow

individualistic way assumed by mainstream rational choice theorists think collectively in terms of the effectiveness of the Conservative or Labour Party as a whole when making the decision to join. In an individualistic world in which potential members only considered their own impact on policy goals there would be few who would claim to join because of collective incentives. The paradox of participation is thus overcome because members think in terms of the importance of the party, not just in terms of their own individual contribution to outcomes.

A summary of Seyd and Whiteley's findings are provided in tables 4.1 and 4.2 below:

**Table 4.1: The Most Important Reason for Joining the Labour Party (Membership Survey) (percentages: N=4700).[159]**

| A. Altruistic concerns | 42.3 |
|---|---|
| B. Collective positive incentives | 7.5 |
| C. Collective negative incentives | 17.4 |
| D. Selective outcome incentives | 0.3 |
| E. Selective process incentives | 23.9 |
| F. Social norms | 7.2 |
| Unclassified | 1.4 |

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[159] From Seyd, P. and Whitley, P. (*Labour's Grass Roots),* Pg 74.

**Table 4.2: The Most Important Reason for Joining the Conservative Party (Membership Survey) (percentages: N=2467).[160]**

| | |
|---|---|
| A.  Altruistic motives | 7.7 |
| B.  Collective positive incentives | 20.2 |
| C.  Collective negative incentives | 15.4 |
| D.  Expressive attachments[161] | 22.0 |
| E.  Selective-outcome incentives | 1.4 |
| F.  Selective-process incentives | 14.4 |
| G.  Social norms | 13.6 |
| Unclassified | 5.3 |

As Seyd and Whiteley themselves point out, one minor problem with their methodology is that they only asked the respondents to provide their most important reason for joining their respective party; whilst most respondents put altruistic reasons for joining either the Labour or Conservative Party first, no doubt they would have also cited policy goals as additional motives for becoming members if they had been able. Nonetheless, the data support the proposition that most people's first priority when they consider joining the party are altruistic concerns or selective incentives and not the achievement of specific policy goals.

*Critique.*

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[160] From Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (*True Blues)*, Pg 96.
[161] In Seyd and Whiteley's survey of Conservative Party members their categorization was slightly different to one used in their survey of Labour Party members. In the Labour survey this category of expressive attachment to the party was included as part of altruistic motives whilst in the Conservative survey it was included as a separate category.

Seyd and Whiteley's work on the membership of the Labour and Conservative Party has not been without criticism from other academics. Ivor Crewe (1996) is critical of the general incentives theory stating:

> A brave but ultimately unsatisfactory attempt is made to explain membership in terms of a 'general incentive theory'. But here the authors stretch concepts and measurements to the breaking point. 'Incentives' include non-instrumental motives such as altruism and party identification and an expectation of collective as well as individual benefits. The 'selective-outcome incentive' is measured by self-appraisal as a potential MP or local councilor, which surely says more about self-esteem than anticipated reward.[162]

Hands (1992) is also critical of the general incentives model and argues that the classifications (collective and selective incentives, social factors and altruism) are rather arbitrary. [163]

However, I would argue that these are minor criticisms. Whilst I accept that Seyd and Whiteley's methodology is an acceptable starting point for my study, it is important to consider whether there are any other variables which we might want to add or consider in examining specifically why young people (aged 25 and under for my purposes) would want to join a political party or do they fit into the categories provided by the existing methodology. I am looking at participation amongst a particular group, the young, whilst Seyd and Whiteley were attempting to explain participation in general. It is always important to bear in mind there could be age or life-cycle specific explanations for behaviour. So, for example, would young people's most important motive for joining a political party also be altruistic or expressive motives, a deeply held desire to fight for Socialism or Conservatism like their older peers, or will their motivation be something else.

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[162] Review by Crewe in *American Political Science Review, 1,* 1996.
[163] Review by Gordon Hands in *EPOP Newsletter*, 7, 1992.

I feel that there are four areas in which the Seyd and Whiteley model could be modified in order to provide a more reliable and comprehensive explanation of participation and non-participation in political parties amongst young people. Firstly, the model only considers incentives to membership, it does not consider disincentives to membership. The model is only concerned with participation and not with non-participation. I am trying to develop an explanation for participation <u>and</u> non-participation and so any improved model would have to look at incentives and disincentives. I would argue that a more systematic examination of disincentives is needed to provide a more rounded model of membership and non-membership.

Secondly, Seyd and Whiteley only look at one incentive. They ask the respondents to their questionnaire for the main reason for participation. I feel that this can only provide a partial and slightly two-dimensional model of participation as individuals seldom engage in an action such as participatio having considered only one factor. Rational actors consider a host of conflicting cost and benefits before they make their decision. I believe that we need to see rational actors as considering a 'package' of different incentives and disincentives. Therefore, respondents need to be asked to state as many incentives or disincentives as possible rather than just one.

Thirdly, I am concerned with a particular section of society, the young. Seyd and Whiteley were concerned with the population in general and so their model is very appropriately called, the general incentives theory. I would argue that young people are a very particular group in society with a very particular set of circumstances and issues which could have a bearing on participation and non-participation. If I am

trying to model youth participation and non-participation in political parties then I need a specifically youth-centric model, one which recognises that they are different from the rest of the population. The model I shall propose will provide such a youth-centric model of participation and non-participation in political parties which places greater stress on those incentives and disincentives which may have a different impact on young people than their older peers.

Finally, it must be recognised that the mobilisation model is important to understanding youth participation and non-participation. I would argue that any new model based on Seyd and Whiteley is complimented by a recognition that whilst young people respond to incentives and disincentives when deciding on whether to participate or not, the political parties and their youth organisations also have a vital role in actively setting out to recruit those young people. I would propose that those youth organisations which actively set out to recruit young members, and do so in a way which is supported by the resources and good-will of their parent party, will be more successful than those which do not or whose efforts are restrained in some way.

**Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have examined the main alternative models of participation in the political system. I have found that the four general models of participation (the civic voluntarism model, the rational choice model, the social psychological model and the mobilisation model) all make a valuable contribution to explaining participation. However, each have their failings and none, on their own, provide a comprehensive explanation of participation. I then went on to consider the general incentives theory

of Seyd and Whiteley which was a response to those criticisms. Whilst I recognised that the Seyd and Whiteley model was a great advance on the previous four models and an important contribution to the research, I still felt that in my particular area it was still lacking. I intended to use Seyd and Whiteley's model as a basis on which to build a more all-embracing model of both participation <u>and</u> non-participation, one which recognises that membership or not is the result of considering a 'package' on incentives and disincentives, and one which recognises young people and a distinct group of actors. Furthermore, I recognised that the mobilisation model also has much to offer, not as a rival to Seyd and Whiteley, but as a compliment to it, seeing the efforts of parties to recruit members being an important factor in recruitment alongside the individual's calculations of costs and benefits. In the next chapter I will propose my alternative model.

# Chapter 5.

## An alternative model of participation and non-participation.

Having examined the membership figures for both the Conservative and Labour Party youth wings and the existing research on participation and non-participation it is now possible to suggest a more comprehensive model of participation and non-participation to explain why young people choose to join a political party or choose not to join.

From the analysis of the membership figures in the previous chapters, even acknowledging the problems of gaining totally reliable membership figures, it has been shown that the membership of the Conservative Party youth movements has declined significantly between 1970 and 2001. This decline has, with the exception of some periods of short term recovery, been absolute. From 50,000 Young Conservatives in 1970 to 3,000 in 2001. From 12,000 Conservative Students to 8,000 in the same period. By 2001 the membership of Conservative Future, the new youth organisation, stood at 9,000. In addition, from the figures we can see that the membership of the youth wings has also fallen relatively, as a percentage of the total Conservative Party membership, although once again there have been times during the period in which membership has shown both an absolute and relative recovery. In 1970 the youth wings of the Conservative Party made up aproximately 4% of the membership, by 2001 this figure had fallen to 2.7%.

The picture for the Labour Party youth organisations had been more mixed. The membership of the Young Socialists (later Young Labour) and Labour Students stagnated during the 1970s with the total membership of the two organisations hovering between 14,000 in 1970 and 12,000 a decade later. The membership enjoyed a comparatively successful recovery during the early and mid-1980s, with membership rising to 16,500 in 1981 and 18,000 in 1984 before falling away slightly during the late 1980s to 15,000 in 1988. The 1990s saw a dramatic change in fortunes for the Labour Party youth organisations as membership of the Young Socialists collapsed in early 1990s, just prior to its dissolution, with total membership falling to 7,250. The mid-1990s saw a dramatic recovery in membership (although one must bear in mind the problems with the accuracy of the figures highlighted in previous chapters) as the membership of the new Young Labour organisation and that of Labour Students rose to 37,000 before falling to 30,000 in 2001.

The Labour Party youth organisations have therefore enjoyed varied fortune in the period 1970-2001 but it is safe to say that overall they have proved to be more successful in recruiting young members than their counterpart in the Conservative Party. Therefore, our task here is slightly more complex than with examining the Conservative youth movements. With the Conservatives we were trying to explain a pretty consistent decline, we were looking at why young people failed to be recruited to the Conservative Party, with the Labour youth movement we are trying to explain why in certain periods the Labour youth organisations were unsuccessful in recruitment whilst in other periods they were successful. Why were young people attracted to the Labour Party in some periods and not in others?

In this chapter I will make a preliminary attempt to explain these changes and to judge whether the explanations lie within existing research and whether a study of the Conservative and Labour Party youth movements can add anything to Seyd and Whiteley's general incentive theory in explaining participation amongst young people.

## **Explaining participation and non-participation.**

It is not easy to explain the success or, as in the case of the Conservative Party, the failure of political parties to recruit and retain members. When examining the fortunes of the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations over such a long period of time, over 30 years, it is important to recognise that there are a whole series of overlapping and interconnecting factors which could affect the membership of a party over such a period. Furthermore, the influence of such factors is not static. Factors change, sometimes to the benefit of the Party and sometimes not. It is important to undertand that there are factors which affect all parties (the general decline in membership since the 1950s), factors which affect the Conservative and Labour Party in general (the unpopularity of the Party in power for example), factors which affect the involvement of young people in the political process, and finally particular factors which affect the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations themselves.

So, in explaining the fortunes of the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations we can look to four different types of explanation:

1. Those explanations which affect political parties in general.

As we have previously seen there has been a general decline in the membership of all political parties since their heyday in the early 1950s. In the past 30 years or so, although the changes could be detected before this, the nature of political participation has changed. Whilst in the three decades after the Second World War, more and more people joined conventional political organisations like trade unions and political parties, from the 1970s membership of these organisations began to fall. Since then, people have increasingly been drawn to unconventional forms of political participation (joining single-issue groups, for example), a trend which has increased in recent years:

> The late 1990s are witnessing a dramatic upsurge in single issue protest activity and unconventional forms of political participation... in the late 1980s, the bulk of survey data pointed to the 'steady state' of political participation in the UK... in the late 1990s, this is no longer the case.[164]

Evans (1997) lists five explanations for changing level of political participation. These can be summarised as follows;

a) The impact of globalisation.

Globalisation has shifted the focus of power, moving it away from Westminster. The new political structures which are emerging as a result of globalisation encourage people to participate in new ways.

b) The impact of de-industrialisation.

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[164]Evans, op cit, pg 110.

De-industrialisation has loosened the old social controls which had developed during industrialisation. As a result, there has been a shift in culture which is manifested, in part, in new forms of political participation.

c) The statist thesis.

Britain is (was?) a strong, centralised state and the growth in unconventional political participation is a response to the fact that opportunities for success using conventional channels are limited.

d) The new class thesis.

Whilst political protest used to be the preserve of the working class, changes in the class structure mean that it is now a middle class phenomenon. This explains why political activity has changed its nature.

e) The party dealignment thesis.

Political scientists have identified a weakening of loyalty bewteen individuals and political parties since the 1950s partly due to a disillusionment with the main political parties. Since people are less loyal to a single party than they used to be, they are more open to the appeal of single-issue groups. Conversely, the growth of single issue groups has encouraged party dealignment.[165]

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[165]Adapted from Evans, 1997.

There are also more mundane explanations for the decline in the membership of major political parties. In the past, political parties, as well as being vehicles of political mobilisation, were also important in terms of social interaction. Quite simply, they were important in meeting other people in a social context. Since the 1950s, due to social change and a general rise in prosperity, there are now a multitude of leisure activities to compete for an individuals time and certain groups now have longer working hours. Political parties have many more competitors than they had 40 years ago for those seeking social activities. It could be argued that this is particularly the case amongst the young. When Julian Critchley joined the Hampstead Young Conservatives at the age of 15 it was because he "had nothing better to do".[166] Would a young person today be able to say the same thing?[167]

## 2. Those explanations which affect the Conservative Party or Labour Party in particular.

An alternative explanation for the changes in the size of Conservative Party membership in the period between 1970 and 2001 could relate to the Conservative Party itself. It could be suggested that the membership of the Conservative Party was affected by it's popularity or unpopularity at various times throughout the period. The Conservative Party was in government for much of this period; the Conservatives were in power between 1970 and 1974 and then again between 1979 and 1997. No less than 22 of the 31 years in the period 1970 to 2001 were under a Conservative government. It could be argued that, when an individual's chosen government is in power (and so securely in power as the Conservatives seemed for much of the period),

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[166] Critchley, J. *Westminster Blues,* Elm Tree Books/Hamish Hamilton, London, 1985. Pg 15.
[167] Seyd and Whiteley mention the proliferation of social activities as an explanation for party decline in their article 'Left behind by the leavers' in *The Guardian*, 18th June 2002.

supporters might allow their memberships to lapse, especially if they are the less active, more casually committed members. When the Conservatives were out of office, or in danger of losing office, potential members might be spurred to joining or retaining their membership. Conversely, if the incumbent government, as the Conservatives were for much of this period, were seen as tired, divided, even corrupt (as seemed the case under John Major's government between 1992 and 1997), members might drift away in frustration and disgust. Therefore, these are factors which would potentially effect all Conservative Party members but which might vary over time and circumstances.

The same explanation could apply to the Labour Party. So, for example, the late 1970s and 1980s saw the bitter infighting within the Labour Party over its future direction. From the figures in previous chapters we can identify a large decrease in the membership as a reaction to this internal squabbling. As such, a reduction in the youth organisation's membership could just reflect a broader fall in membership. Conversely, during the 1990s the membership of the Labour Party increased dramatically due to Tony Blair and his efforts to broaden the appeal of the party. Therefore, the increase in the youth organisation's membership could be due to a general rise in the membership of the party at that time.

There is also the argument that the attempts by the Conservative and Labour Parties to recruit young people could be affected by the strength of support within the young electorate for the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Those who decide to join political parties are those people who identify with that party strongly enough not only to support it through the ballot box but also to join as a formal member.

Therefore, those who support a party, depending upon the strength of that support and the degree of partisan alignment (among other factors) provide a 'pool' of potential members. Research has shown that young people are more likely to either abstain from voting or to support radical parties.[168] In the British case, the younger sections of the electorate have disproportionately supported the Labour Party.[169] At the 1997 General Election, for example, 22% of those aged 18-24 voted Conservative compared to the 56% of those in the same age-group who voted Labour. At the 2001 General Election the respective figures were only 17% for the Conservatives and 43% for Labour.[170] The 2001 British Election Study found that young people regarded the Labour Party with more respect than the Conservative Party.[171]

Therefore, it could be argued that the relative success of the Labour Party in recruiting young people can be partially explained by the fact that young people are proportionately more likely to vote Labour. The Labour Party has a larger 'pool' of potential members which it has then gone on to successfully recruit from. The Conservative Party, on the other hand, has a smaller pool of potential young members and therefore its relative failure to recruit young members can be partially accounted for by the fact the potential young membership is smaller than in the case for the Labour Party.

3.  <u>Those explanations which affect young people and participation.</u>

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[168] See for example: Leonard, D. and Mortimore, R. *Elections in Britain: A Voters Guide*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001.
[169] See for example: Brown, J.A., *Thatcherism and the Young: The Death of the Left?*, CREST Working Paper No. 12.
[170] 1997 figures are from Roberts, D. (Ed), *British Politics in Focus,* Causeway Press, Ormskirk, 1999 and 2001 figures are from Denver, D., 'Making the Choice: Explaining how people vote' in *Politics Review,* Volume 12, Number 1, September 2002.
[171] Russell, et al., Op cit, Pg. 35.

From previous research we have seen that there is a high degree of alienation of young people from the political process and especially participation in the political process through such traditional institutions as political parties. This move away from participation through political parties, in favour of participation through single issue pressure groups, has, as we have noted above, affected all age groups but the evidence is that young people in particular are rejecting 'traditional' political participation. The low level of interest in politics expressed by young people has been a particular cause of concern for some commentators. Electoral turnout fell among 18-24 year olds to 38% in the 2001 General Election whilst registration is lower among first-time voters and those in the 18-24 age-group than any other. As we have seen, membership of the youth wings of the main political parties is low and relatively few are involved in pressure groups. The think tank Demos has claimed that only 6% of 15-34 year olds describe themselves as 'very interested in politics', and concludes that 'an entire generation has opted out of party politics'.[172]

However, as Evans, amongst other, notes, there is a counter-argument. This is that young people are interested in politics, but not in the traditional form of participation as in joining a political party:

> It is not that young people do not participate in politics, rather that they participate differently. Under 35s are particularly interested in help for the homeless (73%), disabled rights (71%), animal rights (66%) and increased funding for the NHS (64%). Young people have been prominent in championing environmental causes and civil rights (in for example, campaigns against the Criminal Justice Bill in 1994).[173]

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[172]Cole, M. 'Politics and Youth', *Politics Review*, Vol 6.3, January 1997. Wilkinson, H. and Mulgan, G., *Freedom's Children*, Demos, 1995.
[173]Evans, op. cit, pg.112.

Furthermore, the indications are that this is a growing phenomenon affecting each succeeding generation more than the last. *The Times* in March 1997 reported on a survey of 9,000 people born in the same week in 1970 and revealed that 'Thatcher's children' (people who had grown up and had most of their education under the Conservative government of 1979-97) were significantly more detatched from politics than people in their 30s. Asked whether they were interested in politics, nearly 60% of men and nearly 75% of women said they had 'no interest' or were 'not very interested' in politics. In a similar survey six years previously, the same question was put to 12,000 people born in 1958. Researchers found lower levels of apathy then; 45% among men and 66% among women. The phenomenon of apathetic first-time voters was not new. However, what was different is that the disinchantment with politics has remained as those voters have grown older. A significant proportion of the 27 year olds interviewed in the survey said that they would not vote in the 1997 General Election, the second general election in which they could vote.[174] This growing alienation could explain part of the relative failure of the Conservative Party and Labour Party to recruit young people during our period.

There is also an explanation which could apply to young people but could equally apply to party members in general. One of the reasons why young people say they do not get involved in what we might term 'mainstream' political activity is that they believe that politicians do not listen to them and that their voice will not make a difference. The evidence is that young people feel ineffiacious when it comes to mainstream political participation such as political parties. There is a belief that even if a young person were to join a political party they would not be listened to.

[174] *The Times,* 23rd March 1997, pg 7.

Politicians make periodic attempts to give the impression that they are listening to young people, such as by the creation of party posts such as 'youth spokesperson' but there is scepticism that this is anything more than mere windowdressing, even when some attempts might be quite genuine. [175]

Political parties might like to have young members, to have willing volunteers to carry out the vital work and give the impression of a vibrant, healthy party, but whether these members are given a true voice is another matter. There is evidence to show that a perception that political parties do not listen to their members in general, let alone their young members, is starting to affect membership. Seyd and Whiteley argue that this perception is one of the reasons why political parties in general are having problems with recruiting and retaining members. Seyd and Whiteley claim that policy making in both the Labour and Conservative Party is increasingly centralised and party organisations are more centrally controlled. As a result members feel increasingly marginalised. They point out that this alienation lead to a loss of support among Labour's traditional working-class support at the 2001 General Election and is now increasingly at work within the parties themselves.

Seyd and Whiteley recount the work of economist Albert Hirschman who mapped out the way in which people can respond to failure in organisations: they can suffer in silence, complain and try to get things changed, or they quit. Seyd and Whiteley put forward the idea that centralisation and the tight control of the political message mean that since members cannot effectively be heard, they are leaving political parties instead. If political parties do not really listen to their members, do not give their

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[175] See, for example, 'Young Peoples Politics: Political Interest and engagement amongst 14 to 24 year olds' published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, May 2000.

young members a meaningful role, it is perhaps not surprising that they leave, or do not join in the first place.[176]

4.  <u>Those explanations which are derived from the youth organisation themselves.</u>

Finally, there are those factors which affect participation and which can be explained by the actions of the youth organisations themselves. By examining the actions, recruitment efforts, internal battles and relationship with the parent party over the period 1970-2001 for the Young Conservatives, Conservatve Students, Young Socialists (later Young Labour) and the National Organisation of Labour Students it is possible to identify a number of factors and variables which, together with the factors we have noted above, could help explain the level of youth participation within the Conservative Party and Labour Party. I suggest that the mobilisation model of participation is appropriate here and helps complement my improved model of participation and non-participation. Those party youth organisations which have the parent-party support, resources and motivation to pursue an active recruitment strategy are more likely to succeed than those which do not.

**Building an alternative model of participation and non-participation.**

Before I look in detail at the Conservative Party and Labour Party youth organisations between 1970 and 2001, I want to see how far an empirical analysis of an existing sample of members and non-members can take me in explaining the nature of participation and non-participation. In order to do so it is necessary to build a model

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[176] See Seyd and Whiteley 'Left behind by the leavers' in *The Guardian*, 18th June 2002.

to explain participation and non-participation. I would then test that model using a questionnaire distributed to a sample of young members of the Conservative Party and Labour Party asking why they chose to join a political party. This would then be compared against a demographically similar sample of non-members who would be asked why they chose not to join a political party.

In earlier chapters we looked at the existing theories on participation and non-participation and decided that Seyd and Whiteley's 'general incentive theory' of participation was a sound basis on which to build a new model of participation and non-participation amongst young people. Based on existing research, the 'general incentive theory' and my examination of the Conservative and Labour youth wings since 1970 it is possible to suggest a new model. The respondents were asked the open-ended question as to what their motivations were for joining a political party if they were a member and what their reasons were for non-participation if they were not a member. Like Seyd and Whiteley I believed that such an open ended question was a better measure of motives for membership or non-membership as it did not restrict responses to predefined categories; respondents could write in anything they wanted. A refinement of the Seyd and Whiteley approach was to ask the respondent to list their reasons, both for participation and non-participation in order of personal importance rather than simply asking them to list their one most important reason. The respondent could list up to four possible reasons rather than just one as in the Seyd and Whiteley research. In this way I hoped to construct a more detailed model of participation and non-participation.

Incentives for membership.

I saw my model of participation and non-participation in terms of a set of incentives and a competing set of disincentives. The incentives I derived from Seyd and Whiteley's general incentive theory. So, as we saw from the earlier chapters, the incentives for party membership were:

A. Altruistic concerns.

B. Collective positive incentives.

C. Collective negative incentives.

D. Selective outcome incentives.

E. Selective process incentives.

F. Social values and norms.

We would expect that respondents who are members would give reasons for their membership which stressed incentives. However, before I move on to consider disincentives, a couple of important points must be made. I am attempting to build a model to explain specifically why young people join or do not join political parties. One explanation for the behaviour of young people could be to do with life cycle effects. This view sees young people as distinct and argues that young people have constraints, choices, pressures and expectations in common with other young people

but distinct from 'adults'. Young people are in a 'transitional' period in their lives, moving from adolescence to adulthood, through a rapid series of emotional, social, legal and educational stages. These life cycle effect influence the young but diminish or vanish with age. In building my model, and explaining youth participation in political parties, in my view these life cycle effects are important.[177]

In my view, Seyd and Whiteley's methodology is an acceptable starting point and I would expect that young members of a political party would give many of the same reasons for joining as older members. The incentives would be similar. However, I would argue that because of life cycle effects, the balance of different incentives, which incentives are more important and why, may be different for younger members.

So, for example, in the light of my preliminary analysis of the efforts by the Conservative and Labour parties to recruit young people it seems that political parties seem to think that young people present a group of potential members who must be lured in a way distinctive to that of older potential members. Both parties have periodically turned to distinctive campaigns to lure young members. Both parties, sometimes through their youth wings and sometimes directly through the main party machinery, have attempted to portray both their parties and specifically their youth wings as something that is 'fun'. Seyd and Whiteley used the term 'selective process incentives'. If a young person joins a political party they are likely to have a fun time, mixing with members of their own age, and they might have a bit of politics mixed in.

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[177] See for example O'Toole, T. 'The Politics of non-participation: engaging with young people's conceptions of the political, The University of Birmingham, 2002.

This kind of approach seems to lie behind numerous attempts by political parties, some of which have lead to a certain degree of derision, to bring in pop stars and celebrities, which the politicians believe that the young people could identify with, in an attempt to draw young people in both as supporters and members. As *The Next Generation: A new agenda for Labour's young members,* the document which set out the rationale behind Young Labour, the successor organisation to the Young Socialists, points out: "Young Labour groups should organise social activities and should not concentrate on meetings and bureaucratic activities".[178] This may be one of the problems for the Young Socialists, they concentrated too much on composite motions, agendas and all the paraphernalia of bureaucracy and were therefore considered extremely boring for all but the most die-hard members. The Labour Party used Red Wedge in the 1980s and Tony Blair used Blur and Oasis in the 1990s to try to capture some youthful credibility and make membership look a fun activity. The Conservatives, perhaps less successfully, had Kenny Everett and Steve Davies. The Young Conservatives were famous, however, for their wild party activities.

I would argue that an important motive for young people would be to have fun. Of course, this fits into the Seyd and Whiteley as a selective process incentive; a young person might join and become active to meet people of their own age. This was definitely used as a positive selling point of the Young Conservatives in the 1950s when they shameless touted themselves as 'the largest marriage bureau in Europe.' This could also explain why the Young Conservatives (and indeed political parties in general) saw their memberships decline from the 1950s onwards and to such a degree. As cultural and economic change widened the choice open to people in their social

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[178] *The Next Generation: A new agenda for Labour's young members,* The Labour Party, 1993, pg 2.

and leisure lives from the 1950s onwards, they no longer had to depend on political parties for their social life and thus those members for whom this was their primary motive drifted away. Perhaps now this is even less of a pull in itself for a young person to join a political party. If they want to meet people of their own age in social circumstance there are plenty of alternatives.

Another incentive, which I would argue, would affect young people disproportionately is social norms. One of the criticisms of mainstream rational choice theory was that it tended to ignore social or cultural factors. Seyd and Whiteley attempted to compensate for this omission by adding to their model of general incentives the motivation of various types of social norms such as the influence and approval of parents or peers. Might some kind of social norm or cultural factors have an effect on young people joining a political party?

As I have already said, political parties go to great efforts to use popular musicians and celebrities to attract young people in what seems to be an attempt to make their parties look both youthful and fashionable. The portrayal of Tony Blair as an ex-member of The Ugly Rumours who invites Noel Gallagher to No. 10 is a perfect example, as is Labour's use of pop songs such as *All together now* by The Farm at the 1992 General Election and *Things can only get better* by D:Ream at the 1997 General Election. If the Labour Party is made to look fashionable could young people join as a 'fashion statement'?

For example, W. Rudig et al (1993) in their study of the rise and fall of the Green Party in Britain discovered that, amongst other characteristics, Green Party members

were distinguished by their relative youth. They argued that some young members of the Green Party joined the party as the result of a political 'fashion statement'. The party was viewed as being fashionable and so some young people joined for that reason. The problem for the long-term health of political parties is that, as Rudig et al pointed out, these members are thus likely to leave as soon as the party went out of fashion.[179] I would argue that the Federation of Conservative Students was 'fashionable' in the context of the politics of the 1980s or that Young Labour was 'fashionable' in the context of the politics of the 1990s.

The idea of an individual joining a political party because it is fashionable fits into Seyd and Whiteley's general incentives theory under the category of social norms; an individual could join a party which is fashionable and gain the approval of his or her peers. Sociologists such as Giddens and Bilton (1995) stress the importance of peer group acceptance to adolescents. However, as I shall discuss below, this idea of fashionability and peer acceptance could act as a positive disincentive to join a political party. The Young Conservatives suffered from a poor image from the 1970s onwards; they were perceived, sometimes unfairly, as being middle class, Home Counties, lads and lasses. This negative picture could have acted as a disincentive to someone considering joining. The Young Socialist's image of sullen extremism could have had much the same effect for the Labour Party. There may be a general feeling amongst young people that no political party is worth joining claiming that they are 'all the same' and so peer group influence may preclude joining at all. Of course, there

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[179] W. Rudig et al, 'Green Blues: The Rise and Decline of the British Green Party', *Strathclyde Papers in Government and Politics,* No. 95, 1993. pg 56.

are always those who will ignore the pressure, but I would argue young people are more susceptible than older people.[180]

The problem with both motivations, 'fun' and 'fashion', is that they are likely to prove to be short-term. If an individual has joined for those reasons, unless he or she then discovers that they are motivated by another aspect of membership, the individual might subsequently leave, which is bad for the party. The problem with these motivations for the methodology is that an individual asked to state their most important reason for joining a political party might not admit that these could be the true motivation for joining as they could invite accusations of superficiality.

Disincentives for membership.

In their research Seyd and Whiteley were solely concerned with participation. They paid little thought to non-participation in their model as their primary concern was why individuals might choose to join either the Labour or Conservative Party. In my model I wish to discover not only why young people join political parties, but also why they choose not to. Therefore, for my purposes, Seyd and Whiteley were only providing half of the equation. Where my model would improve on theirs would be to look at participation not only in terms of incentives, as they do, but disincentives. I saw non-participation as largely complimentary to the incentives under the Seyd and Whiteley model. In my view, whilst there were incentives and benefits which served to motivate individuals into joining a political party, there were also disincentives or

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[180] See for example Bilton, T. et al, *Introductory Sociology,* Macmillan, London, 1995.

costs which would have the effect of putting off individuals from joining a political party. My research would identify a number of disincentives:

*A.* *Cynicism disincentives.*

This disincentive would be the idea that young people are cynical about politicians and about the political process in general, believing it to be meaningless to them or even corrupt. This category could also include the cynical belief that membership of a political party would be pointless as the individual would have no influence over events (inefficacy).

*B.* *Apathy disincentives.*

This disincentive involves the general feeling that a young person is simply not interested in politics. An individual will not get involved in politics as he or she is not interested. I was interested in attempting to understand why young people might be apathetic about political participation. Consequently, in the questionnaire I asked individual respondents who gave lack of interest as a reason for non-participation if they could say what it was about politics that they found uninteresting in an attempt to 'unpack' the issue of apathy.

*C.* *Ignorance disincentives.*

This disincentive involved the idea that a respondent might not have joined a political party because they felt that they did not know enough. This ignorance might be about

specific political parties, about the political process itself or even about what it entailed to be a member of a political party.

## D. *Formative disincentives.*

I anticipated that some young people might not join a political party as they had not yet formed political ideas and loyalties to the extent that they felt they wanted to join a political party. Perhaps, young people having only recently became old enough to vote, may not yet have formed political views as they had not yet had to. Under this category could also come the consideration that, whilst political participation might be recognised as important, it might be considered that this would be an activity left until later in life. This relates to the fact that young people are in a transitional period in their lives and their political allegiances and attitudes are just one area in which their ideas and beliefs may be still in a state of flux and development. Once again, this would a life-cycle specific explanation for the young for non-participation.

## E. *Social factors and norms.*

This category is included in the Seyd and Whiteley model as an incentive, the influence of parents, the peer group or the general approval by society. However, as I have argued above, and this is suggested by the experience of the Young Conservatives and Young Socialists, that, amongst young people, there can be a belief that belonging to a political party is something that is regarded as being 'sad' or 'un-cool'. Andrew Roberts, the historian and former advisor to John Redwood, commented:

> It is uncool among my students to be overly interested in politics. And party politics is out, out, out. It is a nerd's thing. There is nothing uncool about working for Greenpeace, or sitting up a tree in Newbury, but to go out canvassing for an established political party? It is just not hip.[181]

Therefore, social factors and norms specific to young people could be a disincentive to membership. I would argue that due to life cycle effects young people are more likely to be sensitive to social factors and norms than their older peers.

There is a great deal of Psychological research into youth and adolescence which supports this view. Psychologists who follow a psychoanalytic approach such as Erikson (1968) argue that that young people and adolescents go through an identity crisis in their teen and early twenties known as 'identity diffusion'. As part of this process young people develop a sense of 'negative identity' in which they develop 'a scornful and snobbish hostility towards the role offered as proper and desirable in one's family or immediate community'.[182] In other words, young people can reject the values associated with their parent and with other adults. Therefore, if membership of a political party is seen as something associated primarily with adulthood or is seen as something regarded by parents as being approved of young people could reject it. Furthermore, at the same time in which young people can be rejecting the values of their parents the effect is compounded by the growing importance of peer pressure. Both Erikson and Psychologists who adopt a more sociological approach to adolescence such as Brendt argue that peers and peer acceptance become increasingly important to young people. Brendt found that conformity to adult suggestions decreasing with age during adolescence and young

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[181] *The Independent,* 17th January 1996, pg 4.
[182] Erikson, E.H, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Norton, New York, 1968, pg. 173.

adulthood, whereas the reverse was true of peer conformity.[183] Therefore, if peers regard political parties as being 'uncool' this become a disincentive to participation.

*F. Time disincentives.*

Once political parties were an important part of the social life of some young people (hence the success of the Young Conservatives in the 1950s). With the expansion of alternative social outlets, combined with an increase in the affluence of young people there is the disincentive that, whilst political participation might be recognised as important it simply does not come up high enough on the agenda to take precedence in terms of precious time over other social, work related and academic demands. This could be linked with formative disincentives as a young person might have different time priorities than those of someone older.

*G. Financial disincentives.*

A similar disincentive might be the perception that membership of a political party is not only expensive in terms of time but also in terms of precious financial resources. I use the word perception carefully as one of the problems with any model based on rational choice theory must be the fact that individuals are sometime less than the rational well-informed individuals that the theory assumes them to be. Few respondents would probably know how expensive membership of a political party would be and in fact both parties have experimented with cut-price membership fees for young members as an inducement. However, if there is a perception, no matter

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[183] See Eysenck, M.W. and Flanagan, C., *Psychology for A2 Level,* Psychology Press, Hove, 2002.

how ill informed, that membership is expensive this must be considered a disincentive.


## H. *Insufficient engagement disincentives.*


Finally, we have insufficient engagement disincentives. The disincentive here is that, although a young person may feel that political activity is important and that they support one party or another, they may simply feel unable to join. The reason may fall into some of the earlier categories of disincentives, but it might be that they feel simply insufficiently engaged with one party to make that final commitment. This may be born from a perception that commitment to one party or another in a large step and therefore not one to be taken lightly.


Therefore, if our model of participation and non-participation is correct then the responses of members and non-members will fit into the categories of this improved 'General Incentive Theory of Participation and Non-participation for Young People and Political Parties'. The model would look something like this:

**Table 5.1: 'General Incentive Theory of Participation and Non-participation for Young People and Political Parties'.**

| Incentives for membership (+) | Disincentives for membership (-) |
|---|---|
| A. Altruistic concerns. | A. Cynicism disincentives. |
| B. Collective positive incentives. | B. Apathy disincentives. |
| C. Collective negative incentives. | C. Ignorance disincentives. |
| D. Selective outcome incentives. | D. Formative disincentives. |
| E. Selective process incentives. | E. Social factors and norms. |
| F. Social factors and norms. | F. Time disincentives. |
| | G. Financial disincentives. |
| | H. Insufficient engagement disincentives. |

Therefore, our member's reasons for membership will fit into the incentives categories and the non-members will fit into the disincentives categories. It could even be claimed that, under the model, a numerical value could be placed on the incentives (or benefits) for a young person joining a political party which would be

positive value, and a numerical value could be placed on the disincentives (or costs) for a young person joining a political party which would be a negative value and that the positive or negative total of cost and benefit would determine participation or non-participation. Members are members because the incentives, on balance, outweighed the disincentives, whilst the non-members are non-members because, on balance, the disincentives outweighed the incentives. The results would reveal whether the model explained participation and non-participation.

**Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have made some tentative suggestions as to why the main political parties have met with their respective fortunes in recruiting young members. I have emphasised the idea that in explaining the changing fortunes of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party in recruiting young members since 1970 there are a number of different factors and variables to be taken into account. I have argued that since 1970 (and even before that) there has been a general decline in the membership of all political parties. Furthermore, in my opinion, at various times during the period under question the Conservative Party and the Labour Party have been subject to factors which have had a beneficial or detrimental effect on just that party and its attempts to recruit and retain members in general. In addition, since I am looking specifically at young people and political parties, I must take into account the well-documented reluctance of young people to participate widely in 'mainstream' political activity such as voting or joining a political party. Finally, the young membership of the main political parties could be effected by the Conservative and Labour Party youth organisations themselves. Whilst there is a great deal of research and work on

the first three explanations, I feel that the latter explanation is particularly under-researched and I will turn to this in due course.

In the next chapter, I shall use a quantitative analysis of a sample of young members and non-members to attempt to explain participation and non-participation of young people in political parties. For that reason, in this chapter, I have suggested a youth-specific model of participation and non-participation in political parties. Whilst it is adapted in part from the work of Seyd and Whiteley, I wanted to build a model which provided a more detailed picture of both participation and non-participation. Furthermore, the model is intended to provide a youth-specific explanation, thus responding to those who argue that mainstream participation work does not treat young people as the distinct group that they are. My model includes as suggested incentives and disincentives factors specific to explaining young people's behaviour and takes into account life cycle and transitional variables. In the next chapter I will test this model.

# Chapter 6.

## The questionnaire and its results.

In the last chapter I developed a model to explain youth participation and non-participation in political parties. In this chapter I offer a test of that model. I will examine the results of the questionnaire that was completed by a sample of young members of the Conservative and Labour Parties and by a similar sample of non-members. I will begin by examining the questionnaire and how it was designed. I will then discuss how the sample was chosen and how the results were collected. I will subsequently look at the methods of analysis and how the sample and the questionnaire were intended to fit into my wider research. Finally, I will look at the results themselves and I will compare the two samples to examine both whether they help validate the model of participation and non-participation that I have devised and what they might suggest about the broader topic of political participation amongst the young.

## The questionnaire.

If we are to fully understand why young people chose to join a political party or chose not to join a political party one method is to ask them as Seyd and Whiteley did. I intended to test whether my model was a valid explanation of participation and non-participation in political parties amongst young people and I felt the best way to do this was by asking a sample of young members and non-members why they had

joined or had chosen not to join a political party. I decided from an early point that the survey method would be a self-completion questionnaire which would be designed to be sent to members and non-members through the postal system (although I did also use a small number of email versions), completed, and then returned.

I chose this particular survey method for a number of reasons. The main one was one of practicality. With limited resources I felt that the alternatives, such as unstructured or structured interviews, longitudinal studies, group discussions or participant observation were simply not practical. It became rapidly apparent that gathering the sample of members would be very difficult and to gather a sample size of sufficient reliability I would be approaching members across the entire United Kingdom. I simply did not have the time or resources to travel to visit these members in person nor to interview them all over the telephone. The best alternative was therefore the self-completion questionnaire.

I recognised that the use of self-completion questionnaires would produce its own problems and these would have to be taken into consideration. The great strength of this kind of questionnaire was its practicality. Although designing the questionnaire and carrying out pilot studies might take some time, once in use questionnaires can be used to collect large quantities of data from considerable numbers of people over a relatively short period of time and, using the postal system, over a large geographical area. Even with the relatively most sample size I had envisaged would have incurred prohibitive costs using any other research method. Even when questionnaires are administered, as they were in my case, by interviewers this involves relatively little

personal involvement, or danger or sacrifice by the researcher when compared with some participant observation studies.

It could also be argued that quantitative data can be analysed more 'scientifically' and objectively than qualitative data. Since each individual respondent answers precisely the same questions in the same order, they are all responding to the same stimuli. Any differences in response should, in theory, reflect real differences between respondents. It could also be argued that those using questionnaires feel justified in generalising about a wider population than those who have carried out an in-depth study of a smaller number of people. This is particularly likely where a questionnaire is used in conjunction with good sampling techniques so that the researcher can feel confident that the sample is representative. On this last point, however, I personally was going to have problems as I shall show later.

This form of self-completion questionnaire also has its shortcomings. It cannot be assumed that different answers to the same question always reflect real differences between respondents. However much care is taken with the wording of questions, respondents may interpret them differently. People who choose the same response may not mean the same thing and people who choose different responses may not mean different things and, of course, the researcher is not there to clarify any confusion. This may result from the wording of questions where there might be ambiguity or culturally subjective interpretation of phraseology. Therefore a questionnaire, which provides little opportunity to qualify meaning, might not provide comparable data when administered to members of different social groups. There is also the problem that in designing the questionnaire researchers assume that they

know what is important. Respondents cannot provide information that is not requested, they cannot answer questions that they are not asked. For this reason, it is difficult to develop hypotheses during the course of the research and researchers are limited to testing those theories which they have already thought of.

The validity of data with a questionnaire may also be reduced by the unwillingness or inability of respondents to give full and accurate replies to questions. Quite simply respondents might lie. Even if respondents want to tell the truth they may be unable to do so because of faulty memory (did I vote at the last European election or not?) or because they lack the relevant information. Also, when open-ended questions are used, as I intended to do in asking for motives for participation and non-participation, and the researcher requires quantitative data the coding of answers will take place. This will involve the research imposing their own order on the data. The differences in the precise answers given to questions are glossed over as a number of answers which are not identical are placed together in a single category. This process may obscure the differences that do exist between the answers.

There is also a problem that a questionnaire such as this is relying on the respondents self-reporting in areas such as political activity or socio-economic status. Previous research, such as by White, Bruce and Ritchie has shown that young people often underestimate their participation in politics because they have a narrow conception of what 'politics' is, for example voting or membership of a political party or formal pressure group. Other activities which could be objectively defined as being political, such as various forms of voluntary or campaigning activity aiming to achieve some social or political change, can sometimes be overlooked in self-reporting

questionnaires for the simple reason that the young people asked do not perceive their actions as being 'political'.[184] Furthermore, research by sociologists such as Devine have shown that when respondents to self-reporting questionnaires are asked about social class, the respondents often feel themselves to be subjectively of one social class (for example working class) and therefore report themselves accordingly whilst an objective measure of their social class would produce a different result (for example middle class).[185] This is a problem with the kind of self-reporting questionnaire which I am forced to rely on and must be acknowledged.

<u>Designing the questionnaire.</u>

The preliminary reading and the research that I had carried out thus far had already identified some of the areas for investigation that would be tackled through the questionnaire. It was also on my mind that, because many of the questionnaires would be sent through the post rather than carried-out face to face, the instructions would need to be very clear and the whole thing would have to walk a fine line between the detail I required for my research and the brevity which would be needed to allow the respondent to answer my questions in a short period of time before attention began to wander.

I was also aware in designing the questionnaire that care needed to be taken with the wording of the survey questions to avoid bias. I was careful in designing my questionnaire to avoid ambiguity (such as words and phrases which may have double

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[184] For example see White, C., Bruce, S., and Ritchie, J. 'Young Peoples Politics: Political Interest and engagement amongst 14 to 24 year olds', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, May 2000 and Henn, M. and Weinstein, M. 'Do you remember the first time: First-time voters in the 2001 General Election',Paper for the PSA conference, 2002.

[185] See for example Kirby, M, *Stratification and Differentiation*, Macmillan, London, 1999.

meanings or hazy and imprecise meanings), emotive language, leading questions (which may force people to make statements which may be inaccurate) and any other use of language in my questions which might effect the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. I also fully intended to pilot the questionnaire with a sample group precisely to pick up any ambiguous, leading or bias questions which I may have overlooked myself.

I opened the questionnaire with a brief description of the purpose of the research[186], a brief set of instructions for filling in the questionnaire (though I intended and hoped that the questionnaire would be structured and written in a way which made its completion easy and the instructions self explanatory) and a request that the questionnaire be returned promptly.

The first area that I put into the questionnaire dealt with the personal details of the respondent. As we shall see later on, this section came first in the initial draft but following the pilot study was moved to the back of the questionnaire for reasons that will become clear later. The personal details section was felt to be needed because it was important that my final sample should be a representative selection of people and the personal details section could help identify whether the same contained too many students, for example, or too many people at the lower end of my age group. As my resources are limited my final sample will be relatively small but the personal details section will help illustrate the socio-economic make up of the sample and establish

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[186] In retrospect perhaps opening the questionnaire with 'Participation in the political process is important in a healthy democracy' and 'In recent years there has been growing concern over evidence which indicates falling levels of involvement in politics, especially amongst young people' was probably a mistake as it could be argued that this immediately sets up those activities deemed 'political' inside the questionnaire were being regarded as desirable. Therefore, respondents might have felt compelled to overstate their participation to please the researcher. I do believe, however, that the number doing so, if any, would be negligible.

just how representative it is. The personal detail section includes such details as gender, age (within the relatively narrow band of 18-25), occupation, education and social class. I chose these variables as I believed that these were socio-economic variables which could possibly have an effect on participation and non-participation. Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2002) note that socio-economic factors play a prominent part in accounting for participation with older, better educated, more affluent individuals more likely to participate in 'formal' political activity such as voting.[187] By asking the respondents for their socio-economic status, age and education I could match the members sample and the non-members sample. Any difference in the responses of the two groups would be explained by individual differences in attitudes, behaviour and beliefs and not because of social, economic, educational and class differences between the samples. Once again, in retrospect, it might have been advisable to include 'race' as a variable, but I was always mindful that it would difficult enough to match up my members sample with my non-members sample and the more socio-economic variables to consider the more difficult the task would become.

The next section of the questionnaire in the initial draft asked the respondents about their political activity in the previous five years. In all 23 different political activities were listed from voting in local elections right through to using physical force in the pursuit of a cause. This part of the questionnaire utilised a closed-question method in which the respondent was asked to indicate which of the political activities they had taken part in. This part of the questionnaire was based on categories used by Parry, Moyser and Day in their investigation into political participation in Britain. Some of

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[187] Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2002), op cit, pg 3.

the categories were altered slightly and others were expanded to remove ambiguity and confusion.[188] This section was included as, although the main focus of my research is into participation in political parties, my work so far has underlined the idea that some research argues that young people favour more informal participation than that involved in membership of political parties. The inclusion of this section could show whether, whilst shunning formal membership of a party, the respondents might choose to channel their political participation through other means, such as informal pressure group activity.

I recognise the criticism that could be made by O'Toole, et al, at the University of Birmingham that both the method and the categories fall into what they have termed a 'top down' approach in which respondents have been imposed with a set of activities which I have deemed 'political' and which might clash with what the respondent might consider to be a political activity. Furthermore, I recognise the criticism that these categories, adapted from Parry, et al, might be considered a 'narrow' conception of the political, focussing as they do on contacting or influencing public officials.

However, bearing in mind the way in which the survey was administered, through questionnaires posted to respondents, rather than through face to face interviewing or focus groups, I would argue this was the best way in the circumstances. The categories which were used were adapted from Parry *et al* and were chosen as in my opinion they were an extremely comprehensive set of political activities which covered the vast majority of possible methods of political participation. As with any use of closed questions there is always the possibility that there will be an activity

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[188] Based on categories of political participation in Parry, G., Moyser, G. and Day N. *Political Participation in Britain,* Cambridge University Press, 1991.

which is considered 'political' by the respondent but which does not fit into what I have conceived as being 'political'. As I noted above, this is one of the failings of self-completion questionnaires, but it was felt to be unavoidable.

The next section of the questionnaire asked the respondent whether they were a member of a political party. From this response the respondent was guided to one of two subsequent parts of the questionnaire, the first for those who were members and the second for those who were not. These two areas were broadly similar, with the main exception that in the section for those respondents who were members of a political party the respondent was asked of which party they were a member. In both areas the respondent was asked firstly what was the MAIN reason (the word main was emphasised to encourage the respondent to put down their single main reason) for either joining or not joining a political party. This was followed up by a subsidiary question which asked the respondent to indicate any other reasons they felt influenced their decision to join, or not to join, a political party. These questions were open questions and the respondent was allowed to write whatever they wanted. The questionnaire concluded with a short word of gratitude for the respondent's time. The first draft was what I felt to be a manageable and concise eight pages.

<u>Piloting the questionnaire.</u>

The questionnaire now went through two phases of revision in a two-stage piloting. In the first phase the questionnaire was given to a group of five Social Science students to evaluate as an exercise in questionnaire design and research methods. Whilst these students were not specifically Political Science students, I was looking for students

coached in research methods to cast a fresh eye over my questionnaire and to highlight any design faults or misleading, presuming or ambiguous questions.

The general feeling was that the questionnaire was basically sound but there were some minor suggestions which were included in the second draft. Most importantly, it was suggested that the 'personal details' section should be moved from the start of the questionnaire to the end on the basis that some respondents might feel uncomfortable about answering personal questions right from the start, but, if the questions are placed at the end, the respondent might feel more at ease. Indeed, Judith Bell argues that, even if the respondents abandon the questionnaire at this stage, you would at least be left with the response to the earlier questions.[189]

Other minor suggestions included fine-tuning some of the questions and removing the slight hints of ambiguity which was felt existing in some areas; for example, I was encouraged to embellish Parry's political participation categories with more detail and examples, as it was felt that some respondents might not understand what 'canvassing' entailed, or what an 'informal pressure groups'; or indeed what a 'pressure group' was.

The suggestions were included in the second draft of the questionnaire which was then piloted. The pilot sample consisted of ten non-members between 18-25 and four members in the same age group. The sample was given a brief introduction to the purpose of the research by myself and were then asked to complete the questionnaire reading the instructions clearly. Once the respondents had completed the questionnaire they were then asked to complete a further feedback form which I used,

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[189] See Bell, *J., Doing Your Research Project,* Open University Press, 1993, pg. 81.

together with the questionnaire, to iron out any remaining problems. On the feedback form the respondents were asked:

1.  How long did it take you to complete?

2.  Were the instructions clear?

3.  Were any of the questions unclear or unambiguous? If so, will you say which and why?

4.  Did you object to answering any of the questions?

5.  In your opinion, has any major topic been omitted?

6.  Was the layout of the questionnaire clear and attractive?

7.  Any comments?

In almost all cases the comments were positive. Most of the respondents took only five minutes to complete the questionnaire, it was generally believed that the questions were clear, as were the instructions, no questions caused offence and it was agreed that the layout and structure of the questionnaire was clear and attractive. The only possible area for improvement emerged from an examination of what the respondents had written. In the section where the respondent stated why they had chosen to join a political party or why they had chosen not to join (and which is therefore the most important part of the questionnaire) some respondents wrote all their reasons for joining or not joining in the space designed for their MAIN reasons rather than stating their main reasons and then going on to state further reasons in response to the question asking for other reasons for their decision.

Consequently I made an important alteration to the questionnaire which I believed would produce a more detailed explanation of why young people chose to participate in joining a political party or not. I decided to ask the respondents to the questionnaires, both members and non-members, to ranks their reasons for joining or non-joining respectively, in order of importance to them. The questionnaire was slightly redesigned to allow four numbered spaces for up to four reasons for their participation or non-participation with the most important first. This, it was hoped, would improve on the Seyd and Whiteley method of asking for just the main reason, and would provide a more detailed model of reasons for membership or non-membership. I felt that this was important for, whilst one particular reason might be important for an individual actions, under a more complex and more realistic model of rational choice the rational individual might weigh up not just one cost or one benefit but a number of different incentives or disincentives, and I felt that my model should take this into account.

However, with the exception of these minor adjustments the questionnaire seemed fundamentally sound, clear, concise and-well designed. For an example of the final questionnaire see Appendix 1.

### The sample and how it was collected.

With the questionnaire designed and piloted attention now turned to the sample of young people to whom the questionnaire was to be distributed and how that sample was to be chosen. The questionnaire needed to be distributed to two samples; one of young members of the Conservative and Labour Parties and one to non-members.

This was done as I wanted to compare two similar groups of young people and to see why one group had joined a political party whilst the others had not. This would allow me to test my model of participation and non-participation. It was felt that the two samples should be as demographically similar as possible so as to avoid the results being effected by using two dramatically different samples in terms of age, gender and qualifications. As it was anticipated that the sample of members would be the more difficult to obtain, it was planned for the sample of members to be collected first and then the sample of non-members afterwards so that the non-members sample could be selected to match the demographic make up of the members sample as closely as possible.

The next question concerned the size and representativeness of the sample. In statistical terms the larger the sample the better so as to avoid rogue figures and results tainting the final research. The larger the sample the more likely that the result would be reliable. However, against this had to be balanced certain realities such as the fact that the sample was to be collected by one person with limited resources. Therefore a sample size of 600 members (divided equally between young members of the Conservative Party and young members of the Labour Party) and 600 non-members was felt to be a realistic balance between size and practicality. I also wanted a sample that was representative of the youth organisations of the two parties in terms of age, gender, occupation and other socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

The problem which now faced us was how to obtain the sample of members. Once again we had to work from the premise that some compromise would have to be struck between what was most desirable for the accuracy of the research and what

could realistically be achieved. The best way to draw a representative members' sample could be gathered would be to obtain the membership lists of the Conservative and Labour Parties and to randomly select 300 young members from each party. These members would constitute a random sample and would be sent a copy of the questionnaire. Preliminary enquiries to both the Labour and Conservative Parties revealed that this was simply not a practical option. Both the Labour and Conservative Parties were extremely wary and suspicious and in certain cases positively hostile to the research. The Labour Party in particular was extremely wary about releasing membership lists in the light of legal problems the party had faced under the Data Protection Act after membership lists were released to candidates competing for the Labour Party's nomination as its candidate for the London Mayor in the spring of 2000. The Conservative Party's Youth Organiser at Conservative Party Central Office, David Loader, was even more hostile when approached and interestingly seemed to be concerned that the research was another attempt to gather evidence in a fresh attempt to portray the Young Conservatives as extreme or out of touch. A mute testimony to other findings in this research.

With this avenue closed to me another approach needed to be found. Instead of working through the central party organisation I pursued the only viable alternative: I approached individual branches throughout the country one by one, contacting the Chair of the branch, explaining my research, and asking him/her to take a small sample of questionnaires to distribute amongst their members. Whilst ultimately this proved to be a relatively successful strategy, it was also to be extremely time consuming, drawn out and at times, incredibly frustrating. Before branches of Conservative Future and Young Labour could even be approached they needed to be

tracked down, which proved to demand considerable detective work. Many constituency associations of both parties, when approached, had not had any young members, let alone an active youth branch, for a considerable period of time and, once again, this bore mute testimony to the shortage of active young members in both the Labour and Conservative Party. I also left messages on several Internet politics pages and discussion forums explaining my research and inviting young members of political parties to contact me and to complete a questionnaire.

The sample of members was gathered between May and December 2000. During the summer and early autumn of 2000 I approached as many branches of Young Labour and Conservative Future as I could find, contacting the Chair by telephone and explaining my research and suggesting that, if they were interested, they might distribute a sample of questionnaires (I usually suggested 10 per branch) amongst their members between the ages of 18 and 25 at a meeting. Many responded positively, whilst some were suspicious and declined my research. During the autumn of 2000, in anticipation of the start of the new academic year, I wrote to the Conservative and Labour associations of 75 universities and colleges of higher education once again outlining my research and asking for groups to volunteer to take a small sample of research.

In the end, between May and December, I sent out over 780 questionnaires to 73 different branches from both parties across the country. The response was on occasions disappointing and frustrating. Some branches did not respond at all, despite having shown great enthusiasm for the research. Some individuals and branches were extremely helpful and returned all of their questionnaires and many returned a fraction

of those sent. In many cases I had to send out reminder letters which gained some responses but, once again, were ignored elsewhere. By February 2001 I had received 537 completed questionnaires from party members (255 from members of the Conservative Party and 282 from members of the Labour Party) which I felt, whilst short of my intended total, was as many as I could realistically expect to receive back and which would at least enable me to give some indication as to the motives for participation amongst young party members.

The sample of non-members was collected between September 2000 and March 2001. I started collecting the sample of non-members before I had even completed the collection of the members sample as I believed that due to the relatively narrow demographic and age range possible for a sample of 18 to 25 year olds it would be possible to collect the bulk of the sample and then selectively distribute the final questionnaires to fine tune the non-members sample so as to closely match the members sample when the latter had been collected.

Once again, the collection of the non-members sample needed to be determined by considerations of practicality. The sample of non-members had to be as close as possible in its composure as the sample of members and I attempted to construct a sample of non-members which matched in terms of gender, age and qualification. On my own this proved to be very time-consuming. With my limited resources, most of the non-members questionnaires were distributed amongst students in Birmingham, London and Worcester as well as amongst working friends, colleagues and even vague acquaintances who fell within the sample age range. By March 2001 I had

finally collected a sample of 538 non-members. I could now go on to look at the two samples and compare the results.

**The methods of analysis.**

Before looking at the results of the questionnaire it is worth returning to the methods of analysis to remind ourselves of the purpose of the questionnaire and what we were attempting to discover and how the results of the questionnaire would help us in this quest. It is worth remembering that the same questionnaire was sent to both members and non-members. It was designed in such a way that one questionnaire could be used for both samples.

In terms of analysis the questionnaire can be divided into three sections. The first section of the questionnaire looked at political activity and asked the respondent to indicate which of the 23 political activities they had engaged in over the previous five years. These activities were based on the political actions identified by Parry and Moyser in their 1991 and 1993 research into participation amongst the British public in general. The activities were grouped under five broader categories; voting in elections, organised participation, campaigning, contacting and protesting. A few minor changes were made to these categories for the purpose of my research. The reason why these questions were asked was in order to analyse the general political activity of member and non-members. I wanted to find out how active the members were, both in their own parties and in the wider range of political activity. If the young members were very active this would underline the importance of the research, as it would indicate how important young members were to their respective political

parties and therefore how important it was to recruit and retain these young members. If the young members were less active, then their importance would be lessened, if certainly not discounted entirely.

With the non-members the figures indicating political action would help us examine a key claim made about young people and political participation. It has been claimed in the past that one of the reasons why young people do not join political parties is that rather than being simply apathetic or cynical about politics it could be that they are politically active but that they chose to channel their energies through less formal political activity such as protest and pressure group activity. The figures on participation would help us examine whether this could be the case by allowing us to examine whether non-members are just as active as members, but just chose to focus this on different methods, or whether they are simply non-participators.

The second section of the questionnaire looks at motives for participation in a political party or reasons for non-participation depending on what sample the respondent belonged to. This was designed to allow me to test my model of participation and non-participation.

The final part of the questionnaire was designed to look at the demographic nature of the respondent. This section looked at factors such as age, gender, education and occupation and was intended to be used to ensure that the demographic make up of the members sample and the non-members sample were as closely matched as possible to remove the possibility that difference in response could be explained by demographic differences.

**The results.**

**Table 6.1: The demographic make-up of the sample.**

|  | **Members (%).<br>n=537** | **Non-members (%).<br>n=538** |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender:** | | |
| Male: | 78.8 | 73.6 |
| Female: | 21.2 | 26.4 |
| **Age:** | | |
| 18 | 19.0 | 21.9 |
| 19 | 10.8 | 14.9 |
| 20 | 15.6 | 14.1 |
| 21 | 10.1 | 10.4 |
| 22 | 9.8 | 8.9 |
| 23 | 6.1 | 9.7 |
| 24 | 10.6 | 7.8 |
| 25 | 17.9 | 12.3 |

## Table 6.1 (continued): The demographic make-up of the sample.

| | Members (%). n=537 | Non-members (%). n=538 |
|---|---|---|
| **Qualifications:** | | |
| None. | 0.0 | 0.7 |
| G.C.S.E or equivalent. | 97.8 | 99.3 |
| 'A' or 'AS' Levels or equivalent. | 86.6 | 76.9 |
| A vocational qualification. | 12.8 | 18.9 |
| A first degree. | 44.7 | 33.8 |
| A postgraduate degree. | 18.4 | 8.9 |
| A teaching or nursing qualification. | 3.4 | 4.1 |
| Other: | 6.1 | 11.2 |
| **Activity in previous week.** | | |
| In full-time work. | 38.0 | 20.8 |
| In full-time education. | 57.5 | 73.9 |
| On a government training scheme. | 0.0 | 1.5 |
| In part-time paid work. | 13.4 | 33.5 |
| Unemployed. | 1.1 | 1.9 |
| Permanently sick or disabled. | 0.0 | 0.7 |
| In part-time voluntary work. | 4.5 | 2.6 |
| Other. | 3.9 | 2.9 |

The first thing to say about the sample is that it is indicative rather than a representative sample of the young membership of the two parties. I have no way of knowing whether this samples is truly reflective of the socio-economic and demographic profile of the Conservative and Labour youth organisations. As I have

discussed above an indicative sample was forced on me by circumstance with the lack of official cooperation from the two parties forcing me to fall back on an indicative rather than representative sample.

Secondly, as I noted above, the ideal way in which the member's sample should have been gathered would have been to obtain membership lists and then to draw a random sample from those. However, as I discussed, this was simply not possible. Consequently, I had to settle on the method of approaching branches, one by one, and asking the Chair to take a small sample of questionnaires for completion by his or her members. In order to save those who agreed to take questionnaires the cost of postage I suggested that perhaps this could be done at one of their meetings. Why this is important is that the first method would have brought in both active and non-active members, the way in which I was forced to gather the questionnaires seems to suggest that those who attend meetings are more likely to be active members and that therefore the sample is more likely to be made up of active members. This is something to bear in mind.

They key point here, however, is that whilst the sample is indicative rather than representative it is still the first time that anyone has done a sample of this nature, amongst this specific group of people. If we compare, for example, the size of my sample with that used by Seyd and Whiteley, the results are favourable. From the Labour Party Seyd and Whiteley had a total sample of 5007 members and from the Conservative Party 2424. However, only 5% of the Labour sample and 1% of the Conservative sample were under 25 which means that their total sample of those

under 25 was 274 compared to my sample of members of the Labour and Conservative Party under 25 of 537.

As it was felt that the members sample would be the most difficult to gather (with young members being a minority group) this was the sample gathered first and the non-members sample was gathered, later to match that group. Therefore the overall sampling paralleled the member's sample. The first thing of note is the fact that the members were predominantly male (78.8%). We should be wary about making too much of this due to the issues concerning the sample, but it is an interesting, but perhaps not surprising discovery that the large majority of the members sample are male. Could this have a counterproductive effect on the recruitment of more women?

In terms of age the members sample showed a relatively even spread through the age-group 18-25, but with those at the lowest end of the group (19.0% of members were 18) and the upper end of the group (17.9% of members were 25) showing the largest number of members. In terms of qualifications, the vast majority of members had GCSEs and A Levels (or their equivalent) and 44.7% had a first degree. This indicated that the member's sample was certainly an educated group of young people, far more than the average population and more than even their age group. In terms of activity in the week previous to the questionnaires, the member's sample were mainly in full-time education (57.5%) or full-time work (38.0%). Those who were students also accounted for many of those (13.4%) who were also in part-time paid work. The member's sample, therefore, is not representative of the population in general or even for that matter of their age group, especially in terms of education and activity.

The non-members sample was gathered to match that of the member's sample. I felt that, whilst not a perfect match, the non-members sample was broadly similar to that of the members. Where the sample did differ more markedly, I felt that the differences, whilst worth bearing in mind, would not invalidate the results. So, whilst the number of non-members with a first or second degree was less than in the members sample, I felt that, since many of the non-members were in education, they would soon achieve a first or second degree. Similarly, the difference between those in full-time work and those in full time education between the samples could be explained by the fact that the members sample was gathered between May and December when normally full time students could be in full time employment for the duration of the academic holidays, whilst the non-members sample was gathered between September and March when students would have gone back to university or college. This could be a result of the question emphasising what the respondent had been doing in the previous week.

The level of political participation in the sample.

The next factor to consider is the level of political activity in our two samples. As I noted above, I included a section in the questionnaire on the number of political activities the respondent had taken part in over the previous five years. The respondent was then given 23 different political activities, based on categories devised by Parry and Moyser, and was asked which of the activities they had engaged in. The reason why this section was included was due to the theory that young people, rather than being apathetic or ignorant about politics, are on the contrary both active and politically aware, but that they choose 'alternative' types of political activity such as

protest, direct action or pressure group activity, rather than 'formal' forms of political

activity such as membership of a political party.

**Table 6.2: The level of political activity in the sample.**

| Activity | % of members engaging in activity in past five years. n=537 | % of non-members engaging in activity in past five years. n=538 |
|---|---|---|
| **Voting in elections:** | | |
| 1.1.1. I have voted in a Local election. | 88.8 | 50.2 |
| 1.1.2. I have voted in a General election. | 57.5 | 37.9 |
| 1.1.3. I have voted in a European election. | 65.9 | 13.4 |
| **Organised participation:** | | |
| 1.1.4. I have been a member of a political party. | 100.0 | 3.7 |
| 1.1.5. I have been a member of a formal pressure group (such as Greenpeace). | 37.4 | 22.3 |
| 1.1.6. I have been involved in an informal pressure group (one without formal membership or organisation activists). | 18.4 | 15.6 |
| **Campaigning:** | | |
| 1.1.7. I have taken part in fund raising for a party or pressure group. | 70.4 | 18.2 |
| 1.1.8. I have canvassed on behalf of a political issue. | 75.9 | 10.0 |
| 1.1.9. I have done clerical work for a cause, pressure group or party. | 59.8 | 7.1 |
| 1.1.10. I have attended a rally for an issue, pressure group or party. | 64.8 | 17.1 |

**Table 6.2 (continued): The level of political activity in the sample.**

| Activity. | % of members engaging in activity in past five years. n=537 | % of non-members engaging in activity in past five years. n=538 |
|---|---|---|
| **Contacting:** | | |
| 1.1.11. I have contacted my local MP on an issue. | 55.3 | 21.9 |
| 1.1.12. I have contacted a civil servant on an issue. | 22.3 | 6.7 |
| 1.1.13. I have contacted a Councillor on an issue. | 38.0 | 7.1 |
| 1.1.14. I have contacted my local council on an issue. | 33.0 | 12.6 |
| 1.1.15. I have contacted the media on an issue. | 42.5 | 11.5 |
| **Protesting:** | | |
| 1.1.16. I have attended a protest meeting. | 37.4 | 15.6 |
| 1.1.17. I have organised a petition. | 27.4 | 7.8 |
| 1.1.18. I have signed a petition. | 81.6 | 77.3 |
| 1.1.19. I have blocked traffic as part of protest activity. | 6.7 | 4.1 |
| 1.1.20. I have gone on a protest march. | 36.3 | 17.5 |
| 1.1.21. I have been involved in a political strike. | 5.0 | 3.3 |
| 1.1.22. I have taken part in a political boycott. | 17.9 | 6.7 |
| 1.1.23. I have used physical force over an issue or cause. | 1.7 | 2.2 |

Interestingly, the result of the two samples do not seem to support this argument. Out

of 23 activities, in only one category, that of using physical force over an issue or

cause, do more non-members than members claim to have taken part in a particular

political activity over the last five years. On every other form of activity the members

have been much more active than the non-members. Of course, at this point it is worth

re-stating one of the reservations about our member's sample. Due to the way in which the member's sample was gathered it is likely that more active members (rather than passive ones) responded to the questionnaire, therefore, it is possible (though not certain) that the member's sample gives a misleading representation of how active the average young party member is.

Bearing this in mind, it is still interesting to see how active our young members are, not only in the context of their political party but also in terms of their wider political activity. 88.8% of members have voted in local elections, 57.5% in General elections and 65.9% in European elections. The comparable figures for non-members are 50.2%, 37.9% and 13.4% respectively. It is worth noting that these questionnaires were completed in the period May 2000 to March 2001.So, the reason that the local election turnout and European election turnout is higher than the General Election turnout amongst the members sample (and even the local election turnout is higher than the General Election turnout amongst the non-members sample) is because some of the members and non-members would not have been old enough to vote in 1997 whilst they would have been old enough to vote in the European elections of 1999 and local elections up to May 2000.

In terms of organised participation, it is not surprising to see that 100.00% of members have been members of a political party in the previous five years but interestingly 3.7% of non-members have been too. However, even when it comes to both formal and informal pressure groups, supposedly the vehicle of participation for young people, the member's sample shows more involvement than non-members with 37.4% of members being members of a formal group compared with 22.3% of non-

members. It is only with more informal groups that the activity of members is not dramatically more than non-members with 18.4% of the former being involved and 15.6% of the latter involved.

Considering those activities included under the heading of campaigning, the members certainly show that they work hard for their respective parties (or indeed pressure groups), with such mundane, but important, work as fund raising, canvassing and clerical work all being carried out by a large majority of party members, but by a relatively few non-members. The member's sample also shows a clearly higher level of political participation when it comes to contacting such figures as Members of Parliament, civil servants, councillors and the media than that of the non-members sample. So, whilst 38.0% of members have contacted a councillor on an issue, only 7.1% of non-members have. Whilst 55.3% of members have contacted their local MP, 21.9% of non-members have done. With this particular activity it is interesting to note that so many members and non-members have contacted, or claim to have contacted, their local Parliamentary representative.

Finally, we have those political activities grouped under the broad heading of protesting. Once again, it has been suggested that young people favour the direct, physical, heady politics of protest over the staid and sober politics of meetings and composite motions found in political parties. The figures do suggest that members and non-members alike involve themselves in protest, but there is nothing here to indicate that non-members, who have shunned political parties as a method by which they can express their political views, have instead turned to protest activities. With the exception of the signing of a petition, which is by the far the most popular political

activity amongst non-members and only beaten by voting in local elections amongst members, non-members seems as reluctant to involve themselves in politics through protest as they do through any other method. The figures show that, even in those actions defined by Parry *et al* as 'protesting', members are more active than non-members. 37.4% of members have attended a protest meeting, 15.6% of non-members have. 36.3% of members have gone on a protest march, 17.5% of non-members have done so.

The only activity in which non-members could claim to have exceeded members is with the use of physical force; 1.7% of members have used physical force compared with 2.2% of non-members. However, without downplaying these figures, the numbers involved hardly seem to indicate a large-scale level of support for this particular form of direct physical action. In terms of the raw data this translates as 9 members out of 537 and 12 non-members out of 538.

This look at the level of political activity amongst the two samples is a useful exercise. It shows that the young members are more politically active than the young non-members. This is perhaps not surprising if we are talking in terms of formal membership of a political party and working actively for that party, but the figures show that young members are politically active across the full range of activities which we could call political participation. There is no evidence from these figures that the non-members are just as active, just as interested in issues, just as committed to causes, but choose to channel their actions through alternative ways. The two samples are broadly similar and the differences could not be explained in terms of age, gender or education. The figures show that the non-members are less active

across the board. A minority of non-members do get involved in politics, but in general the data on non-members does not indicate a group of political hungry young people seeking a way to release their passions and idealism, it shows a politically inactive group of people. Therefore, we could argue that the figures throw great doubt upon one explanation of why young people don't join political parties, that they choose other avenues.

Reasons for participation in the sample.

We now turn to their own explanations, in their own words, for why members of our two samples choose to join a political party or not:

**Table 6.3: Reasons for participation in a political party.**

| With the exception of sample sizes all figures in percentages. | 1$^{st}$ in importance n=537 | 2$^{nd}$ in importance n=492 | 3$^{rd}$ in importance n=402 | 4$^{th}$ in importance n=225 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Altruistic concerns. | 55.3 | 27.4 | 15.7 | 13.3 |
| B. Collective positive incentives. | 13.4 | 23.8 | 20.1 | 21.3 |
| C. Collective negative incentives. | 11.2 | 12.8 | 22.4 | 8.0 |
| D. Selective outcome incentives. | 1.7 | 3.7 | 4.5 | 5.3 |
| E. Selective process incentives. | 12.3 | 25.6 | 30.6 | 42.7 |
| F. Social norms. | 5.6 | 4.9 | 5.9 | 6.7 |
| G. Other. | 0.6 | 1.8 | 0.7 | 2.7 |

As I have noted in previous chapters, I believed that Seyd and Whiteley's general incentive theory on political participation was a sound basis for explaining joining a political party. However, I did note that Seyd and Whiteley were attempting, in their research, to look at motives for membership as only one aspect of their investigation into membership of a political party. They were also looking at activism, views on particular issues and experiences of membership amongst others. Consequently, in their research Seyd and Whiteley asked respondents to their questionnaire to list only the single most important motive for membership. Since I am focussing on one particular aspect of participation, specifically the reasons for membership or non-membership, I wanted to build a much more in-depth, and youth-specific, explanation for membership, looking not only at the first reason for participation but also the second, third and fourth. I wanted to see the extent to which membership was based on a 'package' of incentives, rather than just the one main reason focussed upon by Seyd and Whiteley. Therefore, members were asked to put their reason for membership in order of importance. The questionnaire allowed respondents to specify four possible reasons; some used two or only one, others used all four. The number of people giving successive reasons for membership declines so that only 225 respondents put a fourth reason. This is worth bearing in mind, because as the sample size shrinks, so the reliability of the results declines.

If we look at the figures, the first thing to note is that the Seyd and Whiteley model serves us well. The vast majority of the respondents' reasons for participation fit into their methodology. As we will see, those few who do not (listed as 'other') provide some interesting information.

The most important reason for membership is clearly those reasons under the heading 'Altruistic concerns' with 55.3% of respondents putting it as their most important reason for joining. This is interesting because, of course, it is this category which was Seyd and Whiteley's main contribution to rational choice theory. Altruistic concerns cover those psychological and emotional attachments to a party that are sometimes thought to fall outside traditional rational choice theory. For example, a 19-year-old member of the Conservative Party stated: "I passionately believe in the principles of the Conservative Party." A 22-year-old member of the Labour Party wrote simply: "I believe in Labour's values." In more detail another 22-year-old member of Labour wrote: "I am on the left of politics and believe in progressive and socialist ideals. I believe the Labour Party is the only viable party in this country for pushing forward progressive politics…" A 20-year-old members of the Conservative Party stated: "I joined whilst the Conservatives were at an all time low and I wanted to help them gain the power back." These altruistic reasons accounted for the majority of 1st preferences and for a sizeable minority of 2nd, 3rd and even 4th preferences though they declined in importance, the least important the motive.

The next category was 'collective positive incentives', that included specific policies of the parties which attracted membership; 13.4% of members put these as their most important reason for membership and this category also provided about a fifth of motives for members in their other preferences. So, a 19-year-old Conservative member stated, as his most important motive for joining, "The 'Keep the Pound campaign'- in Europe, not run by Europe." A fellow 21-year-old member of the Conservative Party wrote: "The policies of the Conservative Party were attractive to me- on Europe, on taxation and on free enterprise." A 23-year-old member of the

Labour Party wrote, as her second most important motive for joining: "I want to abolish the House of Lords and the hereditary principle." Another member of the Labour Party, aged 25, simply stated, as his second most important motive: "To help the poor."

Collective negative incentives were the next category into which some responses fitted. Collective negative incentives are those reason which motivate participation against something, rather than in favour of something; 11.2% of members put this as their most important reason, rising up to 22.4% of members who put it as their third most important motivation. So, for example, an 18-year-old member of the Labour Party wrote as his second most important reason: "I wanted to keep an extremist, right wing, Tory Party out. There's nothing I hate more than prejudice and intolerance- and that's what I believe that I am fighting." A 25-year-old member of the Conservative Party simply stated, as his third most important reason for joining "I loathe everything that New Labour stands for." A 25-year-old member of the Labour Party wrote as his most important reason: "I joined the Labour Party aged 16 because I felt passionately that the Tories were destroying Britain through market-driven policies." A 22-year-old member of the Conservative Party stated as his second most important reason: "To try to stop the Labour Party coming to power. [I] didn't believe their policies in best interest of my family or the country as a whole".

The next category was less important in motivating people into joining a party. This was selective outcome incentives which involves the idea that individual may join a party because they personally gain something from being a member such as if they wish to become a politician or embark upon a political career. Seyd and Whiteley

noted that few people may admit to this particular motive as it appears to be slightly cynical. However, the questionnaire was confidential and, whilst only 1.7% of members put it as their most important reason, the numbers grew for the $2^{nd}$, $3^{rd}$ and $4^{th}$ preferences. A 22-year-old member of the Conservative Party wrote as his fourth most important motive: "At the time I had ambitions to become an M.P. so that was a big factor. On reflection, it was probably the second biggest factor, but with hindsight, it has not been an important reason for my continued membership of the party." A 19-year-old member of the Labour Party stated as her third most important motive: "I am interested in a career in politics and thought that joining a party might be a suitable starting block to such a career." A 19-year-old member of the Conservative Party wrote simply: "I want to be a politician".

"Selective process incentives" is the next category. This incentive covers those motives that are derived from the process of participation itself. So, an individual may join a political party as they feel a desire to take part in the political process or simply because they believe that taking part would be a fun thing to do. It is interesting that most respondents' motives under 'selective process incentives' divide into these two types. From the figures it is worth noting that selective process incentives are quite important as the main motive for participation and get more important when we look at the $2^{nd}$, $3^{rd}$ and $4^{th}$ most important reasons for participation. No less than 42.7% of respondents said that their fourth most important motive could be gathered under the category of selective process incentives. Thus, a 22-year-old member of the Conservative Party stated: "I wanted to get involved and be a part of the process that I had been interested in for some time previously". He then went on to state: "I suppose I also wanted to meet new and hopefully interesting people who would hold similar

views to my own and share my interest in politics." A fellow 22-year-old member of the Conservatives wrote: "The opportunity to meet like-minded people of similar age". An 18-year-old member of the Labour Party stated, as his fourth most important motive: "I figured-'if I don't, who will?' None of my friend realised the importance of politics as I did- someone has to." A 20-year-old female member of the Labour Party said: "[I] enjoy being politically active". The social side of membership was definitely a factor. A 23-year-old member of the Labour Party mentioned the "good social scene", a 20-year-old Conservative member wrote "friendly people, good socials" and a 25-year-old Labour member stated that the fourth most important reason for joining was, quite simply, "for a laugh".

The final category was 'social norms'. Seyd and Whiteley meant by social norms the effect on our behaviour by the approval (or disapproval) of those around us, such as parents, friends and work-mates. The figures show a modest but steady number of respondents who were influenced by such factors. For example, a 19-year-old member of the Labour Party wrote as her fourth most important motive: "My family are all members of the Labour Party and I have been involved with it since I was a small child". A 22-year-old Conservative wrote "The influence of my father's views-he is also a right-wing, free market, law and order, Thatcherite", whilst a 19-year-old, female member of the Labour Party stated "My family is extremely Labour so I have an upbringing of delivering leaflets and canvassing for them".

The encouragement of peers and friends also seemed important to some. A 22-year-old member of the Labour Party stated as her third most important motive: "[I joined] because some of my friends were members and they encouraged me to get involved."

Another 22-year-old Labour member wrote: "A friend urged me to join." A 20-year-old Conservative stated as his fourth reason for participation "I joined because my flat-mate did". One 19-year-old member of the Labour Party had only one reason for being a member: "I was press ganged into it by my friend who is chair of the Labour club". A 23-year-old Labour member pointed to the importance of knowing someone already in a party: "I met someone in the sixth form who was already a member, which gave me the opportunity to actually join and have someone to go to my first meeting with". Interestingly, it is not always the approval of peers and family which motivate participation. A touch of youthful rebellion, and therefore perhaps an illustration of life-cycle effects, can be detected in the 19-year-old Conservative member who stated as his fourth most important motive "My dad is a Labour councillor!"

The final aspect of social norms as an incentive for membership is one which we suggested in Chapter 5. This was the idea that, if an activity is seen as acceptable or desirable in the eyes of peers, this might be an inducement to take part in that activity. It could be suggested that, if a political party or participation is seen as trendy or fashionable, it could form part of the motivation for membership. I suggest that, in most cases, because political participation could be regarded as unfashionable amongst this age group, this factor would be a disincentive to membership. However, I suggest that, in some cases, for example with Labour in 1997, attempts to make the Labour Party fashionable may have given membership a certain degree of credibility. Whilst it was by no means a major factor, in my sample there were a small handful of members who had joined, at least in part, because their party had a good image. So, a 25-year-old member of the Labour Party stated, as his fourth most important reason

for joining: "I suppose that when I first joined just before the 1997 election there was the idea that the Labour Party under Blair had become a bit of a fashion statement- it was a trendy thing to do at the time." Another Labour Party member, aged 19, wrote: "I was attracted by the spin and youthful image of the Labour Party."

Very few responses could not be categorised under Seyd and Whiteley existing model. These are included under the category 'other'. In terms of the raw figures this only amounted to 14 responses and it is important to remember that each respondent could have given up to four reasons for membership. Interestingly, of those 14 responses, 8 had the same reason for membership. That reason all came from Labour Party members who joined because as a 21 year old Labour member stated as his 2nd most important motive: "A month before the 1997 General election a flyer came through the door offering student membership for a pound". This offer of membership for a pound was quoted by 8 respondents. This underlines the importance of membership initiates taken by both the Labour and Conservative parties in recruiting new young members.

<u>Reasons for non-participation in the sample.</u>

We now go on to look at the other side of the coin to see why a similar group of young people choose not to join a political party.

**Table 6.4: Reasons for not participating in a political party.**

| With the exception of sample sizes all figures in percentages. | 1st in importance n=538 | 2nd in importance n=430 | 3rd in importance n=232 | 4th in importance n=96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Cynicism disincentives. | 21.9 | 31.2 | 34.5 | 37.5 |
| B. Apathy disincentives. | 30.5 | 15.8 | 11.2 | 7.3 |
| C. Ignorance disincentives. | 11.9 | 9.8 | 7.8 | 2.1 |
| D. Formative reasons. | 3.3 | 3.3 | 2.6 | 5.2 |
| E. Social factors and norms. | 1.1 | 1.5 | 8.6 | 18.8 |
| F. Time disincentives. | 12.3 | 13.0 | 6.9 | 9.4 |
| G. Financial disincentives. | 0.7 | 2.3 | 4.3 | 1.0 |
| H. Insufficient engagement disincentives. | 17.5 | 18.1 | 18.9 | 8.3 |
| I. Others | 0.7 | 4.7 | 5.2 | 10.4 |

As I have discussed previously, Seyd and Whiteley's general incentive theory was a sound basis from which to look at participation in political parties. However, they ignored the other side of the coin, the reasons for non-participation. This is understandable as Seyd and Whiteley were specifically looking at why people joined the Labour Party or the Conservative Party. I, however, was trying to construct a more detailed and comprehensive model of participation **and** non-participation. Just as Seyd and Whiteley suggested a set of incentives, I believed that we could suggest a

set of disincentives to as to more accurately explain both the costs **and** the benefits taken into account when making a decision on membership.

Before we look at the figures, I feel that it is worth bearing in mind a possible factor which might influence the reliability of the questionnaires. I believe that political participation is not viewed highly in terms of social norms amongst young people. Due to this fact there is a problem identified by researchers in fields such as Psychology and the Social Sciences. This is termed 'social desirability'. This is the factor which involves respondents to questionnaires guessing at what is counted as a socially acceptable or favourable answer and giving it in order to "look good". So, rather than a respondent explaining his lack of political participation in terms of apathy ('I can't be bothered'), it might be more socially desirable to put this down to cynicism with the political system ('Politicians are all the same'). This should not be a problem with an anonymous questionnaire but on a number of occasions, for practical purposes, I had to ask groups of young people to complete questionnaires together and there may have been a degree of 'what have you written?' The extent to which this has effected the figures is hard to gauge but it is worth bearing in mind.[190]

The first thing to say is that the respondents largely fitted into my categories of disincentives. As we can see from the figures the number of people who listed 2nd, 3rd and 4th reasons for non-participation was significantly less than with the members sample. Only 96 non-members gave a fourth reason for non-participation so there must be a question mark over the reliability of a sample this small in size. Those that

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[190] See for example: Coolican, H. *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology*, Hodder and Soughton, 2nd edition, 1996.

did not fit into any of my categories were counted under 'Others' and, as we will see, that particular category provided an interesting discovery.

The first category was 'cynicism disincentives'. This was the second most important disincentive amongst the first preferences and grew in importance in the subsequent reasons; 21.9% of non-members put this as their most important reason for not joining. So, for example, a 23-year-old, female, non-member stated: "Also it seems that most politicians are corrupt and I don't particularly wish to support any of them". A 22-year-old non-member wrote: "I wouldn't trust a politician as far as could throw him". A 24-year-old non-member stated forcefully "Politicians are basically screaming low life who I have no time for." A 19-year-old non-member wrote: "Politicians promise you the world to get you to vote for them. As soon as they get into power these promises go out of the window." Perhaps more worryingly he went on to state "I distrust politicians so much I would quite happily slot (sic) the lot of them." These statements were representative in this category. There was also cynicism not only about politicians and the process, but also about the role young members would play. An 18-year-old non-member wrote "Stories of parties mis-using members put me off". Similarly, a 24-year-old non-member gave as his most important reason: "Youthful members have no influence. The political parties are dominated by middle aged/old people so there seems very little point in joining when young". A 19-year-old female non-member stated "The parties never listen to what young people have to say anyway." These responses support the feeling of inefficacy that some research indicates young people feel in connection with formal politics.

The next category 'apathy disincentives' was the most important amongst first preferences, with 30.5% of responses. This diminished in importance subsequently, but remained significant. The problem with this category is that it was anticipated that too many would make the broad statement "not interested" and that it would be helpful to the research to try to understand why not. Consequently, the questionnaire specifically asked respondents who were not interested to try to explain why not. However, some clearly could not explain. A 21-year-old female non-member quite simply stated "Not interested in politics- I find it boring" and a 22-year-old non-member said that he had "no interest in politics whatsoever." A 19-year-old female non-member wrote that she was "not really interested in politics" whilst an 18-year-old non-member stated: "As with most people I am pretty apathetic about political issues."

The third category into which respondent's reasons for non-membership fitted was 'ignorance disincentives', a general lack of knowledge of politics or of what membership would entail. Whilst not the most important disincentive, with 11.9% of first preferences and diminishing in importance subsequently, it remained a relatively significant factor. A 22-year-old, male, non-member wrote: "I do not believe I know enough about Politics to make a decision." A 20-year-old female non-member argued: "I am not very interested in the subject [politics] because I don't usually take any notice in what is said mainly because I don't understand it all that well as some of the terms they use seem complicated and they sometimes confuse me." There was also ignorance about what membership would mean. An 18-year-old non-member, who identified with the Conservative Party, wrote: "I am unsure of the responsibility that it may entail."

Formative reasons were a relatively minor consideration in our non-members decision not to join a political party, with only 3.3% of respondents giving this as their most important reason and this broadly remained the level subsequently. Formative reasons were suggested as the idea that some young people might, because of their age, have not yet sufficiently made up their mind as to which party to support as their political views were still forming. So, a 20-year-old non-member stated: "I have not yet decided upon my ideological standpoint which I believe is necessary before it is possible to join a party." A 19-year-old non-member wrote: "I am too young to bother with political side of things any way", similarly a 19-year-old female non-member stated "I have not yet decided which party best represents the countries interests and my personal interests", before going on to write "I am 19 years old and have been aware of the political system but never took an interest before the age of 18". An 18-year-old non-member wrote "I haven't fully made up my mind about where I stand politically on some issues" and a 19-year-old female non-member stated "I haven't joined a particular party at present because I am still unsure which of those standing have the best policies."

Social factors or norms were those factors where the disapproval of family, peers and friends may put someone off joining a party. As we have suggested in Chapter 5 a general belief that politics is somehow 'un-cool' and carries a stigma could be a disincentive. Whilst social factors account for a small percentage of first preferences (only 1.1% but then is it something that you would admit to even an anonymous questionnaire? It might seem a shallow reason), they grow in importance in 2nd, 3rd and 4th preference reasons. There did seem to be a distinct view amongst some that

politics had a stigma attached to it. A 22-year-old female non-member said that membership was "sad". Another 22-year-old non-member wrote that those young people who joined political parties "seem just plain strange in some way or other…", although underlining the idea that this could be just a popular perception he went on to admit "…even though I don't know much about it." Interestingly, William Hague seemed to be held up as an example of the kind of social death that meets those who involve themselves in politics at too early an age. An 18-year-old non-member who identified with the Conservative Party summed up a general feeling when he wrote "Although I am interested in politics it is unfashionable and I feel that it is something for sad people like William Hague." Another 18-year-old Conservative identifier wrote: "I don't want to be compared with William Hague, getting involved with the Conservatives at an early age." The 'Tory-boy' label seemed like something to be avoided. In addition where you know no one else who is a member this is another disincentive, so a 22-year-old non-member wrote: "I know none of my friends who are involved".

The fact that political activity might be an unwelcome infringement upon spare time was also a consideration for a significant number of non-members: 12.3% put 'time disincentive' as the most important reason for non-membership and this rose to 13.0% for second preferences. With a higher disposable income for young people, coupled with more leisure activities and more pressure from employment and education, membership of a party simply could not be fitted into a busy life. A 21-year-old non-member wrote "I have never had the time to be completely involved", whilst an 18-year-old non-member stated, as his third most important reasons for non-membership, that he had "no real time to be part of political parties." Similarly, a 18-year-old non-

member stated that his most important reason for non-membership was "a lack of spare time. I have too many other commitments to find time to go and sign up and actively get involved," while a 22 year-old non-member simply stated, "Time consuming". These could be based on perceptions rather than solid knowledge of what membership entailed.

Financial disincentives were a minor consideration in putting young people off membership. Less than one percent listed this as their most important reason and it only reached 4.3% as a third preference. Once again, it was unclear to what extent those who put this as a reason knew exactly how much (or indeed how little) it was to join a party, but the perception was there. An 18-year-old non-member was typical when he wrote "It costs money to join. I don't think that you should have to pay to join a political party."

The final category into which response could be placed was what I had termed "insufficient engagement disincentives" and this was based on the idea that joining a political party might be perceived as a big step, a solid commitment which was not to be taken lightly, therefore, you would have to be sure as to the strength of your loyalties. Under this category were those who, whilst they were committed, didn't feel that they were committed enough or that they might not change their loyalties at some later stage. Again, perhaps this is something that due to their youth, being politically in their formative years, might affect young people more than older people.

It was certainly an important category; 17.5% of non-members put it as their most important reason, 18.9% for their second and 18.9% for their third. A 21-year-old

non-member who identified with the Labour Party wrote: "I don't want to feel that I'm obliged to vote for a particular party. If I prefer the policies of a different party at a different time I want the freedom to be able to vote for them." A 25-year-old non-member who identifies with the Conservative Party stated as his most important reason for non-membership: "None of the major parties is in favour of the key policy I would like to see most- dissolution of the UK and independence for England." Similarly, a 19-year-old female non-member who identified with the Labour Party wrote "I don't feel that I can identify with any political party enough to join one", whilst another 18-year-old non-member who also identified with Labour wrote "I don't feel strongly enough about any particular party to commit to one." A 20-year-old non-member who identified with the Conservative Party stated as his most important reason for non-membership "I don't feel a close enough allegiance to any party." Another non-member, a 22-year-old who identifies with the Conservative Party wrote: "I feel that my opinions do not sit solely with one party but some of them with all parties, e.g. constitutional reform, devolution, Europe, crime, etc."

Those responses that did not fall into any of the categories I had suggested were coded as 'Others'. The relatively low number of responses that could not be fitted into my model seem to bear mute testimony to its strength. However, examining those responses coded as 'others' revealed an interesting finding. If we consider the raw data, out of 46 responses that did not fit into any of the other categories, no less than 45 gave the same reason. That reason was that they had either never been approached or they did not know where to go to join. These reasons do not fit into rational choice theory, but instead fall within the mobilisation model of participation. These response were interesting as they seem to reinforce a point made in earlier chapters that one of

the factors that influence the recruitment of young members is have a vibrant, active and supportive young wing doing the recruiting. These responses seem to validate my hypothesis that incentives and disincentives are complimented by mobilisation considerations.

A 22-year-old non-member who identified with Labour wrote as his fourth most important reason: "I am never approached." In the same vein an 18-year-old non-member who identified with the Conservative Party stated as his second most important reason for non-membership that he was "unsure of whom I  contact or where I go to become a member of a political party." Similarly, a 22-year-old non-member stated "[I] know not how to join, if I decided to do so", whilst a 19-year-old female non-member who identified with the Labour Party wrote "I have not seen any active encouragement from any party to motivate me to become a member." 45 people or 8.4% of the sample listed as one of their reasons for non-membership to be that they lacked the knowledge of how to join. Potentially, these could be members just waiting to be recruited. However, let us not overstate this point. This was often just one reason for non-membership and was in the main one of the less important reasons.

I would also like to recognise at this point that the analysis of the data from the questionnaires could have been broken down even further. It would be perfectly possible to disaggregate the data on participation and non-participation along gender, class, occupation and educational lines. This would be extremely valuable in that it would provide an even greater insight into the nature of participation and non-participation amongst young people. It would also be possible to compare and

contrast the members responses from the Labour Party with those of the Conservative Party and to see whether the motives for membership amongst young Conservative Party members is different to that of young Labour Party members. The sheer range of possibilities bears mute testimony to the richness of this particular area of research. However, at the end of the day, practicality dictated that I simply could not do everything. One person, with limited resources and time, had to pick and chose what to examine and what not. I chose to focus on what I believed was the most important area of concern, the broad reason why young people chose to join or not to join a political party. Perhaps, the other possibilities could be tackled in future research.

**Conclusion.**

So, what do our results tell us about participation and non-participation in political parties amongst young people. The first thing to say is that the results appear to validate the model that I propose. The model, of course, builds on that general incentive model of participation as proposed by Seyd and Whiteley, which in turn is built on rational choice theory. My model, however, sets out to create a more detailed and age-specific model of participation and non-participation in political parties amongst young people. It sets out, successfully I feel, to identify the fact that in making a decision as to participate or not, young people weigh up a whole package of differing and sometimes conflicting costs (disincentives) and benefits (incentives), rather than just a single reason and make their final decision based on whether incentives outweighs the disincentives. The vast majority of responses from both members and non-members fitted into our model.

What makes one young person join a political party whilst another young person of the same gender, the same education, the same age, chooses not to participate? To generalise slightly, the average member is interested in politics and feels strong attachment to a particular political party. He or she believes in their party's policies, dislikes the policies of their political opponents and might be considering a career in politics. They may enjoy the process of participation and feel that participation is important, and finally they might have friends and relatives who are members. A member will have some, or even all, of these attributes. In the members case the strength of these incentives has outweighed the strength of the possible disincentives.

And what of the non-member? Once again, to generalise slightly, the average non-member is cynical about politics and not particularly interested in the political process. The figures on participation show that this is not just restricted to 'formal' participation such as membership of a political party, but also covers general involvement in politics. He or she is not very well informed about politics and he or she feels that they are too young to get involved. The non-member may be concerned about being associated with something as unfashionable as politics and in any case doesn't have any friends who are members. S/he prefers to spend their spare time doing other activities rather than politics and are put off by the perceived cost of membership. Finally, even if the non-member does have an interest in politics, they see membership as a big commitment and, whilst they might identify with a party, they feel that they do not feel strongly enough to make that final commitment. Again, a non-member will have some, or even all, of these attributes. In the non-members case the strength of these disincentives will have outweighed the strength of the incentives.

In my view, the questionnaire has been a useful exercise and has allowed me to partially test my model of youth participation and non-participation in political parties. In validating my model I would claim that I have been able to push forward the academic research into youth participation and non-participation in the political process. However, I would argue that, like Seyd and Whiteley, we are just taking a snapshot of a sample of members at a particular point in time. Quantitative analysis only takes me so far. In particular, it only provides a static explanation, whereas party membership, as I have already noted, is a dynamic phenomenon. In order to fully explain the nature of participation and non-participation amongst young people in the Conservative and Labour Parties, I believe that it is necessary to go further. The data collected in my questionnaire offers some insight into youth participation and non-participation in political parties. However, I believe that we need to examine the Conservative and Labour youth organisations over the period 1970-2001 to see whether this helps explain some of the fluctuations in membership over that period and to see whether the actions of the movements themselves have had any bearing on the failure to recruit young people into the main political parties. This is what I intend to do in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 7.

## The Conservative youth organisations, 1970-2001.

In the previous chapter I tested a model of youth partipation and non-participation which, I argued, went some way to explain why young people chose to join a political party or not. However, whilst the model makes an important contribution to the debate on this particular aspect of participation and non-participation, it is still crucial to examine the youth movements of the Conservative Party and Labour Party over the period 1970-2001 because a static analysis has restricted utility. At the same time, in my view this is an area which has received scant attention in recent years and this chapter and the next aims to rectify this ommission.

This analysis focuses on two factors which, I shall argue, are crucial in understanding the development of both the Conservative and Labour youth organisations. The first factor is one of general image; so in this chapter I will contend that the general image of the Conservative youth organisations proved to be a disincentive for young people to join. As I shall show, the poor image of the Conservative youth organisation was the result of a combination of their politics, their percieved social background, their internal fighting and their broader popular image.

These factors themselves contribute to a second crucial factor; that of the relationship between the youth organisations and the parent party. The embarrassing policy stances of the youth organisations, their constant internal fighting and their general

image not only proved disincentives to membership on their own, but also led to friction and tension with the parent party, which in turn led to a lack of the financial and moral support which was important in recruiting new members. Of course, the disincentives relating to image fit into my modified version of Seyd and Whiteley's general incentive theory. The relationship between the youth organisation and parent party fits into my hypothesis that membership or non-membership is not only influenced by incentives and disincentives but also the mobilisation consideration that potential members need an active, willing, enthusiastic and well-resources youth organisation to recuit them.

**Image problems.**

The first main problem for the Conservative Party youth organisation and one which could be seen to hamper their efforts to recruit new members amongst young people was a general problem with their image. The problem with image suffered by the Young Conservatives stems from an aspect of participation which Seyd and Whiteley termed 'social norms'. 'Social norms' were those factors which caused an individual to participate in politics because of the approval of others; their family or their peers. As can be seen from Seyd and Whiteley's study of Labour and Conservative Party members, this was not a factor to be lightly dismissed.

I have already argued that social norms are an important factor in explaining youth participation in political parties, or indeed the lack of it. The evidence from previous research is that political parties and the political process are not held in high regard by young people. In addition, it has been shown that membership of the Green Party

amongst young people depends on a perception of the 'fashionability' of that organisation.[191] Therefore, in my view youthful perceptions of how fashionable a political party is and the connected attitudes of peers is an important determinate of whether young people would join a political party. If a political party is seen as fashionable, then joining such a party would be a benefit under the general incentive theory as the joiner would receive the approval of his or her peers under social norms. If the political party was regarded as being unfashionable by peer opinion this would be a cost and thus a disincentive to membership. This could apply to joining any party or taking part in any formal political activity. I would argue that young people are more susceptible to peer group approval and that therefore the cost or benefit effects of social norms acts disproportionately on young people.

It could be argued that previous research has shown a general disillusionment with formal political activity such as political parties in youth culture and that this might constitute a general disincentive to join because of the costs outweighing the benefits in terms of the social norms. Furthermore, one political party might be perceived as being even more 'unfashionable' than another, so incurring even greater costs in terms of social norms and constituting an even great disincentive to membership. These social norms could change over time in terms of changes in the party's social norm acceptance. A political party in opposition might also gain social norm credibility due to the fact it is opposing the party 'in power', thus benefiting from a youthful propensity for rebellion.

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[191] See for example: Pattie, C, Johnston, R and Russell, A, 'The Stalled Greening of British Politics' in *Politics Review*, February 1995, pg 21-25.

Whereas the use of 'Red Wedge' gave the Labour Party, albeit for a short period, a dose of youthful credibility which meant that individuals may have joined because of the benefits from social norms, the Young Conservatives suffered such an increasingly poor image that membership could be seen as a cost in terms of social norms. Perhaps the relative success of the Federation of Conservative Students in the mid-1980s resulted from the fact that, for a short while they were seen as fashionable. Interestingly, it could be said that their fashionability came from a youthful rebellion against the 'establishment' from the radical right rather than the radical left. The disadvantage of young people joining for these reasons is that their loyalty and membership could proved extremely tenuous as some more exciting or fashionable past time emerges.

The Young Conservatives, in particular, increasingly suffered from a poor image amongst young people. Whilst in the 1950s the Young Conservatives had been happy to boast that they were 'the largest marriage bureau in Europe', providing opportunities for young people to meet members of the opposite sex and to have a good time, by the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the social world of young people had changed out of all recognition. Young people of the 1990s have many other avenues open to them in their social lives, many more opportunities. Consequently, the Young Conservatives have lost this distinctive social role of which they once boasted.

As time moved on the Young Conservatives were left behind. The word *Young Conservative* conjured up images in the minds of young people not only of a certain type of ideological mindset but of a certain type of person, neither of which they found inviting. The Young Conservatives seemed to conjure up images of a bygone

age, of 'jolly nice' girls (as Julian Critchley might have put it) in taffeta dresses and 'chinless wonders' in faded dinner jackets, all derived from a narrow social mix.

The very term 'Young Conservative' has actually entered popular culture in a derogatory way being used by comedians to lampoon a certain type of person. For example, the comedians Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie, as part of their BBC series *A Bit of Fry and Laurie,* featured a sketch entitled 'Young Conservative of the Year' in which Hugh Laurie played a youthful character who was arrogant, right-wing and upper class and was judged on the reactionary and authoritarian content of his speech in a mock contest. Harry Enfield, in his BBC series, *Harry Enfield and Chums*, developed a character called 'Tory Boy' who once again was a grotesque stereotype of the type of person who joined the Young Conservative; abrasive, arrogant and right-wing. As a personal aside, during my time in education as a Politics lecturer I have taught classes which have included self-avowed young Conservatives. Much to their embarrassment on a number of occasions they have been dubbed 'Tory Boy' by their peers illustrating the pervasive and influential nature of popular culture.

Furthermore, those who joined the Conservative youth movements were sometimes, again perhaps unfairly, perceived as being 'socially inadequate' which in turn put off potential members who didn't wish for their youthful credibility to be tainted by association with such characters. Adrian Lee, the YC Chairman between 1994 and 1995 was well aware of the problems with this image. As he said in 1994: "We need to get away from the image of the Tory sad man, the fruitcake image." A year later he justified banning the press from the main social event of the 1995 YC Conference by complaining: "We have been portrayed as all sorts of things from Hooray Henrys to

Mr Bean."[192] The press did seem intent on portraying the young Tories as extremist and socially inadequate. Even at the first Conservative Future event at the 1998 Conservative Party Conference, young Tories complained that the press deliberately focussed on the members who could be described as looking less socially confident.

The 1987 report *Marketing the Young Conservatives* concluded that YCs were seen as "socially uninspiring people looking for a wife/husband" and that the YCs were seen as 'old fogies'. In the wake of the report Nicholas Robinson, the then YC Chairman, admitted that the Young Conservatives had an image problem:

> People do see the YCs as coming from the shire counties, with their parents wearing twin sets and driving a Rover, but they are not like that at all. They come from a very wide cross section of society and they are not all 'Hooray Henrys', as the press always seems to depict them.[193]

Despite the best efforts of the Young Conservatives to lose this perception and to portray a more 'classless' and inviting image to lure new young members during the Major era, unfortunately for the Young Conservatives, and perhaps unfairly, the stereotype stuck. Ten years after *Marketing the Young Conservatives* the view of the Young Conservatives didn't seem to have changed at all. In *The Big Issue* in October 1998, in his article *Party Line Dancing,* writer Raekha Prasad investigated the youth movements of the main political parties. His guide on 'How to spot a young Tory' sounded rather familiar:

> They wear: Barbour, tweeds, brogues (the men). And for the ladies: court shoes, Jaeger twin-set, Hermes scarf. They want to be: Anything in the City (the boys) or something in PR (the girls). They drive: Range Rovers. They read: The Daily Telegraph.[194]

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[192] *The Daily Telegraph,* 5th April 1994, pg 4. *The Guardian,* 11th February 1995, pg 5.
[193] *The Daily Telegraph*, 7th January 1988, pg 2.
[194] *The Big Issue,* 5-11th October 1998, pg.15.

An accurate representation or not, in my view this image of the Young Conservatives, as middle class and middle England undoubtedly hindered their efforts to recruit young members in an increasingly 'classless' and meritocratic society. The Conservative students had less of this problem. The explosion of higher education meant that people of all backgrounds joined the various Conservative student organisations.

The Conservative youth organisation's problem with image is one which has stuck and has proved difficult to shake, despite the best efforts of those involved. At the 1995 YC Conference the national Vice-Chairman of the YCs complained:

> The MPs, party members and young all rubbish us as boring toffs but we don't sit around drinking Pimms. We are trendy, some of us are even unemployed. We are re-launching ourselves and want teenagers to see us as an alternative night out to the pub, not oversized Boy Scouts.[195]

However, confusion over the image portrayed, and who the Conservative Party youth organisations were trying to recruit, was underlined by a visiting constituency agent who commented:

> The Young Conservatives should be going for young accountants, solicitors and businessmen who want to meet other bright, uncomplicated young kids and who have read the Tory word in the executive dining rooms and golf clubs. Otherwise the YCs will be extinct before the 21st century.[196]

In 1999 the new head of Conservative Future, (the organisation established to break with the previous incarnation of the Young Conservatives) Donal Blaney, called the

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[195] *The Times*, 13th February 1995, pg 4.
[196] *The Times*, 13th February 1995, pg 4.

YCs: "A bunch of social rejects… coming across as raving nutters and anoraks"[197]

Successive attempts were made to rebrand the Conservative youth organisations, with limited success. David Pugh, head of operations for Conservative Future in 2001 commented: "We have tried to re-brand CF with a different image. We don't have YC balls anymore and this year, for example, we had an event at a nightclub until 2am".[198] Shailesh Vara, Party Vice-Chairman responsible for overseeing Conservative Future, insisted in 2002 that young Conservatives were: "no longer the standard short-haired, pinstripe-suited bankers and lawyers".[199]

In addition, one problem which increasingly tainted both the Young Conservatives and especially the Federation of Conservative Students among the Conservative student movements was the associate charge of 'yobbishness' which added to the poor image of the Conservative youth organisations and seemed to confirm the poor perception of the organisations and the worst fears of the parent party. One of the attraction of any youth organisation revolves round the opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex, have a drink and let your hair down; after all, 'all work an no play makes jack (or Jill for that matter) a dull boy (or girl)' and politics is no exception. Unfortunately the activities of the Young Conservatives and the Federation of Conservative Students seemed to spill over from youthful 'high spirits' into 'yobbishness' and wanton destruction, all of which, once again, tainted the image of the Conservative youth movement and put off moderate young people who may have otherwise have joined.

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[197] *The Guardian*, 28th March 1999, pg. 4.
[198] *The Guardian,* 12th October 2001, pg 5.
[199] *The Guardian,* 5th February 2002, pg 6.

The alcohol-fuelled excesses of the Young Conservatives were probably no better or no worse than any group of young people on a Friday night, but, unfortunately for the Conservatives, even usually sympathetic national newspapers seemed intent on giving the maximum publicity to what could hardly be described as a representative group of drunks. The 1985 FCS conference at Loughborough which ended in drunken damage to the university's property received nation-wide publicity, whilst the drunken antics at the October 1994 Young Conservative ball at the Party Conference, featuring the kilt -lifting antics of Sam Small, gained a full page spread, with pictures, the following morning in the proudly Conservative *The Daily Mail.* Of course, there was a wider political agenda here; it was easy for newspapers opposed to the Conservatives to make cheap political capital by contrasting the Conservative leaderships calls for a crackdown on 'yobs' with the 'yobbish' activity of their own youth wing. The *Sunday Times* was typical when it commented:

> The popular image of the youthful Thatcherites of the not so distant past was of drunken young fogeys doing embarrassing disco dancing, or regurgitating excess Bollinger over their dinner jackets. The only time any of them could have been considered 'hip' is when they shouted it twice, followed by 'hooray'.[200]

Once again, the charges of 'yobbishness' may have been unfair but they stuck and, combined with an image of middle-class inclusiveness and political extremism, the Young Conservatives and Conservative Students can't have seemed an inviting prospect to any young person. In addition, as their activities, real or otherwise, alienated the young Tories from young people, they also alienated themselves from their own party who increasingly distanced themselves from their youth branches which only added to the Young Conservatives problems.

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[200] *The Sunday Times,* 19th September 1999, pg 3.

The Conservative's youth movements themselves realised that they did have a problem with their image in the eyes of potential members and over the years made many efforts to overcome these problems and boost their recruitment by attempting to make the Conservative students or the Young Conservatives look fashionable or trendy. Unfortunately for the Conservative Party, these attempts often ended in failure and derision.

For example, during the mid-1980s the Conservative Party had watched with intense interest the success of Labour's 'Red Wedge' campaign lead by singer Billy Bragg in both recruiting young people to the Labour Party and in encouraging young people to vote Labour. John Moore, the Secretary of State for Transport and Chairman of the Conservative Party Youth Committee, sought to emulate the Labour campaign by finding right leaning stars to rival the singers, comedians and actors of Red Wedge and win new young recruits for the Conservative Party.

Unfortunately, what finally emerged could only be described as a decidedly 'B' list line-up including former Olympic gymnast Suzanne Dando (who almost immediately dropped out), Miles Copeland, manager of pop group The Police, Debbie Moore, founder of the Pineapple dance studio, and Bev Bevan, drummer with the Electric Light Orchestra. However, even finding these stars had proved problematic. John Biffen commented at the 1986 Conservative Party Conference that 'Central Office has been casting about like crazy for some top-heavy coal miners daughter to take on Billy Bragg'. Samantha Fox, the model, was considered and rejected whilst a proposal

that Culture Club drummer Jon Moss be co-opted had to be dropped when he was charged with drugs possession.[201]

Mick Brown, in *The Times*, remained sceptical about the quality of the so-called stars roped in by the Conservatives and their ability to steal the thunder of Red Wedge and both capture the youth vote and win new members for the Young Conservatives:

> In a straight popularity contest between singers such as Billy Bragg, Sade and the Smiths and the comedian Lenny Henry on the one hand; and Debbie Moore, Miles Copeland and Peter Stremes on the other, it is, quite simply, no contest. Not even Suzanne Dando could tip the balance.[202]

If association with pop stars and other celebrities couldn't improve the image of the Conservative youth movements and recruit new members there were other ways to attempt to make the Conservative Party appear fashionable. Once again however, these attempts seemed patronising and proved counterproductive. In 1988 Conservative Students attempted to recruit members by launching a set of posters and t-shirts which portrayed, amongst others, Mrs Thatcher as Che Chevara (with the slogan 'Thatcherite Revolutionary') and as Marilyn Monroe in an updating of the Andy Warholl silk-screen but this time with multiple images of the then Prime Minister. A similar attempt in the early 1990s saw the Conservative Students portray John Major and his Chancellor, Norman Lamont, as the 'Blues Brothers'. The Young Conservatives and Conservative Students also took to advertising a in such fashionable periodicals as the popular adult comic *Viz*. This was all part of an attempt to make youthful membership of the Conservative party look fashionable.[203]

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[201] *The Times,* 4th November 1986, pg. 24.
[202] *The Sunday Times,* 9th November 1986, pg 26.
[203] See for example *Viz*, Issue 50, February 1991, pg.37.

An attempt to give the Young Conservatives a 'sexy' new look in 1995 consisted of inviting the Ann Summers dance troupe to gyrate at the Conference disco clad only in black underwear and horrified many.[204] Even less successful was an attempt in October 1995 by Conservative Students to use an image of Kate Moss to recruit new members. Conservative Students had used an image of the model sprawled face down naked on a sofa with the slogan: 'You're better off under the Conservatives'. This drew complaints from Moss's agent who claimed that the image had been used without permission. Helen Newton, a Labour Student at Cheltenham College of Further Education where the poster was used complained: 'People said the poster was degrading and sexist'. John Toddman, Conservative Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Cheltenham, could not see the fuss: 'In my view, no offence was being caused. For the brief time I was on the stand, the poster was being received with good humour.'

The row recalled an earlier incident in which Conservative Students had been forced to withdraw a poster showing a picture of James Dean with the slogan 'Rebels with a cause'. The estate of James Dean demanded that the poster be withdrawn as Dean's image had been used without permission.[205] When the Young Conservatives had been replaced by the new Conservative Future in 1998 attempts continued to be made to make the Conservative youth organisations seem 'trendy'. In 1998 Conservative Future tried tapping into the fashionable glow provided by the trendy clothes chain, FCUK (French Connection United Kingdom), by marketing Conservative Future as CFUK (Conservative Future UK). Gavin Magew, chairman of Conservative Future admitted that the logo was designed partially to mimimise the prominance of the word

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[204] *The Times*, 13th February 1995, pg 4.
[205] *The Guardian,* 20th October 1995, pg 8.

'Conservative'.[206] However, once again, this attempt ended in embarrassment when FCUK demanded that the Conservative Party abandon the campaign for copyright reasons. In winding up the Young Conservatives in 1998 William Hague admitted that the group had become outdated with views no longer in tune with modern British youth.[207]

The quest to make the Conservative youth organisations fashionable continued under Hague and Duncan-Smith. Image was vital for Conservative Future and with the Conservatives talking inclusiveness and tuition fees making Labour unpopular on campus and the cachet of being anti-establishment, Conservative Future had an opportunity to appear 'cool'. However, as *The Times* observed: 'Being Young and Conservative always sounded like a contradiction in terms- the present organisation's task is to ensure that the same is not said about Conservative and Future.'[208] In 2002 Iain Duncan-Smith appointed the Conservative Party's first dedicated youth spokesman, Charles Hendry, charged with listening to the views of young voters, prompting fellow shadow ministers to develop policy aimed at young people, and voicing their concerns himself in Parliament. Hendry promised that he could make it "fashionable to be a Conservative" and argued that the Conservatives were now the radical party which could best appeal to young people, while Labour represented the status quo. Only time will tell if his efforts, like many before him, will succeed in the elusive quest to attract young people to the Conservative Party.[209]

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[206] *The Birmingham Post*, 18th September 1999, pg. 11.
[207] See "Tories ditch Young Conservatives" on the BBC News website, 24th January, 1998.
[208] *The Times,* 11th September 2000, pg 5.
[209] *The Guardian,* 5th February 2002, pg 6.

The early signs were not encouraging. Hendry's first initiative in 2002 had a distinctly old-school feel about it, albeit presented with a modern spin. Every teenager in Britain was to receive a brithday message from the Conservative Party when they turned 18. Each 18-year-old was to be sent a voting age 'welcome pack' by their local Conservative association in an attempt to recruit young members. Hendry had devised the idea after a country-wide consultation with youth organisatuions and by tapping into focus groups at Conservative Central Office.[210]

Perception of extremism.

The image of the Conservative youth organisation has also suffered from the perception that they are right-wing and extreme in their political views. The idea of the Young Conservatives being right-wing, extremist and reactionary is certainly something that seems to have entered the popular consciousness. In 1987 an internal Conservative Party report *Marketing the Young Conservatives* remarked that the Young Conservatives had a problem with image and that young people were put off from joining because members of the Young Conservatives were associated with "mindless reactionary support for right-wing policies." *The Times* reporting on the 1995 Young Conservative Conference in Southport discussed the latest relaunch of the then beleaguered organisation but pointed out that they were perceived to be: "Thatcher's right wing children who want to hang rapists, thrash social workers and tear up the Maastrict treaty".[211] Perhaps the most famous (if not infamous) Young Conservative rally was held in 1983 when Kenny Everett's call to 'bomb Russia' and

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[210] See "Youths get Tory birthday message" on www.bbc.co.uk, 26th August 2002.
[211]*Marketing the Young Conservatives,* The Conservative Party, 1987, pg 1-20. *The Times,* February 13th 1995, pg 4.

'kick Michael Foot's stick away' were met with such enthusiasm by the gathered YCs that the whole event became a major source of embarrassment to the Conservative Party.[212]

However, the truth is more complex. In the 1970s the Young Conservatives were most closely associated with the 'One-Nation' wing of the Conservative Party with their ideological heroes being Edward Heath and Peter Walker, rather than Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph. The Young Conservatives saw themselves as progressive and enlightened, rather than the rabid reactionaries which they were portrayed as in later years. For example, during the 1977 Young Conservative Conference, Mrs Thatcher spoke on the issue of race and immigration, an issue with great salience at the time. Delegates to the Conference complained to Thatcher that their active efforts to recruit members of the ethnic minorities in inner city constituencies was being hindered by the fact that some Conservative social clubs were carrying out open policies of discrimination against members of the ethnic minorities. In May 1977, the national advisory committee of the YCs, under the leadership of the national chairman, Christopher Gent, urged the Conservative Party to be more open in its condemnation of the extreme right-wing, anti-immigration, National Front with Conservative leaders being encouraged to do all in their power to warn people as to the danger of the National Front gaining significant support.[213]

However, whilst the Young Conservatives remained a moderate and mainstream organisation until the late 1980s, the Conservatives Student organisation, the Federation of Conservative Students, increasingly became more extreme in their

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[212] *The Times*, 18th November 1986, pg 12.
[213] *The Times,* 11th May 1977, pg. 5.

views during the early 1980s. Until 1980 the FCS, like the Young Conservatives, had been under the control of moderate 'one nation' Conservatives. In March 1980, however, the contest for chairmanship of the FCS centred on the debate over whether the Conservative Students favoured fighting their battles within the NUS which was the moderate policy or whether, which was a radical idea at the time, Conservative Students should campaign for individual student unions to disaffiliate from the NUS. There was also a fierce debate within the movement over the issue of student finance. The Thatcherites supported the introduction of a system of student loans, a system which was dismissed by the NUS and moderates within the FCS as being fundamentally unfair.[214] The battle between the moderate, Anna Soubry, and the radical, Peter Young, ended in a narrow and expected victory for the Thatcherite Young. This victory was cemented by the election of 8 of Young's Thatcherite supporters onto the 11 strong Federation steering committee. The victory of Young was to mark the beginning of a steady turn into the extreme-right which would lead to the FCS into oblivion.[215]

As the 1980s wore on and the Thatcherite right consolidated their control of the Federation of Conservative Students the organisation began to make increasing numbers of provocative and controversial pronouncement and policy statements. To be fair to the FCS, some of their policy ideas were merely taking the libertarian thrust of some of Mrs Thatcher's New Right ideas to its logical conclusions. Conservative Party Central Office became increasingly concerned at the extreme route the FCS was beginning to take. In 1983 the Conservative Party became concerned over an un-

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[214] *The Times Higher Educational Supplement,* 12th September 1980, pg 28.
[215] *The Times Higher Educational Supplement,* 7th March 1980, pg 7. *Now* (Federation of Conservative Students magazine), March 1980, pg 1.

official FCS magazine, *Campus,* printed by the FCS and distributed across colleges and universities throughout the country. The magazine was subsequently banned in almost every student union in the country for publishing what seemed to be deliberately provocative articles attacking homosexuals, Greenham Common peace women, 'socialist loving sodomites' and 'far left lesbians'.[216]

Worse was to come in 1985 when the annual Federation of Conservative Students Conference at Loughborough University saw delegates wearing FCS badges that declared 'Hang Nelson Mandela' and 'Sink the Morning Cloud', the latter a reference to the extent to which Ted Heath, once warmly received at both YC and FCS gatherings, had become the symbol of what was seen as a failed pre-Thatcherite Conservatism and something of a hate figure for the FCS. The policy proposals were hard Thatcherite and uncompromising and, to make things worse the Conference ended in drunken excess, an outbreak of hooliganism and damage to the halls of residence. The Conservative Party reacted with forced disciplinary measures, the suspension of funds and an inquiry into the alleged extremism.

The growing extremism and provocation from the FCS was not only harming the relationship between the student organisation and the Conservative Party, there was also evidence that the efforts of the Conservative Students were alienating potential support amongst students and leading to increased tension on campus. The Federation of Conservative Students began 1986 by providing Conservative Ministers with a dossier which contained allegation of 30 acts of violence and intimidation against the FCS since the start of the academic year. The FCS claimed that their attempts to

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[216] *Campus*, (Federation of Conservative Students magazine), March 1983.

recruit members during freshers fairs at the beginning of the academic year had been deliberately hampered at a number of universities, polytechnics and colleges. The hampering took the form, according to the FCS, of attacks on their stalls, the destruction of publicity material and even physical attacks on Conservative activists. The FCS claimed that college and student union authorities had seemed unwilling to safeguard the ability of the organisation to recruit members and to host campus meetings. The allegations were used to support the Federations' case that the Government should take action to remove what was seen as the campus power of the left by cutting off state funding from student unions and making membership voluntary.[217]

The eccentric actions of the FCS were partly blamed in May 1986 when a Marplan poll commissioned by the National Union of Students showed a big slump in student support for the Conservative Party. Only 17% of students indicated they would vote Conservative in an immediate general election, compared with a claimed student vote for the Party of 42% in the 1983 general election. The survey of voting intentions gave Labour the lead with 35%, with the Alliance 8% behind. Whilst government policies on grants and entitlement to welfare benefit were partly behind the slump in Conservative support, Phil Woolas, the NUS President, seemed very keen to point at the FCS to explain the survey: "These results show what happens when Conservative student leaders spend time carrying guns in Nicaragua and organising spy rings on campus, as opposed to putting the Conservative point of view to students". Woolas

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[217] *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 3rd January 1986, pg 3.

concluded by saying: "The FCS is an embarrassment to the Conservative Party and its supporters".[218]

The FCS, however, remained defiant: "Don't mess with FCS" declared one of the most popular T-shirts sported by delegates at the FCS conference in Scarborough in April 1986 aimed as much at political 'enemies' within the Conservative Party as the Labour Party or any of the other groups chasing the student vote. The eyes of Conservative Central Office were fixed firmly on Scarborough to ensure no repeat of the previous years fiasco at Loughborough University. Whilst the conference was more restrained than in previous years, tension between the ruling libertarian group and more moderate opinion was never far from the surface; nor was conflict between the libertarians and the Conservative Party hierarchy. On the first day the Federation was in direct conflict with the parent Party for voting to drop from the FCS constitution the commitment to work within student union organisations. More moderate voices within the Federation pointed to the Marplan poll and argued that it was the perceived extremism of the FCS that was alienating student voters but they seemed like voices in the wilderness and lost virtually every vote. Once again, the FCS seemed characterised by extreme factionalism with the libertarians seemingly determined to wipe out any last traces of moderation in the Federation.

One of the constitutional changes brought in after the Loughborough Conference had been the reduction of the ruling FCS national committee to five seats in an attempt to curb the power of the libertarians. However, in the elections held at Scarborough the right won all the seats on the National Committee with the libertarian, John Bercow,

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[218] *The Daily Telegraph*, 2nd March 1986, pg 2. *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 4th March 1986, pg 4.

defeating the moderate candidate, Mark Francois, in the fight for the Chairmanship. The FCS leadership seemed convinced that it was destined to become the future powerhouse of Conservative thinking. Many of the libertarians' tactical weapons were stolen from the Trotskyite left and the mode of address that summer in Scarborough was one rarely heard in Conservative circles- "Comrade".[219]

The Conservative Central Office inquiry into the FCS and the constitutional changes which it recommended ironically had the effect of strengthening the grip of the libertarian 'sound faction' and during 1986 the Federation of Conservative Students continued to campaign on issues in strident opposition to government policy, notably in Northern Ireland, where the federation leadership incurred the wrath of the party chairman, Norman Tebbit, by sending a delegate to support Unionist candidates in the February 1986 by-elections called in protest at the Anglo-Irish agreement signed by Margaret Thatcher and Irish Prime Minister, Garret Fitzgerald, in November 1985. The Scottish section of the FCS, under its fiercely Unionist chairman Simon Morgan, held a conference to mark, and protest against, one year of the agreement, whilst other committee members attended a unionist rally in the Shankill Road in East Belfast.

In May 1986 the Scottish Federation of Conservative Students, under its chairman Simon Morgan, launched its *Conservative Manifesto for Scotland* which included such libertarian ideas as the legalisation of incest between consenting adults, the legalisation of euthanasia, mandatory castration of those found guilty of rape and other sexual offences, commercial surrogate motherhood as well as urging that the "pagan and disrespectful practice" of registry office weddings be banned, "leaving the

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[219] *The Times Higher Educational Supplement,* 11th April 1986, pg 11.

Church as the only body capable of celebrating marriage". The manifesto added that the incidence of sex crimes would be reduced by the decriminalisation of prostitution, creating an open market. Peter Fraser, Solicitor-General for Scotland condemned the document as "loopy libertarianism" and even the national FCS repudiated the manifesto a "a sick joke", with Harry Phibbs, in his capacity as member of the FCS national committee, denying any knowledge of the document.[220]

The FCS also seemed determined to embarrass the Conservative Party with its strident views on foreign affairs, which embodied support for right-wing rebel troops in Nicaragua, Angola and elsewhere and for several authoritarian regimes. In August 1986 a delegation of 11 leading FCS members visited Washington as the guests of the Heritage Foundation, an influential hard right pressure group, and the *Washington Times*, the newspaper funded by the 'Moonie' Unification Church. David Hoile, the previous years FCS Vice-Chairman took a group of FCS members on an armed patrol with the Contras in Nicaragua and visited the South-Africa backed Unita forces in Angola. A FCS policy document called for the winding up of the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth and immediate withdrawal from the United Nations.[221]

Although the Federation of Conservative Students was consigned to history by the Conservative Party leadership, the problem of extremism now began to effect the Young Conservatives, previously seen as a bastion of moderate 'one-nation' Conservatism. In the late 1980s, strengthened by an influx of new members from the disbanded FCS, the Thatcherite right began to challenge the 'one nation' Conservative

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[220] *Conservative Manifesto for Scotland,* May 1986, pg 1-10. *The Time Higher Educational Supplement*, 23rd May 1986, pg 8.
[221] *The Guardian*, 20th August, 1986, pg 3.

leadership of the Young Conservatives. In 1988 there was a fierce and bitter battle for the chairmanship of the Young Conservative between the moderate candidate, Martin Woodroofe and his right-wing challenger, Andrew Tinney. The contest was drawn out and acrimonious with the contest subject to angry claim and counter claim about who was eligible to vote in the electoral college and who was not.

In 1989 Andrew Tinney and his supporters took control of the Young Conservatives. Tinney beat his moderate opponent by 192 votes to 190. Speaking outside Conservative Central Office soon after the result, Tinney pledged to reverse the decline in membership. The defeated Woodroofe predicted, somewhat prophetically, that with the election of Tinney the Young Conservatives would move firmly to the right and there was a possibility that the YCs would go down the same path as the Federation of Conservative Students- into extremism and subsequently oblivion. Secretly some Conservative MPs shared his fear that the victory of the right would lead to a new extremism. Andrew Tinney denied any accusations of either electoral inpropriety or extremism. Asked if he was an extremist, Tinney replied: "If Mrs Thatcher is a right-wing extremist, then I am. But I do not think she is."[222]

The election of Tinney to the Chairmanship of the Young Conservatives marked the beginning of a rightward move for the YCs. However, the movement was still marked with division and factionalism and the election of Tinney did nothing to arrest the decline in membership for the Young Conservatives. Rather than concentrating on new efforts to recruit new young members and turn the tide on the fall in membership, the conference in Torquay once again featured infighting between left and right factions which had bedevilled the YCs. The standing Chairman, Andrew Tinney, led a

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[222] *The Daily Telegraph,* 4th March 1989, pg.16.

radical, aggressive and expensive campaign for re-election, much to the irritation of his opponents. Tinney was seen striding through the conference hall flanked by a team of 'security men' with two-way radios and cellular telephones. Tinney's campaign even boasted a rally for supporters complete with an eight-strong female dancing troupe. Laurence Harris, Tinney's Heathite opponent for the chairmanship complained: "It is clear that substantial amounts of money are being spent, not in the best interests of the party or the YCs but in promoting one person, Andrew Tinney." After a raucous hustings on the Sunday of the conference when the pleas of the Heathite faction were drowned out by the heckling of Tinney's supporters, the sitting Chairman was re-elected with a larger majority confirming the right's control of the Young Conservatives.[223]

By 1993 the Young Conservatives were under the leadership of National Chairman Andrew Rosindell, but Rosindell failed to arrest the further decline in YC membership which by this point had fallen to figure officially put at 10,000, but which party officials privately agreed was nearer to 5,000. By this time the organisation was run by an uneasy alliance of libertarian free-marketers and Thatcherite authoritarians of whom Rosindell was one.

A meeting of the YC's national advisory committee was held in Grantham, Lincolnshire in the summer of 1993 which exposed some of these tensions at the heart of the Young Conservative movement. With Rosindell in the chair, all the major YC chairmen voted in favour of abolishing race relations legislation. Furthermore, the former Conservative students' leader Ian Smedley, who had re-emerged as editor of

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[223] *The Sunday Times*, 11th February 1990, pg 2. Interview with Nic Hughes (Chaiman of Western Area CCF 1991-92), September 1998.

the YC magazine *Campaigner*, had planned to table a motion at the advisory committee meeting calling for the age of consent for homosexuals to be lowered from 21 to 16. Smedley was taken aback by the uproar at his proposed motion. Rosindell demanded that he drop the idea, remarking to one official: "We don't want any poofy nonsense in the YCs."

This shouldn't have come as a surprise as Rosindell had frequently talked of spearheading a moral crusade to regenerate the nation's youth, focusing on campaigns against Sunday trading, cannabis and abortion and in favour of re-criminalizing homosexual activity. Rosindell went as far as to propose that the YCs campaign with fundamentalist Christian groups thus boosting the YCs' membership with religious extremists. Indeed, so opposed to Sunday trading was Rosendell that he had refused an offer of sponsorship from the Shopping Hours Reform Council for the YC fringe meeting at the 1993 party conference in Blackpool. Instead, the meeting was funded by the politically-incorrect British Fur Trade Association.[224]

The Young Conservative Conference in 1994 was a more muted affair with the one issue which seemed to rouse the most interest amongst the 450 representatives being a blow against that Thatcherite bogey-figure, the all powerful state, in the form of a call for pubs to remain open as long as they wished (carried resoundingly) Chris Davenport of Daveyhulme YCs, speaking in favour of the motion, raged: "Whose business is it but our own if we want to enjoy ourselves at any time of the day or night?". Only occasionally did the conference flair with the kind of libertarian and Thatcherite excess that had characterised some of its gatherings in the 1980s. Paul

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[224] Interview with Kingsley Jolowicz (former YC member), August 1998. Interview with Ian Smedley (Chairman of the Conservative Collegiate Forum 1989-91), August 1998.

Gray, of Holborn and St Pancras Young Conservatives, took the assault against the state beyond opening hours and onto the more sensitive subject of the equal-opportunity laws: "Why shouldn't we be allowed to insult other religions?". Damien West, representing Old Bexley and Sidcup YCs, demanded that the state cease saying: "what or whether we can snort, smoke or swallow." However, Conservative Party Central Office had been careful to try to avoid any bad publicity by limiting speeches to the Saturday of the two day conference. For the first time in 11 years the national officers of the YCs were elected unopposed.[225]

With the launch of Conservative Future in 1998 efforts were made to move the party's youth organisation away from its extremist image and towards a more social inclusive view of Conservatism as supported by Hague and his successor Ian Duncan-Smith. Conservative Future hosted events with the gay rights organisation, Stonewall, and the Commission for Racial Equality. David Pugh, one of the leading figures of Conservative Future, argued that in order for the Conservatives to attract new members they had to be seen to be inclusive on social issues such as sexuality, race, gender and ethnicity. Pugh said: "Equality of respect is one that will appeal because a lot of people view us as nasty and bigoted which is unfortunate".[226] It seemed that the new message of listening, inclusive Conservatism would take some time to filter through. In 2002, John Bercow MP, admitted that the Conservatives were seen as anti-youth as well as racist, sexist and homophobic.[227]

Perceptions of division.

[225] *The Guardian*, 7th February 1994, pg 2 and interview with Kingsley Jolowicz (former YC member), August 1998.
[226] *The Guardian,* 12th October 2001, pg 5.
[227] *The Guardian,* 5th February 2002, pg 6.

I would also argue that the vicious and very public battles between left and right within the Conservative youth organisations had a bearing on their efforts to recruit new members. There is much academic evidence to suggest that perceptions of division within political parties (such as the divisions within the Labour Party during the 1970s and 1980s and within the Conservative Party during the 1990s) have an effect on voting behaviour. Voters are less likely to vote for a party that they perceive as being divided. The 1997 General Election provides an excellent example. In the run-up to the 1997 General Election the British Election Panel Study found that the vast majority of their sample of voters believed that the Conservative Party was divided. In 1997, only 9% of the sample believed that the Conservative Party was united, down from 67% in 1992. In contrast, 54% of the sample believed that Labour Party was united, up from 30% in 1992. Whilst, of course, there were other factors involved, the panel clearly indicated that their perceptions of whether a party was divided or not would affect their vote.[228] I would argue that in the same way individual are put off voting for a party they see as divided individuals would also be put off **joining** a political party they perceived as being divided. The perception of the Young Conservatives as being divided, compounded by the other negative aspects of their image, such as extremism, had the effect of putting off potential members and alienating existing members and causing them to leave in frustration.

**The relationship with the parent party.**

Perceptions of general image can also be said to be closely connected to another factor which could effect the Conservative Party's ability to recruit new members to

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[228] See figures in Curtice, J. 'Anatomy of a Non-Landslide' in *Politics Review,* Volume 7, Number 1, September 1997, Pg 6.

their youth sections. This variable is the relationship between the parent party and the youth wings. This is an important consideration as the youth wing is, by definition, not a totally autonomous organisation, but a semi-independent part of the parent party still largely dependent on that parent for funding and support. Therefore, it could be claimed that the relationship between the parent organisation and the youth wing can have an important effect on recruitment. If the relationship is good then the youth wing is rewarded with financial support, administrative help and the heavy weight support of leading members of the Party appearing at the Annual Conference. If the relationship is bad however, the opposite will be the case; the youth wing will find itself short of funds and effectively ostracised by the parent party and this will hit recruitment. The relationship variable fits into a mobilisation model of participation, the idea that individuals join political parties because someone makes the effort to ask them and I see it as a complement to my model of participation and non-participation.

Once again the 'parent party-youth wing relationship' variable varies over time and could be part of the wider explanation of the success or failure of the Conservative Party youth wings. A well-financed and well-supported youth wing would be able to campaign and recruit more effectively than a youth wing which has threadbare resources. The reason why this variable is linked in with the extremism variable is because the parent party, in seeking to portray itself as being a acceptable and reasonable political party to a mainly moderate British electorate, would not take kindly to an extremist youth wing whose percieved extremism could help blight the image of the parent party and give easy ammunition to their political opponents. Therefore, it could be claimed that the two variables are related; poor image leads to a

failure of recruitment but also leads to a lack of parent party support, but then that, in turn, also leads to a failure of recruitment as resources are cut.

In the 1970s the relationship between the Young Conservatives and the parent party was, at least on the surface, harmonious. The Party Leader of the time and leading members of the Conservative Party often graced Young Conservative meetings and conferences and often used the Young Conservative gatherings as a platform from which to make major policy pronoucements or attacks on their Labour opponents. So, for example, Keith Joseph chose the Young Conservative conference in March 1970 as the place where he made his major speech as Conservative spokesman on technology and trade, setting out for the first time in detail the plans of the 'Selsdon Man' Conservative to 'set industry free' through rolling back the frontiers of the state.[229]

In 1975 Mrs Thatcher, as newly elected leader of the Conservative Party, used the annual conference of the FCS in Sheffield to set out her vision for Britain. In 1977 the Young Conservative conference in Eastborne was once again attended by Mrs Thatcher who used the opportunity to deliver a speech on the issue of immigration, one particularly important in the 1970s. As well as Mrs Thatcher, the conference attracted other key Conservative Party figures; Deputy Leader and Shadow Home Secretary, William Whitelaw and also Michael Heseltine. In April of the same year the Greater London Young Conservatives met in Bournemouth and attracted James Prior, then Opposition spokesman on employment policy, and Peter Walker. The contrast with the relationship between the Young Socialists and the Labour Party

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[229] *The Times,* March 9th 1970, pg 14. 'Selsdon Man' was the name give to the followers of the set of radical, free-market, ideas devised by the Conservative Party at their policy meeting at the Selsdon Park Hotel, Croydon.

could not be more obvious with mainstream Labour Party figures going out of their way to avoid attending the gatherings of the left wing Labour youth wing.[230]

However, whilst the relationship between the Conservative Party and its youth organisation was good in this period, in contrast to that between the Labour Party and the Young Socialists, this did not mean that the Young Conservatives and Conservative Students were uncritical of their parent party. On numerous occasions the view of members of the Young Conservatives differed from those of the parent Party and the young activists did not shy away from letting their feelings known.

An example of this can be found in February 1975 during the Conservative Party leadership contest when the Young Conservative Conference in Eastborne declared that the election procedure had been wrong, that it was a 'farce' bringing the party into disrepute and that it must never be repeated. The FCS were even more critical later on the same year when a motion at the Welsh Conservative Party Conference proposed by the Conservative Students attacked Mrs Thatcher by noting: "that there had been little sign of the new positive and aggressive Conservatism on which Mrs Thatcher was elected to the leadership".[231]

The Conservative Party leadership, whilst sometimes smarting at some of the criticism thrown at them by the Young Conservatives and Conservative Students, tolerated the views of the youth organisations and both relations and funding remained good during the 1970s. Mike Gapes, the Chairman of the National

[230] *The Times,* March 25th 1975, pg 4, *The Daily Telegraph,* 14th February 1977, pg 2. *The Times,* 4th April 1977, pg 2.
[231] *The Times,* June 16th 1975, pg 5.

Organisation of Labour Students, complained in 1977, that compared with the Labour Party which was allocating scant resources to its student wing, the Conservative Party had given the Conservative Students "enormous financial resources... which we can't match."[232]

However, the 1980s saw a fatal split between the Conservative Party and its youth wings which was to resemble more closely the tempestuous relationship between the Labour Party and the Young Socialists. First, the Federation of Conservative Students and then the Young Conservatives saw their relationship with their parent Party decline to the extent that it could be claimed that the subsequent loss of financial support damaged their efforts to recruit young people.

The rightward move of the Federation of Conservative Students during the early 1980s increasingly tainted the relationship between the Conservative Students and the Conservative Party. Right wing pronoucements of policy ideas, yobbish behaviour which included drunkenness and wanton destruction and bitter inflighting characterised the activities of the Federation of Conservative Students and subsequently spilled over into the Young Conservatives. This progressively soured the relationship between the youth organisation and the parent party whose increasingly became frustrated at the youth organisations willingness to bite the hand that fed them.

We have already detailed how the move to the right by the Federation of Conservative Students during the early 1980s had caused extreme embarrassment to the

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[232] *The Sunday Times*, January 30th 1977, pg 13.

Conservative Party mainly due to belligerent pronouncements on sensitive issues such as Northern Ireland and foreign policy and policy suggestions which took the libertarian aspects of Thatcherism to their logical, if politically unpalatable, extreme. Ironically, the FCS enjoyed some success in recruiting new members and some of the attraction for the organisation came in its percieved radicalism at the cutting edge of the Thatcherite revolution. The organisation also seemed to enjoy goading the hierarchy of the parent party who many of the young turks regarded as being members of the 'old guard' and whom they disparagingly referred to as their "elders and wetters".

Tensions grew not only between the youth organisations and the parent party but also between the two main Conservative youth organisations themselves. One activists account of his days in the FCS and the YCs provides an excellent illustration of the tensions within the Conservative youth movements at this time. Martin McNeely was a Young Conservative activist:

> I joined the local Young Conservative branch in September 1985. It seemed like a waste of time to start off with. It was all social, all trips to the Henley Regatta and such like: it definitely wasn't me. I had never even owned a dinner suit, didn't know what Pimms was and even less where Henley was. They were 'nice' young people who didn't really know much about politics at all.[233]

McNeely found that in the Young Conservatives during the mid-1980s the emphasis was on social activities rather than political discourse and many of the popular stereotypes of the typical YC were true:

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[233] Interview with Martin McNeely, *New Statesman and Society,* 7th October 1994, pg 20.

> I joined because I didn't like lefties, commies and terrorists… My fellow young Tories tolerated such political leanings; they more or less agreed with me, but politics was a taboo subject in the wine bar. Whilst I wanted stickers and posters, material for evangelising my comprehensive school mates, they wanted to know if Jeremy was going to drive them to the ball that weekend.[234]

Then, McNeely got involved with the FCS, where he discovered fellow ideological travellers:

> They [the FCS] were not ordinary Young Conservatives. These were political ones, who not only had stickers and posters but chunky ideological books as well… We were all part of a mission, not just against socialism, but against our own party. To us they were posh patricians- to them we were dangerous, we were the Tory Party Militant tendancy. If truth be known, we loved that reputation: we knew that Thatcher was on our side not theirs.[235]

The Conservative Party had attempted to curb the power of the libertarian right within the FCS following the destruction at the Loughborough Conference in 1985 by reducing the number of seats on the FCS national committee. However, by 1986 the control of the libertarian right over the FCS was complete under the Chairmanship of John Bercow.[236] Relations between the FCS and the Conservative Party came to a boiling point in August 1986 when an article in the FCS magazine *New Agenda*, edited by Young Conservative stalwart Harry Phibbs, accussed the former Prime Minister and Conservative grandee Harold Macmillan of being a war criminal for his role in the repatriation of 40,000 cossacks, who had fought for the Germans, to the Soviet Union in 1945.[237]

The Chairman of the Conservative Party, Norman Tebbit, the focus, ironically, for much admiration from the FCS, had previously been relatively tolerant of the

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[234] Op cit, pg 21.
[235] Op cit, pg 22.
[236] *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 11th April 1986, pg 11.
[237] *New Agenda,* August 1986, pg 2.

activities of his youthful prodigies. However, even in his eyes, this was a step too far. Tebbit issued a statement describing the attack as "disgraceful". At first Tebbit simply demanded the return of all copies of *New Agenda* but soon took the extraordinary step of applying to receive a High Court injunction preventing further distribution of the magazine. Furthermore, Tebbit and one of his vice-chairmen, Hal Miller, also issued a writ claiming damages from Harry Phibbs for breach of contract, misrepresentation and libel on the grounds that, as *New Agenda* bore the logo of the Conservative Party, it might be thought that the attack on Macmillan came with the blessing of Conservative Party officials.

The Chairman of the FCS, John Bercow (now Conservative Member of Parliament for Buckingham), publicly dissociated himself from the article and censured Phibbs at an emergency meeting of the FCS National Committee which saw Bercow attempt to force Phibbs off the Committee. However, right-wing libertarians remained loyal to Phibbs and accused Bercow of selling out as they believed that Bercow had been elected chairman of the Federation of Conservative Students because he was considered a member of the 'sound faction' but had failed to back Phibbs. In the end, Phibbs remained on the national committee as part of a deal patched up which would see him resign as editor in an attempt to diffuse the row.  David Hoile, a member of the committee, accepted that Phibbs would have to be sacrificed to ease the wrath of Conservative Central Office:

> It seems to be the case that if Phibbs gets the chop all will be well: otherwise the FCS is on the line, and the party will cut off its funds [at that time £30,000 a year]. But all that would do would inconvenience us for a while: you can kill the structure but not the spirit.[238]

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[238] *The Guardian,* 20th August 1986, pg.3.

Ominously, Hoile added: "we'd just move en masse into the Young Conservatives".

Hoile, however, showed that the FCS had no intention of softening its uncompromising line and indicated no regret at either the article or the embarrassment which had been caused to the Conservative Party: "All this stuff about Macmillan is just schmaltz. He's a former prime minister and an old guy, but he was responsible for many of the sufferings which the British people endure today."[239]

Phibbs soon abandoned his attempt to fight Tebbit and resigned as editor of *New Agenda* and apologised to Tebbit for the embarrassment caused by the article. The FCS leadership agreed that any future issues of *New Agenda* would be submitted to Conservative Central Office for scrutiny before publication. However, the damage had been done. Norman Tebbit came under intense criticism for his handling of the affair which had seen an issue of only passing interest to the electorate blown out of all proportion and transformed into ammunition which both Labour and the Alliance gleefully seized upon to attack the Conservative Party. In an editorial *The Guardian* described the whole incident as "an astonishing mess".[240]

Furthermore, the Federation of Conservative Students seemed unmoved by the shot across their bows. Whilst Hal Miller attempted to persuade leading FCS figures to adopt a lower profile, many of the more eccentric members were obviously delighted at all the publicity they had received. As further evidence that the whole incident was failing to die, at the September 1986 Young Conservative conference, Count Tolstoy,

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[239] *The Daily Telegraph*, 20th August 1986, pg.1.
[240] *The Guardian*, 20th August 1986, pg 12.

on whose book the Macmillan article had been based, was invited to speak, despite intense pressure from Conservative Central Office to withdraw the invitation.[241]

In November 1986 Tebbit announced that the Conservative Party had decided to sever its links with the 14,000 strong organisation, withdraw its annual £30,000 grant and it was to be given a week to vacate its office at Conservative Central Office. At the same time, Tebbit announced the formation of a new successor body, the Conservative Collegiate Forum to enable students and academics to have a voice in Conservative Party circles. To try to ensure that the problems with the FCS would not be repeated it was announced that membership of the new CCF would be vetted to keep out those which the Conservative Party deemed not to share traditional party views.[242]

Bercow accepted the inevitable and supported the shake-up, thus retaining his Central Office sabbatical salary and transferring to the CCF to lead its new efforts. The FCS die-hards remained convinced right until the end that they were the victim of a long running campaign by left-wing opponents within the Young Conservatives and within Conservative Central Office to destroy the FCS. Former FCS Vice-Chairman Douglas Smith protested: "There are people in the Young Conservatives and Central Office who have been gunning for the FCS for a considerable time".[243]

Conservative Deputy-Chairman, Peter Morrisson blamed the federation's demise on a "minority of recalcitrant individuals" on its controlling committee, a "balmy" fringe

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[241] *The Guardian*, 28th August 1986, pg 1.
[242] *The Times*, 13th November 1986, pg 1.
[243] *The Times*, 14th November 1986, pg 20.

who had been more interested in grabbing power and "sticking knives" into its internal opponents than campaigning on behalf of the party. Jerry Hayes, Conservative MP for Harlow, said the FCS had come to represent the "unacceptable face of Conservatism" through its members espousing "tacky, seamy" causes such as the legalisation of incest and heroin.[244]

The successor to the FCS, the Conservative Collegiate Forum, was to be headed by a national committee of 20, handpicked by the Morrison, rather than elected as had the national committee of the Federation of Conservative Students. The new committee included 12 area representatives and eight others drawn from postgraduate and academic circles. In this way, it was hoped that the new student body would be kept under central control and would concentrate on the recruitment of young members on campus and on the fight for the youth vote rather than libertarian issues on the fringe of politics.[245] The CCF remained firmly under the control of Conservative Party Central Office (CCO) for rest of the decade and throughout the 1990s. The Conservative Party was determined to prevent the debacle of the FCS happening again in the new organisation and was careful to retain the power to vet both policies and appointments. For example, in 1993 CCO barred Conor Burns from taking the post of National Director of the CCF because he opposed the Maastrict Treaty.[246]

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[244] *The Guardian*, November 14th 1986, pg 2.
[245] *The Times*, December 20th 1986, pg 3. Norman Tebbit, in his autobiography *Upwardly Mobile* (published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1988), makes only a brief reference to the whole incident: "I also had my internal problems at Central Office. One highly public row was caused by the progressive takeover of the Federation of Conservative Students by a coalition of people some of whose views and actions were incompatible with Conservatism. Some, the so-called libertarian wing, were more nearly anarchist, others practiced highly dubious election tactics to gain influence in the organisation." pg.257.
[246] See the Candidate Watch column, 12th May 2002, www.electricreview.com.

Unfortunately, just as the Conservative Party seemed to have solved one problem with its youth organisation, yet another emerged as the right made a concerted effort to win control of the Young Conservatives, an effort which would lead to protracted, and very public, infighting. All this was much to the extreme frustration of the parent Party who hoped that the recruitment of new young members should have taken priority. As David Hoile had prophetically predicted back in 1986, the power and influence of the right within the Young Conservatives had been enhanced by an influx of new recruits from the disbanded Federation of Conservative Students who steadily began to move the organisation to the right. Within two years many of the leading members of the FCS had achieved important positions both within the Young Conservatives and the mainstream Conservative Party itself.

Looking back in 1988, Douglas Smith said that the abolition of the FCS:

> …was a highly educative experience: we were drunk on ideology and thought that we could stick two fingers up and carry on regardless. Those of us who had the highest profiles can forget our careers within the formal party structures for 20 years. But we shall remain active, maintaining our contacts with the many who have avoided being demonised by the Central Office hierarchy. Those who loathe us will fade away, but those who agree with us will inherit the Conservative Party.[247]

The battle for the control of the Young Conservatives lasted between 1987 and 1989 and was marked by accusations of corruption, vote rigging, disputes over size of branches and eligibility for votes and even, in the 1989 contest for the chairmanship,

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[247] From an excellent article 'Banned Tory students re-emerge to continue the right-wing struggle', *The Guardian*, 4th November 1988, pg 8. Smith's prediction also seemed somewhat prophetic. In the article 'Conservatism Under Hague: The Fatal Dilemma' in Talking Politics, Volume 13, Number 2, January 2001, Richard Kelly briefly discusses the FCS before noting (page 82): 'There was a suspicion around 1997 that the young Tory radicals of the 1980s (from the FCS) were now claiming their inheritance-Hague, of course, being the outstanding example. The new brand of Conservative was also exemplified by John Bercow, elected MP from Buckingham in 1997.'

claims of bugging.[248] The frustration of the Conservative hierarchy with the emphasis on infighting rather than recruiting new activists was voiced by David Hunt, vice-chairman of the YCs and Deputy Chief Whip, who warned the 1988 Conference that: "What we need is a good old-fashioned recruiting drive rather than accusations of disloyalty from one side or the other".[249]

Such was the bitter feuding between left and right that Mrs Thatcher felt pushed to intervene. Her Political Secretary, John Wittingdale, was dispatched to Eastbourne to discover what lay behind the acrimonious power struggle. Wittingdale and John Sullivan, a member of the Downing Street policy unit, held talks with both Tinney and Woodroofe in an attempt to stop the ill-feeling from further detracting from the YCs primary task of young member recruitment and retention.[250]

There was growing anger within the Conservative hierarchy at the internal battles within the Young Conservatives and in the wake of the Eastbourne conference there were hints that the YCs might go the same way as their Conservative student counterparts. One party official was quoted at the time as saying: "They've disbanded the Young Liberals, they've disbanded the Young Socialists, and the best thing they could do is disband this lot as well".[251] Ironically, its seemed as if it was not only the stridency of the right and the internal feud which had angered senior Conservatives, but also the willingness of the 'wet' YC leadership to allow motions critical of government policy to be debated at the conference. Geoffrey Smith MP wrote in *The Times* in early March to warn of the dangers of factionalism within the Young

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[248] *The Times,* 13th January 1989, pg.3.
[249] *The Times,* 13th February 1988, pg 1.
[250] *The Sunday Telegraph,* 14th February 1988, pg 2.
[251] *The Sunday Times,* 14th February 1988, pg. 2.

Conservatives concluding that: "a political youth movement which cannot contain conflicting views without descending into factionalism will not serve its party well in the long run."[252]

The 'One Nation' faction led by Martin Woodroofe won the 1988 contest over the right's Andrew Tinney, but Conservative Central Office were determined to end this damaging and divisive feuding. As soon as the result had been announced, senior Conservative official made an appeal to the leaders of warring factions to end their in-fighting aware of the damage being done both to the image of the Conservative Party in general and the Young Conservatives in particular. Woodroofe and Tinney were summoned to Conservative Central Office to be told by Peter Morrison that in the interests of party unity the two of them, and their supporters, should put their differences behind them and channel their energies into the battle with the Labour Party.[253]

Unfortunately for the Conservative Party, as the 1989 contest for the leadership of the Young Conservatives got under way it was soon overshadowed, once again, by bitter fighting between the two factions and further accusations of dirty tactics. The Young Conservative Conference in Southport in February 1989, at which the chairmanship would be decided, opened with a warning from Morrison that the behaviour of the Young Conservatives was on trial:

> For the next 48 hours, you are the Conservative Party in the minds of the
> television viewers and the newspaper readers. So, please, during the course of

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[252] *The Times*, 2nd March 1988, pg.4.
[253] *The Times*, 15th March 1988, pg.2.

the next 48 hours make sure that the way that you conduct your arguments is just as important as the substance of them.[254]

The outspoken views of the Young Conservatives continued to sour relations with the Conservative Party. This was particularly the case over the issue of Europe which threatened to tear the Party apart. At the 1993 Young Conservative Conference, despite efforts to avoid scheduling a debate on the divisive issue of Europe, a last minute ballot lead to a debate on the Maastrict Treaty during which a copy of the treaty was torn up. Much to the embarrassment of the Conservative Party hierarchy, divisions over Maastrict were exposed as the YCs voted overwhelmingly against John Major's policy on Europe. One delegate, Paul Oakley, criticised the governments; 'empty phrases, such as 'lets be at the heart of Europe' when some of us would rather be at the throat of Europe'.[255]

By 1994 the threat of abolition was hanging over the head of the Young Conservatives. As numbers continued to decline to an official membership of 7,000 Sir Anthony Durant, a senior Conservative backbencher and former YC national organiser called, in March 1994, for the YC's to be closed down and replaced with a new, youth-club style organisation aimed at teenager, with an emphasis on sports and social events.[256]

Rumours continued to abound in the summer of 1994 about the possible closing down of the Young Conservatives as Conservative Party Central Office set out to review its youth recruitment policy with the news that the membership of the YCs was hovering

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[254] *The Sunday Telegraph,* 12th February 1989, pg 1.
[255] *The Guardian,* 8th February 1993, pg 2.
[256] *The Daily Telegraph*, 5th April 1994, pg 4.

around the 3,000 mark. Although a committee meeting of Conservative party associations was said to have been convened to consider ways of strengthening the youth movement, one source claimed that senior officers were planning to kill of the YCs. Even then there were those loyalists who rallied round the beleaguered young Tories. In June 1994 Nigel Evans, Conservative MP for Ribble Valley, said: "The YCs are very good in constituencies. When the chips are down they're first over the top."[257]

The growing opinion poll lead of the Labour Party, under their new youthful leader Tony Blair, especially amongst young voters, forced John Major's Cabinet to discuss the problem of youth recruitment in August 1994. The Conservative Party announced the launching of a new 'youth offensive' headed by Micheal Dobbs, the novelist and new Party Deputy Chairman. The initiative, which caused concern to some of those on the right wing of the Conservative Party, involved a radical restructuring of the party machine in order to boost membership in universities and colleges. The Conservative Party had come to believe that the traditional concentration of resources upon the YCs, long the mainstay of the party's drive for the youth vote, was outdated at a time of rapidly expanding student numbers. By August 1994 the YCs had less than half the number of members as the Conservative Students with 10,000 members.

The plans drawn up by Conservative Party Central Office involved transferring more effort and manpower into supporting Conservative students in the universities. Party agents were also ordered to play a more active role in supporting these groups, whilst Central Office's youth department was expected to concentrate its resources on the

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[257] *The Daily Telegraph*, 16th June 1994, pg 6.

new college recruitment drive. YC representation at the Party Conference was also reduced whilst that of the college student associations was stepped up. Of particular concern for Conservative Ministers pondering the problem of youth recruitment was the idea that the hard-right views of the YCs were damaging the Party's image. The right-wing of the Party, precisely because the YCs had remained a bastion of Thatcherism, expressed concern at what they saw as the bypassing of the YCs.[258]

In October 1994 the Conservative Party faithful went to Bournemouth for the annual party conference. It was ironic in the extreme that one of Majors key pledges had been to combat the rise of a 'yob culture' in Britain and the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, was emphasising a strong line on law and order when, once again, it was the Young Conservatives who thoroughly embarrassed the Party leadership with their boorish behaviour once again providing a blow to the uneasy rapport between the Conservative Party and its youth wing.[259]

Conservative Party Central Office's continued exasperation with the Young Conservatives was expressed with the announcement in November 1994 that Central Office had withdrawn funding and other assistance for the annual YC Conference due to take place in Southport in the February 1995. In previous years Central Office had footed more than half the bill of the annual YC Conference, but YC leaders were faced with prospect of paying the £15,000 Conference bill themselves. Furthermore, organisers were told that the Party Chairman, Jeremy Hanley, was too busy to attend the conference. Nonetheless, despite what seemed to amount to a snub to the YCs, three Cabinet Ministers, including Michael Howard, the then Home Secretary, and a

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[258] *The Daily Telegraph*, 21st August 1994, pg 3.
[259] *The Guardian,* 14th October 1994, pg 8.

string of junior ministers and senior Conservative backbenchers accepted invitations to speak. Sources within the Conservative Party were concerned about the press attention placed on the YCs and their antics and also expressed disquiet at the special place granted to the YCs in the Party hierarchy- a place hitherto denied to their Conservative student counterparts. The YCs' independent and sometimes rebellious line had also won them few friends amongst the Party hierarchy.[260]

Instead, Conservative Party Central Office made plans for a 'summer party' in the form of a huge Conservative youth rally with pop stars and side-shows to be held in June 1995. Organisers hoped that it would attract 18,000 young people and it was planned as part of the Party's strategy to shift attention away from the Young Conservatives by focusing on what one figure within Central Office described as "more normal young members" in the Conservative Student movement. Once again, the Conservative Party was expressing concern at the ever right ward move of the YCs and their vocal criticism of John Major and his leadership whilst the Conservative Students, who were once a greater embarrassment to the party, were viewed as being more in touch with young people.

Only a month later the 'summer party' had been scrapped by Central Office. The official reason for cancellation was the poor state of Conservative Party funds- at that time £16 million in the red. The Conservative Deputy Chairman in charge of the youth section, Michael Dobbs told colleagues that the event could not be a priority at a time when funds were tight: "In our current financial position where we are making people redundant can we really justifying spending someone's salary on a party?"

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[260] *The Sunday Telegraph*, 27th November 1994, pg 3.

However, privately party leaders had expressed fears that not enough youngsters would turn up and that once again the event would be dominated by Young Conservatives with further unwelcome publicity. Although officially party sources denied the cancellation was anything to do with fear of the youth section embarrassing the party, one prominent figure said: "It was well known that they [Conservative Party Central Office] were embarrassed by the YCs, few senior ministers are coming to the February conference and there is no doubt why this festival has been cancelled."[261]

In the end, the Young Conservatives Annual Conference did go ahead in 1995, albeit financed from YC funds, not by Conservative Party Central Office. However, the YCs were careful to avoid the kind of bad publicity which they had received in the previous year. Leading YCs banned journalists and cameras from the main social event of their conference in Southport. By the autumn of 1995 Conservative Ministers were once again expressing concern about the media and their concentration on the sometimes outlandish antics of the YCs. In a deliberate attempt to distance themselves from the YCs, Conservative Party Central Office left the YCs to organise the 1995 Conference themselves.[262]

However, despite the best efforts of both the YC leadership and of Conservative ministers to salvage the tainted image of the Conservative Party youth wing, controversy was never far away. In late March 1995 the YCs were involved in a row over allegations of bribery with free dinners by a slate of 'wet' candidates trying to oust the Euro-sceptic leadership of the YCs. The allegations centred on the annual

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[261] *The Daily Telegraph*, 27th December 1994, pg 6.
[262] *The Guardian,* 11th February 1995, pg 5.

elections for the five top positions in the Young Conservatives which would be decided by 175 chairmen and women who represented the then1,500 YC membership. The son of a wealthy Asian businessman, Riaz Mansha, was alleged to have paid for expensive dinners at the Carlton club in an attempt to persuade YC chairman and women from London, Edinburgh, Leeds, Cardiff, Nottingham and Manchester, to back the 'wet' slate of candidates. The 'wet' group of candidates, including the then Chairman of Yorkshire area YCs, claimed that the poor membership of the YCs was due to the "total bankruptcy" of the then leadership and proposed winning back youthful voters through such initiatives as a free national conference, free membership packs, a free holiday-to-America competition and a free magazine. Conservative Central Office refused to investigate the allegations despite formal complaints from 23 YC Chairmen and women, but their exasperation was obvious.[263]

The Conservative youth movement seemed to be coming under attack from all directions by the summer of 1995. The dire state of the Conservative Party's funds- a £16 million overdraft exacerbated by falling membership and a withering membership base- meant that the redundancy axe had to be wielded at Conservative Party Central Office. The post of Chairman of Conservative Students was one of those due to be axed and was only saved when sponsorship was arranged with a private company.[264]

Nonetheless, at least on the surface, the Conservative Party continued in its efforts to recruit young members. At the October 1995 Conservative Party Conference, Sebastian Coe, was appointed by the Party Chairman, Brian Mawhinney, as the member of his campaign in charge of youth. Coe launched himself into his brief by

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[263] *The Guardian*, 20th March 1995, pg 3.
[264] *New Statesman and Society*, 9th June 1995, pg 11.

introducing a dozen young men and women to speak who had flourished under the Conservative Government. The youth session of the conference was concluded by William Hague, former Young Conservative, then Welsh Secretary and at 34 the youngest member of the Cabinet, who complained of the nations "sickening " habit of running down the potential of its youth. Unfortunately, members of the Young Conservatives and Conservative Students privately described the line up as a "beauty parade" and an "outrageous sham" claiming that the Conservative Party had no real commitment to recruiting young people. As evidence they pointed to the recent closing of the parties youth department and a cutting back of resources available to the youth wing.[265] In early 1996 Conservative Party Central Office announced that there would not be a national Young Conservative conference- it was said that the conference had been cancelled for lack of interest.[266]

The Young Conservatives had become an embarrassment to the Conservative Party and a millstone round their neck. As the *Independent* perceptively commented in 1996 on the cancellation of the YC conference:

> Every year it happens: the Maastrict treaty is torn up on the platform to thunderous applause, or the Anne Summers stripper troupe is hired to entertain the delegates, or someone calls for the reintroduction of the death penalty, just for Edward Heath. With YC membership in freefall and those few who remain espousing increasingly [extremist] policies, divorce seems inevitable.[267]

At the Conservative Central Council meeting in Harrogate in March 1998 the talk amongst the Conservative faithful, still reeling and shell-shocked from their historic General Election defeat in May 1997, the talk was of relaunch, reform and renewal.

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[265] *The Guardian*, 13th October 1995, pg 10.
[266] *The Guardian*, 21st January 1996, pg 12.
[267] *The Independent,* 17th January 1996, pg. 5.

However amongst the endorsements of William Hague's vision of a modern political party boasting membership hotlines and grassroots consultation, there were few who noticed that the youthful Conservative leader had effectively strangled the organisation which had helped both himself, amongst others, on the road to a political career. It was at this meeting in Harrogate that the Young Conservatives were finally wound up.

By 1998 membership of the YCs was down to fewer than 5,000 between the age of 16 to 30 year olds. Conservative Students, based on university campuses was marginally stronger at around 8,000. However, the third strand of the Conservative youth movement, Conservative Graduates, had slumped to a mere 1,000, mainly confined to London. It was with a little misty-eyed fondness but also with some relief, bearing in mind some of the former antics of young members of the Conservative Party, that these three groups were wound up and replaced with a new, closely supervised umbrella organisation, Conservative Future.

Archie Norman, Conservative Party Vice-Chairman and the man who revived the Asda superstore chain with his 'Tell Archie' campaign was given a key role in the rebranding of Conservative youth. Norman believed that the fortunes of the movement have matched the decline of community conservatism as a host of new activities have come to compete for activists time. Norman maintains that: "The interest in politics has remained. The interest in going to social functions under a political umbrella has disappeared." The plan now is to relaunch "in a modern political way that will appeal to youth". According to the Conservative Party, there would be no attempt to recreate a social club. MPs and other activists would be

closely involved in building local groups, direct mail would target first time voters, and the focus would be on campaigning and political organisation.[268]

The new youth organisation was named Conservative Future and was launched with great fanfare in 1998. The organisation was designed as a broad coalition to include the Young Conservatives, Conservative Students and Conservative Graduates. Party Leader, William Hague, and Party Chairman, Lord Parkinson, predicted great things for the new organisation, which was intended to provide a clean break with the defunct Young Conservatives. Hague claimed that Conservative Future would draw thousands of professionals into the party and would lead to half the members of the Conservative Party being under 40 by 2002. Unfortunately for the Conservatives the new organisation continued to be dogged by allegations of extremism and corruption which tainted the relationship with the parent party. The first leader of Conservative Future, Donal Blaney, became embroiled in a row over a racist campaign and his leadership was marked by spats and arguments with the parent party. One insider accused Blaney of primarily being interested in keeping himself and his friends in office and remarked: "All Donal does is demand more money so that he can waste it on lunatic ideas".[269]

## **Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have shown that the Conservative Party has not been successful in recruiting young members through its youth organisations. Whilst there were brief

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[268] *The Guardian*, 28th March 1998, pg 8.  Conservative Green Paper, *Blueprint for Change*. October 1997, pg 6-7.
[269] *The Guardian,* 28th March 1999, pg 4.

periods of recovery and consolidation during the period 1970 to 2001, the trend both in the Young Conservatives and the Conservative Students has been one of falling membership. There seems little indication that the new Conservative Future organisation will be able to reverse this pattern. Why has the Conservative Party been so unsuccessful and what does this contribute to our understanding of participation and non-participation in the political system? Furthermore, can we fit our findings into our model of participation and non-participation.

As we have noted, it is not easy to explain why the Conservative Party has been unsuccessful in recruiting young members as there are a number of factors which have had an effect on membership over the period under examination. Some factors which may have worked to the benefit of the Conservative Party in its recruitment of young members, may have been masked by some factors which worked to their detriment. Furthermore, it is difficult to judge which of these factors were major factors and which were less important factors as this might have changed over an almost 30 year period of time.

What seems clear is that part of the explanation for the Conservative's failure can be put down to a general decline in membership of all political parties, not just the Conservative Party and amongst the population as a whole rather than just among young people. The membership of the Conservative Party, declined from 1,550,000 in 1970 to 330,000 in 2001. As such it is perhaps not surprising that the number of young members has also declined. The number of members in the youth organisations has declined proportionately from 62,000 to 9,000. As is clear from the figures presented in the previous chapters, in 1970 members of the youth organisation made

up 4% of the total membership and by 2001 this figure was 2.7%. The Labour Party has experienced a similar decline in membership. Therefore, in part the decline in the Conservative youth organisation could merely reflect a general decline in party membership for reasons that have already been examined.

At the same time, the failure may also result in part from a decline in the popularity of the Conservative Party itself, especially towards the end of the Conservatives time in office, just prior to the 1997 General Election. Certainly, political parties have become less popular vehicles for political participation, but the Conservative Party at various times during the period (and especially during the Major government of 1992-97) may also have lost members because of disillusionment with the actions of the party in government. Once again, it could be argued that this would effect those of all ages, rather than just the young.

In addition, the decline certainly in part reflects the fact that young people in particular are becoming less likely to get involved in the formal political process through such institutions as political parties. There is a wide body of academic research and evidence which points to a general apathy amongst young people towards the political process in general and towards traditional forms of political participation such as political parties in particular. Evidence seems to indicate that this is a growing trend, in addition to the general reluctance of all members of society to join political parties.

It is tempting to conclude that these factors all point to a downward trend in the membership of political parties that has been occurring for the last 50 years and that,

within that, there is a another trend for young people not to get involved in political participation by joining political parties. The membership figures already presented indicate that the memberships of the youth organisations of the Conservative Party have fallen broadly in proportion to the membership of the party as a whole. Sometimes the proportion has risen or fallen, but only very slightly; in 1970 the proportion of Conservative members in the youth organisations was 4%, by 1986 it had risen to 5.5% and then by 2001 it had fallen again to 2.7%. As such, it might be concluded that the changes in the membership of the Conservative youth organisations (in this case broadly downwards) were caused by broader, external trends and variables which the youth organisations themselves could have done nothing to change.

However, I would argue that the youth organisations themselves did contribute to these changes in membership, even while they were victims of broader trends. The examination of the Conservative youth movements has shown how their actions probably accentuated downward trends in membership, but they also support my model of participation and non-participation. It is important to stress again that I have developed a model of participation <u>and</u> non-participation. Therefore, whereas Seyd and Whiteley were attempting to look at why members were members, I am also trying to examine why potential members did not become members; as such, focusing on <u>dis</u>incentives as well as <u>in</u>centives.

With the Conservative youth organisations we are mainly looking at disincentives because the organisation was broadly unsuccessful. As we have seen, the Conservative youth organisation set out to recruit young members. From their efforts

it is clear that they knew that the types of incentive needed to recruit a young person were slightly different from those needed to attract older members. Therefore, both the Young Conservatives and the Conservative Students went to great lengths to convince potential members that membership would be fun. There was much emphasis on socialising, drink, partying and interaction with members of the opposite sex. These are what Seyd and Whiteley call selective process incentives- the incentive of having a good time. Members also joined for more political reasons (collective positive incentives and collective negative incentives for example), but emphasis was placed on the social side because it could be argued that young people place more emphasis on these factors.

Unfortunately, whatever incentives were derived from these factors, they were far out-weighed by disincentives, which were derived from the organisations themselves. I have argued that one of the main problems for the Conservative youth organisation was one of image. The Conservative Students, and especially the Young Conservatives, suffered from a poor public image. They were seen as extreme and bigoted, as divided, as socially-exclusive, as some-how 'sad' or unfashionable. This portrayal was sometimes unfair, but in my view this perception (which has entered popular culture) proved to be a disincentive for potential members. In my modification of Seyd and Whiteley's model I have suggested a disincentive variable of 'social norms'. In Seyd and Whiteley's original model 'social norms' were an incentive. An individual would join a party due to the approval of peers or family. However, in my view this could also be a disincentive. If an organisation is seen as unfashionable, 'sad', or un-trendy, potential members could be put off joining. In this case, friends and peers may question why an individual would want to associate with

such a group of people as the Young Conservatives. Not all members would be put off, it would depend on how other factors influenced the decision, but in my view it clearly had an effect. It could be argued that joining any political party is seen in youthful terms as being a cost in terms of social norms, but that the Conservative youth organisations were seen as more a social cost than other party youth organisations. Unfortunately for the Conservative youth organisation, all their posters, t-shirts, advertising campaigns and personality endorsement were not going to change that perception.

The other main factor which influenced membership of the Conservative youth organisation is one which varied over the period 1970-2001; the relationship between the parent party and the youth wing. This is where considerations of mobilisation help complement my model of participation and non-participation. Potential members need to be recruited. However, as I have already noted, this factor in itself is related to the earlier factor of image. As we have already explained, the youth organisations are a semi-independent wing of the parent party and they rely on the parent party for money and support. This puts the parent party in a strong position in relation to the youth organisation. If the relationship is good, the youth organisation can enjoy resources and support which will help boost efforts at recruitment. However, if the relationship is bad, the youth organisation could find itself out in the cold. Thus, the relationship factor can effect recruitment.

We saw in this chapter how this was the case with the Conservative youth organisations. During the 1970s, the relationship between the Conservative Party and the YCs and the FCS was good and the organisation enjoyed support. However,

during the 1980s and 1990s, starting with the FCS and later continuing with the YCs, the activities of the youth organisations became an embarrassment to the parent party. Whilst the Conservative Party played lip service to the need to recruit young members, its actions showed that, once the youth organisations became a hindrance, they were disposable. In 1986 the Federation of Conservative Students were a success with 30,000 members, but this did not stop Norman Tebbit closing the organisation down and replacing it with the Confederation of Conservative Students which could be more tightly controlled.

This incident illustrates an important point about young people and political parties. I have noted in earlier chapters that one possible explanation for the reluctance of young people to get involved in 'mainstream' political activities such as membership of a political party lies in the issue of efficacy. Does the contribution of the young member make a difference? Is s/he actually listened to, and given a meaningful role in, the party? Research has shown that young people are sceptical that their voice will be listened to, so they simply do not participate in this form of political activity. The relationship between the Conservative Party and both the Young Conservatives and especially the FCS, seems to support this sceptical view. The Conservative Party said that it wanted young members, but it saw their role as that of obedient foot soldiers. When the FCS and the YCs failed to play the role allotted to them and began to talk about radical politics which could embarrass the party, they were reined back in. This takes us back to Seyd and Whiteley's explanation of why people leave political parties. As parties become more centralised and disciplined, so members leave in frustration. With the Conservative Party and its youth organisations, as long as relations were good the youth organisations received support, when relations were

bad, as they were with the FCS in the 1980s and with the Young Conservatives during the 1990s and until they too were closed down, support suffered, as did the recruitment efforts of the organisation. How do these explanations help us understand changes in the membership of the Labour Party youth organisations? That is what I shall examine in the next chapter.

# Chapter 8.

## The Labour Party youth organisations, 1970-2001.

Having examined the possible reasons for the fluctuating membership fortunes of the Conservative Party youth organisations in the previous chapter I now turn to their compatriots in the Labour Party youth organisations. Whereas the Conservative Party youth organisations saw an absolute decline in membership and a failure to recruit young members, the Labour Party youth organisations have had a more mixed record of recruitment and retention in the period 1970-2001.

The next task is therefore to attempt to explain these variations in the membership of the Labour Party youth organisations to judge what this can tell us about the participation of the young in politics and what a study of the Labour Party's youth movements can add to my model of participation and non-participation.

As with the Conservative youth organisations, a study of the Labour youth organisations suggest a number of factors which have effected their success in recruiting young members. As with the Conservative youth organisations these variables divide into two main types. However, these variable work slightly differently with the Labour youth organisations than they did with the Conservative youth organisations. The first factor is once again one of general image. I will suggest that the general image of the Labour youth movement had an influence on the ability of them to recruit young members. For many years, the Labour youth organisations

and especially the Young Socialists, suffered from a poor image derived from their perceived political extremism and their bitter infighting. In the later part of the period, in the 1990s, the image of the Labour youth organisations recovered for reasons that I shall examine. It could also be argued that the infighting within the organisation detracted from the efforts to recruit new members, a factor which would fit within a mobilisation explanation of participation and non-participation.

The factor of the image of the Labour Party youth organisations contributes to the second variable which I have identified, like the Conservative youth movements, that of the relationship between the youth organisations and the parent party. The activities of the Labour youth movements not only effected their own ability to recruit new young members but also effected their relationship with the parent party. As with the Conservative youth movements, this in turn effected the ability of the youth organisations to recruit new members. The variables relating to image fit into my model of participation and non-participation. The relationship between the youth organisation and the parent party fits into the mobilisation model of participation which I suggest compliments the model of incentives and disincentives. I would argue that a youth organisation which enjoys a good relationship with its parent party will enjoy support and resources which enable it to be an effective vehicle of mobilisation whilst an organisation hamstrung in its efforts at recruitment by division, lack of resources and lack of support will not be.

**Problems with image.**

The first variable which can be said to have effected the recruitment efforts of the Labour youth movements was one of general image. During the period in question the Labour youth movements, and especially the Young Socialists, could be seen to have a problem with their perceived image. They were regarded by many as being dour, extremist and constantly engaged in bitter ideological infighting. This problem with their image during the 1970s and 1980s can be said to have been a disincentive for young people to join the youth organisations of the Labour Party.

This problem with image can be seen to have been a disincentive to join in itself, but it would also contribute to a disincentive under what Seyd and Whiteley termed 'social norms' as part of their model of participation. Seyd and Whiteley claimed that one of the reason an individual would join a political party would be due to social norms, the approval of peers or family. As part of my enhancement of their model, I suggested that for young people social norms are important in shaping individual behaviour both as an incentive and a disincentive. So, in my chapter on the Conservative youth organisation, I suggested that because the Young Conservatives suffered from a problem with its image 'social norms' would act as a disincentive on those considering joining. The Labour Party youth movements also suffered from this problem for some, but importantly not all, of this period. As I progress I will chart how this factor could vary over time.

For example, in the early 1970s the Young Socialists took their task seriously and remained active; holding regular gatherings to discuss the issues of the day and organising rallies and marches on various important areas of policy. However, the tone of this activity remained firmly on the left of the Labour Party. At the 1971

Young Socialists Annual Conference in Skegness, 500 Young Socialist delegates greeted with great enthusiasm a call by former Junior Education Minister, Joan Lester, for the abolition of private education. Delegates also passed a resolution calling for a 'united socialist Ireland'; a proposal from Bristol Young Socialists claimed that the only answer to the problems in Ulster at that time was the sweeping away of the Unionist regime and the withdrawal of the British army.[270]

As the trade union movement struggled with the anti-union legislation of the new Heath Government, the Young Socialists demonstrated at the Trades Union Congress Conference in Blackpool in September 1971. Several hundred Young Socialists were in a position to harangue the delegates as they entered the Congress Hall with the cry: "Tories out- general strike" and "Back the workers- sack the Tories."[271]

The Young Socialists reacted with similar determination to the challenges of the Heath government and the rising unemployment of the early 1970s. In March 1973 a mass rally of more than 4,000 Young Socialists at the Empire Pool Wembley greeted the climax of a 1972 version of the Jarrow march against unemployment. The Young Socialists gave a rapturous welcome to 300 young 'Right to Work' marchers, some of whom had been on the march to London for five weeks. The Young Socialists had organised a series of marches from Glasgow, Southampton, Swansea and Liverpool which all culminated at the rally. In a example of what the Young Socialists could achieve, special trains and coaches brought in hundreds more unemployed teenagers to the rally. The rally boasted speeches from politicians, trade union leaders and marchers, whilst, in a coupling which would be used in the future by young Labour

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[270]*The Times*, 12th April 1971, pg 2. *The Times*, 13th April 1971, pg 2.
[271]*The Daily Telegraph*, 8th September 1971, pg 7.

Party activists in their efforts to recruit the young, a number of entertainers such as Spike Milligan, George Melly and Larry Adler gave their service free. It was clear evidence that young political activists could be relevant to young people.[272]

These examples also illustrate another variable involved in participation. The 'Right to Work' made use of entertainers (although it is doubtful whether Milligan, Melly and Adler could be counted as being on the cutting edge of youthful credibility) in an attempt to boost recruitment. As we shall see, this has been a feature of the youth wings attempts to recruit new members since the 1970s.

The use of entertainers and other personalities who it was believed would appeal to young people could be said to contribute towards an explanation of participation. Seyd and Whiteley identified one possible cause of participation as what they termed 'selective process incentives'; political parties provided certain inducements for membership which stemmed not from the ideas or policies of the party but from the very process of participation and membership. In other words individuals could join a political party because it can be a way of having fun and meeting new people. The involvement of pop stars, actors and entertainers and the weaving of political activity and what might be called 'social activities' is certainly something that seems to be more emphasised by the young wings of the political parties than the parent party. Recruitment material aimed at young members certainly seems to place more emphasis on the 'fun' aspects of participation than that of the older members.

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[272]*The Times*, 13th March 1972, pg 2.

I would argue that these 'selective process incentives' identified by Seyd and Whiteley could be more important for young members than for older members and so should be accorded greater status in any revised model of youth participation. As Julian Critchley commented, he joined the Young Conservatives not for the politics but because they boasted the best-looking girls. An emphasis on selective process incentives also helps explain a decline, not only in the main parent party but even more markedly in the youth sections since the 1950s. Individuals used to join political parties precisely because they provided social activities; since the 1950s more opportunities have been open for individuals social lives and so the political parties have suffered. We could argue that, if proportionally more young people joined the youth movements for the selective process incentives, this could explain why the youth movements might have suffered disproportionally.

However, the Young Socialists remained firmly in the hands of the extreme-left and, in particular, in the hands of the *Militant Tendency*, an organisation still tolerated within the Labour Party. The Young Socialists rewarded being awarded a place on the NEC with a continuous barrage about the leadership of the Labour Party and its policies. At a 600 strong Young Socialist rally in Skegness in April 1973 speakers demanded a programme that would include nationalisation of the banks, insurance companies and more than 300 big business concerns.[273] The Young Socialists seemed hell bent on sniping at the Labour Party hierarchy, rather than concentrating on recruiting young activists and winning the youth vote. This was especially unfortunate

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[273] *The Times,* 25th April 1973, pg 2.

as opinion polls indicated that the youth vote was slipping away from the Labour Party in the run up to the first General Election of 1974.[274]

Harold Wilson won the first General Election of 1974, but could only manage to form a minority government. It seemed as if a further election was not only inevitable but, also imminent. However, to the frustration of the Labour Party leadership, the Young Socialists concentrated their efforts on pursing a left-wing agenda combined with vicious attacks on the Labour leadership. At the Young Socialist conference in Clacton in March 1974, Harold Wilson came under fierce attack for supposedly owning five houses at a time when delegates claimed that millions of working people could not obtain council housing. The Young Socialists also provided an early taste of the bitter battles to come within the Labour Party over internal organisation and democracy.

A resolution, passed by an overwhelming majority, called for members of the Parliamentary Labour Party to be drawn primarily from the industrial trade unions. They should carry out policies as decided by national conferences and be subject to immediate recall by local constituency parties. Furthermore, the Young Socialists demanded that MPs should receive no more than the average wage of a skilled worker, with the necessary expenses, and receive no income from outside business interests. Finally, delegates called for the nationalisation of the press, television and radio under what was termed "workers control". This was justified by what was said to have been a vicious campaign against the Labour Party ran by most national newspapers in the run up to the February 1974 election. Young Socialist Julie Aitman

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[274]For example see the opinion poll which pointed to a clear opinion poll lead for the Conservatives in 20 key university seats published in *The Times* on 21st February 1974, pg 4.

claimed that: "the press was concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority of press barons who wielded incredible power in their ability to mould public opinion."[275]

The Young Socialist pressed on with their left-wing agenda throughout 1974 and into 1975 with calls at their annual conference in March 1975 in Blackpool for the Government to take over all second houses in rural areas to house the homeless as well as further calls for sweeping nationalisation, in this case of the land and major food companies.[276]

The dominant national issue in British politics in the summer of 1975 was the referendum called by Harold Wilson on Britain's continued membership of the EEC. Wilson had conceded a referenda on the issue partly to paper-over the deep divisions within his own party over the issue of Europe which reached right to the heart of his Cabinet. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Young Socialists campaigned vigorously against the EEC during the referendum campaign. At the Blackpool Conference delegates backed a resolution which declared: "The EEC is an organisation of Western European capitalism interested only in the furtherance of big business and profit throughout Europe at the expense of the European working class." The resolution urged a campaign to reject the EEC on what it called capitalist terms and based on the slogan: "Common Market, No- United Socialist Europe, Yes". One delegate declared; "We must say openly that the Labour Government, by recommending a 'Yes' vote has scabbed on the working class."[277]

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[275] *The Times*, 15th April 1974, pg 2.
[276] *The Guardian,* 31st March 1975, pg 2.
[277] *The Times*, 1st April 1975, pg 4.

That the organisation continued to be dominated by a decided left-wing agenda was open to no debate. At the 1976 Labour Party Conference in Blackpool, the Young Socialists met under their National Chairman, and unreconstructed Trotskyite, Andrew Bevan. The demands of the Young Socialists were familiar. The answer to Britain's problems were for the banks to be nationalised which should then give interest free loans to local authorities. This would release funds for a new housing drive, which would both solve the housing shortages and cut unemployment at a stroke. The remainder of the unemployed would be dealt with by reducing the working week to 35 hours. Other policy suggestions included the abolition of the monarchy and of the House of Lords.[278]

Members of the Young Socialists seemed much more preoccupied with using the organisation as a pawn in the internal battles within the Labour Party as the Party squabbled over the way forward in the wake of their defeat. Any attempts by the Young Socialists to recruit new members seemed less motivated by a desire to create a body of politically motivated activists willing and able to campaign for the Labour Party against the Conservative Government, and more by a desire to recruit members to fight in the internal battles within the Party.

In September 1979, just a week before the painful post-defeat Annual Conference in Brighton, Andrew Bevan, called for a massive increase in the membership of the Young Socialists. Bevan suggested in *Labour Weekly*, the party official organ, an increase in membership from the then figure of 5,000-6,000 to 40,000 to 50,000. Bevan was backing the claim made by Tony Benn that the policies of Mrs Thatcher

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[278] *The Guardian*, 28th September 1976, pg 16.

and her Conservative Government, such as spending cuts, and a rise in unemployment amongst school-leavers would lead to a process of radicalisation amongst the young. Bevan and Benn believed that these disaffected young people becoming increasingly hostile to the Conservative government could be recruited into the Young Socialists. However, Bevan made it clear that, before the Conservatives could be tackled, the battle for the heart of the Labour Party had to be won. He claimed that many young people were aware of an important struggle for the soul of the Labour Party and that the Young Socialists should be at the forefront of pushing for the left's stance on re-selection of MPs, election of the party leader, determination of the party manifesto and abolition of the House of Lords.[279]

The Young Socialists reputation for extremism resurfaced in the summer of 1981 as riots and other disturbances broke out in a number of British cities. In July 1981 the Toxteth area of Liverpool descended into rioting in which 200 were arrested by the police. MPs had their attention drawn to a pamphlet published by Mersyside Labour Party Young Socialists which called for the immediate release of those imprisoned and for a one day general strike to bring down "the vicious Tory Government whose policies inevitably lead to violence." The pamphlet was severely hostile to the press, the Conservative Government and, particularly, the police, blaming "brutal police harassment" for what happened in Toxteth:

> The press rags have now called for the arming of the police to deal with the situation, as if CS gas was not enough. We believe that the police must be pulled out of the area. they have inflamed the situation with their brutality and mass arrests.[280]

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[279] *The Daily Telegraph*, 22nd September 1979, pg 36.
[280] *The Times,* 8th July 1981, pg 2.

Even Eric Heffer, Member of Parliament for the nearby constituency of Liverpool Walton, who had previously been a strong supporter of the Young Socialists, was quick, in his position as chairman of the Party's organisational committee, to distance both himself and the Labour Party from the leaflet and order an enquiry.

If further evidence was needed of the potential for the Young Socialists severely to embarrass a Labour leadership desperate to emphasise its 'moderate' credentials, it came just before the 1983 General Election. At the Young Socialists' Conference in Bridlington in April one speaker said: "Every bullet in a British soldier is another nail in the coffin of British imperialism". He was followed by a delegate who called for the "death of British troops". Both delegates were speaking in support of a resolution calling for "solidarity with Irish republicans fighting for a united Irish Republic". However, in mute testimony to the fact that not all Young Socialists had lost touch with political reality, the resolution was defeated by a large majority amongst the 1,000 Young Socialists present. Instead, a resolution emphasising that terrorist groups offered no solution was passed. Unfortunately for the image of the Young Socialists, the damage was done and both Labour and Conservative MPs leapt at the opportunity to attack both the speakers and the Young Socialists in particular. Gordon Bagier, Labour MP for Sunderland South said:

> It is crazy. If they really believe this, then the future of the Young Socialists is limited. This cannot possibly be taken seriously. It is certainly not a view of decent youngsters who understand what is going on in Northern Ireland.[281]

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[281] *The Times*, 5th April 1983, pg 2.

Events like these illustrate the left-wing, extremist nature of the Young Socialists. The extremist nature of the organisation would have not only proved a disincentive to those who might wish to join the party for ideological reasons (Seyd and Whiteley's altruistic concerns or collective positive incentives), but also social norms would have frowned disapprovingly on individuals wishing to join such an organisation.

The mid-1980s saw a fresh attempt to win young members for the Labour Party and this can be seen as a move to make the Labour Party look fashionable (therefore changing the social norm from a disincentive to an incentive) and also to make it look fun (Seyd and Whiteley's selective process incentive- the fun of participation).

In June 1985 the Labour Party launched 'Red Wedge'. Red Wedge was an attempt to attract young voters and potential activists through the use of pop performers like Billy Bragg and Paul Weller. The campaign was partly motivated by a Fabian Society pamphlet on the youth vote which argued that, in order to recapture the hearts of young people, Labour would have to do it in the cultural terms of youth. Lynn Franks, one of Labour's former PR agents who promoted Red Wedge, said: "The Labour Party reached the Eighties and discovered pop as a way of reaching young voters of the future." There was nothing particularly new about political parties relying on pop performers to boost their image with the young. Harold Wilson nominated the Beatles for OBEs for precisely that reason. Brian Walden, who was a Labour MP at the time, commented that: "Before that, Prime Ministers had never been interested in pop stars. It was an important innovation then, very typical of the great party manager at his best." The association with pop stars in an attempt to play on an image of youth was one that would be used to great effect more than a decade later when Tony Blair

associated shamelessly with the leading lights of what was to become known as 'Cool Britannia.'[282]

Red Wedge grew directly out of the use by the Greater London Council of pop music, and notably of free concerts, as a popular attraction in its campaign against attacks on it by the Conservative Government, and tours by artists such as Paul Weller and Billy Bragg in support of the Miners strike and against the Conservative Government's youth training scheme. The emergence of Red Wedge came at a time when pop music seemed to becoming increasingly politicised with the imagination of the young being captured by the idealism of Band Aid and the crusading campaigns of CND and the anti-apartheid movement. The Labour Party jumped at the opportunity to harness this idealism for their own ends. The problem with Red Wedge was that the pop stars who were recruited, although they remained broadly committed to the Labour Party, maintained a sense of independence; they had their own policy priorities and were not always willing to be simply used as a cheap publicity stunt by the Labour Party leadership.

Red Wedge was underpinned by a party political broadcast in July 1985 aimed specifically at the young vote. It featured clips from Labour organised rock concerts, including the performances of Billy Bragg, Aswad and the Communards, extracts from Neil Kinnock's speeches and interviews with young men and women about the misery of unemployment. The Labour Party also commissioned trendy designers, Katharine Hammett, Bodymap and the Grey Organisation, to design T-shirts for its Jobs and Industry campaign which largely concentrated on the plight of the young

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[282] *The Times,* 18th November 1986, pg. 12.

unemployed. In June 1985 Labour launched its 'Charter for Youth' in a London Jazz Club. Sponsors of the charter included musicians such as Billy Bragg, Pete Townsend, Tom Robinson, George Melly and Madness, and television stars, such as Rik Mayall from *The Young Ones* and David Yip from *The Chinese Detective.*[283]

However, despite the obvious success of Red Wedge in raising Labour's profile amongst the young, there were dissenting voices. The Young Socialists were not happy at having their task of campaigning stolen by a group of musicians, many of which were not even Labour Party members. One letter to the newspaper of the Young Socialists, *Socialist Youth*, raged that: "Paul Weller is a trendy poser and Red Wedge is a patronising flop." Evidence did seem to suggest that, despite Red Wedge, young people were as cynical about the claims of Labour politicians as they were about any others.[284]

The use of 'Red Wedge' raises a number of important points about theories of participation, reinforces the findings of the questionnaires and validates the model. Once again, one of the intentions behind the campaign was to marry the Labour Party and various pop stars and personalities (although, as we shall see, they had to be personalities with a certain degree of youth credibility) to push forward the idea that the Labour Party was a fun organisation to join; an organisation where you might get to hear some great bands, meeting other people of your age and possibly have a light smattering of politics. Therefore, the Labour Party was attempting to boost its membership by concentrating on those aspects which it believed would attract young members; selective process incentives. As was stated previously, a belief that young

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[283] *The Guardian,* 17th June 1985, pg. 10.
[284] *The Sunday Times,* 21st July 1985, pg. 5. *The Sunday Times*, 19th April 1986, pg. 10.

people, with more forms of social interaction open to them, needed to see political participation as fun meant that the political parties relied on the kind of campaigning which they would have not used in recruiting older members.

I would argue that social norms are an important factor in explaining youth participation, or indeed the lack of it, in political parties. The evidence from previous research is that political parties and the political process are not held in high regard by young people. In addition, it has been shown that membership of the Green Party amongst young people depends on a perception of how 'fashionable' that organisation is. Therefore, youthful perceptions of how fashionable a political party is, and the connected attitudes of peers, are important determinates of whether young people join a political party. If a political party is regarded as being fashionable then the joining of such a party would be a benefit under the general incentive theory as the joiner would receive the approval of his or her peers. If joining a party, or indeed any kind of formal political activity, was regarded as being unfashionable by peer opinion this would be a cost and thus a disincentive to membership. We could argue that young people are more susceptible to peer group approval and that, therefore, the cost or benefit effects of social norms acts disproportionately on young people.

It could be argued that previous research has shown a general disillusion with formal political activity such as political parties in youth culture and that this might constitute a general disincentive to join because of the costs outweighing the benefits in terms of the social norms. Furthermore, one political party might be perceived as being even more 'unfashionable' than another, so incurring even greater costs in terms of social norms and constituting an even great disincentive to membership outweighing other

motivations for joining. These social norms could change over time with a party growing or diminishing over a period of time due to its social norm acceptance. A political party in opposition might also gain social norm credibility due to the fact it is opposing the party 'in power'; thus benefiting from a youthful propensity for rebellion.

Red Wedge was relatively successful because it appealed to those young people who join political parties for the selective process incentives and the association with fashionable pop stars and figures from the world of entertainment can be said to have given the Labour Party, albeit for a short period, a dose of youthful credibility which meant that individuals may have joined because of the benefits from social norms. The disadvantage of young people joining for these reasons is that their loyalty and membership could proved extremely tenuous as some more exciting or fashionable past time emerges. A final point to make about Red Wedge is that, whilst it was not officially part of the Labour Party structure, it received the kind of financial backing from the Party that the extremist Young Socialists were starved of.[285]

At the 1987 General Election Labour's electoral standing amongst the young certainly improved enormously, although it proved not enough to win power. Labour gained 40% of the 18-24 age group compared with the 30.8% of the electorate as a whole; in comparison the Conservatives gained 37% of the 18-24 age group compared with the 43% they gained nationally. Although the Red Wedge campaign was judged a success on the basis of such figures it is difficult to gauge how much Billy Bragg, Paul Weller

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[285] For an interesting summary of the relationship between politics and popular music and the attempts by some politicians to gain youthful credibility by associating with politicians read Cloonan, M. *Mixing Pop and Politics* in *Politics Review*, Philip Allen Publishers, April 2000. For an insider account of the rise and fall of Red Wedge read the biography of Billy Bragg: Collins, A., *Still suitable for miners,* Virgin Publishing, London, 1998.

and company actually added. It was pointed out by some commentators that Labour's vote was already recovering among the young, a natural Labour supporting group, compared with the 1983 low. It is difficult to estimate but Red Wedge perhaps added 2% to Labour's support amongst the young. The success of Red Wedge can be gauged by the fact that the publicity it brought to the Labour Party moved the other two parties into action over their youth recruitment and campaigning. In 1986 John Biffen was heard to say: "Central Office is casting about like crazy for some top heavy coal-miners daughter to take on Billy Bragg."[286]

This attempt to make the youth organisations of the Labour Party look fashionable, trendy and fun with the association of the organisations with left-leaning pop-stars and personalities was a factor which both the Conservative Party and Labour Party tried, but which the Labour Party seemed to enjoy much more success with, mainly due to the calibre of the stars that could be attracted. With the demise of the extremist unfashionable Young Socialists in the early 1990s and its replacement with the moderate, fashionable Young Labour, the Labour Party continued to use a fresh and trendy image to recruit young people.

Less than a year after the enthusiastic launching of Young Labour, Tony Blair became Leader of the Labour Party. Blair was a Leader who positively drew on his relative youth as a political selling point and, as he reformed the Labour Party into 'New Labour', the recruitment of young people and the winning of the youth vote became a key campaigning issue. Here was a politician who, like Kinnock before him, believed that association with pop stars such as Oasis, Simply Red and D:Ream and celebrities

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[286] Figures are from B. Coxall and L. Robins, *Contemporary British Politics,* Macmillan, London, 1998. *The Times*, 18th November 1986, pg. 12.

such as Ben Elton and Chris Evans, as well as the revelation that he played guitar and listened to Guns N' Roses, could help win over the young. This strategy also plugged into a corresponding dissatisfaction with the ailing Conservative Government and its policies amongst young people. Blair clearly wanted to turn his youth to political advantage. In *The Times* in October 1994 he said:

> We're [the Labour Party] beginning to find already that our membership of the party is going up and young people are getting more involved. Its not for any great reasons to do with me except that they see there's someone that they can identify with a little bit easier.[287]

In November 1994 Young Labour held a combined training weekend and rally attended by such Labour supporting celebrities as Arthur Smith, Ben Elton, Jo Brand, Alison Moyet, Alan Rickman and Hattie Hayridge, as well as Labour politicians such as Tony Blair, Chris Smith and Neil Kinnock. Boasting 1,500 young activists packed into a theatre in south London, the rally was characterised by the standing ovation which Blair received *before* he spoke.[288] *New Statesman and Society* commented that the reception reminded them of the "fanatical adulation of Young Tories for Margaret Thatcher." Furthermore, *New Statesman* noted: "The contrast with the morose leftism of Labour Party Young Socialists typical just a decade ago was quite frightening."[289]

By the 1997 General Election Young Labour seemed to have succeeded where the Young Socialists had failed. Membership of the combined Labour youth wing of Young Labour and the National Organisation of Labour Students numbered an impressive 37,000. Furthermore, the members of Young Labour and NOLS seemed

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[287] *The Times*, 1st October 1994, pg. 8.
[288] Interview with Dean Toney (Young Labour activist), August 1998.
[289] *New Statesman and Society*, 18th November 1994, pg 10.

full square behind Tony Blair and his project. An article by Raekha Prasad in *The Big Issue* in October 1998 compared Young Labour activists, who were seen as professional and trendy, favourably with their Conservative counterparts (and indeed their Young Socialist predecessors). Whereas Young Conservatives were still viewed as Home Counties chaps and sloans, Prasad provided a guide as how to spot Labour Youth:

> They listen to: Mick Hucknall, D:Ream and Oasis. They wear: Paul Smith (the men), Nicole Farhi (the women), and Patrick Cox on the feet. They want to become: Lawyers or lobbyists. They drive: Ford Kas. They read: Irvine Welsh, 'The Daily Mail' and 'Bridget Jones Diary'[290]

Even their political opponents had to grudgingly concede that the Labour Party had succeeded in portraying a fashionable, trendy image that helped recruit young members. David Pickin, a Conservative Future officer, said: 'It became fashionable to support Labour with 'Rock the Vote' and D:Ream's *Things Can Only Get Better.*' James Graham, the Young Liberal Democrat's communication officer, commented: 'At Fresher's fairs, everyone's encouraging them to join Young Labour because it is a rather trendy thing to do.'[291]

Perceptions of division.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a closely related factor which I would argue effected recruitment and retention was perceptions of division. Academic evidence has shown that voters are drawn to those parties they perceive as being united over those that they perceive as being divided. I would argue that part of the reason for the

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[290] Prashad, R. *Party Line Dancing* in *The Big Issue,* 5-11th October 1998, pg14-16.
[291] Op cit, pg 15.

Labour Party's failure, both to attain office and to recruit and retain members, lay in its image as a divided political party. As those divisions were healed, or at least hidden beneath the surface, and especially after Tony Blair became leader in 1994, so public perceptions of the party improved. I would argue that this would apply equally to the youth organisations of the Labour Party. When the Young Socialists was seen as a divided and extremist organisation, this both put off potential members and alienated moderate existing members. With the replacement of the Young Socialists by Young Labour, an organisation which was carefully constructed to prevent a repetition of the division and extremism of its predecessor, the new organisation, like New Labour itself, was seen as moderate, modern and importantly, united. This, I would argue, helps explain why Young Labour has enjoyed more success than the Young Socialists.

## The relationship with the parent party.

As with the Conservative youth organisations perceptions of general image can also be said to be closely connected to another possible factor which could effect the Labour Party's ability to recruit new young members. This variable is the relationship between the parent party and their youth sections. As we saw with the Conservatives, this is an important consideration as the youth organisations are not totally autonomous organisations but a semi-independent part of the parent party still largely dependent on that parent for funding and support.

Therefore, it could be claimed that this relationship can have a potentially important effect on recruitment. If the relationship is good then the youth wing is rewarded with

financial backing, administrative help and the moral support of leading members of the party actively campaigning for the organisation. If the relationship is bad then the opposite will be the case: the youth wing will find itself short of funds and effectively shunned by the party with a consequential negative effect on recruitment.

This 'parent party-youth wing relationship' for the Labour Party varies considerably over the period 1970-2001 and it can help explain the variations in the success or failure of the youth organisations to recruit young members. As with the Conservative youth movements, a well financed and well-supported youth wing would be able to campaign, recruit and mobilise more effectively than a youth wing which is threadbare in its resources. The reason why this variable is linked in with the variable of image is that because the parent party, in seeking to portray itself as being acceptable and reasonable to a mainly moderate British electorate, would not take kindly to an extremist and out of control youth organisation whose image could help blight the image of the parent party and give easy ammunition to their political opponents. Thus, the two variables are related: poor image leads to a failure of recruitment but also leads to a lack of parent party support, which also leads to a failure of recruitment as resources are cut.

Ironically, whereas the relationship between the Conservative Party and its youth organisations was at first harmonious, but then soured later in the period, the relationship between the Labour Party and its youth organisations was almost the opposite, being poor in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly due to the outspoken extremism of the Young Socialists who many feared were being used as a vehicle for infiltration by the extreme-left, but then improving in the 1990s, although only after the Young

Socialists had been closed down and replaced by the more tightly controlled Young Labour.

In the early 1970s the main Labour youth movement was the Young Socialists. Formed, reluctantly in the 1920s, the Young Socialists had enjoyed a very difficult relationship with the hierarchy of the Labour Party. Layton-Henry recounts how the Young Socialists enjoyed a poor relationship with the Labour Party itself but also was riven with division and factional problems which hamstrung any serious effort to expand the Young Socialists into a mass youth organisation for the Labour Party. The organisation was dismantled and then reconstituted on a number of occasion between its inception in the 1920s, as the Labour League of Youth, and the late 1960s, in a vain attempt to form a more effective organisation. However, real fears remained within the Party that the Young Socialists were merely being used as a Trojan Horse through which extremist elements could gain access to positions of power within the Labour Party. This helps explain the reluctance of the Labour Party hierarchy to grant any real power or influence to the Young Socialists. A fear of Trotskyite infiltration was one of the issues which was to taint the relationship between the Labour Party and its youth wings right up until the 1990s and which consequently harmed any efforts of the Labour Party to recruit young people. It is for good reason that Zig Layton-Henry's 1976 article was entitled 'Labour's Lost Youth'- this name could have been equally appropriate to characterise the Labour Party's efforts for the next 15 years.[292]

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[292]Leyton-Henry, Z. *Labour's Lost Youth* in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 11, number 3, 1976. Pages 275-306.

As the 1970s dawned the Young Socialists were the main way by which young people were recruited into the Labour Party. However, the organisation seemed marginalised. A number of bruising battles, both within the organisation itself and with the parent party, had prevented the organisation from boosting its membership. By 1969 the Young Socialists with a membership of approximately 10,000. The NEC of the Labour Party had granted the Young Socialists a number of minor concessions in 1968 by which the Young Socialists were allowed a democratically elected national committee and total editorial control over a new official journal of Labour's youth movement, *Left*.[293]

The elections for the Labour Party Young Socialist National Committee in 1969 seemed to confirm the worse fears of the Labour Party hierarchy as Young Socialist representing the Militant Tendency gained a majority of the positions on the committee. The Young Socialists remained small and heavily dependent on the NEC for both financial and administrative support. Furthermore, the Young Socialists remained ideologically isolated from the mainstream of the Labour Party by their extremism. This extremism ensured that Labour Party leaders were careful to disassociate themselves from the youth movement and that leading Labour Party politicians rarely attended Young Socialist rallies or conferences- hardly an attitude to encourage a flourishing youth wing.

The Young Socialists activity was rewarded in 1972 by a Labour Party hierarchy which still found itself torn between the desire, and necessity, to build an active and involved youth section to recruit young people and the fear that such an organisation

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[293]Ibid, pg 303.

would be become dominated by extreme left-wing activists who would seek to subvert the Party from within. In an attempt to encourage the Young Socialists and to give them a true voice in policy making, the Labour Party, in 1972, gave the Young Socialists a seat on the Labour Party's ruling National Executive Committee for the first time since the Second World War. The first representative, elected by YS members, was Peter Doyle.[294]

By 1975 however, it was not just the verbal attacks by Young Socialists on Labour Party policy and Labour Party politicians which was causing concern to the Party hierarchy. Whilst the membership of the Young Socialists had slumped to only 6,000, members of the Young Socialists seemed increasingly intent on using their position not to recruit new members but to push the Labour Party to the extreme-left. In July 1975 Trotskyites within the Young Socialists were blamed for an anonymous letter which was circulated to Labour Party constituency associations detailing how to wreck the Government's anti-inflation policy, claiming that the imposition of a £6 pay curb was an example of the Labour Government's abandonment of its manifesto commitments and its rejection of the will of the party conference.[295]

By this time, some Cabinet ministers and moderate Labour MPs were becoming increasingly alarmed at the growing influence of left-wing extremists in constituency Labour Parties. In a climate of fear that moderate MPs could find themselves in growing danger of deselection by left-wing constituency associations, the Young Socialists came under increasing scrutiny from party managers who regarded them as a potent force in propagating left-wing policies. By the autumn of 1975 Party officials

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[294]*The Guardian,* 3rd April 1972, pg 2.
[295] *The Times,* 4th July 1975, pg 2.

claimed that the Young Socialists had been infiltrated by a Trotskyite group known as the Revolutionary Socialist League which had come to control 17 of the 18 Young Socialist regional executives.

There was growing concern that the Young Socialists were no longer pursuing their mandate by actively recruiting new young members for the Labour Party and, instead, under the direction of extreme-left wingers, were pursuing what was for some a more sinister agenda. A resolution put forward at the 1975 Labour Party Conference called for a working party to investigate the Young Socialists noting "the recent separatist trends." However, other constituencies saw no need for concern. An amendment from Tony Benn's constituency of Bristol South East praised the stirling work carried out during the General Election by both the Young Socialists and the National Organisation of Labour Students and called for a full-time organiser to build up the "mass youth and student movement." Whilst some saw the penetration of the Young Socialists as a great cause for concern, others seemed convinced that this was merely youthful high spirits and that the Trotskyites were merely nuisances.[296]

As Harold Wilson stepped down as Party Leader and Prime Minister to be replaced by James Callaghan, the Labour Party attempted to increase the recruitment of young activists by the appointment of a full-time youth officer at Transport House. Unfortunately, to the horror of many  right wing Labour MPs, the person appointed was Andrew Bevan, Chairman of the Young Socialists and somebody who made no secret of his Trotskyite sympathies. For the first time in the Labour Party's history, Labour's 95 full-time agents announced that they would refuse to work with him.

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[296] *The Times*, 1st September 1975, pg 2. *The Times,* 2nd September 1975, pg 4.

Technically, the agents opposed the appointment because Bevan was not a qualified party organiser with agents' experience. Behind the move, however, was the growing frustration of Labour's professional staff at the take-over of the Party at local-levels and by then national- level, by extremists.[297]

Frustration with the Young Socialists was heightened by a report on extreme-left wing activity within the Party produced by Reg Underhill, the National Agent. Entitled *Entryist Activities,* the report set out to investigate the degree of influence wielded by extreme-left wing 'entryist' organisations. The report quoted examples of constituencies in which a vocal minority of left-wing activists were pushing their constituencies to the left seeking to take control of party machinery at branch and constituency level and threatening to unseat sitting right-wing Labour MPs. The report identified the Young Socialists as one of the main ways by which the extreme left were entering the party:

> Most of the activity springs from the older element of the Labour Party Young Socialists, although their numbers are small in this region. There is a marked easing of pressure during the vacations. We can be affected by student intervention during term time, but until now all the constituencies have been able to contain this.[298]

Underhill based parts of his report on a confidential *Militant* document from 1974 entitled *British Perspectives and Tasks 1974* in which the Young Socialists were identified as a key point by which the extreme-left could gain influence within the Labour Party. On the Young Socialists, the *Militant* report said:

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[297] *The Sunday Times*, 10th October 1976, pg 1 & pg 3.
[298] *Entryist Activities*, The Labour Party, November 1975, pg 3.

> We have made big gains in the last period. The control of the Young Socialists nationally and in most regions, next year probably all, is an enormous weapon in our hands nationally and internationally.

The report also went on to say that: "The Young Socialist branches where we have support are already a springboard for work in the GMCs [General Management Committees]. We must draw the Young Socialists into work in the constituency parties."[299]

Not satisfied with control of the Young Socialists, a seat on the NEC and a national youth officer, the extreme-left made an attempt to gain control of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) in December 1976. NOLS was the other arm of the Labour Party's youth organisation charged with recruiting members and gaining Labour support in universities and colleges. For a brief period in 1974 NOLS had been controlled by the extreme-left until a broad-left alliance regained control. By 1976 NOLS had a membership of 4,500 drawn from 90 college groups. At the organisation's annual conference at Lancaster University an open struggle was fought between the 'Clause 4' group (aligned to the *Tribune* group), who controlled NOLS, and the Trotskyite Militant Action group for control of the Labour Party's student wing. At one point the conference was suspended by the outgoing National Youth Officer, Barrie Clarke, after a dispute over the eligibility of some delegates to vote. Edward Bober, the then Vice-Chairman and a member of Militant Action, seemed confident of victory and criticised the 'Clause 4' leadership:

> At present the organisation is submerged in a Broad-Left alliance which does not give a real socialist lead. We should like to see it as the independent voice of the Labour movement.

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[299] Quoted in *The Times*, 4th December 1976, pg 3 and *The Sunday Times*, 5th December 1976, pg 6.

Such optimism proved premature as the 'Clause 4' group retained control of the chairmanship and four other key roles, albeit by a narrow margin. None the less, the extreme-left remained determined to control NOLS as it was recognised that, whilst the student's organisation was relatively small, it could be seen as a potentially strong force if it were to combine in militant activities with the Young Socialists.[300]

Fresh infighting within the Labour student's movement could not have come at a worse time as evidence began to suggest a dramatic shift to the right amongst students. Between autumn 1976 and spring 1977 the number of card carrying Conservative students increased by 60% with the number of Conservative student associations rising from 78 to nearly 200. To the dismay of a Labour Party struggling with a wafer-thin majority, Conservative Party strategists began to claim that 70 seats could prove vulnerable to a rightward swing amongst students. Labour reacted in early 1977 with a circular sent to Cabinet Ministers urging them to step up their speaking arrangement in university towns. In addition, in January 1977 the Labour Party appointed its first full-time student organiser. However, the Chairman of NOLS, Mike Gapes, complained that Labour efforts were a case of too little and too late. Gapes claimed that Labour was facing a steady swing to the right, away from the radical traditions of the 1960s and 1970s, with students more concerned with getting a job. Gapes complained that, compared with the Labour Party, the Conservatives had poured: "enormous financial resources into the campaign which we can't match."[301]

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[300] *The Guardian*, 21st December 1976, pg 2.
[301] *The Sunday Times,* 30th January 1977, pg 13.

As Labour's majority disappeared and Callaghan's Government became a minority one, the Labour Party realised that winning the youth vote and recruiting more young members would be an important concern for the next General Election. In early 1978 it was proposed that a party political broadcast to be shown on television should be aimed specifically at youth and would be produced by the Young Socialists. Unfortunately, the proposed film was far from being what the Labour Party hierarchy had envisaged; Nicholas Bradley, the NEC member elected by the Young Socialists and Bevan proposed that the film would show, amongst other things, shots of out of work young people followed by footage of people shopping in luxury department stores. The party's campaign committee, chaired by Callaghan, were appalled at the proposal as they believed the film would be merely highlighting government failures rather than portraying a positive message. The broadcast was 'deferred' for latter discussion, but many thought that the idea has been effectively axed.[302]

In the end the long delayed broadcast did go ahead in June 1978 and appealed to young people to support Labour as the best means of influencing the organisation of society in the future. Whilst the broadcast was prepared by the Young Socialists it was subject to heavy censorship by Party officials eager to play down some of the more radical sentiments that some Young Socialist would have liked to emphasise. Consequently, the broadcast concentrated on the defects of public services and the threat posed to them by the Conservatives, rather than the pet Young Socialist idea of mass nationalisation. So, the broadcast referred to the Conservative threat to introduce "hotel charges" for stays in hospital and its probable effect on the unemployed, the poor and pensioners. On nationalisation there was only the remark that the Labour

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[302] *The Times*, 9th January 1978, pg 4.

Party would reorganise industry to: "satisfy the needs of the working people rather than the pockets of the rich".[303]

As the 1979 General Election approached, Callaghan fought desperately to keep together the conflicting factions of the Labour Party. The militant left-wing stance of the Young Socialists was only one of his problems as defeat loomed at the hands of Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Party. Callaghan was desperate to portray the Labour Party as the party of moderation during the election campaign and the Party Leader saw the Young Socialists as a threat to that image. Whilst the Young Socialists were still charged with recruiting young people to the Labour Party and gaining their support, it is mute testimony to the low priority Labour placed on the youth wing that the Young Socialists was allowed to be so blatantly dominated by a left-wing faction that challenged not only the Party's policies and leadership but the very ideology on which the Party was based in the 1970s. Such were the internal battles of the Labour Party in the 1970s that the social democratic leadership of Callaghan and Wilson had their work cut out resisting the advances of the left within the Party, let alone attempting to roll back their influence. Even if they had been in a position to push back the left it is doubtful that the Young Socialists would have been at the top of their list of priorities. In 1979 the Labour leadership were satisfied with sweeping the problem of the Young Socialists under the carpet, to be tackled at some indeterminate point in the future.

As a result, the 1979 Young Socialists Annual Conference was postponed. The official reason given for the postponement of the Conference, originally to be held at

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[303] *The Times,* 17th June 1978, pg 3.

Easter, only a couple of months before polling day, and the decision to put it off until the autumn, was that Transport House officials were too busy to organise it. However, to many, the Conference fell victim to a fear amongst the Labour leadership that the Young Socialist gathering would merely be an opportunity for attacks on the government and the airing of extremist views. Senior Labour officials were expecting the Conference to include a call for a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland- a severe embarrassment following the assassination of the Conservative MP Airey Neave- and demands for wholesale nationalisation under workers control. Such talk would have contrasted with the kind of manifesto which emerged from the NEC and the Cabinet which stressed the moderation of the Party. Privately, Labour leaders believed that the Young Socialists would merely provide the Conservatives with a propaganda gift which would allow them to portray the Labour Party as full of extremists.[304]

In the end Callaghan's efforts failed and Labour was swept out of office and into an even longer period of protracted and damaging internal warfare. In the midst of much ideological blood letting, the Labour Party continued to place low priority on the recruitment of young members. In August 1979 London played host to a mass gathering of thousands of teenagers at the 'Teen-ex '79' exhibition aimed at all aspects of teenage life. All three main political parties were offered free space at the exhibition to sell their respective parties to the young people. However, whilst the Young Conservatives and the Young Liberals jumped at the chance, the Young Socialists passed up on the opportunity. One organiser said:

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[304] *The Daily Telegraph*, 4th April 1979, pg 9.

> We were very surprised when the Young Socialists turned down our offer of free space at the exhibition for their stand. It seems the waste of a good opportunity to put their views across and get a great deal of publicity. But unlike the other two parties, they didn't seem interested.[305]

As the left, supported by the leadership of the Young Socialists, sought reforms of the Party Constitution to ensure that socialism would never again be 'betrayed', the now discredited social democratic 'revisionist' leadership tried to defend their position as a commission of enquiry investigated internal party reform. In a speech in November 1979, Callaghan emphasised the need for any reforms to be designed to revitalise the party so that it could become strong, united and able to win an election on merit. Callaghan emphasised the need for the Labour Party to be active and credible providing the electorate with policies they could support if Labour was to gain power ever again. Callaghan specifically marked out the Young Socialists as an organisation which could stand in the way of these objectives:

> We need to look at the organisation of the Young Socialists, which at national level has fallen into the hands of the so-called militant groups and which is using the machinery and funds of the party to propagate its own ideas- and which between 1974 and 1979 was steadily against the Labour Government.[306]

The possibility of a split within the Labour Party increased as the arguments over internal reform dragged on into 1980. Once again, the Young Socialists were at the heart of the left and their campaign to gain control of the Labour Party. In February 1980 the Young Socialists held a rally in London and were addressed by a number of key left-wingers who used the occasion both to sound out their ideas and to deliver a challenge to the Labour Party leadership and Labour right-wingers. Eric Heffer told

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[305] *The Daily Telegraph*, 3rd August 1979, pg 14.
[306] *The Daily Telegraph,* 3rd November 1979, pg 10. Bill Coxall and Lynton Roberts, *British Politics Since The War,* Macmillan Press, London, 1998. Pg. 182-183.

the Young Socialists that those people who could not accept what he called "socialist principles and aims" should leave the Party; a thinly veiled attack on the right-wingers in the Party. Turning specifically to the Young Socialists, Heffer also dismissed widespread concern at the infiltration tactics of the Trotskyite Militant Tendency and attacked those with "Tory concepts" acting as "a fifth column in Labour's ranks". Tony Benn also went out of his way to praise the Young Socialists, telling the rally that they were: "an integral part of the Labour Party and rooted within its finest traditions." The Young Socialists were becoming a symbol of the struggle within the Labour Party with right-wingers holding the organisation up as an example of the poisonous extremist infiltration to the party and left-wingers defending the Young Socialists as merely an example of the rich cross-section of left wing ideology within the Labour Party's 'broad church'.[307]

Within college and universities, the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS), which had seen off a bid by Militant to gain control, remained under the control of a leadership more supportive of the Labour leadership at a national level. NOLS seemed less concerned with the internal battle within the Labour Party and more focused on the task of recruiting young people in colleges and universities. In this task the organisation met with a certain degree of success raising their membership from 6,000 in March 1980 to 7,500 in January 1981. This was an achievement bearing in mind the very public internal strife of the Labour Party at a national level and the fact that, whilst right leaning students had only the Federation of Conservative Students to turn to, the left on campus was composed of numerous political groupings competing for politically active students membership from NOLS

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[307] *The Guardian*, 3rd February 1980, pg 1.

through to the myriad of extreme-left groups such as the Socialist Worker Student Society.[308]

The struggle for the heart and soul of the Labour Party continued on into 1982 and in October of that year the right-wing of the Party gained a majority on the party's ruling body, the National Executive Committee (NEC). The right were committed to attack the influence of the Militant Tendency within the Labour Party and set out to tackle one of the most blatant examples of Militant activity; the Young Socialists. One of the key NEC subcommittees gained by the right was the Party's youth subcommittee. The committee's new chairman was right-winger Denis Howell. The right-wing's minimum demands were a ban on the sale of the newspaper *Militant* at Young Socialist meetings, a ban on the attendance of any known Militant organiser at any Young Socialist activity, a ban on the collection of money for Militant within the youth organisation and the sacking of any known Militant supporter from positions of authority within the Young Socialists.

Some hard-liners advocated the complete shutdown of the organization, but this was rejected by others as it could have provoked serious new internal fighting at a time when Labour was keen to pursuade the electorate that peace had broken out in the party. The Young Socialists were also showing signs of a revival of strength. By 1982 the organisation could boast 9,000 members and 483 branches throughout the country. This was an increase of more than 100 branches since 1977 and the largest membership for more than twenty years. Consequently, with such strength the organisation presented a formidable challenge to the right-wing. Furthermore, there

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[308] The 1980 figure is from *The Times Higher Education Supplement,* 28th March 1980, pg 32. The 1981 figure is from *The Times Higher Education Supplement,* 16th January 1981, pg 3.

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was every evidence that the extreme-left within the Labour Party were gathering together to resist any attempt to expel Militant from the Party whether within the Young Socialists or within any other part of the Labour Party. At a conference in October 1982 a new constituency-based campaign was established to resist expulsions or disaffiliations. The campaign was backed by 73 constituency parties, 55 Young Socialist branches and more than 150 ward and union branches. It was also sponsored by 18 left-wing MPs including Tony Benn.[309]

The fact that the Young Socialists remained firmly in the hands of Militant and yet NOLS remained, if not totally free of any Militant influence, more sympathetic to the mainstream Labour Party leadership, led to rivalry and sometimes tension between the two organisations. This was akin to the rivalry between the 'one nation' Young Conservatives and the Thatcherite Federation of Conservative Students within the Conservative Party. NOLS was definitely more acceptable to the leadership than the Militant-dominated Young Socialists and the Labour hierarchy began to move funds gradually away from the Young Socialists towards NOLS. In 1983 the Young Socialists lost a large slice of their budget to NOLS which increased its budget by £2,600 to more than £10,000. NOLS also seemed to benefit more from funds from the youth committee and the joint campaigns fund which in January 1983 granted £900 towards preparing student activists for the general election. In early 1983 the rivalry lead to NOLS and the Young Socialists running candidates against each other for election to the NUS further education national committee in what a Labour spokeswoman called "a lack of co-ordination" but which could be interpreted as an

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[309] *The Sunday Times,* 31st October 1982, pg 2.

attempt by the Young Socialists to move in on territory clearly under the jurisdiction of the Labour students.[310]

In May 1984 NOLS held their Annual Conference at Hull University. However, the Conference descended into chaos after fighting broke out between supporters of the Militant Tendency and other left-wing delegates. The violent scenes occurred when Militant delegates accused NOLS leaders of rigging the ballot in an election of key committee members. The platform microphone was grabbed, fighting broke out around the hall and, when the chairwoman announced that she was suspending the Conference, Militant supporters jammed shut the doors and attacked other delegates in an attempt to prevent people from leaving. Delegates reassembled the following day but the Conference was abandoned after further violence threatened to erupt. The Labour Party ordered an immediate inquiry into the incident with both sides claiming that the violence was caused by the other. This internal dissent could not have come at a worse time for the leadership of NOLS who had managed to convince the Labour leadership of its effectiveness as a campaigning and recruiting organisation and by beating off the Militant threat.[311]

The leadership of NOLS fears that the intervention of Militant activists would damage their ability to recruit in universities and colleges seemed to be confirmed by the publication in 1984 of an investigation into Militant infiltration by Michael Crick. His book, *Militant*, claimed that Militant sapped the strength of the parent Party and diverted energy and resources away from support for mainstream policies. Crick pointed to the way in which that although Militant failed to gain control of NOLS,

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[310] The Times Higher Education Supplement, 21st January 1983, pg 4.
[311] *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 1st June 1984, pg 12.

through the Young Socialists, the extreme-left had sought to organise students in further education colleges and on the Youth Opportunity Programme and Youth Training Scheme courses. NOLS pointed to the fact that, whilst Militant had failed to gain control of the Labour students' organisation at a national level, they did control some 30 individual student Labour clubs out of the 130 affiliated to NOLS. The leadership of NOLS claimed that the Militant tactic was to take over existing Labour clubs in universities and colleges and use the opportunity to raise money for Militant causes. The fear amongst NOLS leaders was that Militant's control of some of the larger university Labour clubs would give the impression that the entire organisation was under extreme-left control thus alienating moderate students and discouraging them from joining the Labour Party.[312]

When the inquiry finally reported in early 1985 the blame for the disruption of the conference at Hull University and its premature abandonment was laid firmly at the door of Militant. The report concluded that:

> There is clear evidence that there was considerable disruption of the 1984 conference, that this disruption was organised by those delegates who identified themselves as Militant supporters.[313]

The inquiry found no evidence to substantiate Militant allegations of ballot rigging and absolved John Dennis, the then student organiser of NOLS, of any blame. To ensure that such disruption would not occur again, the March 1985 Conference of NOLS was much more tightly controlled by the Party, with a greater presence of Party staff than in previous years.

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[312] Crick, M, *Militant*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984. *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 29th June 1984, pg 5.
[313] *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 18th January 1985, pg 5.

At the NOLS conference in March 1985 the Democratic Left contender for the chair, Sarah Boyack, beat her Militant rival, Lesley Smirke, by 141 votes to 52, giving the Democratic Left 12 out of 14 seats on the NOLS national committee, with Militant and another far-left group, Socialist Students in NOLS (SSIN) holding one each. The outgoing NOLS Chair seemed convinced that the elections marked the final victory in the battle for the heart of the Labour Student movement as well as a victory for the Labour Party in general:

> These elections, in which democratic socialists received an unprecedented 70 per cent of the vote, shows a growing confidence among young people in the Labour Party, in its policies and principles, and the necessity of uniting to win the next general election.[314]

Despite further efforts by Militant and the new hard-left group, Socialist Students, to gain control of the National Organisation of Labour Students the organisation remained firmly in the hands of members who were supportive of the Labour Party leadership under Neil Kinnock. In March 1986 the Democratic Left under Ben Lucas (himself previously a victim of Militant violence during a meeting at a college of further education) easily defeated his Militant opponent for chairmanship of NOLS. In addition, the tide was firmly about to turn against the extreme left within the Labour Party as Kinnock sought to purge Militant from within the Labour Party.[315]

Traditionally, the Labour Party had left its campaigning amongst the young to the Young Socialists and NOLS. However, as the Labour leadership became convinced of the importance of the youth vote in the mid-1980s, both organisations faded into the

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1 [314] *The Times Higher Education Supplement,* 8th March 1985, pg 6.
2 [315] *The Times,* 5th March 1986, pg 12. *The Times Higher Education Supplement,* 7th March 1986, pg 7. *The Times Higher Education Supplement,* 1st August 1986, pg 6.

background as Labour used its centralised electoral machine to win the elusive young vote.[316] The Young Socialists, in any case, were regarded with suspicion by the Labour leadership as an organisation still firmly tainted with Militant influence. The concentration on the youth vote fitted in well with Neil Kinnock's image as being young and dynamic and with his attempt to portray the Labour Party as progressive and moderate, free from the extremism and division which had bedevilled the Party in the early 1980s.

As the Labour Party hoped that the Red Wedge tours would help recruitment and the support of the Party amongst the young, the Labour leadership finally decided to tackle the Militants within the Young Socialists as part of its wider campaign to purge the Labour Party of the Militant Tendency. In July 1986 the NEC agreed by 19 votes to 7 radically to change its relationship with the Young Socialists. It was suggested that the upper age limit of the group should be lowered from 26 to 21 in the belief that the Militant members tend to be in the older age bracket. However, the lowering of the age limit would effectively bar half the 10,000 membership.

Furthermore, other proposed changes were clearly intended to take the main responsibility for youth campaigning and recruitment out of the hands of the Young Socialists. It was proposed that the influence of the Young Socialists be diluted by the setting up of regional youth campaign committees which would comprise not only

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[316] The mid-1980s saw the issue of the youth vote and the mobilisation of young activists thrust into the political mainstream by the Labour Party.  By 1985, as Neil Kinnock struggled to pull his Party back towards the centre of British politics, the children of the sixties baby boom had come of age creating an enormous new electorate for the 1980s. With both parties sights set on the general election which they knew would come within two years, the importance of the youth vote, and therefore the youth movement of the parties which had the responsibility of recruiting and activating the young, gained a new priority. By the mid-1980s the age group 18-24 formed 16% of the total electorate; more than enough to settle the next general election.

Young Socialists but the loyal Labour Students and young trade unionists. There was also the suggestion of the appointment of youth officers in every constituency.[317]

The Young Socialists came under a sustained attack both from the party leadership and from the 10,000 strong National Organisation of Labour Students who were loyal to Kinnock and his leadership. In August 1986, two leading members of NOLS, Phil Woolas and John Mann, accused the Young Socialists of deliberately restricting their membership at the behest of the Militant Tendency who were keen to limit the membership and maintain their control of the organisation. The Labour Students claimed that the Young Socialists had failed in their attempts to recruit young people. As evidence, Woolas and Mann claimed that membership had fallen to 7,723. The National Chairman of the Young Socialists, John Ellen, hit back at the accusations and countered with the claim that the true membership was 10,000.[318]

These exchanges were to prove the opening salvos in the struggle to purge the Young Socialists of their Militant element. Unfortunately for the Labour Party, this struggle was to overshadow their attempts to recruit the young for a number of years. At the 1986 Labour Party Conference in Blackpool Young Socialists fought desperately to defend their position against the proposed changes.[319]

However, despite their protests, the Labour leadership seemed determined to curb the Young Socialists. The Conference approved the proposals from Tom Sawyer, Chairman of the Party's youth section, that the Labour Party youth movement should

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[317] *The Times*, 31st July 1986, pg. 16.
[318] *The Daily Telegraph*, 23rd August 1986, pg. 7.
[319] *The Times*, 29th August 1986, pg. 4.

be more broadly based, relying less on the Young Socialists alone and more on a youth campaign drawing members from the Labour Students. NOLS were clearly being given a central role in the reorganization of the Labour Party's youth section as a reward for being seen as supportive of the leadership and for their success in resisting Militant takeover. Furthermore, the new broader grouping would elect the youth representative on the NEC rather than that being the exclusive preserve of the Young Socialists. The reorganization was clearly an attempt to dislodge the stranglehold which Militant still had on the Party's youth section and to capitalise upon the desire to popularise policies among young people and students.[320]

The different way in which NOLS was treated compared with the Young Socialists underlines some of the ideas we have put forward to explain success in recruiting members. As we have seen, NOLS successfully fought off the kind of extremist control which the Young Socialists suffered under. This had a number of important consequences for recruitment. Firstly, NOLS never suffered from the label of extremism which tainted their Young Socialist counterparts which removed the extremism disincentive we have discussed. Secondly, whilst the Young Socialists suffered from a lack of resources as a result of the parent parties unwillingness to support them, increasingly the more acceptable NOLS found themselves receiving a higher proportion of youth funding from the Labour Party.

However, the 1987 General Election intervened in any efforts to concentrate on solving the problem of the Young Socialists once and for all. Despite the efforts of Red Wedge to win the youth vote, the Labour Party crashed to a third election defeat

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[320] *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 17th October 1986, pg. 4.

still without a fully functioning youth wing. By 1987 the Young Socialists were the last bastion of Militant influence within the Labour Party. Further evidence of the urgency of the task, if any was needed, was provided by the Young Socialist Conference at Blackpool in April 1987. Here, two moderate Young Socialist delegates from Richmond were assaulted by other Young Socialists wearing Militant badges as they left a conference disco. The Labour leadership seized on the incident as the final straw in their struggle to wrest control of the Young Socialists from Militant control. The Labour NEC voted to cancel the following year's youth conference and to strip the national youth officer, still the Trotskyite Andy Bevan who 11 years after his first appointment was now 34, of his responsibilities and his job. One of those attacked, Steve Channell, expressed his approval of the NEC decision:

> Unfortunately it [the annual Young Socialist conference] has degenerated into nothing more than an annual rally for Militant supporters. It is no longer what it should be, a democratic forum for young people.[321]

The curbs on the Young Socialists were finally passed at the 1988 Labour Party Conference despite a vigorous last-ditch rear guard action by members of the Young Socialists. The proposals to give more weight in Labour youth campaigns to Labour Students and the younger members of trade unions were adopted, as was the proposal that the NEC member for youth should be elected by all young members rather than just the Young Socialists. Militant fought against the changes, but their efforts were doomed to failure as the proposals, including one to lower the age limit of membership to limit the influence of older Militant activists, were passed in October 1988. By this point the membership of the Young Socialists had levelled out at approximately 7,000 members, but there was an inherent contradiction between the

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[321] *The Observer,* 29th November 1987, pg. 1 & pg. 2.

desire to purge Militant and the need to retain membership for the lowering of the age limit immediately precluded many of those members from being part of the Young Socialists.

The 1988 changes to the organisation of Labour's youth movement brought the results that Kinnock had hoped. By 1989 the youth conference was resurrected, taking place in Bournemouth in November. With members from all of Labour's youth organisation eligible to take part in the election of the youth wing's representative on the NEC, rather than just the Young Socialists, the conference voted a non-Militant onto the NEC for the first time in living memory. Alun Parry took the youth seat on the executive by a 53% to 42% margin, thus finally dislodging the Militant Tendency from its last stronghold in the Labour Party.[322]

However, whilst the organisational changes were good for the leadership and good for NOLS who continued to receive preferential funding, a buoyant membership and effective control and leadership of the NUS, the Young Socialists went into a terminal decline. Despite all the efforts by the Labour leadership to purge the Militant Tendency from the organisation the Young Socialists seemed still tainted by its association with Labour's extremists and its divisive past. In fact, Militant still retained chairmanship of the Young Socialist national committee until 1991 when they could still boast 7 of the 12 members. Militant only lost the chairmanship of the committee when Labour's National Youth Officer called a special committee meeting to choose a new Chairman. The meeting happened to be held on the same day that

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[322] *The Sunday Times*, 19th November 1989, pg. 9.

Militant was holding a rally and so none of the Militants turned up. The Chairman of the Young Socialists was replaced on a unanimous vote.[323]

It seemed that the only way in which Labour could relaunch its youth movement in the constituencies was to start from scratch and so the Young Socialists were quietly forgotten and left to fade away. By 1991 the membership of the Young Socialists had collapsed; membership was estimated to be a mere 250 with only 25 branches nation-wide.

It was not until 1993, after Labour's shock defeat in the General Election of the previous year, that strides were made to revamp the constituency youth section. An internal report *Proposals for Change: a Consultation Document on a new youth structure for the Labour Party* proposed winding up the now moribund Young Socialists and replacing it with a new organisation with an upper age limit raised once more to 26 and with a "more user friendly name".[324]

After consultation with younger members on the new name the new organisation was launched at the 1993 conference as 'Young Labour' with the approval by delegates of the document *The Next Generation: A New Agenda for Labour's Young Members.*[325] The Labour Party made it clear that it wanted to change the direction of young peoples involvement away from internal meetings, motions and tedious bureaucracy towards campaigning, recruitment and political education. Emphasis was to be placed

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[323] *The Guardian*, 16th August 1991, pg. 1.
[324] Proposals for Change: a consultation document on a new youth structure for the Labour Party, the Labour Party, 1993, pg. 1-10.
[325] Alternative suggestions for the name of the new organisation included the original 'Labour League of Youth' and even 'The Hardieites' after Labour's first MP but showed a distinct disapproval of the kind of acronyms such as LPYS or YS which had the whiff of the factionalism of the Young Socialists.

on forging links with single issue groups. The age range was to be 15-26. As *The Next Generation* notes:

> At local level, *Young Labour* groups would organise social activities and would not concentrate on meetings and bureaucratic activities. Recruitment and regular contact with local young trade unionists would be a priority. Priority would also be given to developing the skills of young party members and political education.[326]

It is important to emphasise that the structure of the new Young Labour organisation seemed specifically designed to prevent a repetition of the infiltration by the left which had occurred with the Young Socialists. Whilst Young Labour (together with Labour Students) would still elect a representative onto the NEC unlike the Young Socialists, Young Labour branches would not have direct representation on constituency general committees. A new branch could not be established without being first observed by a representative of the relevant Labour Party regional office and the regional office: "will be empowered to simply dissolve and reconstitute a group if the group was not working."[327]

Resources were lavished on Young Labour and this contrasted sharply with the way in which the Young Socialists had been treated. Whereas the Young Socialists had been a continuous thorn in the side for the Labour leadership, Young Labour were young, trendy, professional and, importantly, they were ultra-loyal to Blair's new leadership. They seemed to be the epitome of New Labour; even their magazine, *Regeneration*, glossy and professional, with features on the latest music and films, as well as interviews with Tony Blair, Ed Balls and Jo Brand, contrasted fundamentally

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[326] The Next Generation; A new agenda for Labour's young members, The Labour Party, 1993, pg. 2. The Guardian, 8th February 1993, pg. 2.
[327] The Next Generation, op cit, pg. 3.

with the badly produced Young Socialist newspapers full of political tirades. By late 1994 Young Labour had 17,400 members; an 18% increase on only a year previously.[328] It is perhaps no surprise the first section of the party to vote overwhelmingly and enthusiastically for a change to Clause 4 of the Labour Party Constitution was the Labour youth conference in Brighton in February 1995. Delegates at the Young Labour conference defeated by more than two to one a motion defending commitment to nationalisation.[329]

In September 1996 the Labour Party made another attempt to boost youth membership; billed as the largest since Tony Blair became leader in 1994. At the heart of the campaign was a cut-price annual membership of £1 to under 21-year-olds joining the party for the first time. Labour's solution to what it saw as growing apathy amongst young people was to target hundreds of thousands of poorly paid workers and the jobless in the key 18 to 21 age group who it claimed had suffered under the Conservative Government.

The campaign was launched by the Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam, who was Chairwoman of the National Executive Committee's youth committee, and was designed to increase the membership of Young Labour. By September 1996

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[328] See for example Regeneration, Issue 1, Winter 1994.
[329] The Daily Telegraph, 6th February 1995, pg. 2. I have my own anecdotal example of the way in which this new loyalty was sometimes 'encouraged'. I was at the 1995 Young Labour Conference in Brighton. I was an acquaintance of the then National Young Labour Organiser, Tom Watson (now an M.P.). He knew that I was a modernizer in favour of reforming Clause 4 and Watson was keen for Young Labour to be the first part of the Party to vote for Blair's reform. He arranged that I and a similarly minded colleague, both then impoverished students, should be financed for the trip down to Brighton. The size of our Young Labour branch in Kidderminster was 'enhanced' to allow us two voting delegates rather than one. I was encouraged to write a speech arguing for reforming Clause 4 and it was made clear to me that following the opening speeches, when it came time for contributions from the floor, I would be 'picked' to speak from the podium. Watson read my speech the night before to check the content and, as promised, I was 'randomly picked' to speak at the conference. The conference overwhelmingly voted for the reform of Clause 4 to much publicity and to the delight of both Watson and the Labour Party leadership.

Young Labour had 28,000 members, double the number 18 months previously, but, as Labour Party officials pointed out, still a relatively small proportion of the total national membership of nearly 400,000. Labour sought to spearhead the drive by extending its membership fee of £1- at that time only on offer to those aged 15 to 18- to all under 21-year olds. A special offer of £3 for the first four years was also available. This compared with the full membership rate in 1996 of £18 a year or £5 for those on benefit and £3 for trade union affiliates.[330]

The Labour youth organisations continued to enjoy the favour of the party leadership after the 1997 General Election. Whereas the Young Socialists had proved to be an embarrassing thorn in the side of the Labour Party for many years, Young Labour proved to be loyal bearers of the Blairite message. For this they were rewarded by the active support of the Labour Party machine. When *Guardian* reporter Matthew Tempest visited the Labour Students' 2001 Conference reception he found the young activists to be fiercely loyal to Blair and noted both the lack of "beardie-weirdies" and that "there certainly appear to be no Trots among Labour Students' current crop". Tom Watson M.P., former Labour Party Youth Officer, underlined the closeness of the relationship by telling those gathered: "This is the greatest political education you could ever have. You are the vanguard". Another delegate confided: "This is an utterly careerist gathering of rightwing networkers attached to the AEEU". The Young Labour of 2001 were loyal, disciplined and well-groomed. All that a parent party would wish in its youth section.[331]

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[330] *The Guardian*, 11th September 1996, pg 7.
[331] *The Guardian,* 3rd October 2001. The Labour Party was also very keen to ensure that there was no danger of the kind of extremist infiltration which had befallen the Young Socialists. There was an extremely strict procedure to be followed before a Young Labour branch could be established. As a further anecdotal aside, I proposed the setting up of a Young Labour branch in North Worcestershire in

## Conclusion.

The Labour Party's record of recruiting young members through its youth organisations has been more successful than that of the Conservative Party. By 1998 the membership of Young Labour had risen to 37,000, more than 9% of a rejuvenated Labour Party. However, this could be just a temporary success, as since this date the membership of the Labour Party has fallen and it is now tempting to believe that the boost in the membership of the Labour Party overall was an aberration in the heady atmosphere surrounding the last years of the Major Government and the victory of Tony Blair in 1997. The current membership of Young Labour is now 30,000, but this still amounts to 9.4% of the total Labour Party membership.[332]

Furthermore, the trend for the rest of the period was far less encouraging with the membership of the Labour Party falling dramatically after 1970 and only recovering, though not to its previous levels, in the 1990s. As such, the membership of the Labour youth organisations has been unspectacular, with the total number of members in the Young Socialists and Labour Students varying from as low as 10,000 in 1975 to as high as 18,000 in 1984. The 1990s saw a dramatic increase in the membership of the new Blairite Young Labour with membership rising to an unprecedented 28,000 in 1996 and 37,000 in 1997. However, it is important to repeat that these figures must be taken with a certain degree of scepticism as from 1993 onwards membership of

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the summer of 1994. It took formal checks and visits from the Labour Party West Midlands Regional Organiser to several of our meetings before we finally received our official endorsement.
[332] By 2001 the membership of the Labour Party overall had fallen from 405,000 in 1997 to 361,000. See the BBC News website, 13th March 2001.

Young Labour was calculated in a new way which would boost the membership figures.

So, can we explain the changes in the membership of the Labour youth movements and what does this contribute to our understanding of participation and non-participation in the political system? Furthermore, can we fit our findings into the model of participation and non-participation?

Once again, as with the Conservatives and their youth organizations, there is no one explanation for membership success or failure as there are a number of different factors which have affected membership over the period in question. Sometimes these factors compliment and overlap one another and sometimes they pull in different directions and the influence of one factor masks the influence of another.

As we saw with the Conservative Party, all political parties including the Labour Party, have been subject to a downward movement in its membership over the past decades. The membership of the Labour Party has fallen from 680,000 members in 1970 to a low point of 261,000 in 1991 before rising again to a high of 405,000 in 1997. Since 1997 Labour membership has again fallen. Whilst the membership of the Labour Party has risen and fallen over the period the general trend seems downwards, although this trend seems now to be close to bottoming out. Therefore, if this is the trend within the Party as a whole then this should be the trend with the youth organisations as well. If anything, compared with the Labour Party as a whole the Young Socialists and Labour Students did well to increase their membership as a proportion of party membership as a whole from 2.1% in 1970 to 5.7% in 1986. Any

explanation must account for why the proportion of young members increased dramatically in the 1990s.

Changes in membership of the Labour Party youth organizations can also be linked with rises and falls in membership of the Labour Party in general. So, for example, the membership of the Labour Party fell dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s, no doubt due to the disappointments of the Wilson and Callaghan Governments and the bitter internal battles within the Party, but also, of course, in line with adjustments to inaccurate membership figures. Conversely, the membership of the Labour Party increased significantly in the mid-1990s which was both due to a mood of opposition against John Major's faltering Government and to a genuine belief that Blair offered a fresh, new alternative. Therefore, some of the stagnation of the Labour youth movements in the 1970s and 1980s and the increase in their membership in the 1990s can be ascribed to factors which influenced the membership of the Labour Party in general. It could be that the Labour Party's message under Blair particularly appealed to young people hence the fact that the proportion of young people in the Labour Party rose. Since 1997 the membership of the Labour Party has fallen, as has that of the Labour youth organizations.

Part of the changes in membership could also be put down to changes in broader patterns of participation amongst young people. As we saw with the Conservative youth organizations, part of their failure to recruit young people could be due to a growing apathy amongst young people concerning politics. However, if anything, the Labour youth organisations have managed to buck this trend and not only maintain their membership during the 1980s, but also increased it during the 1990s in the face

of evidence which suggests that young people are less likely than ever to join a political party. Never the less, let us not be too generous, for whilst maintaining, and even increasing, membership amongst young people is something of an achievement, especially when we compare the record of the Labour youth organisations with that of the Conservatives, it is only a modest achievement. I don't think we could dub the Labour youth movements a 'mass' movement.

This brings me to the Labour youth organisations themselves. From the examination of their trials and tribulations it is possible to argue that the Labour youth organisations contributed to changes in membership as well as being victims of broader trends beyond their control. Once again, from the examination of the Labour youth movements It seems clear that part of the explanation fits in my model of participation and non-participation. As with the Conservative youth movements it is possible to identify incentives and disincentives (percieved benefits and costs) working on the membership of the Young Socialists and Labour students some of which can be attributed to the organisations themselves.

Like their Conservative counterparts, the Labour Party youth organisations recognised that, in order to recruit young members, the kinds of incentives differed slightly to those of more mature potential members. Consequently, the Labour Party tried to make membership look 'fun' to potential members. As with the Conservative youth movements, 'political' incentives to join (collective positive incentives and collective negative incentives for example) were complemented by an emphasis on the social aspects of membership. These are Seyd and Whiteley's selective process incentives.

As we have seen, I have adapted and improved Seyd and Whiteley's model by looking at disincentives as well and incentives. Issues of image once again influenced membership of the Labour youth movements, but in a more complex way than with the Conservative youth movements. I would argue that once again, social norms were important in influencing the youth membership of the Labour Party. In my view there is a general disincentive not to join a political party as the social norms of the young look disapprovingly upon this kind of activity. In the last chapter I argued that social norms acted as a disincentive disproportionately for the Conservative Party youth movements, as the Conservative Party in general, and the Young Conservatives in particular, suffered from a poor public image amongst the young.

With the Labour youth movements I feel that social norms were influencing membership in a more complex manner. For the Labour youth movements the influence of social norms had both a negative and positive effect. On the one hand, the Labour youth movements suffered from a general poor image of political parties in terms of social norms amongst young people and also the poor image created by aspects of the Young Socialists percieved militancy and extremism. This would act as a disincentive to membership because a potential member would take into account the poor peer group opinion. Of course, the perceived extremism of the Young Socialists and the divisions within the organization also put people off joining because those factors were a disincentive in themselves to the potential member.

On the other hand, social norms during the period also worked in favour of the Labour youth movements as, during certain times, membership of the Labour Party was seen by some as a trendy and fashionable thing. This was particularly the case during the

'Red Wedge' campaign of the mid to late 1980s when the association of the Labour Party with high profile personalities and pop stars gave the Party a burst of youthful credibility. This was also the case during the mid to late 1990s when the Labour youth organisations gained another burst of fashionability due to Tony Blair's deliberate attempt to portray a youthful progressive image and once again from a new generation of personalities and pop stars endorsing the Labour Party and helping in Young Labour's recruitment efforts. This helps explain why the membership of the youth groups was maintained during the 1980s (when it could have been expected to decline) and rose dramatically in the 1990s (although one must be careful, bearing in mind the changes made in the way in which membership was calculated). The Labour Party very carefully crafted a young, trendy and fun image for Young Labour which paralleled the youthful image they were trying to build for New Labour.

The relationship between the youth organisation and the parent party also had an influence on the membership of the Labour Party youth organizations. This variable lies within the mobilisation model of participation which I see as a complement to the improved Seyd and Whiteley model. However, as with the Conservative youth movements, this factor is related to the factor of image. The youth organisation is a semi-independent wing of the parent party and they rely on the parent party for support and resources. If the relationship is good, the youth organisation will receive support which will help with recruitment and make it a more effective model of mobilisation. If the relationship is bad, the youth organisation and its efforts at recruitment could suffer.

The relationship between the Labour Party and the Young Socialists was extremely poor between 1970 and 1991. The Labour Party recognised the need for an active, vibrant youth organisation but feared, perhaps rightly, that by the early 1970s, the Young Socialists had become a channel by which the extreme left were infiltrating the party. Consequently, the Young Socialists were left out in the cold. The Labour leadership preferred to channel resources into the Labour students who had successfully resisted a take-over by the left and with whom relations were far better than they were with the Young Socialists. The fact that the membership of the youth movements remained relatively static during the period 1970-88 should not disguise the fact that this poor relationship with the parent Party invariably damaged the recruitment efforts of the Young Socialists. It could be argued that with the active support of the Labour leadership, the Young Socialists would have achieved far more, whereas their energies were wasted fighting internal battles.

Once the Young Socialists, by then one of the last bastions of the unreconstructed left, had been allowed to wither on the vine by 1991, it was replaced by Young Labour. Young Labour was an attempt to build a new youth organisation free from the ideological baggage of the past. Unlike its predecessors, it enjoyed an excellent relationship with the parent Party because its activists were very close in views to John Smith and especially Tony Blair. Young Labour was also extremely loyal to the Party leadership, unlike the troublesome Young Socialists: for example helping lead the fight to change Clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution. For their loyalty, Young Labour received close support and generous resources (such as highly subsidised membership fees) and this excellent relationship can help explain, at least in part, the great increase in young Labour party members.

Whether this relative success in recruiting young members can be maintained is questionable. Young Labour was undoubtedly a beneficiary of a broader increase in Labour membership in the heady days leading up to the 1997 General Election. Since then, overall party membership has fallen as some have left, considering their work done after they helped get rid of a disliked Conservative government. The role of government is more difficult than that of opposition and the mood of excitement and expectation before 1997 was difficult to maintain in the long run. Others, as Seyd and Whiteley noted, have left in disillusionment at what they see as an increasingly centralised party. Whilst, so far, the proportion of young members is holding up, if members, young and otherwise, feel that they are not valued as members, the young members of the Labour Party may begin to leave in growing numbers.

# Chapter 10.

## Conclusion.

## What has the thesis told us?

This thesis has dealt with youth participation in the main political parties. It has focussed upon why young people (for my purposes those aged between 18 and 25) choose to join a political party, or why, as is more often the case, they choose not to participate in the political process through the membership of a mainstream political party. This research stemmed from a widespread belief that we are in the midst of a crisis of political participation, the most obvious manifestation of which is a falling turnout in General Elections; the main way in which the vast majority of the population take part in the political system. Numerous sources show that political participation is not widespread in the U.K. Many limit their involvement in politics to a periodic casting of a ballot at a General Election, or the signing of a petition on their high street. Relatively few participate widely, through membership of a political party or a pressure group. Even fewer are active on a continuous and regular basis. Of particular concern has been the political activity of the young. Research into the participation of the young in our political system, whilst it has been challenged, seems to show an ignorant, apathetic and alienated generation who knows little about mainstream politics and wishes to know nothing. They treat politics with a cynicism and detachment that promises, to those who wish to speak in such apocalyptic terms, a crisis of democracy.

In particular, young people seem to be reluctant to join political parties. However, membership of political parties is not a widespread activity among the population in general. The overwhelming trend over the past 50 years has been for political parties such as the Conservative Party and Labour Party to lose members almost continuously. Even when this decline has been arrested, as it was with the Labour Party between 1994 and 1998, this has proved to be a temporary phenomenon; so Labour membership is again falling. The wishes of William Hague and Iain Duncan-Smith to boost the aging and inactive membership of the Conservative Party with legions of new and vibrant younger members seems fanciful in the extreme. Yet, ironically in this age of sound bites, spin doctors and the internet, political parties need members like never before. Ordinary, active members are needed to stand as candidates, to donate 'clean' money and, importantly, to spread their parties message among friends and acquaintances. Without young members the danger is that political parties, vital to the health of Britain's party political system, will grow stagnant and sterile. Young members have the youth to be active members. They have the youth to attract other young members, thus avoiding the self-fulfilling prophecy that political parties are full of 'old' people. This is why this research is so important.

This thesis has highlighted a number of important conclusions about young peoples participation and non-participation in political parties:

1. <u>The membership figures are problematic.</u>

The first point to acknowledge is that there is a problem with the membership figures I used. Membership of a political party, by it nature, is a dynamic phenomenon, with membership of the main political parties and their young organisations varying over time, as new members join and old members either leave or fail to renew their membership. My study is not static, rather my aim was to analyse the success and failure of the main political parties over a long period of time: the 30 years since the last major study of the youth organisations of the main two parties in 1970. In order to judge the success or failure of the main political parties in recruiting young members, I needed clear and accurate figures to show the number of young members of the Labour and Conservative Party between 1970 and 2001.

These figures simply do not exist. Neither the Conservative Party nor the Labour Party had membership lists that stated accurately their youth membership. Furthermore, until relatively recently (1991 for the Labour Party and 1998 for the Conservative Party), neither party had national membership lists that could be described as being reliable. Consequently, the only option was to use the membership figures of the parties youth organisations, those organisations, such as the Young Conservatives and Young Socialists, which were the main parties' primary vehicles of youth recruitment. This was also fraught with difficulty. The accuracy of the membership figures for the youth organisations can not be guaranteed. The definition of what was counted as a 'young' member varied from party to party and even from year to year. So, for example, Young Labour now has 30,000 members compared to the 9,000 members of Conservative Future. However, the age range for Young Labour is 16 to 26 but the age range for Conservative Future is 16 to 30, putting the failure of the Conservative Party even more in perspective. Furthermore, until

recently, the membership of the Young Conservatives and Young Socialists did not automatically include all the young members in the party, whereas, the membership of Conservative Future and Young Labour do. For the Labour Party, the figures for youth membership are only really reliable from 1994 and for the Conservative Party from 1998. Up to that point, the membership figures, our only real guide as to the success or failure of the main parties in their attempts to recruit the young, must be taken with a pinch of salt.

The figures show that neither party has been overwhelmingly successful in recruiting young members into their ranks. The trend overall, for both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, has been for a decline in overall membership since 1970. The Labour Party did meet with some success in arresting that decline under Tony Blair but indications are that this was something of a temporary success and that membership is again on the slide. The Conservatives have been in what seems to be continuous decline. Where the Labour Party has been relatively successful is in increasing the number of young members, both absolutely and proportionately. Whilst there are signs that membership might be tailing off, the Labour Party increased its young membership from 2.1% of party membership to 9.6%. From 14,000 members to 30,000. This increase has not been sustained, however, rather there have been rises and falls in membership of the whole period. The Conservative Party, on the other hand, has been less successful in recruiting young members. The membership of the Conservative youth organisations has fallen both absolutely and proportionately. In 1970, young members of the Conservative Party accounted for 4% of the membership, by 2001 that figure had fallen to 2.7%. In numerical terms the membership of the Conservative youth organisations fell from 62,000 members to

only 9,000. There were periodic bouts of renewal and recovery but, for the Conservative Party there has been a failure to recruit young members.

2. <u>There is little specific literature and research on this area and whilst there has been a great deal of work on participation and non-participation none of it explains this particular area adequately.</u>

There is little specific literature and research on why young people choose to join or not to join political parties. There is research which looks at similar themes and which makes some contribution on the debate about participation, but on the particular issue of young people and their membership of political parties there is a significant gap. There is considerable literature on participation and non-participation in general (Beetham (1993, 2002), Mair and Van Biezen (2002)) and on the changing nature of participation in recent years from conventional forms of participation such as voting and political parties to more unconventional forms of activity such as protest groups (Evans (1997), Mulgan (1994), Inglehart (1990), Maloney and Jordan (1995)). There is research into participation in general (such as Parry et al (1992)) or membership of political parties in general which is also useful to my research, but again, it fails to specifically address the issue of youth participation and non-participation in the main political parties. However, this work on participation is important since participation and non-participation cannot be seen operating as a vacuum: party participation is related to other areas of political participation.

There is also significant work into youth participation in general (such as by Wilkinson and Mulgan (1995), White (2001) and Weinstein and Wring (1998, 1999)),

which explores the reasons for non-participation in 'mainstream' political activity such as voting and membership of parties, but nothing specific. A great deal of research has indicated that young people do not get involved in politics. Indicators such as poor voter turnout among the young and the lack of young political party members I have discussed earlier have been used as evidence, together with survey and poll findings, to argue that young people are apathetic about politics.

Furthermore, research has shown that young people feel alienated from the 'mainstream' political system, feeling that the formal political process does not listen to them and that politicians have little or nothing to offer them. In addition, it could be argued that young people's apathy and alienation is compounded and accentuated by a self-avowed ignorance of politics and how the political system works which acts as a barrier to participation. There is some disagreement over whether this phenomenon of youthful non-participation is a 'life-cycle' effect which will diminish as the young grow older or whether, as some research indicates (Park (2000)), it is a 'cohort' effect which will see today's apathetic and alienated young become tomorrows apathetic and alienated adults.

However, these findings have not been without criticism, some (such as Evans (1997) or O'Toole, et al (2002)) argue that, rather than young people opting out of politics and being apathetic about political issues, they are channelling their political efforts into less conventional channels such as single issue pressure groups, where they feel they are listened to and can make a difference. O'Toole, et al, lays some of the blame for the labelling of a generation as 'apathetic' at the door of academics who use

methodological tools which ignore and underplay young people's conception of the 'political' and impose a 'top-down' idea of political participation.

Finally, there is some work into the youth organisations of the main parties, which by their very definition are at the forefront of the recruitment of young members. The last detailed account here was in 1970 (By Zigg Leyton-Henry) and this was more a historical account of the internal battles of the Young Socialists and Young Conservatives (although this could have some relevance), than a critical evaluation of their success or failure in recruiting members. Elsewhere, research into the Conservative and Labour youth movements is extremely sparse. Whilst the existing literature doe not look at my particular area in great depth the work on participation in general and youth participation in particular helped inform and shape my own research.

3. <u>There are a number of different models of party participation.</u>

I then set out to consider different models of party participation to begin the process of building a model to explain youth participation and non-participation in political parties. There were a host of different perspectives on why people got involved in the political process such as the civil voluntarism model, rational choice theory, the social psychological model and the mobilisation model. All of these models contributed something towards an understanding of why people in general chose to get involved in the political process and yet all, on their own had some shortcomings.

In the end, the model that I found most persuasive in providing an explanation of participation, was that devised by Seyd and Whiteley, the 'general-incentive theory'. Derived mainly from rational choice theory, Seyd and Whiteley saw the decision about whether to participate to be the result of an assessment of costs and benefits. However, Seyd and Whiteley took rational choice theory forward by also including psychological and sociological factors into their calculation, focussing on the effect of altruism and social norms, as well as 'material' gains. Whilst Seyd and Whiteley's model was not without faults, I concluded that it was an excellent starting point from which to build an alternative model of participation and non-participation.

As I felt that the youth organisations themselves could have an affect on recruitment I also felt that the mobilisation model could also be seen as making a contribution to explaining party success or failure in recruiting young members. Research into the mobilisation model of participation has mainly focussed on the effectiveness of political parties in mobilising voters during elections. I believe that the mobilisation model can be used to argue that individuals join a political party because they are actively recruited. An active, committed and well-resourced youth organisation was more likely to recruit its potential members than one which was not. I saw this aspect of the mobilisation model as complimenting the Seyd and Whiteley general incentives model and a possible further refinement to the model.

4. <u>In explaining changes in the youth membership of the parties there are a number of factors to consider.</u>

I then returned to the membership figures to see if I could make a preliminary attempt to explain the changes in the young membership of the Conservative and Labour Party. I concluded that it was not easy to explain the changing fortunes of the parties over such a long period of time. There were a number of factors and variables to consider which could have effected the efforts of both parties to recruit young people. These factors overlapped and interconnected and influenced different parties in different ways, and to different extents, and at different times over the period 1970-2001.

I argued that there were four sets of explanation which could have influenced youth membership. Firstly, I contended that all political parties have been subject to a general decline in membership over the past 40 years, due to a number of factors, effecting members in general, not just young members. This links back in with the research on the changing pattern of participation outlined in Chapter 3. Secondly, I argued that, at various periods between 1970 and 2001, the Conservative and Labour Parties were subject to factors particular to them, such as the damaging divisions within the Labour Party during the 1970s and 1980s and the Conservative Party during the 1990s, which had a detrimental influence on membership. The flip side of this could be the boost the Labour Party received in the mid-1990s as a response to a new, young leader, and the unpopularity of the Conservatives. Once again, these would effect all members, rather than just young members. There was also the effect of electoral popularity and unpopularity, especially, in my case, amongst the young.

Thirdly, there were those explanations which effected young people and participation such as the trend, identified in the research discussed in Chapter 3, which points to

318

young people becoming less involved in politics or becoming involved in politics in less 'conventional' ways such as direct action and single issue pressure groups rather than voting and political party membership. Finally, there were those explanations which are derived from the youth organisations themselves. I concluded that since the Labour and Conservative Party youth organisations were the primary way in which young people were recruited into their respective parties, that the way in which they organised their efforts and the way in which they operated was likely to have had some effect on their efforts and recruitment and retention.

5. <u>It is possible to develop a youth-specific model of participation and non-participation.</u>

In my view it was possible to develop an alternative youth-specific model of participation and non-participation in political parties based on a critique of the Seyd and Whiteley model. From the existing research, two things had become clear. Firstly, whilst Seyd and Whiteley's model provided the most convincing model of participation it was, for my purposes, incomplete. It was incomplete in two ways. It was incomplete in that in its analysis of costs and benefits it only considered the incentives for membership. I wanted to create a model that looked at both incentives and disincentives, that looked at those factors which encouraged membership and at those factors which discouraged membership. It was also incomplete in that Seyd and Whiteley only asked for the main reason for membership of a political party. In order to build a more detailed picture of reasons for participation I wanted to see incentives and disincentives in terms of a 'package' of different incentives and disincentives,

because in my view peoples actions are not influenced by just one consideration, but by a host of, sometimes conflicting and competing, factors.

The second conclusion I had drawn from the existing research was that participation and models of participation and non-participation tended to be generic. For example, Seyd and Whiteley's general incentive theory was a model designed to explain participation amongst the population as a whole. I was trying to explain participation and non-participation in a particular group in society, the young. I concluded that any model of participation and non-participation must take into account the life-cycle and transitional factors unique to those in the 18-25 age group. Whilst the boundaries of this age group are, of course, arbitrary, I felt that the young were a distinct group and that my model should treat them as such.

My model of participation is a youth-specific model of participation and non-participation in political parties. Like Seyd and Whiteley, I saw the decision to join a political party or not in terms of a competing set of incentives and disincentives. The incentives were largely based on the incentives which had served Seyd and Whiteley so well. However, because this was a youth-specific model, I hypothesised that certain of the incentives, such as 'selective process incentives' (the fun of involvement) and 'social values and norms' (the effect of peer group approval), would be more important to young people than to older members. I built on Seyd and Whiteley by identifying a set of disincentives which I believed would act as costs on young people and help dissuade them from joining a political party. These were such costs as apathy, cynicism, ignorance, a lack of time, financial cost and peer

disapproval in the shape of social costs. I concluded that this provided a youth-specific model of participation and non-participation in political parties.

6. <u>This model was tested using a sample of members and non-members and proved to be a valid model.</u>

My model was now tested using a sample of young members of the Conservative Party and Labour Party and a sample of non-members. No one had attempted such a study before. A questionnaire was designed which asked the respondent about their level of political activity and asked young members of the Labour and Conservative Party why they had decided to join a party and asked the non-members why they had decided not to join a political party. The respondents were asked to list their reasons for participation and non-participation in order of personal importance. The questionnaires were distributed to two samples: sample one was 537 members; sample two was 538 members. Whilst it proved impossible to guarantee that the samples were representative because, as we saw, there are no centralised membership lists available, the two samples were designed to be as close as possible to each other in terms of demographic and socio-economic make-up to preclude these factors distorting the results.

Whilst the sample should be taken to be indicative rather than strictly representative, my members sample was predominantly male (78.8%), well-educated (86.6% had 'A' or 'AS' Levels or equivalent) and politically active (for example 75.9% had canvassed on behalf of a political issue whilst 70.4% had taken part in fund raising for a party or pressure group). Interestingly, whilst the members' sample was active

across the board, not just within their chosen political party but also in other political activities, such as voting and pressure groups, the non-members' sample was less active in virtually every one of the 23 political activities (adapted from Parry, et al (1992)) provided. This seemed to argue against the theory put forward by Evans (1997) and others that, instead of young people being active in 'traditional' political activities, they seek political outlet through less conventional means such as protest. Even in those activities counted under protesting, the non-members were relatively inactive. Of course, there is the possibility that they are simply involved in activities they deem as being 'political' but which have not been picked up by such a 'top-down' questionnaire, but I personally find that doubtful.

As to the reasons given for participation and non-participation the responses seemed to validate my model. The vast majority of responses from members fitted within the incentives adapted from the Seyd and Whiteley model. Only 0.6% of responses given as the most important reasons for joining a political party failed to fit into the model. Furthermore, asking the respondent to provide not just their most important reasons but up to four reasons helped provide a more detailed picture of the package of incentives young people consider when joining a political party. So, for example, whilst the majority (55.3%) of young members claimed altruistic concerns to be paramount in joining (youthful idealism?), selective process incentives (having fun and meeting other young people) became progressively more important as 2nd, 3rd and 4th most important reason for joining.

I would argue that the model was also validated by the non-members sample. Once again, most of the responses as to why they had chosen not to join a political party

could be fitted into the disincentives provided by my model. Amongst the reasons given by the respondents as to why they had not joined were reasons of cynicism (they claimed not to trust politicians and the political process and doubted what influence they would have if they did join), apathy (respondents claimed to find politics boring), ignorance (respondents lack 'political literacy'), lack of time and a simple failure to engage sufficiently with one or other of the major parties. Many of reasons given did confirm other general research into the lack of youth participation, at least in 'mainstream' politics. I concluded that my model of youth-specific participation and non-participation in political parties has been tested and validated.

7. <u>The Conservative youth organisations themselves have contributed to their relative failure to recruit members.</u>

Whilst the sample had provided a snapshot of why a group of young members had joined their respective parties and why a group of non-members had not participated in this way, in my view, if I was to fully explain the fluctuations in youth membership of the Conservative and Labour Parties between 1970 and 2001, I needed to examine the actions of the parties themselves. This analysis focussed on the youth organisations of the parties since they were the main vehicle by which young members were recruited into the Conservative and Labour Parties. With the Conservative Party I was trying to explain a mainly continuous decline, interrupted by short-lived periods of recovery. I was looking to see whether this decline could be explained within the context of my model or whether the explanation lay outside it.

I concluded that the Conservative youth organisations themselves had through their image and actions, contributed to their failure to recruit and retain young members. From studying the activities of the Conservative youth organisations over 30 years I would argue that the wide-spread perception, sometimes fair, sometimes unfair, of the Young Conservatives and Conservative Students, as being extremist, unfashionable, divided and socially-narrow organisations has had an adverse effect on their recruitment efforts. I concluded that potential members were put off joining these organisations because of the image of the organisations and that this image, as well as itself putting off potential members in, created in the popular imagination, a social norm that joining such an organisation would meet with peer group disapproval. Young people might be put off joining the Young Conservatives, not just because of the image itself, but also because of what they feared others would think. Mute testimony to the tainted nature of the 'Young Conservative' label is provided by the fact the organisation was closed down and re-launched under a totally new name. Despite this cosmetic change, however, Conservative Future is still labouring under the sins of the father.

I also concluded that the relationship between the parent party and the youth organisation has had a detrimental effect on recruitment. This factor lies within the mobilisation model of participation which I saw a complimentary refinement to my model and clearly has an effect on recruitment. As a subordinate organisation, the Conservative youth organisations were always at the mercy of the parent Party for financial resources and moral support. It seems that the Conservative Party had a very clear view of the role of the Young Conservatives as loyal foot soldiers. The ability of the Young Conservatives to embarrass the parent Party, not only through their

drunken excess, but increasingly as the right took power during the 1990s, through their strident political pronouncements, increasingly soured the relationship. As a result, funding was withdrawn and the Young Conservatives found themselves out on a limb. The Federation of Conservative Students provides an excellent example. They were extremely successful in recruiting members by the mid-1980s, because they succeeded in making Thatcherism trendy to a certain group of young people. However, as soon as they were seen as a liability, in terms of their potential to damage the electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party, the organisation was purged. This seems a salutary lesson, that political parties may claim to want young members, but they want young members who do not rock the boat. However, if young members feel they have little real power or input, save as youthful 'window dressing' they will leave.

Seyd and Whiteley (1994) pointed to the danger of a spiral of decline for the Conservative Party if they do not succeed in recruiting more young members. They argued that the Party is seen as being dominated by old people and that this in turn puts off young people from joining:

> It seems likely that many young people will think of the party as essentially a retired persons club... this image of the party is likely to deter many young people who might otherwise be attracted into politics.[333]

8. <u>The Labour youth organisations have met with relatively greater success in their efforts at recruitment.</u>

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[333] Ibid., pg. 228.

I concluded that the Labour youth organisations have been relatively more successful in recruiting young members. However, I must stress the word relative, for, whilst having 37,000 young members in 1997 was a success for the Labour Party, it is only so in comparison with its previous failure in recruiting members and the failure of their Conservative counterparts. Furthermore, the Labour Party does not have an unbroken record of success in recruiting young members. It is only in the last years of the period under question have the Labour youth organisations succeeded in recruiting sizable numbers of members. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the Young Socialists struggled to maintain their membership. If anything, the Thatcher and Major years should have been fertile ground for the Labour Party to recruit young members and yet they did not seem to be able to seize the opportunity. Some of the short term success of the Labour Party in maintaining its youth membership during the mid-1980s I would argue was due to the 'Red Wedge' tour which injected the party with a boost of youthful credibility and status as well as making politics seem 'fun'.

I would argue that the Labour youth organisations, and especially the Young Socialists, suffered from a similar problem with image as the Young Conservatives. They were extremist (long being the stronghold of the Militant Tendency within the Labour Party), unfashionable and divided. This image not only put off potential members (therefore acting as a disincentive in terms of cost and benefits) and proved to be a limiting factor in any large scale increase in membership but also made others wonder who would ever join such an organisation. Furthermore, even more so than with the Young Conservatives, the Young Socialists enjoyed an extremely poor relationship with the parent Party. However, unlike with the Young Conservatives, where relations only really soured from the late 1980s, the Labour Party had been

fighting an ongoing battle with the Young Socialists for decades. The Labour Party was torn between a genuine desire to have a healthy youth wing and a need to limit the damage caused by the extremists within the organisation.

I concluded that from the early 1990s the fortunes of the Labour Party youth organisations were revived. The Labour Party recognised that they had an unpopular brand earlier than the Conservative Party did and the Young Socialists were consigned to the dustbin of history in 1991. The new organisation, Young Labour, was portrayed as fresh, hip, united and moderate and was lucky to enjoy its formative years just as Blair became leader and was enthusiastic about linking the youth of the new organisation with the youthful nature of his leadership and 'New' Labour. In the run up to the 1997 election Young Labour, with the assorted left-leaning pop stars and hip young 'gun-slinging' comedians involved, became a fashionable organisation. The Labour Party was careful to prevent the infiltration that had blighted its predecessor organisation and Young Labour enjoyed an excellent relationship with the parent party, playing its expected role loyally and compounding its success. Since then membership has started to fall, but whether this will be sustained, or whether this is just part of a general post-1997 return to reality generally across the party, remains to be seen.

Whilst the Conservatives have done badly in terms of recruiting young members, witnessing both a relative and absolute decline in young members in the Conservative Party over the period 1970-2001, the Labour Party has done relatively increasing their membership both as a proportion of the total membership and in absolute terms. However, this has only really come about in the later part of the period under study,

since the early 1990s. From my research this has come about because the 1990s saw a number of factors which I believe influence youth participation and which turned in favour of the Labour Party. A combination of the unpopularity of the Conservatives, the revival of the Labour Party under a young and charismatic leader, an increase in support for the Labour Party in the 18-25 age-group, a revived youth organisation which portrayed an image of moderation, unity and fashionability and the enthusiastic support of the parent party all came together as factors to explain the significant increase in youth membership in the Labour Party after 1994. However, I would repeat my note of caution that it is too early to tell whether this is a sustained success or just a temporary phenomenon. I still believe that there are wider trends away from youth membership of political parties but that these have been disguised for the Labour Party by a happy and beneficial (at least for the Labour Party) combination of favourable factors.

The Conservatives, in contrast, have enjoyed period of recovery and consolidation in the period 1970-2001, but the general trend has been one of decline. This can be explained by a combination of factor which have worked to the detriment of the Conservative Party and its attempts to recruit young members. The Conservative youth organisations did enjoy some periods of success, especially in the mid-1980s when the FCS especially seemed to capture the Thatcherite *zeitgeist* combining the appeal of a trendy and fashionable youth organisation with the 1980s success of the Thatcher government. However, this did not save the FCS from being purged and the combination of an increasingly unpopular Conservative government, a divided and extremist youth organisation which suffered from an extremely poor image amongst young people and which had an increasingly poor relation with its parent party all

came together, compounded by wider forces which lead young people to seek alternative forms of entertainment, socialising and political action, to explain the relative failure of the Conservative youth movements.

**What does my thesis contribute to the debate?**

What has my thesis contributed to the debate on participation and non-participation? Whilst participation and non-participation is a popular area of research and youth participation has become an area of particular interest, I would argue that there has been insufficient research and focus on this particular area, that of young people and political parties. In my opinion this thesis makes a valuable general contribution to the ongoing debate on participation and on youth participation in the political process. In particular, I would argue that this thesis makes two particularly important contributions:

1. A new, youth specific model of participation and non-participation in political parties.

There has been considerable work on participation. There has been work on why people join political parties. There has been work on the level and nature of youth participation. What there has not been is a youth-specific study of why young people choose to join political parties or not. I have devised a model to explain why young people choose to join a political party or not. This model builds on the general incentive theory as devised by Seyd and Whiteley. I felt that the general incentives theory was a solid model of participation in political parties and indeed my research

has validated, once again, their central premise that rational individuals, when deciding on whether to join a political party, do respond to certain incentives which influence their actions. In my model I remained faithful to Seyd and Whiteley's set of incentives for membership and these were validated with the overwhelming majority of my members sample response fitting into those categories.

However, whilst the thesis does reinforce Seyd and Whiteley research in terms of incentives for membership, my thesis also builds on my criticisms of their model. Whilst recognising the strength of the general incentives model, there were a number of areas where I took issue with their research.

I was critical of the fact that in their model Seyd and Whiteley only considered incentives and mainly ignored the disincentives to membership. This can be partially explained by the fact that their intention was always to investigate why members joined a political party rather than why they did not. My thesis, however, was focussed on both membership and non-membership and so I wanted to consider not only incentives to membership but also the other side of the equation, or rational-actor calculation, disincentives.

A second issue with Seyd and Whiteley's research was that they only considered one incentive. Respondents within their sample were only asked to state their main incentive for membership. I felt that this was a major shortcoming as such an action as membership of a political party would in most cases be the result of not one consideration but of a host of incentives.

Thirdly, I was concerned with a particular group of people, the young. I was aware from the start that young people were not just a subsection of the population who happened to be aged between 18 and 25 but a group of people who, due to their age and their legal, political, emotional, social and even psychological status, had to be considered distinct from the population as a whole. When considering youth participation and non-participation youth related factors had to be considered. Seyd and Whiteley did not consider this. Once again, this is understandable to the extent that their research developed a generic model of participation. I was looking to develop a youth specific model of participation and non-participation.

Finally, I felt that in this particular area there had to be a refinement made to the model to take into account aspects of the mobilisation model. It was felt that the activities of the youth organisations had an effect on the ability to recruit potential members. Potential members were driven by incentives to wish to join but still had to be actually recruited by the party. Party youth organisations are in a strange position in that they are semi-independent organisations very much dependent on the good will and support of their parent parties. If that relationship is good and the youth organisation is well-supported, blessed with resources and actively seeks to focus all of its activities on recruitment, the youth organisation will be a positive vehicle of potential mobilisation. If the opposite is the case then it will not be and potential members will go un-recruited.

So, whilst in certain aspects my thesis reinforces Seyd and Whiteley's research, in others it takes issue with their model. My thesis takes the general incentives theory a further stage forward to provide not only incentives to explain why people join

political parties but also the disincentives to explain why people do not. The model also sees people's actions determined not just by one incentive or disincentive but by a package of costs and benefits. Furthermore, in response to the criticism that 'mainstream' participation research does not give enough recognition to young people as a distinct group of rational actors, my model is a youth-specific model, designed to explain youth participation and non-participation. Factors such as social norms are identified as a factor, as both an incentive and a disincentive, which could effect young people more than their older peers, for example. It is not a generic model applied to young people. The model has been validated by a quantitative study of a sample of young members and a sample of young non-members. No-one else has carried out a survey of this scale, on this kind of group, about this particular issue. Furthermore, my model take into account the mobilising efforts of the parties and sees this as a further important refinement to the Seyd and Whiteley model.

2.  <u>A contemporary in-depth study of the Conservative and Labour youth organisations which contributes to explaining changing patterns in membership.</u>

Secondly, I have researched a much-neglected area of study. Much is written about participation and much is written on political parties. The youth organisations of the main political parties get very little attention, if at all. I have argued that by examining and analysing the youth organisations of the Conservative and Labour parties I have shed further light on the reasons for our major parties and their success and failure in recruiting members. Whilst political parties, in their attempts to recruit members, young and otherwise, are subject to greater forces, such as the general decline in membership of political parties over the past 50 years, my research has shown that the

youth organisations themselves have contributed their relative success or failure. An analysis of the youth organisations of the major parties not only sheds further light on the nature of participation and non-participation, but also provides vital research on the way in which political parties work, how their members are valued and how they recruit members. The battles within the Conservative and Labour youth organisations also hold up a fascinating mirror to the battles within their parent parties. No-one else has provided such a detailed and comprehensive study of the actions and fortunes of the Labour and Conservative youth movements for more than 30 years. Nor has anyone placed those actions and fortunes within the context of the broader debate and research on youth participation and non-participation.

My findings on the internal battles within the party youth organisations, between the youth organisations and their parent party and the youth organisations recruitment efforts have also helped support the mobilisation model of participation which I saw as an important explanatory factor and a further refinement to my improved model. Whilst there were other factors having an influence, there seemed to be a positive correlation between success in recruitment and an effective youth organisation supported by the parent party. The Labour Party after 1994 would seem a perfect example of Young Labour as a successful vehicle of mobilisation taking advantage of the popularity of Tony Blair's Labour Party and its youthful and trendy portrayal in boosting the number of young members recruited into the Labour Party.

**What future research?**

I would argue that this is fertile ground for further research. Whilst some research argues, understandably, that the key to understanding what young people mean by the 'political' I would argue that such a traditional form of political participation as membership of a political party is still of vital importance, both as an area of academic research and as a part of a healthy democracy. My own research had its short comings. The main one of these was the fact that I was only one person, working on my own, with limited resources, limited time and limited cooperation from the organisations, the Labour and Conservative Parties, whose help I needed the most. As a result I could simply not do everything and so some issues that the research threw up and certain potential avenues of research had to be sacrificed or put to one side for future research.

Future research that repeated my work but with the active cooperation of the Labour Party and Conservative Party themselves would be very useful. In my work I had to labour under a series of difficulties which sometimes seemed insurmountable. I had absolutely no cooperation from the parties themselves when I was trying to gain my sample of young Conservative and Labour Party members. My attempts to get cooperation and to explain that they themselves would be welcome to the findings were met with suspicion and, in some cases, downright hostility. Seyd and Whiteley were lucky enough to have the support of both parties. They wrote: "Without the collaboration and support of both parties the research would have been impossible".[334] I had to build my sample as best I could, contacting those branches I could find (itself a frustrating game of detectives) without the official sanction of the parties. As a result, my sample is indicative rather than representative. Access to

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[334] Seyd, C. and Whiteley, P. *The Party Membership Surveys: Does Social Science Research Have Any Impact?,* Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, 1998. Pg. 2

central membership lists, the active and willing cooperation of the parties, a larger sample, and, of course financial support (I paid for my research out of my own pocket), would produce a more representative sample.

I also believe that there could be much to be gained from more focus group and one-on-one interviewing techniques to develop some of the ideas hinted at in my research. Questionnaires and other quantitative methods, by their very nature, have their limitations. I was forced, once again for reasons of practicality, to rely on self-completion questionnaires, which I recognise have their short comings. The ability to talk to young people would be useful with non-members but would be particularly interesting with members. I would like to research young peoples experience as members. Do they feel valued? How active are they? How do they feel they are treated and regarded by older members? More access to official Conservative Party and Labour Party documents and more interviews with important figures and party members would also help with a more detailed analysis of the party youth organisations. Once again, this would require cooperation and financial support.

With more time and resources the quantitative research could also have been extended or analysed in other ways, or a more extensive sample taken. So, for example, it could have been possible to analyse the samples in terms of race (although that particular factor was excluded from the questionnaire), gender, class and education. The sample of both members and non-members could have been examined and disaggregated to examine the extent to which such socio-economic factors influenced the reasons for participation and non-participation and whether the reasons varied in importance according to gender, race, age and so on. It would also have been possible to compare

and contrast the responses from the young Conservative Party members and the young Labour Party members to see whether the reasons for membership varied significantly between the two samples. I feel that it bears mute testimony to the richness of this area of research that it throws up so many potential areas for future research.

## What does this thesis tell us about party politics and political participation in Britain?

I chose this area of research and wrote this thesis because having been a member of political parties since I was 18 I have always been fascinated by why people take part in what is now such a minority activity, membership of a politicial party. Furthermore, anacdotal experience both as a young member of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party and then as a Politics lecturer has illustrated that membership can often be considered by non-members, especially young non-members, as being in some way 'strange' or unfathomable. My research certainly seems to point towards membership of a political party being regarded by young people with a combination of apathy, puzzlement, derision and even contempt. How to change this perception would seem to be extremely difficult. Both the Conservative and Labour Parties have strived to make membership attractive, and save the successes of the Labour Party with Red Wedge during the 1980s and Young Labour during the 1990s, these efforts often end in failure.

I also chose this research because I believe that political parties are important to democracy and that successful political parties are those which have a vibrant and active membership. I believe that political parties are important. They provide money

from individual members which reduces the need for large donations from individuals and corporations which in themselves raise questions of potential corruption. Members of political parties provide a willing pool of volunteers who can be relied upon to do the vital electoral donkey work of delivering leaflets, canvassing, standing as candidates and acting as ambassadors for their party amongst their friends, family and wider community. The political parties themselves also see their members as a source of legitimacy: the members represent the aspirations of a large proportion of society. It is for this reason that Tony Blair's reinvention of the Labour Party included a pledge (not realised) to recruit a million members.

I also believe that young people are vital to political parties. Young members are more likely to be active and the more active members a political party has the more successful that party is going to be in mobilising and educating its potential electorate and in recuriting further new members. The Conservative Party's inability to recruit young people is beginning to severely hamper its electioneering efforts with 76% of its shrinking and aging membership doing nothing save pay membership fees. My thesis lays out the stark evidence that the story is unlikely to change with the Conservative Party having failed to recruit the future generation of party activists. Whilst the Labour Party has enjoyed greater success this is only relative to its Conservative opponents and the shrunken size of the Labour membership. Both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party have paid lip service to recognising the importance of young members but as my thesis notes, the cynic might regard this as being only for as long as those young members play the role of loyal and unquestioning election-fodder. Should they start to become a liability even successful youth organisations such as the FCS become expendable. My thesis certainly

questions the main parties genuine commitment in some cases to attracting and encouraging young members.

There are those who argue that this does not matter. Young people, far from being the apathetic, de-politicised abstainers they are often portayed as by selective research, are interested and active in politics, it is just that they choose to involve themselves in politics in other, less formal ways. The kind of methodology favoured by political scientists in the past has been criticised by some as underestimating political participation amongst the young or of failing to pick up participation by imposing a rigid and narrow conception of 'politics'. This trend is not just limited to young people however, with research indicating that the population in general is chosing, if they participate at all, alternative forms of political participation such as single issue pressure groups.

I feel that this is complacent and mistaken. Political parties are vital to British democracy and active members are vital to political parties. The fact that young people are participating in other ways is no consolation at all. As young people fail to join political parties so the membership of those parties becomes older, less active and less effective. The perception of parties as being the preserve of the old then become a self-fulfilling prophecy as young people are put off joining. One only has to look to the United States to see the damage to democracy caused by weak political parties. An over reliance on corporate donation where once there were activists donations and a complimentary over reliance on expensive television and call centres where once the parties foot soliders communicated with the voter. Do we really want the United Kingdom to go down this path? My thesis does not produce an encouraging picture of

youth membership of political parties and provides no easy solutions but it should serve as an urgent wake-up call not only for the political parties themselves but all those who value a healthy and vibrant democracy.

# Appendix 1.


# An example of the questionnaire used.

## Youth political participation questionnaire.

## The University of Birmingham, 2000.

Participation in the political process is important in a healthy democracy. In recent years there has been growing concern over evidence which indicates falling levels of involvement in politics, especially amongst young people. This questionnaire is being used as part of a piece of research into why young people choose to join a political party. It is also, equally importantly, being used to discover why young people choose not to join a political party. This questionnaire is specifically designed to be answered by those in the age-group 18-25.

As part of this research we are asking you to answer the following questions. The questions are designed to be answered either by ticking (3) one or more of the boxes, writing a figure or one word answer or by writing a short sentence. This questionnaire is anonymous and the results will be treated with complete confidentiality, so feel free to be honest. Please write in as much detail as you can where requested as this will help the research. The questionnaire should not take long to complete and we hope that you will find it interesting and enjoyable. Read the questions carefully and follow any instructions that are given.

When you have completed the questionnaire, either give it to the person who asked you to fill it in or place it into the postage paid envelope that we have provided and post it back to us, as soon as you possibly can. If you have any problems or questions about the questionnaire please contact Matt Lamb on ████████.

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP AND CO-OPERATION.

### PLEASE TURN OVER THE PAGE.

**PART ONE:**

**Political activity:**

**Q.1.1: Below are listed a number of political activities. Tick (3) next to the ones in which you have taken part in the LAST FIVE YEARS.**

**FILL IN AS MANY BOXES AS ARE APPROPRIATE.**

**Action**

**Voting in elections:**

**1.1.1. I have voted in a Local election.**

**1.1.2. I have voted in a General election.**

**1.1.3. I have voted in a European election.**

**Organised participation:**

**1.1.4. I have been a member of a political party.**

**1.1.5. I have been a member of a formal pressure group (such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the RSPCA and so on).**

**1.1.6. I have been involved in an informal pressure group (one without formal membership or organisation such as anti-fox hunting activists).**

**Campaigning:**

**1.1.7. I have taken part in fund raising for a party or pressure group.**

**1.1.8. I have canvassed (asked people their opinion on an issue in the street or on the doorstep) on behalf of a political issue.**

**1.1.9. I have done clerical work for a cause, pressure group or party.**

**1.1.10. I have attended a rally for an issue, pressure group or party.**

**Contacting:**

**1.1.11. I have contacted my local MP on an issue.**

**1.1.12. I have contacted a civil servant on an issue.**

**1.1.13. I have contacted a Councillor on an issue.** ☐

**1.1.14. I have contacted my local council on an issue.** ☐

**1.1.15. I have contacted the media on an issue.** ☐

**Protesting:**

**1.1.16. I have attended a protest meeting.** ☐

**1.1.17. I have organised a petition.** ☐

**1.1.18. I have signed a petition.** ☐

**1.1.19. I have blocked traffic as part of protest activity.** ☐

**1.1.20. I have gone on a protest march.** ☐

**1.1.21. I have been involved in a political strike.** ☐

**1.1.22. I have taken part in a political boycott.** ☐

**1.1.23. I have used physical force over an issue or cause.** ☐

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**PART TWO.**

**Membership of a political party.**

**Q.2.1: Are you a member of a political party (for example, the Conservative Party, the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats?**

**TICK ONE BOX ONLY.**

**a) Yes, I am a member of a political party.** ☐

**b) No, I am not a member of a political party.** ☐

**IF YOUR ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION WAS a) GO TO PART THREE.**

**IF YOUR ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION WAS b) GO TO PART FOUR.**

**PART THREE.**

**Reasons for membership of a political party.**

**Q.3.1: Which political party are you a member of?**

**WRITE THE NAME OF THE POLITICAL PARTY BELOW.**

_____

**Q.3.2: What are the reasons why you joined this political party?**

**PLEASE WRITE YOUR REASONS BELOW IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE. PUT THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FIRST, THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT SECOND AND SO ON. USE ONE NUMBERED SPACE FOR EACH SINGLE REASON. WRITE IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU CAN.**

**1.** _____

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**2.** _____

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**3.** _____

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**4.** _____

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**GO ON TO PART FIVE.**

**PART FOUR.**

**Reasons for not being a member of a political party.**

**Q.4.1: Which political party, if any, do you feel you most closely identify with?**

**WRITE THE NAME OF THE POLITICAL PARTY BELOW.**

_____

**Q.4.2: What are the reasons why you have not joined a political party?**

**PLEASE WRITE YOUR REASONS BELOW IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE. PUT THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FIRST, THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT SECOND AND SO ON. USE ONE NUMBERED SPACE FOR EACH SINGLE REASON. WRITE IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU CAN. <u>IF ONE OF YOUR REASONS IS THAT YOU ARE 'NOT INTERESTED' IN POLITICS PLEASE SPECIFY, IF YOU CAN, WHY NOT.</u>**

**1.** _____

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**2.** _____

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**3.** _____

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**4.** _____

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**GO ON TO PART FIVE.**

**PART FIVE:**

**About yourself:**

**Q.5.1: What gender are you? Please tick the appropriate box.**

**a) Male**

**b) Female**

**Q.5.2: How old are you? Write your age in the box.**

**Q.5.3: Which of the following qualifications do you have?**

**FILL IN AS MANY BOXES AS ARE APPROPRIATE.**

**a) None.**

**b) GCSE or equivalent**

**c) 'A' or 'AS' Levels or equivalent such as Scottish Highers.**

**d) A vocational qualification such as GNVQ or City and Guilds.**

**e) A first degree such as B.A. or a B.Sc.**

**f) A postgraduate degree such as M.A. or PhD.**

**g) A teaching or nursing qualification.**

**h) Any other qualifications (please specify below):**

**Q.5.4: Which of these descriptions applies to what you were doing last week?**

**PLEASE FILL IN AS MANY BOXES AS ARE APPLICABLE.**

**a) In full-time work.**

**b) In full-time education.**

**c) On a government training/employment scheme (such as 'New Deal')**

**d) In part-time paid work.**

**e) Unemployed.**

**f) Permanently sick or disabled.**

**g) In part-time voluntary (unpaid) work.**

**h) Other. Please specify below.**

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**Q.5.5: If you are in work now, what is the title of your present job and describe what your job entails (If you are not working now, please answer about your LAST job).**

**PLEASE WRITE YOUR DESCRIPTION HERE.**

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**Q.5.6: Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular social class?**

**PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY.**

**a) Yes.**

**b) No.**

**Q.5.7: If your answer was YES, which class is that?**

**PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY.**

**a) Middle class.**

**b) Working class.** ☐

**c) Other (please specify below).** ☐

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**Q.5.8: Would you say that YOUR FAMILY belongs to a particular social class?**

**PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY.**

**a) Yes.** ☐

**b) No.** ☐

**Q.5.9: If your answer was YES, which class is that?**

**PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY.**

**a) Middle class.** ☐

**b) Working class.** ☐

**c) Other (please specify below).** ☐

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**Q.5.10: What jobs do BOTH your parents (or step-parents) do? If they are retired, unemployed or deceased please specify what job they did.**

**PLEASE WRITE IN YOUR ANSWER HERE.**

Mother or step-mother:

Father or step-father:

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**That is the end of the questionnaire. Once again, thank you for your co-operation.**

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE PERSON WHO GAVE IT TO YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

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