Chapter 3. *1983-92: Neil Kinnock and The 'New Model Party'*

Introduction

Following Labour's defeat in the 1983 general election, Michael Foot resigned as Party Leader. In the election to choose his successor (contested under the new electoral college format) Neil Kinnock received over seventy-one per cent of the electoral college vote, enjoying the crucial support of all the largest trade unions, and he also emerged as the clear winner in the CLP and PLP sections (*RACLP*, *1983*: 29). In contrast to his seventy year-old predecessor who was elected to Parliament in 1945, Kinnock was only forty-one and signified the appearance of a younger generation of leaders (McSmith, 1996: 7). Moreover, his working-class background was somewhat unusual for a Labour Leader (who were and still are mostly drawn from the middle-classes and private school backgrounds), but at this point in the Party's history a miner's son was more welcome than middle-class intellectuals such as Michael Foot. During his nine year tenure as Party Leader, Neil Kinnock managed to reinvent both himself and the Party. Elected as a member of the 'soft' left, Kinnock had in the seventies been a somewhat radical left-winger[1] and was a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), but by 1992 he had renounced many, if not most of the beliefs he previously held and had moved the Party to the right along with him. He was instrumental in transforming the Party into an efficient organisation which, in contrast to the débâcle of 1983, orchestrated highly professional campaigns and appeared capable of being a serious contender for government. Ultimately, however, he led the Party to two further election defeats in 1987 and 1992. In purely electoral terms (and it was clear that Kinnock's overriding motivation was electoral success[2]), Neil Kinnock was a failure as a Leader of the Labour Party, but in actual fact he was considerably more successful and influential in utilising and transforming internal Party structures, so that he left his successors with a party that now seems more likely to win the 1997 election.

This chapter analyses the nine-year period during which Kinnock led the Party, a period spanning two general elections. In examining this period it will become clear that changes to the internal structures of the Party can for the most part be divided into two principal phases: the 1983-7 period saw a transformation of the organisational 'rules and resources' of the Party, whilst the 1987-92 phase was dominated by the Policy Review, the comprehensive reassessment of Party

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[1] A good example of this earlier incarnation is the famous photograph of Neil Kinnock and Dennis Skinner sitting alone in the Commons chamber having refused to join their colleagues in going to the House of Lords to listen to the Queen's Speech in 1977 (the Queen's Silver Jubilee year). As the *Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition* (the official title of the Opposition leader), however, such republican sympathies were nowhere to be seen.

[2] In an interview on the BBC's *Panorama* programme in 1989, Kinnock said: "I'm in to win. That's my attitude to life and politics" (Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992: 101).

policy and policy-making structures. Throughout the entire period there were also significant changes in the Party's identity. These structural reforms instigated by agents in the Party Leadership will be examined in the context of their impact upon Labour's electoral support using data from the appropriate British Election Studies, before examining external structural factors in the latter part of the chapter.[3]

***Table 3.1*: General Election Results, 1987 and 1992.[4]**

Party	***MPs***		***% Share of Votes***	
	1987	1992	1987	1992
Conservative	376	336	42.3	41.9
Labour	229	271	30.8	34.4
Alliance/Liberal Democrats	22	20	22.5	17.8
Plaid Cymru	3	4	0.4	0.5
Scottish National Party	3	3	1.3	1.9
Others	17	17	2.7	3.5
Total	650	651	100.0	100.0

I. *Internal Structures*

i. Party Organisation and the Restoration of Leadership Control

The years preceding the 1983 general election saw Labour in a state of chaotic disunity which had proved to be a factor in the Party's electoral defeat. It had seemed as though a large section of the Party, particularly on the 'hard' left, had become intent on enacting constitutional reforms regardless of the consequences in terms of Labour's image in the eyes of the British electorate. Kinnock, on the other hand, was more clearly concerned with electoral success and was disapproving of this trend in the Party during the early eighties (hence his decision not to support Tony Benn in the potentially divisive 1981 Deputy Leadership contest). To Kinnock, "it was more

[3] The 1987 and 1992 British Election Studies were directed by Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell and John Curtice. The 1992 British Election Study dataset incorporates data from the 1992 Scottish Election Study, which was directed by Jack Brand and James Mitchell. Once again, unless otherwise indicated the directors of these studies bear no responsibility for any analyses and interpretations contained herein.

[4] Source: Butler and Butler, 1994: 219.

important to 'put principles into effect than to enjoy powerless perfection in Opposition'" (Fielding, 1995: 71).

Although Kinnock was elected with an overwhelming majority in the electoral college he was still not in a clear position to put into practice the more pragmatic principles of which he spoke. It is true that the left was no longer the force it was in 1980-1, but it still had considerable influence in the CLPs, Conference and the NEC. In order to present Labour as an electorally viable party, Kinnock felt that it was necessary to restore Leadership Control by enacting reforms to the Party's organisational structures.

One of Kinnock's first attempts to neutralise the influence of the left came at the 1984 Annual Conference, in relation to the contentious issue of the mandatory re-selection of MPs. Under the new constitutional arrangements passed in 1980 the power to re-select MPs lay with the Constituency Party, but in practice this meant the General Committee (GC) of the CLP, which consisted of delegates from local braches and trade unions.[5] Kinnock felt that if this process could be widened to include all local Party members then the votes of more moderate non-activists could lessen the chances of MPs being deselected (a theory which is given support by May's (1973) 'special law of curvilinear disparity'). This system of 'One Member, One Vote' (hereafter referred to as OMOV), was, of course, precisely the policy favoured by David Owen and other right-wingers before they quit the Party to form the SDP.

Realising that such a proposal would be given short shrift by a Party which held Owen *et al*. in contempt (as did Kinnock himself), Kinnock instead proposed a compromise. He suggested 'voluntary OMOV' in which GCs could choose to ballot local Party members if they so desired, but they remained under no obligation to do so. However, even this watered-down proposal has little support; Kinnock only gained a narrow majority of support for the measure on the NEC, and it was voted down by the Party Conference, due in large part to the Transport and General Workers' Union's (TGWU) refusal to support Kinnock (Shaw, 1994: 31). Thus, in his first serious attempt to assert his authority on the Party, Kinnock was constrained by the organisational structures of conference voting, and in particular the trade union block vote system. Since the major British parties' annual conferences are shown live on television, Kinnock's embarrassing defeat was very public.

In other ways however, Kinnock was to be more successful in using his position of Party Leader to transform Labour's organisational structure, as much by stealth as anything else. In this regard

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[5] General Committees are notoriously secretive and wield considerable power. Meetings are not open to ordinary Party members. An illustration of this fact manifested itself at an Annual Meeting of my local Constituency Party at which I was present. Midway through the meeting there was a brief hiatus during which time all the rank-and-file members and even the local MP (who is just another rank-and-file member as far as the CLP is concerned) had to leave the hall and wait in the corridor whilst the GC met *in camera*.

he was able to take advantage of the rapprochement between the right of the Party and the more moderate left, both on the NEC and in the Party at large. Although Tony Benn just managed to remain on the NEC throughout Kinnock's leadership (being voted off the NEC in 1993), he and his followers were increasingly marginalised, particularly over the issue of the expulsion of Militant members.

It was mentioned above that one of the major structural constraints on the Party Leader and the Shadow Cabinet was the National Executive Committee, which was not always in agreement with the Party's Parliamentary Leaders. Since Kinnock felt changes were needed in the way the Party presented itself and to the manner in which it practised campaigns in the media, but could not yet be sure of a working majority on the NEC, he decided to form a Campaign Strategy Committee (CSC), which was separate from the NEC (although technically responsible to it) and given responsibility for Labour's campaigns and media presentation (Butler and Kavanagh, 1988: 50). The CSC's members were drawn from the Shadow Cabinet, the PLP, the NEC, and trade unions, and Kinnock used the new committee to reduce the influence of the NEC. Indeed, any doubts about Kinnock's strategic reasoning behind setting up the CSC are dispelled by the fact that when the composition of the NEC became more favourable to him, the influence of the CSC reduced considerably (Butler and Kavanagh, 1988; Shaw 1994).

Further significant changes were made to the Party organisation in 1985, when Larry Whitty replaced Jim Mortimer as the General Secretary of the Labour Party. In contrast to Mortimer, Whitty was more conducive to Kinnock's approach, which allowed organisational reforms to proceed with greater speed. Internal departments were consolidated and reorganised, so that three main directorates were established: Organisation, Policy Development, and Campaigns and Communications. The last group proved to be most significant; the new Director of Campaigns and Communications was a former television producer named Peter Mandelson. Mandelson (whose grandfather Herbert Morrison was a member of Atlee's 1945-51 Cabinet) brought with him a new approach to campaigning and media presentation, which emphasised reliance on advertising agencies, opinion polling and qualitative research to shape policies and images which would appeal to the electorate. Mandelson consulted an advertising executive, Philip Gould, to produce a report on Labour's campaign strategy, one that proved to be highly critical of Labour's 'cloth cap' image. A key recommendation was that the Party should establish a working group including not only Party officials, but also professionals from advertising and opinion research agencies to work on Labour's image and communications strategy (Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 50-2).

Whilst the results of the formation of what became known as the Shadow Communications Agency (SCA) in terms of Labour image and policies will be discussed below, for the time being it is more important to recognise the SCA's significance as part of Kinnock's strategy to transform internal Party structures to his own liking. Although the SCA and Peter Mandelson (as head of the Campaigns and Communications Directorate) were officially responsible to the NEC, in reality

both answered to the Leader's (i.e., Kinnock's) Office (Mandelson was a close friend of Kinnock's senior aide, Charles Clarke) (Shaw, 1994: 58). Thus Kinnock had *de facto* control over both the SCA and Mandelson's highly powerful department, whilst reducing the effective power of the NEC. Not content with trying to adopt strategies which would allow himself to work within Labour's internal structural framework, Kinnock was able to use the resources available to him as Party Leader to transform existing Party structures, and even create new ones. Of course, it would be wrong to say that he was able to do this by himself; such a process would have been more difficult if Kinnock was not surrounded by allies such as Clarke, Hewitt, Whitty and Mandelson.

In the Parliamentary Party, the Leader was able to use his power of patronage to stifle dissent within the Party. By rapidly expanding the number of Opposition frontbench spokesperson positions (to over sixty by 1987) he was able to reward simultaneously his supporters and protégés whilst reducing the number of potential backbench critics, since "[with] a frontbench job went the obligation not to criticize the leader" (McSmith, 1996: 20). Such powers were also put to good effect later on by John Smith and Tony Blair.

Similarly, during Neil Kinnock's tenure the power of the Party Leader's Personal Office grew substantially, with a number of consequences for the nature of Leadership control. Foremost amongst these was the ability to take advantage of the considerable media attention accorded to the Leader. Thus, senior members of Kinnock's office such as Patricia Hewitt and Charles Clarke were able to issue unattributable briefings to political correspondents in which Kinnock's political enemies, not to mention his Shadow Cabinet colleagues, could be criticised indirectly by him (Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992; McSmith, 1996). The intended consequences of these actions were primarily twofold: it gave the Leader increased power over his parliamentary colleagues, and, since it was his version of events which was increasingly portrayed as the 'Party line', it gave the impression that he was in complete control of the Party organisation.

But in an organisation which was increasingly becoming oligarchical in Michels' (1962) terms, structural constraints still remained on the Leader's attempts to prevail at all times. The trade unions, with their financial and institutional links to the Party, still had considerable power, to the extent that their support was vital for any substantial reforms. In a second attempt to reform the selection process for MPs in 1987, Kinnock's desire to introduce OMOV was again thwarted by the major unions, although, as Minkin notes, union leaders now appeared more receptive to reforms than before (1992: 247). Instead, a compromise was accepted which introduced a form of the electoral college at the constituency level, where the unions retained considerable influence. However, the system was complicated and difficult to operate in practice, and was abandoned in 1990 (Shaw, 1994: 117-8). Notwithstanding this constraint on the Leader's authority however, OMOV was introduced in the Constituency Section of the NEC elections, allowing the right-wing of the Party to make gains in the form of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, whilst left-wingers such as Ken Livingstone lost their seats.

A final example of the centralisation of control in the Labour Party during Neil Kinnock's leadership concerns the selection of candidates to fight by-elections held in the event of an MP's resignation or death. Previously, this had been primarily the responsibility of the affected CLP, but during a period in the mid-eighties when Labour was subject to accusations in the media of being dominated by (especially at the local government level) the so-called 'Loony Left', the leadership was in no mood to witness a repeat of Foot's damaging reversal over the selection of Peter Tatchell in 1983.[6] A loss to the SDP in the Greenwich by-election only months before the 1987 election, where an 'unsuitable' candidate was chosen by the CLP, was deeply embarrassing to the Party, but worse was to follow. In the 1988 Glasgow Govan by-election, the Scottish National Party (SNP) overturned a 'safe' Labour majority of over 19,500 to win the seat.[7] The Labour candidate (Bob Gillespie) was a left-wing trade union official who performed badly in comparison to the SNP candidate Jim Sillars (a former Labour MP himself), and was almost universally regarded as a disastrous choice to fight the seat. Following this, Labour's worst by-election result since 1983, the Labour Party Leadership altered Party rules so that, in the words of the new rule, "Where a parliamentary by-election occurs, the NEC shall take *whatever action may be necessary* to ensure that the vacancy is contested by a duly endorsed Labour candidate." (quoted in McSmith, 1996: 56; emphasis added). Following Govan, all prospective by-election candidates had to be interviewed by senior Party officials in London before they could be selected as the official Party candidate. On several occasions the NEC removed the CLP's choice of candidate and imposed one of their own, often to the considerable consternation of the local CLP. In doing so, the Leadership was able to increase control over selecting candidates whom they deemed suitable to represent the Party in the glare of media publicity, although, paradoxically, the attention surrounding the lengths the NEC had to go to in order to do this hardly gave the impression of a united and moderate Party.

In summary therefore, it has been shown that under Neil Kinnock the Labour Leader's control over the organisational structure of the Party grew considerably. Kinnock was able to transform some of the organisational structures (for example, elections to the NEC) so that he was able to remove potential constraints on his authority such as the actions of dissenting left-wingers. Moreover, he was able to use the informal resources accorded to the Party Leader to increase his control and influence in the PLP. Finally, the shift of power away from the CLPs towards the Party headquarters in Walworth Road, London, meant that the Leadership was able to reduce the chances of dissenting (and electorate unfriendly) candidates being selected to contest by-elections. Kinnock's view that an oligarchical, top-down structure was necessary to build an electable Party

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[6] On Tatchell, see Chapter Two, *n*25. The accusations of 'Loony Left' dominance were based on claims in the media (usually grossly exaggerated or simply made up) that Labour councils were dominated by members who were, for example, said to have banned the use of black bin liners, or the singing in schools of the nursery rhyme *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, on the grounds that they were racialist.

[7] The seat was eventually returned to Labour at the 1992 general election.

permeated most of the changes during his leadership. In Eric Shaw's view, the importance of these changes cannot be overstated:

> By 1992, the structure of power in the Labour Party had undergone a profound change. The highly pluralistic, deeply polarised Party characterised by the institutionalised dispersal of power and weak central
> authority had been replaced by a powerful central authority exercising tight control over all aspects of organisational life. Not only was this a crucial aspect of the transformation process, it was the necessary condition for the radical overhaul of its programme and strategy and one that will not easily be reversed. (1994: 122-3.)

The extent to which the Leadership's control over the Party at large had grown can be demonstrated through an examination of the decisions taken at Party Conferences from 1986 onwards. Whilst during the 1985 Conference Kinnock was defeated over the issue of an amnesty for miners affected by the year-long industrial dispute (*RACLP, 1985*), this was the last major occasion on which the Party Leadership was defeated under Neil Kinnock (see *RACLP*[8], *1986*, *1987*, *1988*, *1989*, *1990*, *1991*). Thus, the Labour Party Conference, which had traditionally been known for its heated debates and heckling of Party Leaders, had effectively been transformed into a deferential rubber-stamp for the Leadership, thereby removing one of the most publicly visible constraints on the Leadership's authority. As it will become clear in the next section, had it not been for the restoration of Leadership control in the 1985-7 period, the process of structural transformation in policy-making and image would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

That senior figures in the Labour Party, especially Neil Kinnock, were able to act as intentional agents transforming organisational structures of the Labour Party is irrefutable, as the above evidence shows. However, it is less clear that these agents were successful at translating successes in organisational change into electoral improvements. In other words, whilst Labour after 1985 *was* less divided than it had been prior to the 1983 election, and the authority of the Leadership had been restored, significant majorities of voters in 1987 and 1992 still thought that the Party was divided.

Table 3.2 shows the BES respondents' perceptions of Labour Party unity in 1987 and 1992. When the percentages in the 'United' row are compared with the corresponding figure from 1983, when only just over eight per cent of respondents thought that Labour was united, it is clear that there had been some improvement, but the numbers believing Labour was divided remained very

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[8] In 1986 the title of the Annual Conference reports changed from the *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party* to the shorter *Conference Report*. For the purposes of continuity however, the acronym *RACLP* will continue to be used to refer to the Reports of 1986 and thereafter.

high.As Table 3.3 shows, the vast majority of those who thought Labour was divided voted for other parties, particularly the Conservatives. In contrast, in the 1989 survey of Labour Party members carried out by Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, fifty-six per cent of respondents thought that the Party was united, with only twenty-seven per cent saying the opposite (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992: 149).

***Table 3.2*: Respondents' Perceptions of Labour Party Unity, 1987 and 1992.**[9]

Respondents' Views of Party Unity:	Labour Party:	
	1987	1992
United (%)	22.2	29.1
Divided (%)	69.4	62.8
Neither or both (%)	3.1	2.7
Don't know (%)	5.2	5.1
(N)	(3826)	(3534)

***Table 3.3*: Vote by Respondents' Perceptions of Labour Party, 1992 (percentages)**[10]

Party Voted for in 1992:	*View of Labour in 1992:*			
	United	Divided	Neither or both	Don't Know
Conservative	27.0	48.9	38.3	44.6
Labour	52.8	26.9	28.4	35.4
Lib. Democrat	15.4	15.7	27.2	15.4
Other	4.8	8.5	6.2	4.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0
(N)	878	1900	81	130

χ^2=205.348, df=9 (p<.001)

[9] Source: 1987 and 1992 British Election Studies.

[10] Source: 1992 British Election Study.

It appears, then, that the organisational changes which may have been apparent to Party members had less of an impact on the electorate at large. This suggests a failure to successfully articulate the fact that there had been a considerable degree of rapprochement between various factions in the Party -- driven together by a shared weariness of being in opposition as much as anything else -- but it will become apparent below that Labour was not helped in this task by other external structural factors.

ii. Policy-making 1983-7

In the period before the 1987 general election, no significant changes were made to policy-making structures in the Labour Party. Given the major changes to the organisational structures of the Party during this time, in addition to the troublesome issues of Militant expulsions and the year-long miners' strike, this was perhaps not surprising. Kinnock clearly felt that that his first priority should be to regain control of Party organisation: this would be a necessary precursor to any programmatic changes which might follow. Moreover, given the new spirit of co-operation between the 'soft' left and the right wings of the Party, radical changes to Party policy may have irrevocably damaged this alliance. As Kinnock said in a television interview in 1993, "to have changed all policies simultaneously [in that period] would have fractured the Party" (quoted in Shaw, 1994: 51).

Nevertheless, there were some clear signs that the Party was moving away from its positions of 1983. The 1987 election manifesto, *Britain Will Win*, which at just over nine thousand words was less than half the length of its predecessor (Topf, 1994: 153), contained several policy pledges which sharply contrasted with the contents of the 1983 document. In place of the earlier promise to withdraw from the EEC was a commitment "to work constructively with our EEC partners to promote economic expansion and combat unemployment" ([1987] 1990: 473). In addition, the manifesto now supported the rights of tenants to buy their council-owned houses. On industrial relations issues, the Party manifesto was more equivocal: it promised (as in 1983) to repeal Conservative trade union legislation, whilst establishing a 'statutory framework' protecting the rights of union members to hold secret ballots before strikes and when electing union executives.

Although these changes were fairly substantial in their own right, Kinnock remained constrained by the policy-making structure of the Party Conference, and so more radical changes were impractical. Thus, a commitment to "social ownership" (i.e., public ownership under a new name) of the major utilities remained, as did the Party's commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament. The latter remained an unpopular policy (both amongst the electorate and senior Party figures) and was a weakness which was effectively exploited by the Conservatives during the 1987 general election campaign.

The lack of any major changes, other than those already noted, to Labour Party policies before 1987 did little to convince voters that Labour had moved away from its radical stances of 1983.

According to Gallup poll data from 1987, fewer than a third of voters polled believed that Labour had the best policies of the main parties, and in another post-election study more than one in five non-Labour voters cited Labour's policies as a prime reason for not voting Labour (Lipsey *et al.*, 1989: 19-20).

In the 1987-92 BES panel study, respondents were asked to place parties, and themselves on an eleven-point, left-right scale in relation to a series of policy-areas, where '1' represented far left, '11' far right, and '6' the mid-point. Table 3.4 shows that in each policy area Labour was still well to the left of both the mid-point and the voters themselves. Overall, when compared to the Conservatives, "Labour was seen as somewhat more 'left-wing' than the Conservatives were seen to be 'right-wing'" (Heath and Jowell, 1994: 194). Although the electorate had appeared to be closer to Labour's unemployment policies, in the areas of nuclear weapons, and nationalisation and privatisation Labour appeared to be well to the left of respondents' preferences.

***Table 3.4*: Perceived Issue Positions of Labour and Electorate, 1987**[11]

Issue	Labour	Electorate
Nuclear Weapons	2.0	5.1
Unemployment & Inflation	2.2	3.6
Taxation & Spending	2.8	4.4
Nationalisation & Privatisation	2.8	6.5
Overall	2.5	4.9
N (minimum)	(1505)	(1534)

Further evidence that the electorate believed that Labour's policies had changed little since 1983 is shown in Table 3.5. The overwhelming majority of respondents to the 1987 BES believed that there remained a 'great difference' between the two major parties, suggesting that neither Labour, nor the Conservatives for that matter, had changed much since 1983. Clearly then, if Labour was to attract more voters in future it would have to adapt its policies to the preferences of a larger portion of the electorate.

[11] Source: adapted from 1987-92 BES Panel Survey data in Heath and Jowell, 1994: 194-6.

***Table 3.5*: Respondents' Perceptions of Differences Between Conservative and Labour Parties, 1983-92 (percentages)[12]**

Difference Between Parties:	Year		
	1983	1987	1992
Great Difference	82.3	83.5	54.5
Some Difference	10.0	10.7	30.4
Not Much Difference	6.2	4.5	12.9
Don't Know	1.5	1.2	2.0
Total	100.0	99.9	99.9
(N)	(3955)	(3826)	(3534)

iii. The Policy Review

If you insist on positions you had 20 or 30 years ago, if you insist nothing has changed, then you are dead. -- Bryan Gould, 1987.

Following the 1987 election defeat, the Party leadership realised that transforming the Party's organisational structure and running what was regarded as a highly professional campaign would not be sufficient to guarantee electoral success. Few in the Party believed that winning the 1987 election was truly a realistic possibility; instead the aim of the senior leaders was to ensure that Labour's share of the vote increased, and that it dismissed the challenge of the Alliance for the right to be regarded as the principal opposition party. Labour succeeded on both counts, but as far as the former goal was concerned, the gains were slight. Winning just under thirty-one per cent of the vote, Labour managed an increase on its 1983 total of only about three per cent, whilst the Conservative vote remained fairly steady at forty-two per cent. Moreover, the factors which those in the Labour movement and elsewhere cited when trying to account for Labour's poor performance in 1983 -- Foot's weaknesses as Leader, Party disunity, the Falklands Conflict and a shambolic electoral campaign -- were all absent in 1987. The 1987 result still represented Labour's second worst performance since 1931, and therefore further changes were still required if the Party was to become more electable.

[12] Sources: British Election Studies, 1983-92.

At the 1987 Conference following the election defeat, the Leadership presented a statement to the conference entitled *Moving Ahead* (1987a), which set forth the next steps to be taken by the Party. Labour planned to build upon the advances made thus far in three ways:

- by ensuring that policies meet the needs and aspirations of people in Britain today -- and that they take full account of the social and economic changes that will shape the Britain of the 1990s;
- by communicating those policies clearly and effectively to the electorate;
- and by demonstrating, through our Labour-controlled local authorities, that we can provide caring, responsible and efficient government. (1987a: 2.)

The Leadership's document proposed that the Party "reflect, calmly and candidly," (1987a: 2) on its electoral defeat. Recognising that Labour had to take account of socioeconomic and demographic changes, *Moving Ahead* expressed a need to expand the Party's electoral appeal by adjusting its policies, and the values of democratic socialism, to the new electoral context. Most significantly, the NEC (by this time firmly in the Leader's control) proposed "to establish a small number of Policy Review Groups, involving members from both the NEC and the Shadow Cabinet, to report early in 1988" (1987a: 9). Each Policy Review Group was to deal with a distinctive area of Party policy, and seven were formed in all.

The most remarkable aspect of the Policy Review process, aside from the changes to the policies themselves, was the extent to which it was controlled not by the NEC but directly from the Leader's Office. Kinnock chose the convenors of each of the seven groups, placing allies in the key positions. In doing so, he was able "to ensure the kind of political mix which he believed would bring about the results he wanted, while ensuring that dissident voices were fairly reflected" (Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 102).[13] Thus, in the area of policy-making Kinnock was able to radically transform the nature of the Party's structures. In contrast to the previous division of power between the NEC and the Leader and the Shadow Cabinet, which had proved so problematic and a real constraint on many occasions in the past, Kinnock had ensured that the Leader and the Shadow Cabinet, but especially the Leader, had unprecedented control over policy-making structures.

Meet the Challenge, Make the Change (1989a) was the final report produced by the seven Policy Review groups for presentation to the 1989 Conference. The exhaustive eighty-eight page document (in small type) covered every aspect of Party policy. Each of the seven chapters were

[13] Although Kinnock was keen to give the impression that 'dissident' voices were heard, neither Tony Benn nor Dennis Skinner, the two leading left-wingers on the NEC, took part in any of the Groups. This was of their own choosing, so that they would be free to criticise the Review's findings (Seyd, 1993: 81).

well in excess of ten-thousand words in length, and to emphasise the Leader's control over the process, it is worth noting that the final draft was edited (and rewritten in some places) by Patricia Hewitt and her colleagues working in the Leader's Office (Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 174).

Several notable shifts in Labour's policy and emphasis were contained in *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*. Whilst Labour had previously criticised the market system, it now recognised that in certain (but by no means all) circumstances "markets are the most appropriate means of efficiently distributing many goods and services. Competition is one way of securing consumer choice" (1989a: 41). The Policy Review also placed greater emphasis on protecting the interests of the consumer, whereas Labour had previously been associated (due to its union links) to the interests of producers (1989a: 7). Most notably, in the area of defence policy, Labour ended its policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament, which had been unpopular with the electorate. Whilst promising to cancel the proposed fourth Trident nuclear submarine and adopt a strategy of 'no first use' of nuclear weapons, *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* made no claims to either decommission Britain's nuclear capability unilaterally, or promise to ensure that the United States removed its nuclear missiles from its bases in Britain (1989a: 87). Both of these policies had featured in the manifestos of 1983 and 1987.[14]

Each of the seven sections of the Policy Review document were approved with relatively little dissention at the 1989 Party Conference, and the policies contained therein formed the basis of the 1992 election manifesto, *It's Time to Get Britain Working Again*. As was the case with *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*, the final draft of the manifesto was the responsibility of Kinnock's aides in the Leader's Office, a further sign of the Leader's control over Party policy-making (Topf, 1994: 152). The changes in the Party's emphasis since Kinnock assumed the Leadership in 1983 were highlighted by the fact that the entire 1992 manifesto was bereft of any mention of the words *socialism* or *socialist*, which appeared, to many commentators and Party members alike, to be somewhat unusual for a self-proclaimed democratic socialist Party.

It is clear that the differences in both style and content between the 1983 manifesto and *It's Time to Get Britain Working Again,* and Labour's policies more generally, were in large part due to the transformation of policy-making structures under the Leadership of Neil Kinnock. Having regained a large degree of control over what Lewis Minkin refers to as "the hydra-headed character of Labour's national power structure" (1992: 597), Kinnock and his colleagues (especially his closest advisors) were undoubtedly successful *qua* agents transforming policy-

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[14] It should be noted that ending the policy of unilateralism in the Party was not to take a leap into uncharted territory: as Croft (1992) points out, it was under Atlee's Labour government that Britain produced an atomic bomb in 1947, and in the seventies the Wilson and Callaghan governments were responsible for purchasing Polaris and deploying NATO Cruise missiles in Britain. Croft's analysis therefore suggests that the post-Policy Review defence policy resembled not an entirely new approach, but rather a return to a more 'traditionalist' nuclear defence policy.

making structures to their own advantage, enabling them to steer the Party back towards the mainstream of centre-left politics in Britain.

Once again, however, it is apparent that agents' successes in transforming party policy-making structures are ultimately futile if the changes do not register in the minds of voters. In this respect, data from the British Election Studies provide some evidence to support the view that Labour's Policy Review did capture the attention of the electorate. Table 3.5 (above) also includes BES respondents' perceptions of the differences between the Conservative and Labour parties in 1992, in addition to 1983 and 1987. In contrast to the previous two election years, when over eighty per cent of respondents felt that there was a 'great difference' between the parties, only fifty-four and one-half per cent thought the same in 1992. Almost thirteen per cent, or over one in eight respondents thought that there was 'not much difference' between the parties. This suggests that voters felt the major parties were moving closer together in policy positions, something which would have seemed unthinkable in the previous two elections.[15]

Turning to individual issues, British Election Study data in Table 3.6 suggest that the electorate did believe Labour had moved closer to the centre. This is particularly apparent on the issues of nuclear weapons, and nationalisation and privatisation, where Labour's Policy Review u-turns were most widely publicised.

Assessing the Policy Review's impact on electoral support for the Labour Party, Anthony Heath and Roger Jowell suggest that the effect was a positive one, but perhaps not as positive as agents in the Labour Party might have hoped for. They estimate that the Policy Review may have accounted for just over one per cent of the increase in Labour's total vote share (which was only about four per cent since 1987) although the authors admit that even this figure may have over-estimated the Policy Review's impact (1994: 201). Heath and Jowell conclude by saying that:

> The Policy Review does appear to have been a success. Even though Labour's policy changes on defence were largely made irrelevant by changes in the real world, the electorate did notice that Labour had moved to the centre, and they did feel that Labour was now a more moderate and, we may surmise, a more electable party than it had been in the 1980s. (1994: 206).

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[15] Of course, it is equally possible to suggest that, rather than Labour moving to the right, respondents felt the Conservatives had gone to the left. Whilst the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as party leader, and her replacement by an apparently less ideologically inclined leader in John Major may have prompted some respondents to assume such a change had taken place, in effect Conservative policy (with the notable exception of the abolition of the unpopular community charge) remained relatively unchanged. However, Heath and Jowell (1994: 195) suggest that the respondents believed the Tories *had* moved slightly leftwards. Nonetheless, it appears reasonable to assume that some of the perceived convergence was due to Labour's shift to the right.

***Table 3.6*: Respondents' Perceived Issue Positions of Labour, 1992**[16]

Issue	1992	Change since 1987
Nuclear Weapons	3.5	+1.5
Unemployment & Inflation	2.8	+0.6
Taxation & Spending	2.9	+0.1
Nationalisation & Privatisation	3.4	+0.6
Overall	3.2	+0.7
N (minimum)	(1462)	

Whilst the process of transformation which took place in relation to Labour's policy-making structures between 1987 and 1992 was not (and was never likely to be) sufficient to secure an electoral victory in 1992, the Policy Review instigated by agents in the Labour Party Leadership did at least have the intended effect of repositioning the Party closer to the centre of the British political spectrum.

iv. From the Red Flag to the Red Rose: Labour's Identity Transformed?

> Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
> We'll keep the Red Flag flying here!
> -- *The Red Flag* (trad.).

It was argued in Chapter Two that Labour faced an identity crisis in the early eighties which gave voters the not entirely incorrect impression that the Party was divided and prone to extremism. The identity structure of Labour at that time constrained agents in the Party, who were vainly attempting to present to the electorate a party worth voting for, in two ways: it undermined Leadership authority, and thus damaged the Party's electoral image. It was this type of party which Kinnock inherited in 1983. Clearly being an office-seeking agent, Kinnock spent the next nine years attempting to transform Labour's identity structure, from one representing a Party torn

[16] Source: adapted from 1987-92 BES Panel Survey data in Heath and Jowell, 1994: 194. Note that the use of panel data means that the same respondents were interviewed in both 1987 and 1992, meaning that there is a greater indication of real shifts in perceptions amongst the same-cross-section of the electorate at two points in time. As in Table 3.4, a rating of '1' is farthest left on the ideological scale, '11' farthest right, and '6' is the mid-point. Thus, any increase in ratings represents movement to the right.

asunder by parochial divisions which were largely irrelevant to the electorate, into that of a professionalised, competent, and, above all, 'modernised' government-in-waiting. This process was, like the transformation of policy-making structures, carried out in two phases: first, the old structure had to be discarded, before a new one was constituted. In this section it will be apparent that although Labour's identity was transformed during this period, the Leadership remained constrained in several ways which were damaging to its office-seeking goals.

The early phase of Kinnock's Leadership, from 1983 until 1986, was dominated by two factors which reinforced Labour's image as being extreme and divided: one was an internal Party matter, whilst the other, although outside the Party, was inextricably linked to it. The former was the ongoing attempt to rid the Party of the Militant tendency. There had been considerable reluctance (discussed in Chapter Two), amongst rank-and-file members as well as senior left-wingers in the Party, to take action to expel members of the Militant tendency, and so the Leadership had been constrained in its attempts to press the issue. However, in 1985 the Labour-controlled Liverpool City Council, which was dominated by the Militant tendency, decided to issue redundancy notices to *all* of its employees in protest against the central government's 'capping' of local authority spending limits. Rather than gaining sympathy as they had hoped, however, the Council's tactic seriously backfired and angered the employees and the trade unions which represented them. At the 1985 Party Conference, Neil Kinnock used this as a pretext to attack those whom he called the "tendency-tacticians" (*RACLP 1985*: 128) who were behind the move:

> I'll tell you what happens with impossible promises. You start with far-fetched resolutions. They are then pickled into a rigid dogma, a code, and you go through the years sticking to that, out-dated, misplaced, irrelevant to the real needs, and you end in the grotesque chaos of a Labour council - a *Labour* council - hiring taxis to scuttle round a city handing out redundancy notices to its own workers. *(Applause)* I am telling you, no matter how entertaining, how fulfilling to short-term egos - *(Continuing applause)* - you can't play politics with people's jobs and with people's services or with their homes. *(Applause and some boos)* (*RACLP 1985*: 128.)

These famous remarks caused uproar in the Conference hall, but for the most part the delegates were supportive of the Leader's stance, indicative of a growing change in the views of the CLP and union delegates. The speech was given much favourable publicity in the media allowing Kinnock, and by extension the Party itself, to be seen to be having no truck with extremists.[17]

Kinnock also used the 1985 Conference to attack the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which had instigated and lost the year long miners' strike of 1984-5. The

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[17] A hard left member of the NEC, Eric Heffer MP, stood up and walked off the conference platform in protest against Kinnock's attack.

dispute was marred by scenes of serious picket-line violence as massed pickets fought running battles with riot police. Kinnock found himself on the horns of a dilemma, since he sympathised with the miners' cause, but condoned neither the violence nor the fact that the Marxist NUM leader, Arthur Scargill, had called the strike without balloting his union's members first.[18] But during the dispute Kinnock could not publicly criticise the NUM for fear of splitting the labour movement, which left him prone to claims from the Conservatives that he was implicitly supporting the violence and illegality of the dispute. With the strike over by the 1985 Conference, however, he was free to launch an attack on Scargill and the violence, thus publicly distancing himself and the Party leadership from images of extremism (*RACLP 1985*: 153-6).

Taken together, the actions of Neil Kinnock at the 1985 Conference constituted something of a watershed in terms of the transformation of Labour's identity structure. Whilst the miners' strike was ongoing the Party Leader was constrained by a need to maintain Party unity, whilst Labour's image in the eyes of many voters "was little more (to use Kinnock's expression) than a 'union support group'" (Shaw, 1994: 34). Hence, the end of the strike enabled Kinnock to begin to transform Labour's identity structure by attempting to discard publicly some of the vestiges of Labour's association with extremists and union militancy.

From 1986 onwards, the 'modernisation' (as it came to be known) of Labour's identity proceeded with greater haste. The old symbols of the Labour Party which were found on most publications, conference platforms and campaign literature, were the Party's 'red flag' logo (a red flag with the Party name emblazoned on it) and the 'Liberty' crest, depicting a quill pen and a shovel to represent the unity of all workers. By 1986, however, these symbols fell out of favour with the Leadership. Philip Gould, head of the advertising agency which Labour employed, suggested the Party adopt a new 'corporate image', with the Director of Campaigns and Communications, Peter Mandelson, claiming that "It is vital to reinforce the impression of an innovative party *shedding old associations and image*" (quoted in Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 52; emphasis added). The red flag in particular was regarded as being representative of 'old-style socialism', which Kinnock believed was unpopular with voters and was keen to discard (Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 52-3). The decision to adopt a thornless red rose as the new 'corporate logo' was not a surprising choice: it already was the symbol of several European social democratic parties and also featured in the Socialist International's logo. To emphasise Labour's break with the past and the new 'softer' image, it became *de rigueur* for Labour MPs to be seen wearing a red rose on their lapels, and visitors to the Party's London Headquarters are now met with the sight of a bronze rose, rather than the old 'Liberty' crest adorning the entrance gate to John Smith House.

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[18] Scargill's decision to call a strike appeared to play into the hands of the Thatcher government, which was keen to weaken further union power: the strike was called at the end of winter (when demand for coal is obviously lower) and it was well known that coal stocks were particularly high at the time, thus weakening the potential impact of industrial action.

The Labour Leadership of Kinnock and his Deputy, Roy Hattersley, sought to distance the Party further from its old identity by publishing a new statement in 1988 concerning Labour's aims and values. At that time Labour had no clearly defined statement of values; instead great emphasis was placed on Clause IV (Section 4) of the Party Constitution, which committed the Party,

> To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

This statement, emphasising Labour's commitment to public ownership, was the closest thing Labour had to a statement of values. It was printed on the back of all Party membership cards and had great symbolic importance, particularly amongst those on the left. *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values* (1988a) (which included the entire Clause IV on the first page) foreshadowed many of the ideas adumbrated in the following year's *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*. In order to dispel the traditional view that Labour believed in a powerful state interfering in people's lives, the statement (written principally by Hattersley and Kinnock, in that order) asserted that "We do not believe in the intrusive state. ... To us, the state is an instrument for sustaining and enhancing the liberties of the whole community, no more, no less" (1988a: 5). The overriding thrust of the entire document was an emphasis on democratic socialism's commitment to individual freedom (although it was defined in a manner very different from the Thatcherite notion of 'freedom'). The document also recognised the value of the market economy, although the enthusiasm for the market contained in the original draft was toned down somewhat (after protests from some Shadow Cabinet members) to point out where the market system was clearly inappropriate (Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 72).

The final aspect of the Leadership's attempts to transform the identity of the Party was related to Labour's communication strategy. A concerted effort was made to place less emphasis on 'traditional' Labour images -- 'cloth cap workers' and mass rallies dominated by trade union banners. Instead, the campaign team, led by Mandelson and the Shadow Communications Agency (SCA), sought to associate Labour with positive images. A leaked memo written by Patricia Hewitt discussed the preferred locations and content of Labour photo-opportunities:

> [L]ocations must reflect the overall themes and style of our campaign. In particular they must be *positive*, we want places that are modern, that show the best of Britain and, in particular, the best of what Labour councils are doing; places that encapsulate Kinnock's Britain. We do NOT want any closed factories, derelict housing sites, run-down hospitals, industrial wastelands or other wrecks of Thatcher's Britain. We also want *people* -- bright, attractive people presenting an image of the broader base Labour has to capture -- *not* people who present an image of old-fashioned Labour diehards. (Butler and Kavanagh, 1988: 61-2; original emphasis.)

Labour's attention to presentation increased greatly, with the key instigators of the changes -- Mandelson, Hewitt, *et al.*, -- working, in effect, directly for Kinnock. Innovative techniques, not previously used to any great extent in British political communications were introduced by the SCA. For example, the Academy-Award winning director of *Chariots of Fire*, Hugh Hudson, produced an unprecedented PEB during the 1987 election campaign which, by placing the emphasis entirely on Kinnock, rather than the Party, resembled American presidential campaign advertisements.[19]

In addition, extensive use was made of private polling information and focus groups, and Labour's image was to a large extent modelled around images favoured by the target groups in the middle-class south of England -- 'middle England' -- which Labour had to win over if it was to win an election. Labour's new voter-friendly image was memorably summed up by the *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young, who commented that "Chaotic romanticism has given way to the hard-eyed exploitation of sentiment, a pretty child being the new jump-suited logo of socialist realism" (quoted in Shaw, 1994: 71), although clearly, the new 'socialist realism' was far removed from that of Sergei Eisenstein.

As far as the identity structure is concerned, the strategies adopted by agents in the Labour Party under Kinnock appear to have been successful in some respects, but not in others. More specifically, it was claimed above that Kinnock's aim was to transform Labour's identity structure so that, rather than appearing extreme and incompetent, the image of the Party would be that of a moderate government-in-waiting.

Table 3.7 highlights the changing perceptions of the Labour Party extremism between 1987 and 1992. It is clear that the efforts to transform Labour's identity from 1986 onwards were not in vain. Whilst fewer than four in ten respondents in 1987 believed that the Labour Party was moderate, by 1992 a clear majority of respondents -- sixty-one per cent -- thought Labour was a moderate party. Moreover when the same data are divided according to the party voted for in 1992, in the case of each party's voters (even Conservatives) more thought Labour to be moderate rather than extreme. The discarding of Labour's old 'workerist' image and the adoption of a more modern identity therefore appeared to benefit the Party.

However, despite these efforts, agents appeared to be less able to portray Labour as a strong government-in-waiting. Tables 3.8 and 3.9 contrast perceptions of the perceived governing capability of the Labour and Conservative parties in 1987 and 1992.

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[19] The caption at the end of the broadcast, in place of the usual 'Labour', was simply: 'Kinnock'. The film, which came to be known as 'Kinnock -- the movie', was thought to be so popular that it was shown twice during the campaign. Hughes and Wintour note that at a Fabian conference after the election, Mandelson called it "the most effective piece of political communication in recent political history", to which an audience member replied: "But it didn't work, did it?" (1990: 27).

***Table 3.7*: Respondents' Perceptions of Labour Party Extremism, 1987-92**[20]

Respondents' Views of Labour:	Year:	
	1987	1992
Extreme (%)	49.3	29.3
Moderate (%)	37.2	61.0
Neither or both (%)	6.9	4.0
Don't know (%)	6.4	5.5
(N)	(3826)	(3534)

***Table 3.8*: Respondents' Perceptions of Governing Capability of Labour Party, 1987-1992**[21]

Respondents' Views of Labour Party:	Year:	
	1987	1992
Capable of Strong Govt. (%)	33.7	39.1
Not Capable (%)	59.3	54.1
Neither or both (%)	1.6	1.8
Don't know (%)	5.3	4.8
(N)	(3826)	(3534)

Even by 1992, less than forty per cent of respondents thought that Labour was capable of being a strong government, whereas more than eighty per cent believed as much about the Conservatives. Of course, in both 1987 and 1992 the Conservative Party had the advantage of being the incumbent governing party, and so it would have been easier for respondents to have made retrospective judgements about its governing capability (in stark contrast to the inexperienced opposition Labour Party), but nevertheless, the wide gap between the two parties, and the relatively small degree of improvement in Labour's position between 1987 and 1992 suggests that

[20] Sources: 1987 and 1992 British Election Studies.

[21] Source: 1987 and 1992 British Election Studies.

agents in the Labour Party Leadership were less successful in promoting the Party as a credible alternative governing party.

***Table 3.9*: Respondents' Perceptions of Governing Capability of Conservative Party, 1987-1992**[22]

Respondents' Views of Conservatives:	Year:	
	1987	1992
Capable of Strong Govt. (%)	92.3	82.5
Not Capable (%)	4.7	13.3
Neither or both (%)	0.6	1.3
Don't know (%)	2.2	2.8
(N)	(3826)	(3534)

Between 1983 and 1992 therefore, the Labour Party under the Leadership of Neil Kinnock undoubtedly underwent large-scale structural transformations, shedding much of its old baggage and becoming what Peter Mandelson referred to as the "new model party" (Hughes and Wintour, 1990: 5). The combination of a dynamic Leadership team and the increasing willingness within the Party to put previous divisions aside to try to defeat the Conservatives facilitated this process:

> The party has never been an easy one to lead, but the problems and difficulties Kinnock experienced when he was first elected were considerable, and yet by 1991 he had developed into the most powerful leader of the party since Clement Atlee. His goal was office, and the bulk of the party was willing to follow in his tracks. (Seyd, 1992: 96.)

The tactics adopted by Kinnock *et al.* were not universally popular -- the left-winger Ken Livingstone described them as "completely Stalinist" (Seyd, 1992: 92) -- but in many respects they were highly effective, but ultimately not effective enough in themselves to put an end to the Labour Party's years in opposition.

[22] Source: 1987 and 1992 British Election Studies.

II. *External Structures*

i. Political Structures

The 1983-92 period started with the rise of a strong third party grouping in the form of the SDP/Liberal Alliance, which gained less than seven-hundred thousand votes fewer than Labour at the 1983 general election. Although the first-past-the-post electoral system ensured that Labour gained nine times as many seats as the Alliance in the House of Commons, the possibility that the Alliance would continue to remain as popular in ensuing elections was clearly of considerable concern to the Labour Party.[23] Whilst the prospect of Labour being replaced as the second largest party (in purely electoral terms) disappeared in 1987, the presence of a strong third party remained, in 1987 and 1992, a constraint on Labour's electoral prospects. Although the Alliance, and subsequently the Liberal Democrats, never matched their popularity of 1983, the party's level of support still remained relatively high, and the new party gained much national prominence. Moreover, the presence of a strong third party of the centre meant that disaffected Conservative supporters had an alternative to switching to Labour, making it more difficult for Labour to attract potential vote switchers. In 1992, many predicted (incorrectly, as it turned out) that the revival of the Liberal Democrats would mean that even if Labour emerged as the largest party, the strength of the Liberal Democrats might have been enough to deny it an overall majority, making some form of coalition necessary. Therefore, during this period it seemed as if the structure of the party system had changed to Labour's detriment.

The British political landscape was changed further in November 1990 when Margaret Thatcher resigned as Conservative Party Leader after she was challenged in a leadership contest. One of the main reasons the contest was held in the first place was a widespread belief in the Conservative Party that Thatcher had become an electoral liability which might cost it the upcoming election. When John Major became Leader (and thus Prime Minister) in her place, the Conservative opinion poll ratings immediately recovered to draw level with Labour. In contrast, for much of 1989 and 1990, Labour enjoyed large poll leads, as Thatcher became the most unpopular Prime Minister since opinion polls began (source: Gallup Poll Findings in Butler and Butler, 1994: 247-59). Thus, whereas Labour had been able to capitalise on the Prime Minister's unpopularity, Thatcher's removal meant that a key target of Labour's campaign strategy had been removed, and the structure of party competition was altered as Major adopted what seemed like a less adversarial approach to emphasise the contrast between himself and his predecessor.

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[23] The Liberals and the vast majority of the SDP formally merged in the early part of 1988, after protracted negotiations which often bordered on farce. The issue of the party's new name, which itself had become something of a running joke in British politics, was finally resolved in the autumn of 1989, when the name was changed to the 'Liberal Democrats'. David Owen, who opposed the merger, led a 'continuing SDP' until May 1990, when his party's candidate in the Bootle by-election gathered fewer votes than the Monster Raving Loony Party's candidate. Following this embarrassment, the 'continuing SDP' was disbanded. See Crewe and King, 1995: 383-441.

The Labour Party was also constrained by the revival in the late-eighties and early-nineties of the Scottish National Party (SNP). Scotland, particularly its densely populated central belt which was once dominated by heavy industry, has always been solid Labour territory. and “since 1955, Labour has become virtually the hegemonic party in Scotland” (Brand, Mitchell and Surridge, 1994: 213). The downside of this domination for the Labour Party was that in the years since 1979, Labour’s Scottish MPs could do little to advance Scottish interests in the face of large Conservative majorities, leading to claims by the SNP that Labour’s fifty Scottish MPs (out of a total of 72 in the country) were the ‘Feeble Fifty’.

This proved to be something of a constraint on Labour’s modernisation project in two ways. First, Labour had to deal with a serious challenger in Scotland in the form of the SNP, which by now had positioned itself politically to the left of Labour. Second, Labour had to temper its modernisation in Scotland for fear of alienating its traditional Scottish voters. Since the whole point of the project was to appeal to middle-class voters in England, the charge made by the SNP was that Labour was taking its Scottish vote for granted, whilst effectively producing nothing in return. Thus, the modernisation of Labour’s identity in Scotland has always remained less pronounced (in comparison to England) than the Party might have hoped.

These changes to the structures of the party system at both the national level and in the distinctive Scottish system were again of little help to Labour’s cause. As in the 1979-83 period, there appeared to be little Labour as a collective agent could do; it had no control over either the Tory leadership contest or the merger of the Alliance parties. In Scotland, it suffered from being the dominant Scottish party whilst having no power at Westminster, allowing the SNP to gain, in 1992, its largest share of the vote in Scotland since 1974.

ii. Socioeconomic Structures

In the mid to late-eighties, changes to the British class structure continued. Clearly, the most serious transformation from Labour’s point of view was the seemingly interminable decline in the size of the working class, the traditional base of Labour’s support. Whilst the 1964 British Election Study reported that fifty-one per cent of the electorate belonged to the working class, by 1992 this figure had dropped to only thirty-five per cent (Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1994: 281). The continuation of this thirty-year trend is clearly a structural factor which, like many external structural factors, is beyond Labour’s control. However, it is clear that the Party has not been blind to socioeconomic change, and indeed many of the changes discussed above were in response to the fact that Labour now had to appeal to the wider electorate beyond the shrinking working class. The 1983-92 period can be contrasted favourably with the 1979-83 period in this respect; the Party was more willing to adapt to the changing socioeconomic environment than under Foot’s leadership when the presentation and campaign strategies had little appeal beyond rather

narrow class interests.[24] The ability to transform structures not being a possibility in this instance, the Party instead was more successful in attempting to adapt to the new realities, allowing it to increase its share of the vote across *all* classes in 1992 (Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1994: 283).

The long-term impact of changes to socioeconomic structures resulting from Conservative policies had also negatively affected the Labour Party's electoral prospects. Three key elements of the Thatcherite project -- council house sales, the extension of share-ownership through the privatisation of public companies, and the reduction in the power and size of trade unions -- brought about major changes to socioeconomic trends in Britain, each of which eroded Labour's traditional support. Geoff Garrett's analyses show that in 1992, home-owners, share-owners and non-union members (all of which increased in number under Conservative governments of the eighties) were all more likely to vote Conservative than council tenants, non-share-owners and union members, and the extension of what he calls 'popular capitalism' as a result of Thatcherite reforms may have cost the Labour Party nearly three per cent of the vote in 1992 (1994: 119-20).

It is clear that Labour's Policy Review was intended to take account of these trends in the electorate, by adopting policy positions which were less 'threatening' to share-owners, owner-occupiers, and non-union members, but the fact that the impact of these Thatcherite reforms still appeared to have a considerable impact on the outcome of the 1992 election -- long after the introduction of these policies in the mid-eighties -- suggests that such socioeconomic changes remained a considerable structural constraint on Labour's electoral hopes.[25]

iii. Media and Communications Structures

In contrast to the ramshackle campaign of 1983, Labour's election campaigns in 1987 and 1992 were highly professional, efficient, and praised by many commentators. Indeed, on both occasions, Labour was said to have 'won the campaign' even though it ultimately lost both elections.

As in 1983, the role of the newspaper industry was given much attention during the election campaigns of 1987 and 1992. In the latter case much was made of the alleged role of press coverage in influencing the outcome, particularly as the result (according to opinion polls, at least) of a Conservative victory was not expected. Perceptions of the role of the media as a

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[24] And, of course, these policies were not even very popular with large sections of the working class itself, which resulted in many working-class voters switching their allegiance to the Conservative Party.

[25] Despite the effects of these changes on voting behaviour, it would be wrong to assume that the electorate had, as Mrs Thatcher hoped, become 'Thatcherite'. A number of studies (e.g., Crewe, 1988, Heath *et al*., 1991) suggest that on a wide range of issues, the electorate still held collectivist values, rather than the individualistic values which Thatcher espoused. Therefore, whilst there was an apparent discrepancy between attitudes and actual voting behaviour, the attitudes of voters, at least, suggested that the policies and values held by the Labour Party in the late-eighties and early-nineties were not entirely irrelevant to the electorate.

constraining influence are divided into two groups. The first was summed up by Neil Kinnock in his resignation speech of April 1992:

> I make, and I seek, no excuses, and I express no bitterness, when I say that the Conservative-supporting press has enabled the Tory Party to win yet again when the Conservative Party could not have secured victory for itself on the basis of its record, its programme or its character. (Quoted in McKie, 1995: 121.)

In a more self-congratulatory mode two days after the election, the pro-Conservative *Sun* was more memorably succinct, stating that: "IT'S THE *SUN* WOT WON IT".

In both 1987 and 1992, the Labour Party again had to deal with an extremely hostile national press, which relentlessly attacked Labour and its Leaders (especially Neil Kinnock[26]), often using dubious evidence and arithmetic to question Labour's tax and spending plans. In several instances, pro-Conservative papers such as the *Daily Mail* often were supplied with anti-Labour stories by Conservative Central Office. McKie cites several studies which suggest that the press had an influence on the outcome of the 1992 election, accounting for what appeared to be a late swing to the Conservatives (1995: 132).

The view that it was the '*The Sun* (and others) wot won it' for the Conservative Party, however, is not universally supported by academic studies. John Curtice and Holli Semetko (1994) argue that the impact of the press specifically *during* the three-week 1992 election campaign was non-existent and over the longer term it was at best marginal. Again, as was pointed out in Chapter Two, the central problem in measuring the press' influence is one of cause and effect. What is not in doubt, however, is that readers of pro-Conservative papers "are far more likely to vote Conservative than are those who do not" (Curtice and Semetko, 1994: 44). And in 1987 and 1992, the overwhelming majority of newspapers supported the Conservatives. Whilst it may have been the case that voters are not necessarily guided by their newspapers during election campaigns, it could certainly be said that in the longer term the Labour Party had some difficulty in highlighting the extent to which it had modernised when, for example, the majority of newspapers were focussing on 'loony left councils' (in the late-eighties), or (in early 1992), 'LABOUR'S CRAZY TAX PLANS' (*Daily Mail*). Regardless of the debate over the exact nature of the relationship between newspapers and voting, few would argue that the press was a facilitating media structure for the Labour Party in either 1987 or 1992.

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[26] The *Sun*'s front page on April 9, 1992 (election day) was dominated by a large photo of a light-bulb containing Kinnock's head, alongside the headline, "IF KINNOCK WINS TODAY, WOULD THE LAST PERSON TO LEAVE BRITAIN PLEASE TURN OUT THE LIGHTS?" For a more detailed survey of newspaper headlines, see Harrop, 1988 and MacArthur, 1989 on the 1987 campaign, and Harrop and Scammell, 1992, and McKie, 1995, on the 1992 campaign.

Despite the claims that Labour's campaigns were highly organised in comparison to 1983, it is worth noting that probably the most memorable pieces of campaign propaganda produced by any party in 1987 and 1992 both came from the Conservative Party. In each case they highlighted areas in which Labour was weakest: defence in 1987, and taxation in 1992.[27] Therefore, it is necessary not to be carried away by the lavish praise which the Labour campaigns received; although its communications strategies were organised, so too were its opponents: in a post-election conference in 1992, the (then) Conservative Party chairman, Lord Wakeham, emphasised the importance of the campaign to his party's victory (Wakeham, 1995). There were also criticisms made of Labour's campaign in 1992 (again, when the campaign was generally agreed to have been more crucial than in 1987), particularly over the so-called 'War of Jennifer's Ear' and Labour's 'Sheffield Rally'.[28] Thus, it appeared that there was still room for improvement in terms of Labour being able to maximise the utility of communications and media structures.

Summary

In the 1983-92 period the Labour Party underwent a process of profound transformation. Internally, the Leadership was able to reassert its control, enforcing tight discipline on a Party which had threatened to implode during the internal conflicts of the early eighties. By 1992, in contrast, the Party had an oligarchical streak which stifled internal dissent, and concentrated effective decision-making power in the hands of a smaller number of Leaders. Having secured his grip on the Party by 1985-6, Neil Kinnock then set about transforming the policy-making structures after the general election defeat of 1987, dropping many of Labour's more unpopular commitments and, again in contrast to 1983, adopting many of the characteristics of what Kirchheimer (1966) referred to as a 'catch-all' party, much as the German SPD did after its renunciation of Marxism at Bad Godesberg in 1959. Another striking feature of the Labour Party's structural transformation under Kinnock was with regard to the Party's identity: new techniques were used in campaigns, and modern symbols were adopted to replace its narrower, class-based images.

Whilst the nature of the Party in the 1979-83 period was one characterised by agents in the Labour Leadership being constrained by Party structures, the 1983-92 period saw a gradual process of transformation in which agents were able to transform Party structures in a number of

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[27] In 1987 the Conservatives' poster depicted a British soldier with his arms raised in surrender, alongside the caption, 'Labour's policy on arms'. In 1992, a poster showed a large bomb with the caption 'Labour's tax bombshell'. Both were designed by the Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency.

[28] The former refers to a Labour PEB on NHS waiting lists, which erupted into a major row between Labour, the Conservatives, the media, and members of the family of the young girl featured in the broadcast. The latter refers to the rally held in Sheffield for ten thousand Labour activists a week before election day, which many observers felt was triumphalist in tone, not to mention rather premature.

ways. Of course, this was not an overnight process, but one that was still taking place when Kinnock left office nine years after becoming Leader. It also appears clear that control of Party organisational structures was crucial to the modernisation of the Party's policy-making and identity structures.

Despite these radical changes to the nature of Labour Party structures, however, the Party still lost two general elections, and once again failed to gain over forty per cent of the vote. If it is clear that agents in the Labour Party were successful in transforming internal Party structures, it is also the case that on the second level of the framework, the Labour Party *qua* agent found that external structures were less malleable, and the Party had to do the best it could within the bounds of external structural factors. Changes to the party system, and internal changes to other parties acted against Labour: the 1992 election may have produced a different outcome, for example, had either Mrs Thatcher remained Prime Minister or the Liberal Democrats failed to hold its position in the centre of the political spectrum. Socioeconomic change continued to work against Labour, as the shrinking working class and Thatcherite policies eroded Labour's electoral base. In this respect, at least, Labour was now cognizant of the need to change to attract new voters, and adjusted its policies and identity accordingly. Finally, despite Labour's revamped campaigns and communications strategy, which was responsible for producing highly professional campaigns, Labour was still constrained by the limited favourable coverage it received in British national newspapers. Whilst there is evidence to show that newspaper coverage of election campaigns had little, if any, impact on vote-switching or the decisions made by voters during the election campaigns, it can still be argued that bias in the media remained a problem for Labour. One of the principal explanations for Labour's election losses, despite its more moderate image, its policy reforms, and professional campaigns, was that there remained a 'credibility' problem, for Labour; it appeared that many voters still held grave doubts about being able to trust Labour on a number of issues such as taxation, crime, an industrial relations. Whilst this problem was seized upon by the Conservative election campaigns, with images of the 1978-9 'Winter of Discontent', it was certainly not helped by dubious headlines and articles in many newspapers designed to undermine the credibility of the Party over the long term.

Therefore, an examination of the Labour Party and its electoral fortunes during the 1983-92 period, using the structure and agency framework outlined in Chapter One, shows that the successes of agents in transforming structures were somewhat mixed. Whilst it is clear that agents had more success in transforming structures than was the case in 1979-83, due to the Leadership's ability to take advantage of the realignment of the 'soft' left and the widely felt sense of shock at the sheer scale of the 1983 election defeat, in the short term (i.e., within the temporal bounds covered by this chapter) they remained unable to use these changes to maximise their immediate office-seeking goals. Nevertheless, in the longer term the tenure of Neil Kinnock's Leadership from 1983-92 was highly significant to the current nature of the Labour Party as it approaches the 1997 general election, as will become apparent in the next chapter.