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Walling, Andrew

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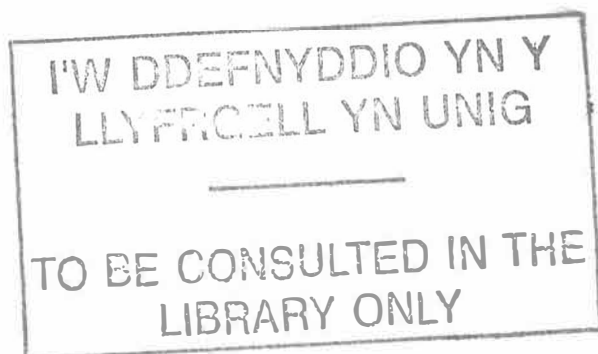
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**'MODERNISATION', POLICY
DEBATE AND ORGANISATION
IN THE LABOUR PARTY 1951-64.**

ANDREW WALLING



Ph.D Thesis, University of Wales, Bangor.

2000



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INTRODUCTION

'One day the don't knows will get in - then where will we be?' - Spike Milligan

Although for much of the twentieth century the Labour party has been trying to find its way into power, much of the literature on the post-war party deals with its periods in office. Thus there are innumerable accounts of the 1945-51 Labour government, detailed studies of its foreign policy, its economic policy, its relations with the left and its industrial relations record.¹ Similarly there are innumerable studies of the 1964-70 Wilson governments, although the thirty year rule and the apparently poor record of the party have meant these are fewer in number and lack the same depth.² Until recently, when historians looked at Labour politics between 1951 and 1964 they focused on a duel between two titans - the rigidly determined, moderate Old Wykemist Hugh Gaitskell, and the passionate and fiery Welsh radical, Aneurin Bevan, the son of a coalminer from Tredegar. The family backgrounds of the chief protagonists are significant - for many, this was a battle for the soul of the party, a battle between the academic interloper on the one hand, and the real son of the working class, the real voice of the Labour party, on the other. Those studies which went beyond this and stretched across the period tended to focus on the party's internal conflicts. Internal warfare was not an uncommon feature of party life;³ whether it should be the primary focus is another matter.

Some recent works take a rather different view of the Labour party. Whilst hardly denying that there was considerable conflict within the early history of the Labour party, they emphasise the emergence of a shared political commitment and policy agenda in the 1920s and 1930s, based around the programme which Labour eventually implemented between 1945 and

1951.⁴ It was a commitment to ethical change, sustained by a substantial slice of state regulation, and directed at essentially practical concerns, that was the driving force for unity both in the 1930s and from 1945 to 1951.⁵ The 'practical socialism' of Dalton and Morrison gained massive support from 'left' and 'right' in the 1930s, pushing to the margins both the much-studied intellectual advocates of Keynesian ideas⁶ and the even more well-examined intellectual advocates of a radical socialist strategy.⁷ Of course, the advocates of this strategy were defeated in 1951. The party had used up and then failed to adapt the programme that it had been developing since at least 1931. It failed to notice the difference between the activists' earnestness and willingness to sacrifice the individual to the nation, and the voters' understandable reluctance to embrace another round of Labour's collectivism, rationing and self-sacrifice for the greater good.⁸ As a result, the official approach adopted from the 1930s to 1951 was again called into question, and the advocates of Keynesian ideas and the advocates of 'socialism' again resumed their critique.

Conceptually, this thesis builds on these recent works, but it moves away from their concentration on conflict and examines the construction of a practical and interventionist socialism which reflected the views of neither 'extreme'. It is not primarily concerned with the battle between 'revisionists' and 'socialists' in the 1950s and early 1960s, but with those who sought to rebuild the centre ground, to reassert the validity of a 'practical socialism' against calls for a new revisionism or a return to socialist fundamentalism. Some of these modernisers also recognised the need to adapt and change the practical socialism of the past, the need to create a new approach and message which had learnt from the lessons of 1951. They accepted a world in which full unemployment and consumerism were the norm. It is the rebuilding of such an

approach that is at the heart of the thesis. Thus the thesis helps to explain how an approach which featured between 1931 and 1951, and again (as some now argue) in the period between 1964 and 1970,⁹ never really went away.

I

Studies of Labour politics in the 1950s and 1960s have examined the party's internal conflicts at length and in detail. A number of studies examine feuds amongst the party elite, dwelling on the views of revisionists (with undue emphasis attached to Gaitskell) and delighting in the actions of the Bevanites (with undue emphasis attached to Bevan). Indeed, the first biographies of Gaitskell and Bevan were strongly partisan, almost seeking to perpetuate the conflict and showing little understanding of the 'other' side.¹⁰ There was certainly a period of conflict after 1951. By late 1952, the left of the Labour Party dominated the National Executive Committee (NEC) with Crossman and Wilson replacing the old school of Morrison and Dalton, and joining Bevan, Driberg, Mikardo and Castle on the left dominated committee. *Tribune* was also re-launched on a weekly basis. Constituency Labour parties (CLPs) were often dominated by radical left-wing activists. Mikardo played an important organisational role in spreading the left's ideas through his use of the 'Brain's Trust' programme and through the Victory for Socialism movement.¹¹ On the Labour right, many felt this was an attempt to create a party faction, and some steps were taken to form rival 'Gaitskellite' groups in the constituencies.

The resulting conflict was indeed bitter. The Labour right believed Bevan was 'at best an egocentric prima donna, unable to work in a team, and at worst a destructive demagogue corroded by class bitterness, incapable of political activity and dominated by personal ambition'.¹² His resignation in 1951 and his initial support for CND were often cited as

examples of his unreasonable extremist attitudes and his ambition. For the Labour left Gaitskell was a fop, who surrounded himself with the affluent and educated (the 'Frognaal set, after the name of Gaitskell's home). He was viewed as the man who betrayed the party's key values. His attack on Clause IV was seen as a clear example of this betrayal.

Defeat in 1951 allowed the undercurrents of dissension to take centre stage. Howell maintains the resulting internal party atmosphere was one of 'intolerance and bitterness'.¹³ Indeed, he goes further. He describes the 'years of alternating crisis and surface unity in which contending factions shifted between bitter feuding and temporary subordination of differences to electoral considerations'.¹⁴ The 1952 Morecambe conference was a sign of things to come. Right-wing speakers were roundly booed from the gallery. The ascendancy of Bevanite ideas at this stage was reflected not only by the fact that the NEC was loaded with left wingers but also by the 'passing of motions backing the principle of a free health service and demanding further nationalisation'.¹⁵ The right screamed 'mob rule' and Dalton noted in his diary: 'nothing is getting better, more hatred and more love of hatred'.¹⁶ It was not long before the right of the party organised themselves, as disputes over the party's direction escalated. Jeffreys argues that 1953-54 was a period of 'armed truce on all sides. It was acknowledged that Churchill's government could only be seriously challenged if Labour displayed unity'.¹⁷ Shaw believes that from the back-bench revolt in 1952 right up to the eve of the next general election in 1955 'Labour was vent by fierce internal strife'.¹⁸ For different reasons and from different poles of the political spectrum, Howell and, more particularly, Haseler have agreed that this conflict encapsulated and dominated the party in the years that followed.¹⁹

Attlee's demise as party leader in December 1955 did not improve internal disagreements. Gaitskell's leadership offered no end to the intense rivalry. The Tribunites bitterly opposed him and his leadership style. Castle was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet for publicly opposing Gaitskell over the bomb and Clause IV. She chastised Gaitskell for refusing to abide by conference decisions, and made 'public declarations that she would not wish to make herself available to serve on the front bench under Mr Gaitskell'.²⁰ After 1957, and Bevan's abandonment of the left, the Tribunites campaigned on single issues and embraced CND. A further general election defeat in 1959 led the party to another period of soul searching. Gaitskell found the party's soul to be out of date. He appealed for the party to modernise. This appeal was encapsulated in his rejection of Clause IV. However, he had ignored the emotional appeal and significance of the party's most important symbol. Gaitskell received little support, even from his erstwhile backers - the trade unions. He was left to 'fight and fight and fight again' not only for the party he loved, but for his own position. In 1960, he would successfully hold off Wilson's leadership challenge and reverse the 1959 conference's unilateralist approach.

Paradoxically, Gaitskell's approach, variously interpreted as unsupportable, illogical, stubborn, and erroneous, was interpreted by some as principled and praiseworthy. George Strauss, once left wing Labour MP for North Lambeth,²¹ certainly found much about Gaitskell to support: 'Gaitskell was the Minister, who apart from Aneurin I knew best and liked best. He battled doggedly for principles in which he believed however difficult their application may have become by the passage of time'. Strauss used the right of immigration as an example of Gaitskell standing up for the rights of black immigrants, even though it was not popular, to demonstrate his sincerity. Although few have recognised it, Gaitskell could make a strong appeal

to moral Labour principles, which attracted support from across the party, including its left-wing middle-class elements. During the later part of the Suez crisis, for example, Gaitskell's moralistic appeal showed his capacity to unite the party. Even Michael Foot, hardly a Gaitskellite, had to recognise his strengths:

‘Indeed, the speeches of Gaitskell and Bevan throughout the crisis - the combination of Gaitskell's relentless, passionate marshalling of the whole legal and moral case against the government's expedition to Suez and Bevan's sardonic and reflective commentary upon it - complimented one another and constitute together the most brilliant display of opposition in recent Parliamentary history’.²²

Strauss's support for Gaitskell never wavered and following Gaitskell's defeat on unilateralism he courted twelve senior Labour back bench MPs to sign a letter asking Gaitskell to stay on.²³ There were ‘principles’ at stake on both sides of the conflict.

For scholars from the Labour left, and especially those with a 'rank and filist' perspective, this was a battle *by* socialist party members, *against* their leaders for the soul of the party (a battle which had been fought in the past against MacDonald, and which would have to be fought again). Gaitskell's domination of the party was an artificial creation, a denial of the party's 'real' socialism. Minkin has argued that Labour's leaders, predominantly revisionists, were able to control, manipulate and cajole Conference into accepting their ideas. He argues that many within the Labour Party, the Parliamentary Labour Party, Trade Unions, and Constituency Labour Parties were in some way and to varying degrees opposed to aspects of revisionism - and especially to the mixed economy - but did not have the power to make their voices heard. Indeed, for Minkin, the revisionists had gained control of the party leadership and, with loyal trade union backing, were now able to force their ideas onto a dejected party - a party desperate to change in order to get back into office and convinced that the embourgeoisement of its chief

supporters meant it must give in to its leaders. Shaw brings out the tensions within the Labour Party in these early years of opposition very clearly. In the wake of the Morecambe conference and the rank and file revolt over voting for the Conservative Government's first defence White Paper, came a furious response from the PLP loyalists. Shaw describes senior figures within the party urging 'the expulsion of ring leaders including Bevan' and notes that 'Gaitskell contemplated Bevan outside the party as easy to attack'.²⁴

Shaw believes that the party leaders were able to do this because they had captured the party machine, *not* because they had convinced the party's members. He describes 'a high measure of managerial control, bolstered by a stringent disciplinary regime', which rank and file 'radicals' within the constituencies could not counter. Its power depended upon a mixture of competent authority, normative control (in which the right of an authority holder to issue commands is accepted and where the recipient feels under some obligation to obey) and imperative control (whereby the right to exert control is derived from a party's rules and where compliance can be enforced). The Labour leaders gained their authority from three inter-linked factors: procedural and substantive consensus, a respect for rules and party authority and the control of the intellectual agenda. Shaw concludes that: 'the official secret of social democratic centralism was less the stick it brandished than the aura of legitimacy that surrounded it'.²⁵ Although in theory power was split between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary components of the party, the party's elite groups (trade unions, parliamentary party, and NEC) had the real authority and respect. They 'were predominantly right-wing in orientation...[they] shared principal tenets of social democratic centralism...and an aversion to the left'.²⁶ It was this 'elite consensus' which gave 'a wide measure of agreement over the party's principal managerial

tasks'. The unions defended the party leadership against the left. Together with the leadership, they guaranteed Conference support, which in turn guaranteed the ascendancy of social democratic revisionism (until the untimely Clause IV attack). The early 1950's proved to be a successful period for the left, but for a number of reasons it failed to capitalise on its achievements and it was eclipsed by the revisionists and their loyal backers, the trade union triumvirate of Deakin, Lawther, and Williams, who 'continually agitated for tougher measures' against left wing dissidents.²⁷ For Minkin too, revisionism existed only 'at an elite level within the party, amongst parliamentarians, and amongst trade union leaders'.²⁸

For Shaw and others, the history of post 1950 Labour politics is one long tale of decline, a journey from a position of socialist commitment to one of social democratic fudge and failure. For Shaw in particular, the choice offered the party was 'Keynesian social democracy' on the one hand, or 'true' socialism on the other. The reassessment of the concept of ownership in socialist thought and practice had begun before 1951, but increased rapidly thereafter. Revisionists believed that the capitalist structure had changed. Hence for Shaw, 'the mixed economy and separation of the (capitalist) ownership and (managerial) control'²⁹ became firmly embodied in the party's policy. Shareholding of a controlling interest was the most radical of proposals. The 'rot' spread slowly. David Coates argues that 'The victory for revisionism did not occur overnight. Rather the shift away from theory, class categories and specific policies of the Attlee generation was a gradual one, proceeding step by step through successive policy documents and election manifestos'.³⁰ The fact that Labour was the party of opposition meant such documents were invariably ambiguous, but equality and public ownership was down graded to equality of opportunity and a commitment to the mixed economy.

Those who identify polarisation in the party maintain a majority supported the core fundamentals of socialism, and point to the party's rejection of Gaitskell's attempt to overturn Clause IV of the party's constitution as a key event. Gaitskell believed it was not policy but image and impression (the party's symbols and ethos) which had led to Labour's electoral defeat in 1959. As such, he felt a very public upheaval of the Labour Party was necessary. It was a major miscalculation. The left would not allow Clause IV to be abandoned. They did not believe in the market and felt it was necessary to regulate the private sector. In truth, nobody was proposing massive extensions of public ownership and so Gaitskell was at best foolish to attack such a cherished symbol, as even those on the 'right' saw it as a symbol of the party's commitment to the public sector. With major trade unions having a substantial membership within nationalised industries and the public sector, attacks which might indicate a change in approach faced a practical difficulty too. Even Gaitskell's loyal trade unionists turned against him. By July 1960, defeat for Gaitskell's plans was inevitable. As a result the NEC demoted Gaitskell's proposal to delete Clause IV from a constitutional amendment to an expression of Labour views. The bewilderment and shock induced by Gaitskell's plans were the result, of his 'taking down the signpost to the promised land',³¹ maintains Williams. Drucker and Hamilton argue that Clause IV was part of the party's 'ethos', drawing on 'the long experience of the party and its members rather than its formal doctrines, beliefs and policies'.³² A history of struggle with private sector employers was entrenched in the commitment to Clause IV. Solidarity, the traditional opposition to capitalism and struggle for social transformation, were all behind the statement printed on the card of every member of the Labour Party. The conception of society being offered (mainly) by Crosland, and touted (mainly) by Gaitskell worried many in the

Labour Party. Strachey argued that if socialists were to abandon their commitment to public ownership, 'they will cease, in a very real sense to be socialists at all: they will subside into the role of well-intentioned, amiable, rootless, drifting social reformers'.³³ Whether this meant - conversely - that the party rejected *most* of what Gaitskell stood for, and accepted *most* of what Bevan stood for is another matter.

Gaitskell's second major defeat is also used to suggest a fundamental split between the revisionist leaders and the radical party. In October 1960 Gaitskell had been defeated at Conference over unilateral disarmament. The choice between unilateralism and the leadership's multilateral line was far more than a debate about 'banning the bomb'. Howell argues it 'encapsulated the vital question of the party's attitude towards a NATO orientated Foreign Policy'.³⁴ According to Jeffreys, the defeat was largely a result of the trade unions' opposition to the party's official multilateral policy.³⁵ Gaitskell's response threw Labour's democratic tradition into the melting pot when he threatened to 'fight and fight and fight again'. Here, apparently, was concrete evidence of a leader at war with his party's conscience and with a Labour tradition of opposition to armaments dating back to before the First World War.

It is hardly surprising that rank-and-file historians identify post 1951 Labour politics as a process of decline and see Harold Wilson's advent as leader as little more than a continuation of Gaitskellite policy by newer means. For Shaw, Wilson was 'a highly skilled political operator, a master tactician - but with no strategy'.³⁶ Hamilton argues that when Wilson followed Gaitskell, 'there was no shift in the party's policies. Issues of public ownership became linked to regional improvement and scientific development, but with general emphasis now placed on

technical growth'. Of course, Wilson talked of the 'white heat of the technological revolution'. However, Jeffreys describes this as a 'love-fest', with Wilson equating socialism with 'applying a sense of purpose to our national life - economic purpose, social purpose and moral purpose. Purpose means technical skill'.³⁷ Howell thus places Wilson firmly in the Fabian tradition. Coates describes his 'non-socialist modernisation vision'.³⁸

Stressing the continuities between Wilson and the revisionists, and highlighting the deficiencies of Wilson's approach, might seem incompatible with Wilson's success in 1964. If Wilson offered nothing new, why was his party successful when Gaitskell's had failed? Jeffreys suggests that Wilson was lucky, not different. Disillusionment with the Conservatives, rather than enthusiasm for a new Labour approach, was the basis of Labour's victory: '1964 - like 1945 - owed as much to a desire to punish unpopular Tory ministers as to any widespread endorsement of Labour values'.³⁹ Whilst not discounting Alex Douglas-Home's image problem as an influence, Jeffreys points to a downturn in the British economy, as well as the public dissatisfaction with 'Supermac'. According to Jeffreys, 'what made all the difference was that the Conservative vote had dropped by a million and three quarters since 1959'.⁴⁰ The real benefactors emerged as the Liberal Party, whose vote doubled to around eleven per cent. Influenced again by hindsight and the adverse image of Wilson and Callaghan so prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, the period from 1951 onward is seen as a retreat from Labour's core values in which first Gaitskell and then Wilson are cast as villains.

For many the whole history of the period from 1951 to 1964 is one of growing domination by a group and an approach which had no roots in the party and no ideas for the

future. Kept in power by a 'managerial centralism', Gaitskell gave way to Wilson, the arch pragmatist, whilst the mass of the party looked on from the sidelines, increasingly disaffected but powerless. Howell describes revisionism as essentially optimistic and stresses the 'major and radical discontinuity in Labour doctrine'⁴¹ which it involved.

II

Since much Labour history has been written by those who favour the left of the party, it is unsurprising that this view has been challenged infrequently. What exists is patchy and based on little evidence. As a Gaitskellite activist, Haseler inevitably concludes that by the mid-1950s the Gaitskellites 'had won the post-war battle for the soul of the Labour Party'.⁴² The idea that the Constituency Labour Parties (CLP) were Bevanite strongholds has been questioned by Hamilton. For him, the assumption that the 'Constituency Labour Parties were well to the left has been largely generated by the fact that left wing parties submitted resolutions well out of proportion to their numbers while right wing parties were relatively inactive'.⁴³ Historians sympathetic to Gaitskell have expressed similar views, although largely as asides in studies concerned with leading figures. Thus, Williams in his biography of Gaitskell claims that many CLPs were tired of the internal strife and constant squabbling and were increasingly turning against Bevan. Likewise Campbell, in his critical biography of Bevan, has argued that the strength of Bevanite organisation has been over estimated and that in fact Bevanites constituted not so much 'a party within a party' but in fact a 'smoking room within a smoking room'.⁴⁴ Even so, neither claim has been followed up, nor built into a 'Gaitskellite' analysis. Rather, historians sympathetic to Gaitskell have preferred to re-enact the divisions and the values of contemporaries, arguing that the Gaitskellites were intellectually superior. They highlight Bevan's personal failings and suggest that his 'conflict' with the party was based on his

ambition, and was marred by his personal failings and ignorance of political realities.

For historians on the ‘right’ of the social democratic divide, Bevan’s resignation in 1951 (along with that of Harold Wilson and John Freeman) provided an incoherent and disparate collection of left wingers with a focal point for dissent. However, Bevanites simply became ‘fundamentalists’ advocating the extension of public ownership and little else. According to Campbell, at one time a committed member of the SDP, Bevan's book *In Place of Fear* was ‘a highly personal, utterly unstructured mish-mash of autobiography and sub-Marxist philosophy, questionable assertions and idealistic hopes...a dismaying sense of muddle and irrelevance. It must be one of the most disillusioning books ever written by a prophet to whom so many ardent followers looked for a way forward’.⁴⁵ Bevan was scornful of the ‘fresh thinkers’ who claimed that socialism needed to be re-assessed; asking ‘do we now burn the books? Don’t we need to bother with William Morris or Karl Marx or Keir Hardie?’ Such comments were likely to attract sympathy from those rooted in the movement, but showed no way forward. Marquand - another prominent social democrat - has taken this assessment further, arguing Bevan did not want a programme to mobilise behind, because he would not be bound by a fixed idea.⁴⁶

The Bevanites’ most pronounced critic is without doubt Nicholas Ellison, who has done much to escape the partisan interpretations of earlier writings and to suggest a less heroic picture of the Bevanites and their apparent strengths. For Ellison, Bevan was the mouthpiece of a rather disparate group of left wing politicians and thinkers rather than the leader who moulded opinion and united views. Yet even for Ellison, the attitude of many Bevanites to key policy areas was unsophisticated and based on broad conceptions of party values. Ellison defines the Tribunitites’

regard for public ownership as the 'linchpin' of their socialism. For them 'socialist principle was umbilically tied to public ownership'.⁴⁷ They believed that public ownership was the economic blueprint to follow, that it would create a better, fully employed expansionist economy and greater equality. Barbara Castle saw public ownership as a moral principle 'because it could facilitate equality, and as a prerequisite of efficiency and economic planning'.⁴⁸ She demanded one hundred percent public ownership of the top six hundred companies, describing the idea of taking a few shares here and a few shares there as seeking a 'share [of] the capitalist swag'.⁴⁹ As clearly recognised, foreign policy was also a key theme. The left's idea of a 'Third Force' had strong anti-American currents. According to Ellison, Bevan saw the Labour Party's pro-Americanism as 'support for a new imperialism'.⁵⁰ Bevan spoke out against German rearmament, SEATO and the building and testing of the British H-bomb, but provided no alternative international policies.

By contrast, the revisionists are seen as possessing superior talent and intellect. If political scientists fascinated by institutional conflict have dominated the literature on this period, those interested in political intellectuals have come a close second. A key theme in studies of the Gaitskellites has been the emergence and significance of Anthony Crosland as a political thinker, and the permeation of his perceptive ideas into the party hierarchy. Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* is lauded as a landmark study, his views highlighted for their influence on Gaitskell and on a subsequent generation of moderate democratic socialists. The revisionists may not have had a sophisticated economic or sociological analysis, sufficient to please Desai, but they were nonetheless the only elements in the party to have any real ideas. They counted among their numbers not just Crosland, but Douglas Jay, Gaitskell and newer talents - Roy

Jenkins, William Rogers, Shirley Williams - who in the 1980s formed their own separate social democratic organisation and were finally defeated by Labour's resolute anti-intellectualism. Because of the subsequent domination of Thatcherism and Labour's re-invention of social democracy in the 1990s, some historians now portray Gaitskellites as perceptive early advocates of an ideology for the new world.⁵¹

The relationship between Gaitskellite 'revisionism' and more recent developments has indeed become a major theme in recent historical writings. Thus Gaitskell, Wilson and Callaghan have been seen as (partial) precursors of Blair.⁵² Tudor Jones sees Blair's rejection of Clause IV as the completion of unfinished business, and attitudes to social ownership generally as the touchstone of a constant ideological strand within the Labour party, which he calls 'Labour revisionism'. Hence, revisionism is defined not in relation to its context, but in relation to public ownership. Its significance in the 1950s is guaranteed by its subsequent significance in the history of Labour politics. This is hindsight applied to history, with all the evident pitfalls. In much of the literature the period between 1951 and 1964 has little identity. It is an episode in a story with a known ending. If for those favourable to revisionism it was a period when opportunities were missed, for those on the left it was a time when the party slipped into moral and ideological decline.

III

But was this really an era of missed opportunities and polarised politics, the origins of 'Blairism' or the onset of Labour's 'decline'? Such ideas emanate from a particular approach, from a reliance on a very narrow range of sources - largely policy papers and theoretical writings - and from a focus on a few party leaders and intellectuals. Some more recent work has taken

a different line, questioning the focus on conflict and the traditional picture of Bevanite and Gaitskellite factions. Ellison provides a fine picture of the left's fears, hopes and ambitions - as well as its failures, disputes and false hopes. Whilst reaffirming some conclusions concerning the 'fundamentalism' of the left, he goes beyond this to examine the content of hitherto unstudied policy analyses which suggest a different picture of Labour's internal politics. Examining records of Labour's Home Policy Committee after 1955, for example, he shows how more concrete ideas began to emerge. The study group on the Ownership and Control of Industry which included Gaitskell, Mikardo, Bevan, Wilson and Castle as well as non-aligned moderates, re-stated and re-defined Labour's approach to public ownership. Although Crossman claimed their report was 'extensively re-drafted at Transport House, removing most of its radical trimmings and making it a great deal more reactionary'⁵³ it is clear that something more profound was taking place than classic pictures of this period would suggest. Social ownership was not a given ideological 'good': it was being reinvented as a practical policy.

Crossman emerges as the key character in this attempt to escape political duelling and address policy issues. He evidently wanted to look forward. In this he was not alone, even if Bevan refused to participate and instead adopted a romanticised view of the past. From Ellison's work it is possible to suggest that the 'practical socialism' evident in the past - the desire to use social ownership as a tool of policy but also adopt newer ideas - was still an intellectually potent and indeed a developing theory. Identifying and re-emphasising the strength of this tendency - a tendency hidden by the emphasis on conflict - will be a central aim of the thesis.

Evidence in other historical works suggests that the need to abandon both socialist

fundamentalism and simplistic revisionism were well understood at the time by pragmatists and the less ideologically committed. Fielding briefly questions the extent of the ideological division between left and right. The leadership, he claims, 'embraced revisionism largely for pragmatic reasons: voters rejected further nationalisation'. They also recognised that Keynesian ideas supported the (long-established) Labour belief that 'in order to offset a slump, governments could employ a number of powerful weapons...to stimulate demand'.⁵⁴ A new approach - a new economic language - was a useful tool, rather than an ideological commitment. Nor (eventually) were the realities of the affluent society ignored, even by those whose sympathies were with the left. In 1959 Barbara Castle wrote 'Mr Macmillan has boasted that the T.V. set is the badge of prosperity. In the back streets of Blackburn the T.V. aerials are there all right; what we lack are the thousands of decent houses to put under them'.⁵⁵ Such people combined an acceptance of a new consumerism with the traditional concerns of the left.

Finally the need for change was also recognised by party officials and agents. Adapting to the consumer age - and especially adapting party propaganda techniques to its demands and values - was a key interest and a central area of party concern. It was also (like party organisation of a more conventional nature) an issue which all wings of the party accepted needed attention, and where many would and could commit themselves to greater activity, without feeling that their ideological values were in danger. Following the 1959 defeat, the Labour Party held one of its many inquests into its regular electoral defeats. The state of the party organisation was condemned as unsatisfactory and unacceptable. The facts of this are incontestable. Howell suggests the situation was grave, with 'little attempt to place full-time agents in key marginals, and a lack of any party machine in many safe Labour seats'.⁵⁶ Wilson's

in-depth study of party organisation in 1955, which likened the Labour machine to a ‘rusty penny-farthing...in the jet propelled age’ is well known. Fielding and Tanner have added depth to this analysis. What has not been considered is that the need to secure power - and the means necessary to secure that power - was an area where the party unifiers could have their way, where all wings of the party could gather, either to work collectively or to weep collectively over the ignorance of the electorate. There was, in short, a growing group of people anxious to build for the future, *not* to carry on the conflicts of the past.

The aims of party members and officials are too seldom examined in studies of political change. This thesis pays attention to organisational debates, not because of their assumed significance for electoral politics, but because of what they tell us about opinion within the party. Organisation was a tool, a means of refocusing all wings of the party on common concerns. This thesis is concerned to outline the strength of such currents, and to explain why they took so long to dominate the forces of conflict and division.

If ideology was never the party's sole concern, and other interests could dominate, it needed a strong leader to pull such elements together and stress the party's shared aims. This was perhaps MacDonald's greatest weakness and Attlee's greatest contribution to the party. Gaitskell did not emerge as the conciliatory leader that Labour needed, despite the fact that he supposedly looked up to Attlee. He was criticised for his reliance on the ‘Hampstead Set’ - a narrow clique of friends - and for his refusal to listen to opposing views. If an alliance of revisionist intellectuals and loyal trade union leaders enabled Gaitskell to become party leader, and to maintain his position, he did not use this power base to create a revisionist party structure nor to

build bridges to potential non-revisionist allies who agreed with some aspects of his approach. His taste for a clean sweep caused immense problems; he sought to discredit and remove the central symbols of the Labour Party itself. When he attacked Clause IV after the 1959 defeat, he did so despite the fact that 'Labour had existed amicably with a combination of specific policies that implied the acceptance of the mixed economy and a constitutional clause which did not'.⁵⁷ As Tudor Jones writes, 'Labour's broad consensus, already disrupted by the revisionist challenge, had now been severely fractured. For his proposals intensified disagreement within the Party over its identity, direction and purpose...it threatened the foundations of party unity'.⁵⁸ The recently opened Gaitskell papers show that Gaitskell rejected attempts to hold the centre ground, even when those closely associated with revisionism (like Crosland) urged him to do so. Neither could Bevan lead such a movement, even after he re-entered the party leadership. Yet as Wilson was to show, the ideological and strategic basis for such a re-unification existed. Ellison marks out Wilson, Balogh and Crossman as key figures in such a process, although as a theorist interested in ideas, he does not explain how and why this approach eventually attracted support from the party.⁵⁹ In this thesis, Gaitskell's poor leadership is examined to help explain why party rifts remained unhealed (or at best unhidden) until Wilson.

It is argued here that the defeat of the unilateralists and the scaling down of CND activity, coupled with Gaitskell's defeat over Clause IV, led to a period of compromise. It is suggested that a 'centre left' approach developed in the 1950s began to emerge in party policy documents, especially in *Labour in the Sixties* (1960) and *Signposts for the Sixties* (1961). These documents involved 'both a rehabilitation of public ownership in Labour policy and rhetoric and a dilution of the revisionist approach'.⁶⁰ Private industry was seen less favourably, and the first signs of

the 'white-hot heat of the scientific revolution' emerged. According to Ellison it was a new image of 'a modern party of progress'.⁶¹ With planning and public ownership safely back amongst the cherished goals and science about to be harnessed, Mikardo considered it 'a banner around which the party can rally in unity'. In fact, however, this thesis will go one stage further by seeing this development as neither a retreat from socialism nor a pragmatic rallying cry, but as a restoration of the party to its 'natural' roots. Labour had been a centre-left, modernising force in 1945, with social ownership a part of the message. In the 1960s it offered an updated vision, with some similar aims.

A unique focus on the conflict between 'revisionism' and 'socialism' distorts the real nature of Labour's internal debate and its concern with practical politics from the mid 1950s to the 1960s. Conflict was real and intense - but it was episodic, and matched by attempts to create new and practical programmes many years before Wilson actually harnessed these developments. This thesis looks beneath the surface layer of Labour politics, and examines more than just a few of its leaders and intellectuals. In doing so, it adds to the literature in three significant respects. Firstly, it studies how far conflict permeated into party politics, looking beyond the broad statements and political rhetoric into the policy committees of the party itself. The desire to turn ideology into concrete policy was apparent to some extent in the immediate aftermath of the 1951 election. Prominent members of the party tried to develop a less polarised approach, even when discussing contentious issues such as the role of nationalisation (chapter 1). Nonetheless, rhetoric and 'principle' eventually dominated, perhaps because at this stage a return to office was not unexpected. No new, united, programme emerged. On the left, Crossman subsequently tried to develop a new policy agenda, with ideas for turning social ownership into a more effective and

practical policy. He found the organised left and the party hierarchy at war and his ideas too were frustrated (chapter 2). Gaitskell was also under pressure to effect a shift in approach and re-create a positive programme, particularly from Crosland. Crosland urged him *not* to engage in petty feuds through organisations such as the Campaign for Democratic Socialism, but to devise a concrete and radical programme which would pull in those who habitually dwelt in the centre ground (chapter 3). Very little of this desire for a concrete modernising programme has been examined by historians and political scientists. ‘Wilsonism’ did not emerge from nowhere. Conflict reflected differences - but it exaggerated them and destroyed those who sought to recreate modernisation as a practical approach.

All such attempts to recreate policy dealt with the key political concern - how to get (re-) elected. The thesis makes its second original contribution by showing that the party's need to devise a means of communicating with and mobilising the electorate presented another opportunity to move forward and modernise - to modernise the party image. Television, radio and opinion polls all offered Labour a chance to present itself as a force for modernisation, as a modern party for the modern world. However, although Crosland and Benn showed some interest in the techniques of communication and in the psychology of the electorate - organisation was dominated by traditionalists like Morgan Phillips and Morrison, who saw a good card index system and voluntary effort as a symbol of socialist commitment (chapter 4). Indeed, the mistaken belief that a better conventional machine might get Labour elected held back innovation. Despite this, apparently dry debates over organisation did play a major role in altering the balance of the party from the late 1950s onwards. Harold Wilson's report on the state of the party allowed him to comfort traditionalists and modernisers, to make friends and allies

amongst the party faithful and to suggest that their effort, and a new push for targeted policies and campaigning techniques, could see the party home. An examination of such issues shows that neither the 'left' nor the 'right' had any real strategy for creating a party in their own image. Nonetheless, there was a clear opportunity to use reforms in organisation and communication as a means of securing support within the party. Wilson was to benefit from that opportunity where others failed.

The party in the country - like most party organisers and officials - did not in fact wish to engage in fratricidal conflict. The thesis breaks new ground in a third area by showing what dominated Labour activity in the constituencies, largely through case studies from Wales and from Salford. These areas were chosen because they were areas where Bevanites might logically have gained support. Bevan was not just a Welsh M.P. - he was a Welsh symbol. Salford was a Labour fiefdom with a radical past, dominated by the left. In fact, whilst in both areas there was support for nationalisation, and for direct state/municipal intervention to improve conditions, conflict was both muted and seldom directly 'ideological'. Instead political life was dominated by attempts to construct sound local policies, designed to deliver services and a decent lifestyle, to provide adequate housing or to spread jobs into the less fortunate areas. Where there was conflict, it was even more episodic and frequently stemmed from personality clashes, or a desire to remove those felt to be 'too old' (chapters 5 and 6). These chapters - which draw on little-utilised but excellent sources - represent a rare examination of the Labour world outside Westminster in the 1950s and 1960s. They develop the idea that there was a pool of sympathy within the party for approaches which combined some use of state machinery with practical measures for increasing popular living standards and opportunities. In short, they focus on

'modernisation'.

As the epilogue and conclusion indicate, it is no real surprise that Wilson should emerge as Gaitskell's replacement. Nor is it surprising that he should develop a modernising programme, with a strong element of direct state intervention and a commitment to any economic approach that would produce practical and effective reforms. This was not simply rhetoric, but a restatement of a traditional Labour approach. It was garnished with a new language, and substantially altered to reflect the passage of time and the redefinition of popular needs. Nevertheless, its pursuit of 'practical socialism' was the very essence of what the vast majority of Labour members had been advocating since the party's foundation.

FOOTNOTES

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11

. The *Tribune* 'Brains Trust' (viewed by the right as an element of Bevanite activity) toured the country attempting to rally left wing opinion throughout the constituencies. The format of the meetings were question and answers. Usually chaired by Mikardo, the panel would vary and included Crossman, Castle, Foot, Wilson, Sir Richard Acland, Jennie Lee, Stephen Swingle, Geoffrey Bing, Leslie Hale, Julius Siverman, Fenner Brockway, Tom Driberg, Bill Mallalieu, Konni Zilliacus, Hugh Delargy, (Lord) Gavin Farringdon and Harold Davies. Meetings were greatly sought after by the constituencies, and were pro-Bevan. See B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1993), p.176.

¹². Ibid., p.110.

¹³. D. Howell, op. cit., p.182.

¹⁴. Ibid., p.240.

¹⁵. K. Jeffreys, op. cit., p.39.

¹⁶. Quoted in Ibid., p.40.

¹⁷. K. Jeffreys, op. cit., p.41.

¹⁸. E. Shaw, op. cit., p.31.

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²¹. see *ibid.*, p.51.

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²⁴. E. Shaw, *op.cit.*, p.32.

²⁵. *Ibid.*, pp.146-151.

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²⁷. *Ibid.*, p.184.

²⁸. L. Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference. A Study of the Politics of Intra-Party Democracy*. (London, 1978), p.240. See also M. B. Hamilton, *Democratic Socialism in Britain and Sweden* (London, 1989), p.102.

²⁹. *Ibid.*, p.57.

³⁰. D. Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism*. (Cambridge, 1975), p.89.

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³³. T. Jones, 'Labour Revisionism and Public Ownership, 1951-63', *op. cit.*, (Vol.5, No.3, 1991) p.438.

³⁴. D. Howell, *op. cit.*, p.224.

³⁵. K. Jeffreys, *op. cit.*, p.39.

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- ⁴⁵. J. Campbell, *Nye Bevan. A Biography* (London, 1987), p.264.
- ⁴⁶. D. Marquand, op. cit., p.110.
- ⁴⁷. *Ibid.*, p.56.
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- ⁵². T. Jones, *Remaking the Labour Party. From Gaitskell to Blair* (London, 1996).
- ⁵³. N. Ellison, op. cit., p.57.
- ⁵⁴. S. Fielding, *Labour: Decline and Renewal* (Tisbury, Wiltshire, 1995), p.36.
- ⁵⁵. Quoted in S. Laing, *Representations of Working Class Life 1957-64* (London, 1986), p.20.
- ⁵⁶. D. Howell, op. cit., p.217.

⁵⁷. Ibid., p.223.

⁵⁸. Ibid., p.443.

⁵⁹. N. Ellison, op. cit., pp.69-70.

⁶⁰. Ibid., p.443.

⁶¹. N. Ellison, op. cit., p.70.

CHAPTER ONE

POLICY DEBATE AND POLITICAL VISIONS 1951-53.

This chapter examines the debates over policy which took place in the Labour Party, whilst at parliamentary level and at conference there were major conflicts between Bevan and Gaitskell. Perhaps because so many studies concentrate on the debate over Clause IV of the party constitution, too little attention has been paid to the critical debates which preceded it. The debate over Clause IV did not arise from nowhere. This chapter shows that the debates which led to this decision were based on changing ideas on economics, society, equality, workers participation, and the role of and Labour's relationship with management which had been developing since 1950. In existing works this is too frequently reduced to an apparently abstract debate between the thinkers Crosland and Crossman. Whilst an understanding of the ideological debate between Crosland and Crossman is initially presented below as part of the context in which new views were formulated, the chapter goes on to focus rather more on the internal Labour committees set up to reconsider the party's policy after 1950. It seeks to explain how far ideological division permeated, portraying the neglected relationship between practical and more abstract ideas in both the revisionists' and in Crossman's thinking. In the process the chapter notes the emergence of ideas which were later to become an element of Wilsonite philosophy and demonstrates how - at this stage - they were marginalised in favour of less measured and more polemical views. As a result, the emergence of substantive policy conclusions from these debates was less apparent than the development of warring factions.

I

Despite recent biographies of Crossman and Crosland, which place both men in their

context, the part which both men tried to play in the Labour Party has not been fully appreciated. Crossman was no narrow minded theorist. He was also desperate to see a united party. During 1955, one of the high points of the Bevan - Gaitskell rivalry, when Gaitskell was attempting to have Bevan expelled over foreign affairs, Crossman arranged a secret meeting with Gaitskell. Gaitskell wrote that

‘naturally his purpose was to urge me not to support the expulsion...The only interesting things about the conversation were that he said at one point that what we really wanted was a left wing without Nye and a right wing without Deakin and Tom Williamson...He regarded Nye in a mild pitying slightly contemptuous way...in fact, he said we made a great mistake because they [Bevanites] were in bits and pieces, but this move had solidified them again’.¹

Nor was this interest confined to Crossman the most well known ‘left-wing’ Labour thinker of the post war period. Jenkins, Wyatt and Crosland - from the other wing of the party - wrote to Gaitskell in 1955 claiming that the Bevanites had been mishandled. They supported Gaitskell out of loyalty, ‘but could be expected to do so only a limited number of times’.² Crosland found the tribal divisions within the Labour party tiresome and unproductive. His recent biographer, Kevin Jeffreys, argues that he resented having the right wing label forced upon him, and that as long as the party continued to concentrate on its internal divisions rather than ridding the nation of the Conservative government, he remained disenchanted with life inside the Palace of Westminster. In spite of his life style - the penchant for alcohol, the boredom with life in the Commons and a string of affairs - Crosland emerged as a major new talent and, without doubt, the party’s leading theoretician. Unfortunately for those who hoped for the reconciliation of left and right within the party, although Crossman had stressed the need for unity, he also emphasised the centrality of the issue which formed a major part of the left/right split. Anthony Crosland and the revisionists were to arrive at very different interpretations of the role of the state and its

necessary controls to those interpretations embraced by the left. Their ideas were based on Keynesian economics and its analysis of the post-capitalism world. When the revisionists analysed the effects of nationalisation, they felt justified in breaking the party's affiliation with what they regarded as a set of out-dated, out-moded and even irrelevant beliefs from a different era and a different society. Thus it was not easy to achieve a new 'unifying' programme, an alternative to the bickering between Bevan and Gaitskell, and a new rallying point for the party, despite a core of agreement at one level of the apparently 'opposing' camps.

This was new - a departure from the views held by 'moderates' in the past. Much recent work suggests that Labour's commitment to nationalisation in the 1920s and 1930s was for many party members an element in their commitment to industrial modernisation. Nor did this fade thereafter. Labour's commitment to nationalisation in 1945, and following their landslide victory, was buoyant and positive. Cripps, newly installed as President of the Board of Trade, became a key figure in pushing this agenda.³ Cripps believed that 'a high degree of industrial efficiency' was 'a national interest of the first importance'.⁴ In line with this approach Labour attempted to tackle industrial inefficiency. Tiratsoo and Tomlinson note Labour had 'no quarrel with private enterprise, only with, in Morrison's phrase 'private unenterprise''.⁵

One of the earliest prominent Labour Party figures to turn against nationalisation as *the* essential factor and motivating force in the creation of a socialist society was Douglas Jay (MP for Battersea, 1946-83). Both Gaitskell and Jay had been Dalton protégés. Jay was a brilliant economist and close ally of Gaitskell. Martin Francis has shown how Jay tackled this intellectual conundrum before others who are more readily associated with the revisionist view. Francis

believes that Jay's hostility to public ownership not only distinguished him from his mentor, Hugh Dalton, but also from contemporary 'revisionists' Hugh Gaitskell and Evan Durbin. Indeed, he states that 'these three young economists have frequently been labelled as 'revisionist', but whilst they shared a common hostility to Marxism, there were significant ideological differences between them. In the 1930s, Jay was much more enthusiastic about Keynesianism than his colleagues'.⁶ Jay's most well known work, *The Socialist Case*, stressed the value of Keynesian demand management as an economic tool. It identified taxation, rather than the transfer of industries to the state, as the best method of equalising society. Crosland would pick up these threads, and his exposition in *New Fabian Essays* and more particularly in *The Future of Socialism* which would become the revisionists' guiding light.

Along with Tiratsoo and Tomlinson, Francis argues that Labour's ethical commitment to public ownership was also increasingly diminished after 1951. Efficiency had become the deciding factor. Michael Young, head of Labour's Research Department, had further worries. He felt that nationalisation was destined to disappoint those who had placed their faith in it as a means of redistributing wealth. As Francis argues, Young viewed this as an 'inevitable consequence of Labour's insistence that shareholders in these private industries should be fully compensated'.⁷ Young was opposed to what he (and others) saw as over generous compensation paid to coal owners and transport shareholders. Jay had argued that if the purchasing of shares of firms for public ownership was at 'market rate, no transfer of income from rich to poor will take place at all'.⁸ Thus an emerging, articulate, well placed group began to question the value of public ownership.

The apparent unpopularity of nationalisation at the 1951 election threatened to reinforce this reassessment. A spur towards this was perhaps the *Times Review of Industry* report from 1947 which had concluded that ‘while fear is happily disappearing as a goad to work, no positive enthusiasm is taking its place’.⁹ Nor were those on the left unable to detect problems. Following Labour’s general election victory in 1950, Richard Crossman assessed the problems facing the Labour Party. His main aim was the same as the party’s: ‘how to win the next election’.¹⁰ Although known as the defender of nationalisation against revisionism, he was much more than this. He was as quick finding faults in policy proposals as he was at mapping out directions for the party to travel. However, because Crossman’s abilities were never fully harnessed, his ideas were rarely translated into constructive policy proposals. The party, its left wing in particular, failed to utilise one of its finest assets to the full. The left’s ideological interventions seemed to focus on personalities, to be sterile or rhetorical. This handed the intellectual ascendancy to the right.

Crossman in fact developed a shrewd analysis of how left/right divisions would adversely affect the party. He felt that divisions between left and right in 1950 could lead to ‘a sterile disagreement’; yet he also warned against a compromise between the two factions ‘which satisfied neither’. Crossman argued that some within the party ‘favoured consolidation and wooing the middle-classes’, whilst others would only be satisfied with ‘more nationalisation and the mobilisation of the working-class vote’.¹¹ He called for unity and stressed the need for clear policies which stated the issues correctly. In order to be successful at the polls (and with the knowledge that a general election was not far away), he called for a concentration on short term policy, around which many elements could rally. However, Crossman’s belief that the

‘nationalised industries must be defended as the necessary foundation for Socialist planning’¹² seemed to place him firmly at odds with the developing revisionist line. In fact, Crossman was more correctly defined as being on the centre left compared with the Bevanites or Tribunites, for along with ‘revisionists’ like Young, he believed that further nationalisation of whole industries was unnecessary. As Francis has shown, Michael Young had questioned the viability of continuing the wholesale take over of complete industries. In 1948, Young argued that it was not worth going through ‘legislative nightmare’ to ‘acquire a large agglomeration of partially out-of-date industrial assets’.¹³ Crossman agreed with much of this. Though his adherence to socialist planning inextricably linked him with the left, the tone of his own memorandum in 1950 was constructive and sought to encourage socialism through diverse means. Crossman stated that ‘one of our main objectives must be to enlarge the Movement’s idea of Socialism by showing that the public corporation is only one of the many available instruments for achieving the ends of Socialism’.¹⁴

Despite his earlier appeal for a concentration on short-term policy, Crossman was also taking a long term view. He felt that the party should re-examine the structure of public corporations to see if they were really serviceable as instruments of socialism. The economic and moral case for nationalisation had to be proved. The economic power exercised by the state had to be responsible, democratic and efficient. He was also keen to note the positive aspects of nationalisation, and supported the party’s commitment to steel nationalisation and full employment. Crossman defended Labour’s record on public ownership but was keen to stimulate debate on the subject and to show the general public the success of Labour’s nationalisation programme. He hoped that full and frank discussions in the House of Commons

would reveal that ‘we are not hide-bound by ideologues...Our need is not more power, but effective administration of the powers we possess, and...to encourage participation by the people...about decisions which affect their lives’. Ultimately, Crossman felt ‘that a full explanation of the controls we consider essential to a Socialist community should be the very centre of our next election programme’.¹⁵ Since no one proposed denationalisation, it might be thought defending and improving what he wanted to retain would prove popular. But many revisionists felt this was not enough.

The 1950s saw a marked shift among Labour’s revisionists. Francis has shown how the foundations were based in the 1940s in the ever growing association with Keynesian economics. However, he also warns against any exaggeration of ‘the impact of the Keynesian challenge in the years of the Attlee government’, something he believed was ‘neither whole hearted nor unambiguous’.¹⁶ Crosland, Jay, Gaitskell, Albu, Jenkins and others thought Keynesian economics were a solution to the old style boom and bust economics and the way forward. The revisionists believed a massive shift in the control of industry had taken place. Crosland believed that salaried managers in private industry were the new owners of power. Ellison argues that Crosland vehemently denied that the new ‘private sector salariat had simply replaced the old entrepreneurial class, and thus posed a similar threat to public interest’. The new breed of manager was a public servant. In their hands, economic power could be used in a socially responsible way. Such people regarded long term planning as more important than short term profit. The old exploitative capitalist owning classes had ceased to exist. Shareholders too had seen their influence wane.

Crosland still firmly believed in state intervention, but in what was seen as an appalling abandonment of a holy grail by the left, it was not public ownership which Crosland felt could deliver the socially responsible society. According to Jones, Crosland concluded that the ‘control of industry and ownership were no longer regarded as inseparable; therefore it was hard to regard ownership as an indispensable part of socialist policy and strategy’.¹⁷ Crosland’s belief in socially responsible managers (through the managerial revolution), and in the relationship carved out between Labour and managers, meant he felt a massive shift had taken place. Macmillan was quite right: Britain had ‘never had it so good’. The country was basking in swift yet sustained economic growth; it had a good share of foreign markets and had taken advantage of other countries concentrating on post-war reconstruction. By the end of the Korean war in 1953, full employment and the Welfare State were being maintained by a confident Conservative government itself sustained by this and growing affluence. Keynesian macro economics seemed to be the dream answer. Ellison regards this period as vital, the time when Britain’s economic performance ‘challenged earlier ideas about fair shares and tight economic control. Keynesian capitalism seemed a fine substitute for socialism’.¹⁸

The revisionists believed that economic growth and full employment were there to stay. As such, Labour’s 1918 constitution could not possibly relate to 1950s Britain. For Crosland, ‘the traditional association of socialism with public ownership of the means of production, embodied in Clause IV...was obsolete and inadequate’.¹⁹ Though state intervention remained a vital ingredient of the revisionist stance, in Crosland’s new society the need for further public ownership had disappeared. Keynesian management techniques employed by the state would ‘regulate the distribution of income and capital, plan investment and control the economy in

ways unimaginable in the days of uninhibited *laissez-faire*'.²⁰ Crosland thought, 'political authority has emerged as the final arbitrator of economic life' and that 'the present rate of [economic] growth will continue'. As a consequence 'the future is more likely to be characterised by inflation than by unemployment'. This should be 'the starting point for any analysis of the future'.²¹

Naturally, this presented a challenge to the left. John Callaghan argues that the left also believed 'the Attlee governments had radically changed the character of the system...the Bevanites...believed that Labour had effected a revolution or its first major step by the legislative reforms of 1945-51'²². The Bevanites felt that market values were disappearing - replaced by a morally responsible Welfare State which did not distinguish between rich and poor but instead assessed wants and needs. Yet they also felt this revolution could not be finished without more large scale public ownership. For those on the far left of the party, the revisionist message was tantamount to sacrilege. Ellison recognised the depth of feeling surrounding Clause IV, a principle and policy to which the Tribunites felt 'umbilically tied'.²³ Jones details the reaction of members of the Labour Party (not necessarily all left wingers), who felt that social ownership was the only way to truly achieve a classless socialist society. It was a talisman of intent.

Ellison has identified various groupings within the Labour Party, based on their stance on nationalisation. The Tribunites, which included Nye Bevan, Jennie Lee and Michael Foot, believed the advance towards a socialist society could only be achieved through further measures of nationalisation. They could not divorce public ownership from full employment and the expansionist economy. They argued that this method would create greater equality; and that

efficiency was less important than the equality for which they strove. However, the Tribunites consistently failed to produce a coherent set of policy proposals, which demonstrated how nationalisation would produce equality. They relied greatly on Bevan, but he tended to provide charisma rather than policies and, too often proved to be ‘a reluctant Bevanite’. There were occasional flashes of ideas and policy statements, but no single set of ideas to match those produced by Crosland, nor to rival the older work of thinkers such as Tawney or Laski. Too often, Bevan also proved contradictory. Campbell has argued that Bevan was unhappy that the party was so greatly divided; a division for which he felt at least partly responsible, and one he would rather see healed: ‘He was torn, as so often in his career, between the instinct to rebel and the powerful contrary pull of loyalty to the movement’.²⁴ His failure to articulate a solid set of left wing policies not only allowed the revisionist message greater room within the party, but also caused much frustration amongst many of his supporters. Crossman was not the only one frustrated by the fact that ‘Nye always resents any ideas of seriously thinking out policy’.²⁵ Even before 1951 Labour’s Policy and Publicity Committee had concluded that ‘there is still a great deal to be done to improve the structure and operation of the nationalised industries and common sense indicates that...efforts should be concentrated on making the existing schemes a success first’.²⁶ Nonetheless, both the centre-left group, and voices such as those, were drowned out by the growth of loud, factional conflict. The result was a disparate group of left wingers who rejected the Gaitskellite revisionist stance, but who were often forced onto the defensive: from this diverse group emerged the highly influential centre-left. This centre-left faction included the eminent Crossman, and the up and coming Wilson and Balogh. They were to become the pivotal group which would ultimately gain ascendancy within the party.

II

The desire to move on came together in *New Fabian Essays* which contained contributions by both Crossman and revisionists. The publication of *New Fabian Essays* was a 'statement of Labour's purpose' which according to John Callaghan 'most of the Parliamentary Labour Party came to accept'.²⁷ But this unity was not easily achieved. Callaghan has also recognised the left's distaste for what it regarded as 'Keynesian Liberalism with frills'. Geoffrey Foote has argued that the publication 'heralded the revisionist onslaught', as the revisionists 'hoped to revive the radical traditions of the party by cutting out the shibboleths and Marxist rhetoric which made Labour appear a relic of the past'.²⁸ Even Crossman, in his contribution was unable to agree with the revisionist line and argued that 'the enemy of human freedom is the managerial society and the central coercive power which goes with it'.²⁹ Yet his was not just a rhetorical assault. He agreed that nationalised industries were over-regulated and bureaucratic. He was critical of the fact that 'in the nationalised industries old managements were preserved almost untouched, and appointments to the national, regional and consultative boards were made with the express intention of affirming that no change was intended'.³⁰ Whilst Crosland and the revisionists embraced Keynes, statism and the managerial society in the volume, Crossman was a lone voice of caution and criticism. He wanted greater industrial democracy as a remedy to the power of *all types of management*. He argued that 'the main task of socialism today is to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of either industrial management or state bureaucracy - in brief, to distribute responsibility and enlarge freedom of choice'.³¹ According to Crossman, the state was a real threat to democracy, in the same way as monopolistic private enterprise. This separated him from the Tribune left. The evils of private enterprise, and the need for state control in order to produce a socialist society and economy, were the far more familiar left wing cries. Crossman's contribution to *New Fabian Essays* has been largely forgotten. It was also

overshadowed at the time by the revisionists' analysis.

It was Crosland's thesis as outlined in *New Fabian Essays* which had a major influence on Labour thinking, and which has attracted all the historical attention. Through *New Fabian Essays*, the revisionists' line of thought was given more credence and made more accessible to a wider audience. In it Crosland argued that capitalism's transformation had been 'inevitable'. Indeed, he stated 'it is now clear that capitalism is undergoing a metamorphosis into a quite different system and...is rendering academic most of the traditional socialist analysis'.³² Crosland's argument was that society - more particularly, agents within society - had forced capitalism to be reformed: 'strong anti-capitalist forces', such as trade unions, Labour and socialist parties, had been instrumental in forcing the gradual change. Marxist philosophy had been rendered irrelevant in Britain (as in Scandinavia) because socialist governments had held power and shown how piecemeal reform and change had taken place. Crosland felt Marxists had misjudged the concept of political democracy which had made such changes possible. He was also at pains to point out that downturns in the boom and bust economic cycle did not just affect the working classes. Whilst the working class suffered worst, Crosland noted that profits suffered too. Furthermore, the inter-war years had dented the confidence of capitalists. Crosland claimed social misery, the famous Jarrow march, suffering on a grand scale, soup kitchens etc., had been instrumental in destroying 'the pristine certainty...that [unregulated capitalism] was the best of all systems'.³³ This was a real difference between the two thinkers. For Crosland the private sector was benign. For Crossman all industrial power was a potential danger.

Crosland elaborated on his view that as a result of all these experiences, when industrial

power had changed hands it had created a different private sector. Successful government planning, a process hastened by two world wars, had 'made it quite impossible for the system to revert...to...pre war days. Thus capitalism with no hope of abortion, is forced to give birth to a new society'.³⁴ Crosland argued that this transformation into a post-capitalist, and responsible society had been fuelled by three factors. Firstly, political pressure. Secondly, the capitalist classes no longer resisted change - its confidence was damaged by the inter-war period. Thirdly, the power of private property had given way to technical change and salaried managers. Crosland's analysis involved a rejection of Marxist ideology. Roy Jenkins, also rejected Marxist ideas, stating that 'A classical Marxist clash is not possible...The capitalists have already surrendered too much power, partly to the state, partly to their own, managers, and partly to the trade unions'.³⁵

A key left wing problem, the ownership of property - was not a problem for Crosland. Property rights had ceased to mean automatic control of economic and social power. Managers might share the social origins and attitudes of the entrepreneurs, but a 'curtailment in the rights of property' had taken place. Pandering to shareholders and their desire for higher dividends was no longer essential working practice. Hence co-operation with the state became easier, and the previously hostile relationship was consigned to history. The importance of the state in the post capitalist world was crucial. It would dominate the economic life of the country, directly operate certain sectors, exercise physical controls over the remaining private sector and use budgetary policy to determine income. This process saw 'another essential feature of capitalism [disappear]...the absolute autonomy of economic life'.³⁶ The Welfare State had removed insecurity, and was creating greater equality, partly through higher and more redistributive

taxation - an essential feature in Crosland's thinking. According to Crosland, high unemployment was a thing of the past and the standard of living would mirror the trend of production, by going strongly upward. Crosland maintained that 'Ideologically, the dominant emphasis ceases to be on the rights of property, private initiative, competition, and the profit motive; and is transferred to the duties of the state, social and economic security and the virtues of co-operative action'.³⁷

Seemingly little attention was paid to private ownership by the revisionists. Crosland acknowledged that private industry was dominant, and that the market was still essential. However, he felt that through central planning of the 'strategically decisive sectors; that the power of the state is much greater than...any one particular class; and that the distribution of national income is consciously a matter of political decision and not the...consequence of market forces'. Crosland's egalitarian outlook involved a new society where: 'the most fundamental change from capitalism is the change from *laisser-faire* to state control. He continued 'it is as well to have a name which spotlights this crucial change'.³⁸ The name he chose was 'Statism'.

Crosland felt it only logical to ask where the party should go next. He stated bluntly that the split in the party between left and right had 'no relevance for the future of socialism'. Labour had to move on. This meant ditching both the Labour Party's commitment to nationalisation of the means of production distribution and exchange and the Fabian emphasis on collectivism. This did not mean abandoning socialism. He chose G.D.H Cole's definition of socialism from 1935 'By Socialism I mean a form of society in which men and women are not divided into opposing economic classes but live together under conditions of approximate social and

economic equality, using in common the means that lie to their hands of promoting social welfare'.³⁹ There was a radicalism here which was shared by many on the left. The driving force behind Crosland's future society was equality, with an emphasis on a classless society. Crosland wanted to break down barriers, tackle social inequality, make workers feel a part of the firm for which they worked and eradicate the situation whereby an acute sense of class was linked with regional accents and where differentials in education led to differentials in opportunity. 'The purpose of socialism', he wrote, 'is quite simply to eradicate this sense of class, and to create in its place a sense of common interest and equal status'.⁴⁰ Crosland thus rejected more nationalisation, but not state controls. Instead, he looked to high levels of planning to ensure Labour's goals: control of full employment, of the balance of payments and of the location of industry. The state would have a major role, although he felt that to over-burden private industry with too many complex controls could be counter productive. Instead, 'within the framework of overall government planning, the proper way to make the private sector responsive to the needs of the community is to make it competitive'.⁴¹

Crosland did not regard the system established by Labour as ideal. He felt it had been a progressive step in the right direction and had cured many ills. However, he still felt that the socialist society was a long way off. Whilst Statism had enabled full employment, high wages, security and a stronger bargaining position for the workers, it had failed to give workers 'a new social status, nor [has it] cured the basic hostility which stems from his total exclusion from either rights or participation. Sole rights still belong to the functionless shareholder, and this knowledge still breeds frustration and annoyance among the workers'⁴². Here Crosland maintained that his conception of socialism was the answer. It would eradicate hostility, and

work towards joint endeavour through joint consultation. Crosland felt worker participation in the decision making process of their industries would make a substantial difference. He felt that the workers must 'have a sense of partnership in, and responsibility for, the industry in which they work...without this sense we shall remain a class society for all time'.⁴³

Many across the party also shared Crosland's observation that nationalisation had not meant greater democracy. Austen Albu, a Labour MP with Gaitskellite sympathies, argued:

'However successful the nationalisation of the basic industries has been in technical and economic terms, it has not satisfied the desire for a wider and more democratic distribution of authority nor built up any real measure of participation, by those engaged in them, in managerial decisions and their execution'.⁴⁴

Furthermore, he agreed with many of its objectives Albu felt that many of the objectives behind the drive for nationalisation had been achieved - but by other means. Full employment, a major motive in 1945 was satisfied with just one-fifth of industry nationalised. He felt 'other methods had been found of re distributing the national income in favour of the poorer sections of the community'. Taxation of company profits, limiting dividends, price fixing and stronger trade unions had all helped in this crucial area.

Crucially, some revisionists argued that the public sector was being harshly treated. Albu was unsure whether increased efficiency had been realised, but felt that public industries had suffered unfair and 'dishonest...attacks against them'.⁴⁵ He felt a failure to create any radical change of attitude in managers, technicians and workers had restricted the public corporations: 'so many in authority...held the same positions under the old regime'. Albu recognised that 'The creation of a feeling of common purpose in the activities of industry still remains...one of the

outstanding unattained objectives of socialist industrial policy'.⁴⁶ Yet if this suggested some degree of common ground with the left, Albu felt that there was little difference between private joint stock companies and nationalised industries because control was in the hands of salaried directors who were separate from shareholders. In Albu's eyes, this shift meant that 'the public joint stock company is nearer to a public corporation than to the classical conception of private industry'.⁴⁷

Even Jay who stood out more than any other in the revisionist group, with his opposition to further nationalisation, was not without some sympathy for the Crossman line on nationalisation. Like Crossman, Jay railed against monopoly of any kind (private or public). The two would also later find agreement on new approaches to nationalisation, most notably on ideas of competitive public enterprise and the state owning shares in private industry. Jay was a firm believer in competition and efficiency. He argued that 'where there is monopoly there ought to be common ownership, and where there is private ownership there ought to be competition...We should seek not to set up new monopolies where they do not exist, but rather extend public enterprise in fair competition with private enterprise'.⁴⁸ In the *Socialist Case*, Jay had stated that inequality had to be tackled: 'one of the chief reasons why the poor are very poor is that the rich are very rich'.⁴⁹ In 1951, when Financial Secretary to the Treasury Jay stated that 'from now on the emphasis of British Labour policy will be rather more on planning and on distribution than on public ownership...as it always has sought on the one hand, equality of opportunity with rising standards - not equality of incomes - and on the other hand, personal and political liberty'.⁵⁰

Crossman attempted to create harmony before the 1951 election: ‘the epoch of wholesale nationalisation by Act of Parliament is concluded. The next five years will be devoted at Whitehall level, to perfecting economic planning and removing the anomalies in the social services...at the popular level...giving people a real part in economic democracy’.⁵¹ Such sentiment appealed to the likes of Albu. Crossman remained keen to improve the nationalisation process. Like Jay he worried about replacing a private monopoly with a public one. Like Jay he believed workers participation to be an essential feature of any future plans. If there was a real area of division, there were also areas of common ground.

III

Stressing functional policy aims gained high level support. The opinion expressed during a conference between the NEC, Cabinet, TUC representatives and the Co-operative movement in 1950 was that nationalisation ‘should be regarded as a means not an end and therefore should not be overstated’⁵². Those present agreed that the NHS and housing programmes had added more socialism into society than the transference of ownership of the coal industry. Consolidation (‘we must make nationalisation work in the existing field before going further’) and the desire for greater efficiency (‘having nationalised the basic industries we should seek to perfect our techniques’⁵³) also found favour. Nonetheless, in *Labour Believes In Britain* (Labour’s 1950 election manifesto) Labour had overstated its plans for nationalisation. Promises had been made about cement, sugar, meat wholesaling, water and the mutualisation of Industrial Assurance. Looking back, Crossman was particularly damning, stating that the proposals ‘looked very silly in the election campaign. Frankly they were irrelevant...they lost us floating votes, because they seemed to imply a vague threat of unlimited nationalisation. We are very lucky not to have to pass the Bills to put them into practice’.⁵⁴ According to the discussions at

the conference at Beatrice Webb House, large numbers within the trade union movement, and within the general public opposed the proposals.⁵⁵ Nationalisation of sugar and cement was not regarded as essential to the creation of a socialist society.

Despite this expression of a desire to consolidate (encapsulated by Morrison and Dalton) the balance of the party had shifted to the left. During the 1951 campaign, Labour was forced on the defensive over nationalisation. Labour's *Campaign Notes* stressed the importance of 'all the nationalised industries...to our whole economy'⁵⁶. The fact that industries such as fuel and power, transport and steel affected virtually every other industry as well as the consumer was highlighted. The Conservatives proved equally keen to talk about nationalisation. Dr. Charles Hill focused on Bevan, describing him as 'dangerous...waiting in the wings to step on stage when the election is over...As one wag put it- "The end is Nye"...The Tito of Tonypandy'⁵⁷.

In early 1952, commitment to public ownership remained seemingly undimmed as illustrated by the NEC notes on 'The Elements of Socialism'. The need to extend public ownership and the control of industry was first on the list of 'acceptable elements'. Further redistribution of national income, equality of opportunity and the need for political and economic democracy made up the list. It was stated that 'the system of private enterprise is one which puts private profit before the social needs of the community'. If private industrialists believed that the building of cinemas and luxury hotels was likely to be more profitable than the building of houses, the hotels and cinemas would be produced. This was clearly an unacceptable feature. The usefulness of a state monopoly was extolled, and the argument against private enterprise was expounded. State monopoly need not mean inefficiency. It would avoid heavy shared losses at

a time of slump, would increase profits by combining small units of production, and would create large scale production units. Private monopolies could use these circumstances to exploit the consumer. Their motivation would remain profit rather than social need. In these circumstances 'it becomes necessary to impose some form of public control'.⁵⁸

Further undesirable traits of monopolistic private enterprise were discussed. It was felt that high employment levels were not regarded as a priority by private employers. Nor were they prone to make sensible long-term investments. During periods when profit margins fell, private enterprise would reduce levels of investment. In the public sector, where profit was not the be all and end all, this was less likely to be the case. Here the left seemed to be in the ascendant.

This approach co-existed with a very different approach, which came to the fore when Labour discussed private industry. Labour's sub-committee on privately owned industry recognised that this remained the major sector of Britain's economy, adding that 'whatever the party's policy for extending public ownership may be, the private sector of industry will be vital for many years to come'.⁵⁹ Hence Labour's policies for both public and private industry were regarded as equally important. The composition of this committee was mixed, but weighted towards revisionist advocates of private enterprise. The sub-committee hoped to encourage enterprise in private industry. They recognised that efficient and effective private industrial concerns were essential to a healthy economy. However, it was argued that private industry had a duty to the community which was just as important as that of industry in public ownership. Labour's aims for the private sector were similar to those for the public sector- efficiency, full employment and prosperity for the country; using all necessary controls to achieve their aim.

Labour wanted to make private industry socially responsible not only to the economy and to its employees, but also towards the consumers.

Labour was intent on not only maintaining full employment, but also having a happy industrial workforce with high morale. It hoped to achieve this in part through greater worker participation, a target it felt could only be recognised realistically 'by the combined efforts of the Trade Union Movement and the employers as well as the Government'.⁶⁰

Labour's sub-committee also felt that private industry had to modernise and adjust. It had to conform to the public interest in a number of ways. Firstly, industry should produce efficiently: 'more scientific and technical staff are needed in private industry'. It promised that 'Labour will see that more scientists and technologists are trained for industry to employ'.⁶¹ Secondly, Labour lay down how efficiency could be improved. Development Councils were to examine struggling industries and to recommend areas for improvement. Thirdly, Labour recognised the increased power of the state and the controls it could impose. The purchasing power of government spending departments was huge and it was envisaged that the weight of this buying power would be used to 'influence private industry'. Orders would be placed for long runs of standardised but quality goods, guaranteed markets provided for items deemed essential to the national interest and even production guarantees given to take up all or part of the whole output of a given private industry. The state could be a guarantor and be 'a means of promoting standardisation, reducing costs, and also keeping up production, if necessary, as an anti-slump device'.⁶² Finally, those on the sub-committee argued that private industry would benefit from public competition.

Whilst this committee contained prominent revisionists, including Jay and Gaitskell, it shared interests with a centre-left grouping keen to adapt a modernising approach. The 'Bevanites' Harold Wilson and David Ginsburg had examined the role of Development Councils during the previous Labour government. Wilson argued that towards the end of Labour's time in government, employers had become increasingly intransigent towards Development Councils, as they felt the government was dying. Once returned to power, Wilson argued that 'employers will realise that we mean business...our mandate will be based on a general attack on the Country's economic position, and industrial efficiency, we shall be able to take action to set up strong Development Councils to [achieve] our over riding task'.⁶³ Here was one clear attempt to make positive intervention and direction a feature of the party's strategy.

Yet Wilson was also keen to *extend* the powers of the Development Councils. He felt that subject to the control of parliament through a Minister, each Council should have wide ranging powers to re-organise within its industry. He believed that long term planning, setting targets, devising incentive bonus schemes, monitoring efficiency, conciliation and the distribution of state funds could all become part of a Development Council's responsibilities.⁶⁴ There were echoes here of the state role supported by Attlee. However, Wilson also felt that much would depend on the 'political climate of industry under the next Labour Government. If industry recognises that the Government means to be ruthless about inefficiency in individual cases, then provisions might be made involving Development Council interference in individual firms'.⁶⁵ It was unfortunate that such an important aspect of Labour's approach would have to depend greatly on the political climate and Labour's mandate, but this was both inevitable and a reflection of Wilson's cautious approach.

A second positive aspect of Labour's new interventionism was consumer protection, including Consumers' Consultative Committees. These committees had proved successful in nationalised industries and Labour's sub-committee felt that extending them into private industry would be worthwhile. Certain sections of the party had expressed reservations about the extent to which the private sector was socially responsible. The members of the sub-committee were keen to control its restrictive practices and prevent monopolies from exploiting the consumer. First, Labour planned to strengthen the Monopolies Commission by increasing its budget and staffing levels. In an attempt to increase the Commission's effectiveness, the system was to be changed so that groups would operate with individual chairman. More importantly, Labour planned to forbid restrictive practices and gave weight to their proposals by stating that special legislation would be introduced. Labour's sub-committee realised that a great deal more time needed to be spent on the various issues and that 'working out a policy for private industry is perhaps the most difficult task facing the Party'.⁶⁶

Despite this practical case for government intervention, Labour's approach to nationalisation remained inconsistent, producing an air of uncertainty. Differing committees or factions held and advanced contradictory beliefs. In June 1952, the party's Sub-committee on Socially Owned Industries was keen to reinforce earlier promises made by the party.⁶⁷ This committee consisted largely of trade unionists and those committed to nationalisation, in direct contrast to the committee on private industry. They stated that 'Public Ownership, at least of the basic industries is...a necessity if the nation is to plan and control its economy'.⁶⁸ In 1945, *Let Us Face The Future* had stated that 'if it serves the nation, well and good; if it is inefficient and falls down on its job, the nation must see that things are put right'. These principles received the

backing of the sub-committee. They remained 'an essential and important part of our policy'. All the nationalised industries were defended. It was argued that nationalised industries showed 'greater and increasing efficiency' whilst 'prices in the public sector have not risen as sharply as in the private sector'. Many problems inherited from the days before public ownership had been addressed; long term planning and research had been substantially expanded. Wages and working conditions had been improved and workers were able to take an 'active interest in the operation of their industries'.⁶⁹

Labour's Sub-committee on Socially Owned Industry hoped to produce greater decentralisation of socialised industries whilst retaining some measure of central control. The committee proved was an eclectic group with some important revisionist thinkers, some left wing firebrands, some trade unionists and a majority of moderates. They concluded that central control would ensure that the benefits of economic planning, co-ordination and public accountability were realised, but decentralisation of internal administration within nationalised industries was encouraged because it would allow initiative, personal responsibility and local loyalties to flourish. High levels of centralisation were seen as temporary measures during the initial stages while a previously private firm was being absorbed, and the staff were adapting to working on a national scale. By gradually giving more and more independence, the committee hoped that each industry would 'be encouraged to show the maximum initiative and sense of responsibility'.⁷⁰ It was felt that the delegation of authority to the local level would become easier with time.

Yet these were not ideologically committed advocates of public ownership who defended

any form of social ownership. The sub-committee more than realised the importance of high levels of efficiency within the public sector. Constructive professional criticism from outside a particular industry was seen as a means of achieving greater efficiency across the board. However, the sub-committee recognised that each industry had to create its own programme which would increase their own industry's effectiveness. Outside industrial consultants had already proved their worth in civil aviation, but other socialised industries were criticised by the sub-committee for what it regarded as their 'somewhat slow, and indeed unwilling [desire], to adopt their use'.⁷¹ Labour planned to encourage, but where necessary instruct, the socialised industries to use the service available to them. Labour felt that industrial consultants could either form a panel or a common efficiency unit which would be appointed under the authority of a co-ordinating minister.

The sub-committee was particularly keen that the nation's socialised industries would not appear bureaucratic and wasteful. These industries were to underpin the economy and reach higher levels of production and efficiency. Common Efficiency Units would be instrumental in an industry's smooth running; Labour was keen to appoint the correct people to do the job. Political or personal patronage was to be avoided. There was a strong desire to use 'suitable' individuals 'already employed in the industries'. The Boards [or Common Efficiency Units] 'should provide comprehensive careers for the most able of their employees'. The sub-committee maintained that all Board members must be working for the nation as a whole. Direct workers' representation was partially rejected as it was felt that 'Workers' delegates would damage a full sense of social responsibility and substitute sectionalism for teamwork'.⁷² Whilst Labour was keen to ensure workers' involvement, it was essentially an involvement with limits,

and far removed from any form of workers' control in the left wing sense. The involvement of the workforce, and their right to discuss the policies and problems of their industry, would be safeguarded through joint consultation. Good partnerships between the trade unions and management would lead to greater efficiency and better working practices. The ultimate aim was to become a true industrial democracy. Members of the rank and file workforce were also encouraged to serve on the Joint Consultative Committees, a process which would involve the workforce in matters of production: 'Direct election should encourage proper reporting back and contact with the ordinary workers'. It was recognised that management must function but that 'the status and importance of the Joint Consultative Committee must be beyond question'.⁷³ In this process, Labour would have to rely on the full co-operation and support of trade unions and management. In particular, it was essential that management remained in touch with lower levels of authority and was prepared to explain its actions to the workforce. The importance Labour attached to consultation, partnerships, openness and discussion was abundantly clear.⁷⁴

A further key issue was the size of the salaries which Labour was prepared to pay. In the socialised industries, it was already the case that some full-time members' salaries had fallen. The chairman of the London Public Transport Board had received £12,500 a year. In 1952, the chairman of the socially owned London Transport received £5,000. The sub-committee was clear that the best people needed to be attracted, and that salaries should reflect the individuals' worth. However, they felt that salaries would have to fall and recognised that 'as a matter of social policy it is undesirable that luxury salaries should persist'.⁷⁵ Quite obviously, the committee was attempting to meet the needs of the day. They were not hamstrung by ideology. The view being taken was neither narrow, rhetoric based or left wing. The aim was to have

industries managed with a public purpose.

The sub-committee also looked critically into the party's approach to future social ownership. It felt that 'in principle it is basically sound that where there is monopoly, there ought to be public ownership'. However, it was also recognised that the case for setting up single public monopoly organisations had weakened. Indeed, it was argued that 'as socialism progresses, the argument becomes stronger for social ownership or control in wider and more various forms, which should not involve, if possible, legislation forbidding the ordinary citizen to engage in the trade concerned'.⁷⁶

Partial public ownership was touted, and the success of schemes in Development Areas (where government built and owned factories were let to private firms) was viewed as offering great potential for expansion. In terms of employment and investment, such schemes were sound commercial propositions. It was also suggested that in suitable cases public enterprises could be set up to compete with private enterprises. These were just the type of ideas later developed by Wilson. Ultimately, the committee felt that there was a need for a flexible policy, which emphasised social ownership, the democratic control of power, industrial efficiency and competitive rather than monopolistic forms of organisation. In this respect, the group drew not only on its own formidable talents, but also considered ideas from other party sources. A Fabian Report on nationalised industries was discussed by four members of the group, Frank Beswick, Ernest Davies, Ian Mikardo and Austen Albu. Whilst there was a good deal of agreement, 'on some major issues',⁷⁷ Albu had to write the report on his own, so extensive was the disagreement in other key areas. Albu's report stressed democracy and workers' involvement. Centralisation

was lambasted for lowering individual production, raising costs, frustrating individual initiative, complicating political tasks of the State and worsening the workers' conditions by rendering managerial responsibility anonymous.⁷⁸ However, the group of four could not agree with his emphasis. Mikardo's 'Bevanism' was an obstacle. This was another example of progress halted. Ideas existed, aims proliferated, and practical measures were debated, but differences over principles prevented anything concrete emerging.

This is illustrated by events following Labour's 1951 general election defeat. The NEC established various new sub-committees to review important fields of policy. Discussion pamphlets were also produced and sent to CLPs. An early example, *Facing the Facts*, began its section on public ownership with an unequivocal 'Labour believes in public ownership. The state can only plan for full employment if the basic industries are publicly owned'.⁷⁹ It also stated that the nationalised industries were serving the nation well. However, the limit of Labour's continued commitment was 'to restore to public ownership those sections of the iron, steel and transport industries, which are sold to private buyers [by the Conservative government]'. In future, Labour 'would seek a mandate from the people to extend public ownership wherever the nation's overriding needs demand'.⁸⁰ However, the pamphlet also declared that the publicly owned coal and steel industries held the key to Britain's future economic prosperity. Efficiency and greater productivity were therefore vital in these industries. This was effectively what most Labour members could accept.

The reconvened Sub-Committee on Socially Owned Industries wished to build on this. It clearly recognised the economic realities and the pressure of public opinion. It recognised that

Britain's output had to increase or else 'the major economic objectives of the party are in jeopardy'.⁸¹ There was a fall in demand for British goods abroad, and serious bottlenecks on the production side needed attention if Britain was to be competitive. Labour felt an increase in goods with a high exportable content and a large domestic market was essential. Clear targets, industrial redeployment and high levels of investment were all deemed essential if the programme was to be successful. The sub-committee was in no doubt that the party had to consider its approach to production, the general domestic economic policy, the pattern of trade (multilateral or bilateral), the future of sterling, investment in under-developed areas and the various aspects of the dollar problem. It felt that 'difficult and technical though some of these issues may be, if the NEC does not face up to them we are going to be in grave danger of going to the country on an unreasonable programme'.⁸²

Revisionists reacted to defeat in 1951 even more stridently. The electorate's verdict, they argued, reflected a pattern of social change which Labour had not addressed. When the ills of society were more plentiful, Crosland argued that 'we all knew what to do, and who the enemy was...it was exhilarating to fight for such clear cut and righteous aims. But now the certainty and simplicity are gone; the enemy seems to have disappeared, and everything suddenly has become complicated and ambiguous'.⁸³ Crosland expressed the view that 'social-democratic parties of Western Europe [showed]...some sense of bewilderment...The pre-war socialist goals which were preached...with so much fervour over so many decades, are now accomplished facts'.⁸⁴ He felt that this had led to a wider philosophical issue - the role of socialists in the changed society. Crosland argued that Labour had to change to meet that modern society. He argued an essential feature of the Labour party now was 'the defence of the present position, with occasional minor

reforms thrown in to sweeten the temper of the local activist'. Crosland recognised that revisionism was a threat to the emotional commitment of local activists to the cause of socialism: 'for the working class activist...both his social status and emotional certainty depend on the conviction that militant struggle is necessary; it is only in this assumption that his life makes sense'. But Crosland accepted and embraced a 'Keynes-plus-modified-capitalism-plus-Welfare-State' society, which he felt 'would have seemed a paradise to many early socialist pioneers'.⁸⁵ He was keen to move on. He was hugely critical of those people who were backward looking and parochial, who felt that 'a people enjoying full employment and social security has lost its dreams, and lost the need to struggle'. He felt the activists would 'resent the revisionist thinkers who compel them to face this new reality, and try to delude themselves that all the old enemies - capitalist barons, Wall Street, exploiting profiteers - are still there'.⁸⁶ He felt that 'a fully employed electorate, enjoying the present level of real wages...durable consumer goods, and cushioned against most normal adversities by general social services...is less and less likely to feel militant and emotional about political issues. The only way to re-create the pre-war militancy would be to re-create the poverty and unemployment which gave rise to it'.⁸⁷ Thus, electorally - and in order to create equality - Labour had to change.

Whilst formulating their domestic political vision, and planning how to implement their strategy, the revisionists found that real world economic problems acted to divert their attention. Indeed, Crosland was deeply frustrated by the fact that 'instead of fussing about glaring and conspicuous evils, squalor and injustice and distressed areas...[time and energy had to go on] the balance of payments, and incentives, and higher productivity'.⁸⁸ The escalating dollar problem proved to be an area of great economic concern for the revisionists. Crosland felt that 'Britain

is, and has been, worse affected than other countries by this problem'. Foreign trade played a central role in Britain's existence. Furthermore, a trading deficit with the dollar areas had always existed. However, Crosland recognised that the post-war economic power structure had shifted greatly; that Britain's 'means of settling this deficit have now been largely destroyed by the forced sale of dollar investments, the lower purchasing power of gold, and the lessened possibility of earning dollars in trade with third countries'.⁸⁹ Britain had to reverse her trading fortunes with Canada and the southern and central American countries, increasing exports to these targeted areas, and hence easing the dollar deficit. Canada was a market 'on the threshold of a period of sensational expansion'.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, Crosland ruefully, noted 'there is no sign of either government or industry making the required sales effort'.⁹¹ Underpinning this was a belief in the weakness of private industry, noted earlier, but also commitment to the Commonwealth, not Europe or the USA. This was to re-emerge later as an element of revisionist politics. For the time being it just pulled attention away from the development of a new agenda - and demonstrated that there were pressing issues which needed a Labour response.

Nowhere was this need to focus on the short-term more apparent than with Gaitskell. He also addressed the dollar problem, arguing that 'Britain, Europe and the Commonwealth just cannot stand any further losses from their dollar reserves...with low reserves and a precarious balance of payments...[a crisis] could happen any time'.⁹² His first priority was to reduce the dollar gap. He felt that restrictions on non essential articles had to remain in place whilst dollar exports needed to be increased. Thus Labour's traditional support for intervention was justified on economic grounds - and more elaborate and 'liberal' measures had to be restricted. This was hardly 'modernising', but it was something that Labour could agree upon.

Despite Labour's election defeat, and the potential common ground between some revisionist and left wing thinkers, Labour's attempts to construct a new approach were inconclusive. Crossman's constructive criticism of nationalisation had no force behind it. The revisionists' belief in some social ownership - and in physical economic controls - was less apparent than their commitment to the market. Party committees came closer to effecting some kind of new centre-left approach, but such efforts were too unco-ordinated, and politically contradictory. They were also complicated by the pressing need to develop a response to world economic constraints rather than focus on what Labour might address once returned to power. Thus rhetoric and 'principle' dominated, rather than attempts to formulate a way forward.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gaitskell Diary 25 March 1955, cited in P. Williams (ed.), *The Diary of Hugh Gaitskell, 1945-56* (London, 1983), p.392.
2. K. Jeffreys, *Anthony Crosland. A New Biography* (London, 1999), p.51.
3. N. Tiratsoo and J. Tomlinson, *Industrial Efficiency and State Intervention. Labour 1939-51* (London, 1993), p.65.
4. *Ibid.*, p.67.
5. *Ibid.*, p.72.
6. M. Francis, *Ideas and Policies Under Labour, 1945-51. Building a New Britain* (Manchester, 1997), p.25.
7. *Ibid.*, p.76.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Quoted in Tiratsoo and Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, p.91.
10. R. H. S. Crossman, 'Memorandum on Problems Facing the Party', p.1, NEC minutes 26 April 1950.
11. *Ibid.*, p.1.
12. *Ibid.*, p.3.
13. Francis, *op. cit.*, p.89.
14. *Ibid.*, p.4.
15. *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.
16. Francis. *op. cit.*, p.91.
17. T. Jones, *Remaking the Labour Party* (London, 1996), p.30. Also see N. Ellison, *Egalitarian Thought and Labour Politics. Retreating Visions* (London, 1994), pp.80-90 for a detailed account of Crosland's and the revisionists' conclusions surrounding public ownership, Keynesian economics and their attempt to produce a system which could create greater equality.
18. Ellison, *op. cit.*, p.54.
19. Jones, *op. cit.*, p.31.
20. Ellison, *op. cit.*, p.81.

21. A. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London, 1956), p.23.
22. J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.170.
23. Ellison, op. cit., p.56.
24. J. Campbell, *Nye Bevan A Biography* (London, 1994), p.259.
25. Crossman Diary 10 April 1952, cited in J. Morgan (ed.), *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, (London, 1981), p.99. Ellison has also forcefully argued that Bevan gave his supporters 'no intellectual direction'. (Ellison, op. cit. p.47).
26. Mins of a joint meeting of the Policy and Publicity Committee of the NEC and the Economic Committee of the TUC, NEC mins., 7 July 1950.
27. J. Callaghan, 'The Fabian Society since 1945', *Contemporary British History*, Vol.10 No. 2 (1996), p.40.
28. G. Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought* (London, 1985), p.208.
29. Quoted in Callaghan, op. cit., p.174.
30. Crossman, 'Towards a philosophy of socialism', in Crossman (ed.), *New Fabian Essays* (London, 1952), p.27.
31. Ibid., p.27.
32. Crosland, 'The transition from capitalism', in Crossman, op. cit., p.35.
33. Ibid., p.36.
34. Ibid., p.37.
35. Roy Jenkins, 'Equality', in Crossman, op. cit., p.72.
36. Crosland, in Crossman, op. cit., p.39.
37. Ibid., p.42.
38. Ibid., p.43.
39. Ibid., p.61.
40. Ibid., p.62.
41. Ibid., p.64.
42. Ibid., p.66.

43. Ibid., p.67.
44. Albu, 'The Organisation of Industry', in Crossman, *op. cit.*, p.121.
45. Ibid., p.127.
46. Ibid., pp.128-130.
47. Ibid., p.134.
48. Quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1951.
49. Quoted in Foote, *op. cit.*, p.199.
50. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September, 1951.
51. Crossman memorandum, 'Problems Facing the Party', NEC mins., 26 April 1950, p.5.
52. 'Summary of Discussions at Conference at Beatrice Webb House 19-21 May 1950'. NEC Papers p.7. June 1950.
53. Ibid., p.7.
54. Crossman Memorandum, 'Problems Facing the Party', NEC mins., 26 April 1950. p.3.
55. The lack of support for more public ownership is stated in NEC 'Summary of Discussions at Conference at Beatrice Webb House 19-21 May 1950', p.7, and also by Herbert Morrison memorandum, NEC 22 March 1950, 'The Recent General Election and the Next', p.7.
56. General Election 1951 Campaign Notes 19 October 1951, 'Nationalised Industries', Labour Party Archives NMLH, JN1055.A6.
57. *The Listener*, 25 October 1951.
58. NEC notes to CLPs, NEC mins., January 1952. 'The following notes are suggested as the first of four lectures on the elements of socialism', pp.1-3.
59. 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-committee on Privately Owned Industry', NEC mins., June 1952. p.1. The sub-committee members were: Austen Albu, J. Edwards, T. Fletcher (TUC), Hugh Gaitskell, Douglas Jay, Alf Robens, Hartley Shawcross, R. Stokes, M. Webb, Harold Wilson, A. Woodburn.
60. Ibid., p.1.
61. Ibid., p.2.
62. Ibid., p.2.

63. Harold Wilson, 'Covering Note to Memorandum on Development Councils', NEC mins, 7 March 1953.
64. See *Ibid.*, Appendix Two. Also see 'Keeping Left' and Wilson's memorandum on 'State and Private Industries'.
65. H. Wilson, 'Memorandum on Development Councils', NEC mins., March 1953 p.2.
66. 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-committee on Privately Owned Industry', NEC mins., June 1952, p.4.
67. The sub-committee on socially owned industries consisted of: Herbert Morrison, Barbara Castle, H. Douglas, H. W. Franklin, Jim Griffiths, Miss M. Herbison, Ian Mikardo, J. Reeves, A. E. Tiffin, Sam Watson, J. W. P. Webber, A. Barnes, V. Feather, E. P. Harries, Douglas Jay, Emanuel Shinwell and Ernest Davies.
69. 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-committee on Socially Owned Industries', NEC mins., June 1952. p.1.
69. *Ibid.*, p.1.
70. *Ibid.*, p.3.
71. *Ibid.*, p.4.
72. *Ibid.*, p.5.
73. *Ibid.*, p.6.
74. See N. Tiratsoo and J. Tomlinson, *Industrial Efficiency and State Intervention. Labour 1931-51* (London, 1993), pp.100-105 and 117-118.
75. 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-committee on Socially Owned Industries', NEC mins., June 1952, p.5.
76. *Ibid.*, Part B 'The Future Policy for Social Ownership', p.10.
77. A. Albu, *Fabian Report on Nationalised Industries*, NEC mins., December 1952, p.1.
78. For a fuller account see *ibid.*, p.4.
79. *Facing the Facts*, NEC mins., July 1952. p.10.
80. *Ibid.*, p.10.
81. 'Policy Formation General Directive', NEC mins., November, 1952, p.1.
82. *Ibid.*, p.2.

83. Memo by Crosland, n.d., p.3. Crosland MSS. MF259, BLPES.
84. *Ibid.*, p.1.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*, p.3.
87. *Ibid.*, p.11.
88. Crosland, *op. cit.*, p.99.
89. Crosland, 'The Sterling-Dollar Problem'. NEC mins., January 1953. p.1.
90. *Ibid.*, p.2.
91. *Ibid.*, p.2.
92. Hugh Gaitskell, 'The Dollar Problem and the Sterling Commonwealth', NEC mins., January 1953. p.1.

CHAPTER TWO

'In the coal field from which he came, Marx and Engels have been replaced by Marks and Spencer; and the sound of class war is drowned by the hum of the spin dryer' - Statement by a Tory MP following Bevan's death.

A LEFT WING ALTERNATIVE 1953-1960

This chapter examines the left's attempt to develop a Bevanite agenda within the party after 1953, progressively bearing more relation to aspects of Crossman's approach, and sharing more of his desire for policy depth or careful tactics. As a result, it charts his growing dissatisfaction with the left's approach, and the inadequacies of the left's 'thinking'. From 1951 until Gaitskell's untimely and unwise attack on Clause IV, each defeat at the polls tightened the revisionists' grip on the Labour Party. Disputes between the left and right wings of the Labour Party centred almost exclusively on foreign policy and nationalisation. The concept of nationalisation, the holy grail of the left, was increasingly toned down in party publications and policy proposals, and then attacked by Gaitskell the party leader. The left was forced on the defensive and later abandoned by Bevan, who had been both their leader and focal point. The support he gave Gaitskell against the unilateralist stance of his friends and colleagues when he became Shadow Foreign Secretary at the end of 1956 was regarded by many as unforgivable. Bevan's relations with Michael Foot (one of his closest political allies) were badly damaged and the Tribunite faction was left in a state of flux. Following the 1957 Brighton Conference, the Tribunite group found it had no leader. The group was marginalised, abandoned and to some extent humiliated. The situation was as far removed from the early days of Bevanism as was possible. In 1951, Bevan's resignation had united an incongruous group of left-wingers. The group contained important figures, and, with Bevan steering their course, they looked set to dominate the party. Within a few days of the 1951 election defeat, Crossman was declaring to

the Labour students at Oxford that ‘within 12 months Bevanism which, under the last Labour Government was a heresy, will have become the official party policy’.¹ However, in his 1957 Conference speech, Bevan effectively turned his back on his own supporters. Jeffreys argues that Bevan’s speech ‘signified the end of Bevanism as a Parliamentary force...the 1957 Brighton Conference also demonstrated the eclipse of the left on domestic policy’.² This assumes too much, and places too much emphasis on Bevan as a leader. This chapter examines the main group which attempted to create ‘Bevanism’ without Bevan - the Victory for Socialism movement. Whilst the limitations of this group are clearly indicated, it will be argued that from their failures there emerged a new centre-left group based around Wilson, Crossman and Balogh. This group, freed from Bevan, would come to dominate the PLP. The ‘Bevanites’ were always - potentially - a constructive force with the capacity to recruit well across the party. Crossman actively sought to develop that approach, becoming increasingly frustrated with Victory for Socialism.

Until recently few have recognised this point. The left has been roundly criticised for being a group bereft of ideas. Bevan’s *In Place of Fear* received nothing like the attention of Crosland’s much heralded work and it was widely assumed that an intellectual vacuum existed on the left of the Labour Party. From a left-wing perspective David Howell has argued that ‘they [the left] failed to come up with any significant perspective on the party’s problems’.³ Howell felt that the left had too readily found agreement with large areas of revisionist policy. He saw their concentration on international and defence issues as bordering on scandalous. Whilst Howell was more accurate in his assessment that there was ‘an intellectual poverty about Bevanism’,⁴ he failed to recognise that a number of intellectuals comprising the centre-left

backed Bevan, but wanted something more than the nostalgic and almost exclusive commitment to nationalisation which came to be seen as 'Bevanism'. As I will argue, Crossman for one was addressing domestic issues. He was looking at public ownership and how to create a fairer, more equal and more just society. Rejecting the revisionists' affluent society, the centre-left strove to force the Labour Party to fully commit itself to public ownership. Many felt that the material wealth enjoyed by the British public would have been even greater if the economy had been more vigorously controlled. The key problem is explaining why the left's concerns were rejected. Fielding suggests 'the main problem for the left was that its access to power within the party was restricted...its ideas were not enough: they needed to be adopted as party policy and then implemented by a Labour Government'.⁵ Yet to gain power the left needed credible ideas, and support from those in the 'centre'. This chapter charts the development of a 'left' alternative, shows how this could be compatible with elements of the 'revisionist' right, explains the weaknesses of the left's ideas and tactics and charts the emergence of a newer approach in the early 1960s.

I

Brivati devotes only a few lines to the VFS group and the role it played. He regards VFS as an attempt to revive flailing Bevanism following the maverick left-winger's alliance with Gaitskell, as providing 'vocal criticism of party policy' and as 'hostile to Gaitskell and the Gaitskellites'.⁶ Perhaps more analysis should have gone into the reasons for the hostility towards the leadership and its apparatchiks. Brivati shows the consternation caused by VFS in 1956 when the organisation began its campaign. This was in part because such groups were neither temporary nor insignificant within Labour politics. They represented a deep seated and consistent sense of dissatisfaction. As Ellison states, VFS was not a new organisation. During

the 1940's the group had been a small faction on the far left of the Labour Party and had expressed decidedly pro-Soviet leanings.⁷ But in 1956 VFS re-emerged, still radical, but less pro-Soviet, to re-start and build on left-wing critiques of the Labour leadership which had been evident in dissident movements throughout the party's history. At this stage it had yet to gain the involvement of the irreconcilable Bevanites, Foot, Castle, Freeman and Mikardo - who wanted to revive the banned Bevanite group in the early 1950s and gave more of their energy to *Tribune*. However in 1958 Mikardo and other Bevanites joined and VFS embraced both an older and newer generation of radicals.

Ellison has rightly argued that 'latent disagreements among the Bevanites became manifest when the group eventually split in the mid-1950s...as the centre-left, in the shape of Wilson, Balogh and Crossman, divorced planning from public ownership and looked to an efficient, planned economy as the major determinant of greater social equality. The Tribunite faction which Bevan continued to lead was much less coherent'.⁸ It was also, at last, a small portion of the party, with just 57 MPs defying the three line whip to vote against the Defence estimates in March 1952. Foot, Castle and Lee did indeed remain prominent amongst the Tribunite faction, which maintained its unequivocal belief that 'public ownership was both a necessary and sufficient means of eradicating inequalities of economic power at home'.⁹ The left's weakness was not internal division between groups such as VFS and Tribune, but the poverty of its ideas. What Ellison has failed to note in sufficient depth is the way that Crossman and others sought not just an 'ideological' left alternative to revisionism, but an alternative grounded in practical policy proposals.

By 1956 Crossman was intent on discovering why Labour had been steadily losing support since its days in high office. He thought the loss of support from the ‘thoughtful independent voters’ should be the party’s main concern. He felt that ‘despite the record of the Labour Government, more and more serious-minded people are having second thoughts about what once seemed to them the obvious advantages of central planning and the extension of State ownership’.¹⁰ Crossman felt the answer was to divorce planning from state ownership, promoting the former not the latter. He argued that governments could prevent evils such as mass unemployment by understanding the economic system and by having ‘the right instruments for controlling it and manipulating it’.¹¹ Whilst Crossman accepted the need for the state to regulate, he knew Labour remained closely associated with war-time controls. Maintained into peace time, these controls had damaged the party’s public image. Secondly, he felt that the bureaucracy of state owned industry and its failure to involve workers in management had done little to win support for nationalised industries. In a slight at Crosland’s theories, Crossman argued that the social revolution and the managerial society (which Crosland had heralded as the beginning of a new dawn) had not led to a freer society. In a world increasingly intimidated by the Cold War, and increasingly aware of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime, Labour was losing the support of those liberal-minded members of the electorate who had previously supported the party in an almost instinctive manner.

Crossman continued to challenge the revisionist line and called for fresh thought on some of the revisionists’ most basic assumptions. Their hasty embrace of Keynesian theory was a particular area of condemnation. Crossman accepted he was not an economist, and focused on what he felt to be more important, the basic principles underlying people’s socialism: ‘what

matters to me are the basic assumptions about the nature of Western society which a socialist should accept'.¹² Keynes had argued that whether work was socially useful or socially useless was of secondary importance.¹³ Crossman's approach had several moral infusions which meant he opposed such ideas. Crossman believed that Keynes' analysis had not revealed an 'inherently unworkable society, but a workable society which contains gross injustices'. He continued 'only when we have frankly admitted this can we begin to think sensibly about the next stage of socialism'.¹⁴ Crossman believed that totalitarian government control was not necessary to abolish mass unemployment. He acknowledged that the more successful, better run and more popular achievements of the 1945-51 Labour Government were those which were less dogmatically socialist, and expressed particular disappointment that nationalisation had failed to change workers' lives in the way initially anticipated. He realistically assessed the situation, and whilst he would never want to abandon nationalisation, he recognised that socialism had to offer more than public ownership and boards controlling industries to gain enough support to win elections in future.

Crossman called for a fundamental review of Labour's approach to society. He felt that under the mixed economy of 1955, the British people had suffered the 'worst of both worlds'. It was not a society based on monopoly, but rather one based on oligopoly - a market dominated by a very few mammoth concerns. He argued that in Britain, this state of oligopoly was protected by a vast bureaucratic state. According to Crossman Britain had fallen between 'the two stools of full socialist planning and a modern American Keynesism'.¹⁵ Furthermore, he believed that the Russian and American systems were outstripping the British system, and that a practical or attractive third way was not available. This scenario had led to strong and

increasing disillusionment within Labour ranks.

In Crossman's appeal for an overhaul of the system and a re-think of the very foundations of socialism, his assault on the revisionist stance continued unabated:

'Surely it is time to recognise that socialism cannot and should not be based on any particular economic theory...Labour's real dynamic has always been a moral protest against social injustice, not an intellectual demonstration that capitalism is bound to collapse; a challenge to capitalist privilege, not proof that those privileges must inevitably be replaced by a classless society. Keynesianism may have undermined the old fashioned economic case for Socialism, but it has left the political and moral case for it completely unaffected'.¹⁶

Crossman acknowledged his debt to R.H. Tawney, who had first formulated the idea that Parliamentary democracy could only fully guarantee individual freedom if combined with social control of economic power. The idea that power, when unaccountable, would at worst corrupt and at best degenerate into privilege was firmly held. As such, responsible power was fundamental to Crossman's philosophy. Like Tawney, he argued that in a democratic system, those who control, own or manage the means of production must be made responsible to a popularly elected government. Furthermore, Crossman argued that Tawney's denunciation of the acquisitive society had become even more pertinent with the emergence of the managerial revolution. Again, Crossman attacked the revisionist view point. Whilst Crosland had argued that the managerial class would maintain a large degree of responsibility through their accountability to shareholders, Crossman saw this 'responsibility to shareholders [as]...purely titular...The first task of Socialism, therefore in the 1950's must be to expose this growth of irresponsible power; to challenge this managerial oligarchy; to show monopolistic - or oligopolistic - privileges are a threat to democracy and to demand that it should become not the master but the servant to the nation'.¹⁷ In this respect he repeated aspects of his earlier views,

expressed in *New Fabian Essays*.

Whilst it is conventional to think of Labour's 'ethical socialism' as a feature of its early years alone, Crossman's radical free thinking was based on deep moral foundations. He strove to create a fairer society.¹⁸ He recognised that the dangers of monopolistic powers were not simply restricted to the private sphere. For example Labour had declared that Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) was ripe for nationalisation as it was a private monopoly. However, Crossman felt that the Coal Board (a public corporation) shared many of the characteristics of the monopolistic ICI. The Coal Board could not pursue an unorthodox price policy, based on the national interest. It was not fully accountable to parliament, which Crossman felt necessary, and the level of workers' participation in management was little better than the level of a progressive company. Whilst Crossman acknowledged that nationalisation maintained certain economic advantages¹⁹ he regarded nationalised industries as some considerable distance away from the socialism envisaged in Tawney's *Acquisitive Society*. He regarded the current process as a first step towards the goal. He recognised that there had to be further substantial changes before he could justifiably argue that nationalisation was working effectively. Unlike many on the left, Crossman did not back nationalisation blindly. He argued that a public industry (just like its private counterpart) could have a vast, centralised bureaucracy which was a genuine and real threat to social democracy. Blind faith in the state as the sole executor of power was not a viable option. The great concentrations of power had to become fully accountable to the people in order to enlarge freedom.

Of course nationalisation still occupied an important place in Crossman's theories. He

deemed that changes to Labour's approach were essential, but far from desiring an abandonment of the traditional socialist goal, Crossman argued 'that great concentrations of power became a menace to freedom and equality unless they are subjected to public control. Since the process of power concentration is inevitable in a modern economy, the only alternatives are either to permit the oligopolists to dominate the community or to subject them to public control'.²⁰ Like Crosland, equality was vital to Crossman's socialism, but he believed that the best way to enlarge freedom, create greater equality and achieve full democracy was to subject the economy to public control. His rhetorical musings led him to ponder 'if we increase its authority still further, shall we not be endangering the liberties we are trying to defend?'²¹ Crossman saw the extension of public ownership, and hence an extension of the power of the state, as a means of curbing oligopoly, but he felt safety measures to prevent the growth of a massive unwieldy and unresponsive state bureaucracy were essential. He stressed that providing an industry or part of an industry with a Consumers' Council was not an end point, nor was it the perfect solution. However, the drive towards greater equality and a fairer society could only be truly satisfied when the consumer and the worker were protected and defended by their elected representatives, whether they were in local or central government.

Whilst Crosland accepted the managerial society as a stepping stone towards a more responsible society, Crossman continued to attack it. It was yet another example of the irresponsible power which promoted inequality within society. Furthermore, when looking ahead towards future change, Crossman echoed the Bevanite Victory For Socialism stance, in that he felt the 'dynamic of change today must be found in the socialist membership of the Labour Party'.²² Ultimately, Crossman wanted

‘to make economic power responsible both to the community as a whole (the consumer) and to the worker in any particular industry (the producer). Plans for nationalisation which do not satisfy the aspirations to workers’ control are the technocrats’ perversion of our socialist ideal. We must frankly admit that, so far, our nationalised industries have been little better than that’.²³

In some respects this was an attack on the ‘consolidation’ advocated by Attlee and Morrison, and with their particular form of public ownership. Nonetheless, he emerged in this period as a clear centre-left figure distinct from both the revisionists and the Tribune left. He was keen to examine the various options open to the party in order to make nationalisation effective. He pointed to the German ‘Mitbestimmungsrecht’(workers’ participation in management) as a progressive and successful alternative system - and this was hardly ‘workers’ control in the left-wing sense. Whilst Crossman felt the basic differences in the industrial structures of Britain and Germany meant merely importing the German system would be inappropriate, he felt that the level of worker participation in management was not only a lesson to be learnt but a fundamental plank of his socialism. Thus, he called on the party to study the German system.

Two other features of Crossman’s greater belief in the state’s role need to be stressed, in part because of the way in which they are developed later. First, Crossman also expressed his support for ‘the municipalisation of rented houses, municipal laundries, taxis, etc., a drive by the Labour Party for municipal theatres - and also for municipal cinemas, built to break the monopoly of the big chains’.²⁴ He believed in collectivism. Second, he believed in the expert. He felt that the fatal defect of the last Labour government was its inability to plan because it did not understand what was going on in the economy. The remedy prescribed by Crossman was to increase the number of economists and statisticians available, thus creating a central fact finding bureau. If there was something of the libertarian about Crosland, for all Crossman’s belief in

accountability and democratisation, he was also something of a moralistic Fabian. Wilson was at ease with this latter tradition.

Following further defeat in the 1959 general election, Crossman was again to assess the future of the Labour Party. On this occasion he had to contend with a new factor - the background of an 'affluent society' which was seen by some as a death knell for Labour. Crossman felt that apathy and fear had proved the most decisive factors in modern democratic politics; that Super Mac's contention that the British public had never had it so good had had a profound influence. Crossman's contention was that the electorate did not feel ready to 'take the risk of a Labour Government'.²⁵ Here again we see the impact of events on his 'theories'.

Crossman was keen to derail the revisionists' diagnosis of what had gone wrong. He resented the predictions made by Crosland, Jenkins and Jay, that Labour would decline into a minority party, representing a fast diminishing working-class unless it abandoned its old-fashioned critique of capitalism and modernised its policies. Crossman stated that 'the Revisionists conclude that, despite Mr. Macmillan's skill in choosing a particularly favourable moment, Mr. Gaitskell could and should have won, if the confidence of the electorate had not been unnecessarily alienated by the images of the Labour Party as dogmatically wedded to wholesale nationalisation'.²⁶ Labour had more to do. Crossman felt that since the coming of democracy, British politics had not witnessed the swing of the pendulum. Indeed, Crossman felt the major trend in 'the first 75 years of British democracy has been the success of the Conservatives in retaining working-class support and either keeping effective power for themselves or rapidly denying it to the Left-wing parties whenever they do attain office'.²⁷

Crossman felt that under the revisionists, Labour would appeal to the electorate on the basis that they could manage capitalism as competently as the Tories. For Crossman, this abandonment of fundamental socialist principles was political suicide. He believed Labour must retain 'a Socialist challenge to the established order', that Labour would become electorally popular following a crisis which would cause people to lose faith in the traditional rulers and insist that the country needed 'new men and a big step forward'.²⁸ Claiming that these were the circumstances which would force change, he also claimed that here was 'the true rhythm of British political development'. Crossman argued that the prime function of a Labour Party must be to 'provide an ideology for non-conformist critics of the Establishment and a political instrument for the interests and social groups which are denied justice under the *status quo*'.²⁹ For Crossman, the Labour Party could not and should not simply seek to regain office. To him, selling the party's soul to Keynesian techniques and abandoning the moral fibre of the party was a corruption of what the Labour Party and British socialism was about. He firmly believed that a Labour Party which solely sought power, which abandoned established policies, which reneged on its promises and which betrayed its pledges would be destroying itself.

At the same time, however, he recognised that the moral code which socialism had to promote to create a popular alternative to both Conservatives and revisionists had to be accepted by the people. It was not enough just to hold the moral high ground of socialist purity. Crossman continued his attempt to force the party to re-examine and rethink its approach. He argued that the Gaitskell revolution was fundamentally flawed. From 1955 Crossman had maintained that 'Right wingers...had mainly had their way in rethinking socialist policy, in formulating the election programme, and most of all in creating the new image of the Labour

Party in the press, in radio and on television'.³⁰ He argued that the 'image of a crusading Socialist Opposition was suppressed and the Labour Party presented itself as a humane, decent and business like alternative to the Tories'.³¹ Crossman felt this course was at best ill-judged, that this group of right wing administrators was tearing the heart out of the party, and abandoning the concept of being a fighting opposition. In trying to be an alternative government he felt the group was in danger of losing sight of the problems with which future governments would have to contend.

For Crossman, a Labour Party true to the revisionist perspective could not function as a left-wing party. Whilst he acknowledged that Labour had to change to meet the new and differing demands of the 1960s, he remained adamant that Labour could rise to the challenge and meet the demands of the affluent society as a radical left-wing party. He attacked the revisionists for what he saw as their 'parochialism', by which he meant defeatism. They had reacted exclusively to the mood of the British electorate. Significantly, he felt they failed to recognise the achievements of communism. This placed him firmly on the left, in that a 'rational' respect for the USSR and its achievements (including its struggles against imperialism) was becoming a talismanic feature of British socialist radicalism. The communists' planned economy had produced military might, technological advance and mass literacy. In the planned communist society, inflation was controlled through organised income distribution. Crossman felt the communist advance could pave the way for the victory of public ownership over free enterprise. He did not support the Soviet regime, but wrote during a period of sudden and massive growth for the Russian economy. Particularly impressive was the country's rapid advance in the sphere of space exploration, which (through the Sputnik) had stunned the western world. Crossman

believed much could be gleaned from the Russian model. He also feared that Britain could become squeezed between the United States, the Common Market and the Communist Bloc. He argued that failure to implement a planned economy was short-sighted. In Britain, employers demanded quick profits, and 'demands for annual wage rises forced on the unions in a free-for-all economy have combined to keep capital investment down to a dangerously low level'.³² The result was Britain falling behind Russia, West Germany, France and the United States. This respect for the USSR reflected Crossman's belief in long-term structural change over 'market' expediency. Crossman felt that the Conservatives had consistently sacrificed long-term national interests in their attempts to produce short-term gain. He did not want to allow the revisionists to offer similar fools' gold on behalf of the Labour Party. Crossman was uncomfortable with 'comfortable affluence', believing that for years this goal had been used by governments 'systematically appeasing the private-profit-makers at the cost of public service and public enterprise'.³³ In order that Britain might be a major player in the world economy, Crossman believed that 'the commanding heights of the economy must be captured and held permanently for the public interest'.³⁴ He felt the future would be about peaceful competition with eastern Europe. He wanted the Labour Party to begin preparing for the fight immediately, without adopting the values of America. He acknowledged western democracies' failures to subject irresponsible economic power to public control was a fundamental flaw, which could allow the communists' economic system to supercede that of Britain and other western democracies. The strength of the oligopolists blighted progress both economically and socially. He suggested that the state was forced to kowtow to the oligopolists, and that in reality the market did not spread wealth and opportunity. Hence government policy should be to try and encourage prosperous industries to set up in areas of high regional unemployment, since they would not do so

voluntarily. Crossman argued that to date this was done on the oligopolists' terms, with damaging results. The democratic government was preserving the irresponsible power of oligopoly and was unable to impose any kind of popular control.

Crossman's response to affluence merits more attention. He rejected the basis of the affluent society, which depended on an artificial demand for more and more consumer goods. Crossman used Galbraith's analysis, to show how the big consumption industries maintained the economic boom. Galbraith claimed the prosperity of America (upon which the security of the western world was based) depended on 'whether the American people can be persuaded each year to consume six million new cars. If, in any year, that figure falls to four million, there is a sharp recession; if two million, a (non-Communist) world slump'.³⁵ For Crossman, this had ghastly and unacceptable consequences. Satisfying the consumers' need was of paramount importance in the affluent society. Crossman did not feel that this was an acceptable state of affairs for any socialist. 'If the health of the western economies depends on artificially creating an ever more extravagant demand for increasingly unnecessary consumer goods, then the maintenance of public services must always take second place to the satisfaction of the private consumer needs. For the money to pay for these public services derives from taxation, whose level...must depend on the profitability of [private] industry'. Money spent on schools, roads, or scientific research depends, under the guise of managed capitalism 'on the number of golden eggs that are laid by these oligopolistic geese'.³⁶ Importantly, Crosland emerges as a concerned voice against the increasingly hedonistic and individualistic approach apparently endorsed by the revisionist section of the party. Hence he preserved Labour's ethical - almost puritanical - voice, in the face of social changes and individual choices.

For Crossman at least, the answer was simple: ‘the Western world will be unable to strengthen themselves (sic)...until the public sector becomes the dominant sector in our economies’.³⁷ Crossman felt that if the affluent society were accepted then the Labour Party should be allowed to die and that the Liberal Party should become the party of alternative Government. What he wanted, however, was to see the Labour Party re-shape its policies and ‘present an outright challenge to the Affluent Society...we should make it unambiguously clear that, if we are given a mandate, we shall...[ensure] that the public dominates over the private sector’.³⁸ He saw this as meaning the collective goal, and collectivism over selfish individualism, promoted by selfish industries.

II

It is important to note that Crossman was not the only voice on the left arguing for change. In 1945 Wilson had expressed the view that nationalisation was necessary for greater efficiency, and not because of ‘ethical or doctrinal grounds’.³⁹ Wilson wrote:

‘that socialism and efficiency are compatible, but also that socialism, properly applied, is the only means to full efficiency; and, finally, that, through that efficiency, the interest of the consumer, in a plentiful supply of coal at a reasonable price, can be reconciled with the right of the miner to a high standard of living good working conditions, and an effective share in controlling the destination of the industry in which he works’.⁴⁰

Wilson’s work had attempted to show ‘how in practical terms, the progress towards state control which had been made during the war could be driven home’.⁴¹ During the early 1950s, Mikardo, Crossman and Wilson pressed for more nationalisation. Advised by economists Thomas Balogh and Dudley Seers, they argued that the dollar gap could be closed by expanding national production and exports.⁴² Other writers filled some of the gaps in Crossman’s analysis. In his work *Nationalised Industries In The Mixed Economy*, John Hughes supported Crossman’s view

that the government could exercise very little control over private industries, but went further in showing how the private sector was unrestricted. Hughes felt that ‘the normal market situation is one of oligopoly or institutional monopoly’.⁴³ The government’s inability to control pricing in the private sector had a further damaging effect. The government was forced into ‘exerting disproportionate pressure on the nationalised industries in an effort to stabilise the price level’.⁴⁴ Hughes was not prepared to accept that nationalised industries should shoulder the burden of supplying the mixed economy. He believed that major changes were necessary, and that the ‘main concentrations of economic and financial power (the giant firms)’ had to adopt a socialist outlook, so that ‘social needs and public accountability will prevail over the maximisation and private appropriation of profit’.⁴⁵ Hughes produced a set of radical left-wing policy proposals. He called for socialists to both reconstruct and extend the public sector. He believed that a well organised and efficiently operated public sector could achieve high levels of public accountability, which would involve high levels of workers’ participation. Hughes believed that ‘the status given to working people...is to be such as to challenge the irresponsibility and autocracy of capitalist industry’.⁴⁶

Hughes was reluctant to allow the state and nationalised industries to purchase goods from private industry on a regular basis. He felt this would merely line the pockets of private industries’ shareholders. Hughes argued that competition was essential, and here was an obvious area for the extension of public ownership. Furthermore, he was keen to rationalise research and development by extending the public sector’s role in this and thus ensuring ‘public control over the rate and direction of development to ensure that such industries are technologically efficient and have adequate capacity’.⁴⁷ He believed that there was massive scope for extending the

efficiency of public firms. He felt government needed to play a major role in providing a solid infra-structure, knowing that the private sector would not or could not do so. He argued the large scale and long term commitments to pit-reorganisation, the power station programme, railway electrification and the like produced an overwhelming case for 'building up public firms able to handle them...very large-scale public civil-engineering and building firms using the most up-to-date techniques and employing specialist resources'.⁴⁸ Hughes also felt that it was logical that the state should take over some existing firms (through bids or otherwise) and then rapidly expand their capacity.

For Hughes the public sector was a potential force for social good. He remained inventive and forward looking in his claims for its positive role. In the sphere of transport, he argued that there would be a strong social benefit in 'encouraging increased use of railway or bus transport in preference to private car use (especially urban), and...increased use of railways for freight haulage'.⁴⁹ He believed government grants could be used to cover any deficits on operation, or a tax relief on bus fuel and licence duties could be employed. He also suggested taxation on other forms of transport should be increased so as to encourage greater use of public transport networks. The state should be used to promote 'responsible' development.

Hughes was concerned with political issues, such as the debt burden and interest problems faced by nationalised industries. He argued that if the country's transport system was to be rationally used, then the railways should not have to demand prices that covered their enormous capital charges. He regarded transport as an integral part of the public service and an area from which all might benefit. Hughes reasoned that the bulk of the railways' capital charges

should be transferred to the budget, and that when the government lent money for essential maintenance and the improvement of basic supply industries, then it should do so with low interest rates. By implementing such a practice the public industries could invest more successfully and thus a Labour government could be seen to be encouraging progress and development.

Hughes agreed with Crossman, that a major socialist initiative was necessary to make public industries accountable and to ensure that their employees participated in management. He wanted major changes in company law and a drive towards improving the techniques of social control at industry level. He was at pains to point out that it was only public industry which was subjected to performance reviews and public accountability. In the private industrial sphere, the public was only aware of a company's advertising image. Hughes was adamant that a social democratic party must address the question of social accountability for private industry. He believed that Labour had ducked some difficult decisions; that 'the Labour Government [had] used monopoly investigation only marginally, retreated precipitately from Development Councils when Trade Associations opposed them, and made no attempt to alter the system under which shareholders (and this in practice means large shareholders) exercised control'.⁵⁰

In the public sector, limiting higher management and extending worker participation was central to the model envisaged by Hughes. Hughes preferred regional organisations and felt that any hierarchical levels of management which existed beyond or above the operating unit should be scrutinised to see whether in fact the system was effective. Hughes ascribed to the view that on-site management offered many advantages, and that 'where operational management has

scope and responsibility there is a significant sphere of control over job environment and plant development for workers to participate in'.⁵¹ Hughes believed that there was much scope for experimentation in worker and trade union participation. He advocated integration via board membership or control of managerial functions such as welfare provision or safety regulation and control. He felt industrial democracy, a much cherished ideal and goal for those supporting public ownership, was dependent on the implementation of such schemes. Hughes also believed that nationalisation could be made to work. He believed that 'public accountability could be greatly strengthened by establishing at industry level strong supervisory boards with a considerable representative element (including trade unions and consumer organisations, and....MPs)'.⁵² Hughes felt these boards could produce public reports on the progress of firms or regions, as well as make specific proposals which might benefit the industry or region concerned. Hughes was offering a socialist alternative to the actual way in nationalised industries were being run.

III

For constructive left-wing politicians, nationalised industries had to be made more efficient and more democratic. Democratisation had always been a feature of Labour thinking, albeit one which became overshadowed by centralised planning.⁵³ Similarly, democratisation was always a feature of the left's views on the party's internal structures. The two were often linked.⁵⁴ However, for the left it was often the latter which predominated. The left-wing Victory For Socialism (VFS) group performed an important function in opening up discussion about the Labour Party's internal workings, its democracy and its power. They advocated a greater say for

party members in the decision making process at conference, whilst attempting to lessen the voting strength of the generally pro-Gaitskell trade union block-vote. It was an attempt to gain power - to alter the party's direction by altering the leadership - it was also a matter of conviction. VFS clung to a deep-seated belief in decentralised power, and a belief that those at the grass-roots were important in maintaining the vitality, the radical socialist intent and the socialist philosophy of the Party. The lack of a left-wing constituency voice nationally, or rather, the more oligarchical and managerial nature of Gaitskell's Labour Party, came under fire.

'The reason the Labour Party lost the last election was that too many people stopped knocking on doors and the more managerial the party becomes, the fewer doors will be knocked on. This fact must be broken to the National Committee; the constitution must be changed or the Party will wither. It is a case of Socialism or die'.⁵⁵

This combination of views can be seen in the VFS discussion pamphlet, *Tho Cowards Flinch*. In the foreword William Warbey argued that the Labour Party had fallen away from 'the principles and practice of radical socialism', thus losing 'its mission, its goal and its faith'. What it also illustrates is the failure of the left to combine an assault on party managers with any of the demands for new policies outlined above. Democratisation became not an alternative philosophy, but a means of achieving power for the left. With an emotional idealism Warbey saw the need for the party returning 'to the well-springs of socialism and drinking deep'. He set the general tone of the pamphlet, and the group, by expressing the fear that the inspiration drawn from the long swig of socialism which he advocated might be compromised or 'dammed up against the rocks of bureaucracy and [of course] the block vote'.⁵⁶ The party hierarchy could manage the decision making process easily; grass-roots opinion could be marginalised. The much vaunted Labour Party democracy could be worked and cajoled, as at the 1954 Annual Conference. Then the unions' block voting power ensured that German rearmament was

approved by 3,270,000 votes to 3,022,000 votes. According to the VFS group, this was despite 'the vast majority of Constituency Parties [being] unshakably opposed'.⁵⁷

The fact that over the German rearmament issue, a small number of powerful figures on the NEC were able to gather sufficient votes to achieve victory clearly rankled. Jenkins and Wolfgang attacked the 'hidden power' resting in the TUC's General Council. They argued that this diminished the power of the constituency parties and created a body unable to commit the Labour Party to more radical policies without 'first securing a majority for such policies at the Trade Union Congress or in the Parliamentary Party'.⁵⁸

The anomalies involved in block-voting are well known. Jenkins and Wolfgang pointed that majority opinions in whole regions such as Wales and Scotland could be ignored in the 'democratic' block vote of the National Union of Mineworkers. If a trade union had, say, one million members, the whole of that vote would be used to support majority policy - although the minority may have been anything up to 300,000. Such a large minority was bigger than many unions and could represent nearly a third of the total vote of the constituency parties.⁵⁹ The trade union block vote could, and did, far out vote that of the constituency parties. VFS regarded this as a real problem.

Jenkins and Wolfgang listed other areas of concern: Standing Orders, Parliamentary meetings being closed to the press, parliamentary debate not changing MPs opinions and ordinary citizens being unable to discover how their MP voted. Furthermore, they felt party management was too restrictive as Labour members could not submit motions of their own

without first showing them to the Chief Whip. Members could only meet with groups officially approved by the Parliamentary Committee or the Whip would be withdrawn, resulting in possible suspension or expulsion. The authors felt that on these issues of internal democracy the Labour Party was failing miserably. They even went as far as to suggest: 'In fact, its oligarchical tendencies are nearly as bad as the Conservative Party's'. They felt Labour had become a party where 'democracy is preached - not practised'.⁶⁰

The aims of *Tho Cowards Flinch* were essentially threefold. It was not just in favour of changing the democratic infrastructure of the party by giving the constituency parties a greater say. It strove for a true socialist infrastructure, providing a real voice to the vital agencies within the party system. The information about any MP's actions in the House of Commons was linked to a famous battle of yesteryear: that 'representative democracy demands that a battle shall be fought to get those decisions publicly made in exactly the same way as a similar battle had to be fought more than a hundred years ago to establish public knowledge of the proceedings of the House of Commons itself'.⁶¹ The language is strong, the desire for change is well set out in the radical tradition, and associated with fair play and moral correctness.

The importance of this system of control was that it frustrated the party and corrupted its policy. Wolfgang and Jenkins pointed out that in 1946 Harold Laski and Barbara Castle had expressed reservations about the way in which the Labour government was regarding conference resolutions as a matter of confidence in the government itself. In *Tribune* in 1947 and 1948, Nat Whine and Ian Mikardo had said that 'the Labour Party had lost control of the direction of its own policy'.⁶² To remove the stunning club of the block-vote from the hands of the few and to

distribute power into the control of the many was an obvious and fair aim of this left-wing faction. The decentralisation of power and the desire to help the Labour Party become more 'responsive to and responsible for the dreams, desires, aims and ambitions of its workers' was the final rallying cry of the pamphlet. If nothing was done, then it was feared the party would 'cease to have any workers'¹⁶³ whose dreams, desires, aims and ambitions it could realise. However, the idea that a leadership able to control this vital element of power would actually change the democratic system proved to be an unrealistic case of optimism, principle and morality triumphing over practicality and the revisionists' pursuit of power and control.

This VFS pamphlet laid out the areas on which the group was to focus and was the basis for discussion at the first VFS conference. Policy and policy discussion were initially secondary, although the connection between Crossman's call for a positive socialist Labour policy and VFS's actions are obvious: the shift towards a more socialist outlook for the Labour Party was to be the eventual result of the tinkering with the party's internal workings. VFS felt that once the constituency parties and membership received their rightful say in the decision making process, then the knock on effect of their endeavours would be a return to a more socialist outlook for the Labour Party as a whole.

As in the past with other similar movements (such as the constituencies movement of the 1930s), VFS attempted to organise a conference to discuss the Labour Party's constitution, as broadly laid out in *Tho Cowards Flinch*. An early letter to the constituency parties in 1956 sought to discover constituency opinion of the VFS plan of 'inaugurating an Annual Constituency Party Congress...we do this because we feel that opinion in the Constituency Parties is not being

taken sufficiently into account in the formation of Labour policy'.⁶⁴ The letter was certainly a source of consternation to the party leadership. MPs who attached their names to the circular (Frank Allaun, Fenner Brockway, Bob Edwards, Hugh Jenkins, Sir Fred Messer, Stephen Swingler, William Warbey and Konni Zilliacus) received a strong letter from the General Secretary, Morgan Phillips, attacking the VFS stance as (predominantly) unconstitutional. Phillips argued that discussion on the party's constitution should take place at the Annual Conference - the very arena VFS hoped to reform. Phillips described VFS as unofficial and advised the MPs to 'call off this Conference'.⁶⁵ Phillips' plea received short shrift in Fred Messer's reply, supported by the other members. Messer felt that the National Executive Committee's objection to the Conference was due to a misunderstanding. He argued that VFS was not trying to 'anticipate' annual conference discussion; nor did it plan to secure 'unofficial' groups within the party.⁶⁶ Phillips' response came back even more strongly. It drew on the potential damage and divisions VFS's actions could produce. It marked out the real concern that the VFS conference was usurping the authority of the NEC and other national bodies, as well as having the structure of an unofficial group - a 'Party within a Party'. Again he reiterated that these actions 'contravened the spirit and purpose of the Labour Party constitution'.⁶⁷

The arguments raised by Phillips in his letter to the MP's involved in the VFS conference were dismantled one by one. Firstly, the conference was not national and so could not be said to be usurping the functions or authority of the national bodies. Secondly, VFS could not suddenly have begun to take on the demeanour of an unofficial group when it had already been in existence for twelve years. Not only that, but in those twelve years, VFS had organised many conferences and meetings to which no objections had been raised and from which had sprung no

unofficial groups. Finally, Messer found that there were some shared beliefs between himself and Phillips; for like Phillips, Messer (and VFS too) would 'strongly oppose anything that was against the "spirit and purpose of the Party" or which was in conflict with the Party constitution'.⁶⁸

With neither side willing to give on the issue, the dispute received some press attention. The NEC attempted to undermine the VFS conference plans by writing to every CLP advising them not to attend. The constituencies were told in no uncertain terms that the

'NEC regard this action as one calculated to impair the unity of the Party. All our organisations have their own method for determining policy and constitution, and the purpose of such a conference as the one being organised by the 'VFS' group can only be to try and secure organised unofficial groups within the Party. This is contrary to the spirit and purpose of the Party's constitution. The NEC, therefore, warns organisations in the areas concerned not to accept an invitation to participate in the Conference'.⁶⁹

The response from the CLPs was overwhelmingly a slap in the face for the NEC. Strong objections were raised by many constituency parties, who argued that they could reach a decision on whether to attend through their own volition. Importantly, they felt that democracy and freedom of discussion were key features of the party. Hornsey CLP provides a typical example of the reply sent to the NEC. It noted: 'thanks for the letter warning it not to attend the Conference on 'VFS', and pointed out that it does not need such a warning, since it will decide for itself which conferences within the movement it will attend, and which it will not attend'.⁷⁰ Woodford's General Management Committee's resolution was even more uncompromising: 'Bearing in mind the recent warning issued by the National Executive against the conference of the 'Victory For Socialism' Group, this Party deplores the continual interference of the executive in the activities of Discussion Groups within the Labour Movement, feeling the deep

dissatisfaction to which this gives rise can only injure the best interests of the Party'.⁷¹ Konni Zilliacus, MP for Gorton, told the *Manchester Evening News* 'I shall certainly go to the conference. The whole thing is a storm in a tea cup. We MP's are not sponsoring the conference. It is being called for by the 'VFS' group. In any case, it is only a meeting to discuss a pamphlet on democracy within the party. No resolutions will be passed. It is just a local conference'.⁷²

The situation seems to have been blown out of all proportion. The NEC and Morgan Phillips both overreacted. This view seems to have been confirmed in April 1956, when the National Agent sent Morgan Phillips data concerning the constituencies of VFS supporters in parliament. He was informed that 'it is very difficult to give any general picture of the state of the organisation in the constituencies of the Members of Parliament mentioned in the 'VFS' pamphlet because circumstances vary so widely'.⁷³ The information showed each MP's vote in 1951 and 1955, the swing, away from Labour and the membership levels. Such activity by the General Secretary certainly has an uncomfortable feel to it, though quite what Phillips planned to do with the information he had sought is unclear.

The problems of a splintered party are clear. Unable to gain access to the top level of the Labour Party, VFS seemed to be constantly fighting a losing battle. As early as 1951, when the schisms within the party were still relatively small, the public viewed such discord and disunity unfavourably. Indeed, 34 per cent of those asked by a Gallup poll felt that Bevan's activities had hindered the party. The fact that many blamed Bevan personally is also clear. Only 25 per cent of Labour voters said they would vote for Bevan if a leadership contest were to arise.⁷⁴ The VFS group had to go carefully. Without a really big political figure to front them, and with no reform

of the party, they were impotent. They certainly could not claim the public were on their side.

Nor were VFS building internal alliances within the party. Hugh Jenkins carried on the desire for constitutional change within the Labour Party in a follow up pamphlet, *The Defeat of the Left*. He sent a draft copy to Bill Rodgers, then the Fabian General Secretary. Rodgers' described it as 'a good statement on the case for constitutional changes in the Labour Party'. However, he did not believe this should be a priority for the party, and personally, he was not 'sympathetic towards it'.⁷⁵ Whilst there was a long-standing sympathy for critics of the 'oligarchical' Labour leadership, VFS was too associated with the USSR, Bevan, and other far left views to be the basis for rallying the party against revisionism. Rodgers's response to Jenkins is instructive. Rodgers recognised the importance of the trade unions within the labour movement, and perhaps felt uneasy with it has disinclined to act. He felt the constant criticism of the way in which they exercised their power might only serve to alienate them, when what the Labour Party really ought to be doing was 'making them feel at home with the political wing'. His stark warning continued: 'the very greatest mistake the left can make is to give the trade unions, which means their leaders, a sense of isolation'. Hugh Jenkins also recognised the value of courting the left of centre Frank Cousins. Crossman had pointed out the significance of such a move, when he warned that: '[Cousins] could end up as intransigent as Deakin ever was, not because power corrupts, but because he has been thrown back on the other trade union leaders out of loyalty - that is if his union is constantly attacked'.⁷⁶ Rodgers also warned that those advocating constitutional change because their policies had not been adopted, did so from a weakened position. He argued that the most important area for the labour movement to address was policy. He suggested that 'all of us will do a great deal more for the objectives in which we

believe if we concentrate on this and pull together'.⁷⁷ Rodgers aimed his side swipe well, feeling that internal disagreements, might dissipate the sense of purpose he believed the movement possessed. It was the 'sterile disagreement' which Richard Crossman had warned the party about in 1950.⁷⁸

VFS made little progress towards providing the party with a left-wing policy. Although it had a policy agenda, it did not produce the tightly forged, well held together policy alternatives the left required in order to offer itself an alternative to the ideological sweep of revisionism. Nor did it create a united centre/left block at this time. However, the left of the Labour Party had fewer and fewer outlets for their policy ideas and felt increasingly frustrated that it could not influence the Party's leadership. Thus VFS continued for want of any more significant alternative.

IV

VFS became more important following the disappearance of Bevanism as a recognised entity. Ellison rightly states that it was the re-vamped VFS of 1958 which was to have the greater impact. He argues 'the VFS strategy was encapsulated in a letter written by the ex-Bevanite MP Stephen Swingler to all CLPs. VFS proclaimed it stood for the 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' and demanded 'the nationalisation of key companies and industries as a means of placing in the people's hands decisive economic power'.⁷⁹ Here was a statement or policy - but for VFS, public ownership was seen as the means for creating economic efficiency, and little more was said.

In its 1958 guise, VFS re-emerged with a reiteration of left-wing dogma and a more

heavyweight membership. Many of the old gang of 1956 remained though, as did the desire to promote the grass-roots of the party. Fred Messer became President, Stephen Swingler Chairman, Konni Zilliacus Chairman of the International and Commonwealth Policy Committee. Frank Allaun and Hugh Jenkins were joined by long time Bevanites, Ian Mikardo (Chairman of the Home Policy Committee), Michael Foot, the Reverend Donald Soper, Sidney Silverman and Ralph Milliband.⁸⁰ According to Ellison, 'it was only in February 1958, after Bevan's 'defection' from the Tribune group, and thus the final disappearance of Bevanism as a recognised entity, that VFS was relaunched with a much revamped membership which included salient Tribunate figures'.⁸¹ The VFS press release, containing the names of MP's involved, also described their group as 'an organisation of socialist "shock troops" to fight apathy in the labour ranks...Our task is to ensure that the national swing against the Tories becomes a positive movement in favour of socialism'. Stephen Swingler argued that this could be achieved by 'overcoming the frustration which exists even among the key workers in the constituency parties'. With the implementation of a 'forthright socialist policy' high up the VFS agenda, as well as the plan to have a meeting to launch the reconstituted organisation, echoes of 1956 seem rather apparent.⁸² The incorporation of the prominent ex-Bevanites did little to change the balance of the VFS approach.

The re-launching of VFS was also aided by an address in *Tribune* by Stephen Swingler, complete with an appeal for members and details of how to join. It was a bold and forthright piece, planning to fight apathy from Lands End to John O'Groats and hoping to invigorate the whole of the labour movement through the Labour Party. There was even an encouraging sign for those on the left who had been starved of a set of radical left-wing policy alternatives.

Swingler wanted 'to make socialists by putting forward a coherent, convincing socialist policy...Apathy is the deadly enemy of all progressive movements...lack of virile discussion, falling attendances at meetings, citizens glued to the fireside TV [all of which] can spell doom to democracy'.⁸³

The nuclear bomb and public ownership were the two major issues on which VFS campaigned. Swingler saw the bomb as a decisive issue, believing survival should be the prime concern. He regarded the Brighton Conference of 1957 as a grave disappointment as it had revealed the 'Party's failure to take a clear stand against the bomb'.⁸⁴ Secondly, Swingler tied VFS to public ownership. As Ellison has written, VFS thought 'efficiency associated with planning could best be obtained under the conditions afforded by widespread public ownership. The aim was to ensure the success of central planning by first securing the control of industry'.⁸⁵

The talk of 'faith', 'zeal', 'principles', 'democracy' and 'planning' seems to draw on ethical socialist rhetoric and the moralistic traditions of Labour's early advocates. Indeed Swingler's call to arms had referred back to Blatchford and the party's early zeal. He called on members 'to form branches, stimulate fresh discussion about the application of socialist principles, and, above all, inspire renewed faith in the power of democratic action'⁸⁶. VFS tried to sound progressive, a group ready to seize the initiative, prepared to be bold and campaign. It attempted to do this by promoting itself as the pioneering spirit of the labour movement's past.

Unfortunately for VFS their crusading zeal did not win many converts from the leadership or the NEC and an impasse similar to that of 1956 was the result. On 28 February,

Transport House sent 618 letters to the secretaries of CLPs, warning them that the party's electoral chances would be jeopardised if the VFS movement was permitted to establish a 'party within a party' at constituency level.⁸⁷ According to Crossman, NEC discussion centred on how best to deter the CLPs from adopting the VFS position. Nye Bevan objected to this warning against VFS on constitutional grounds, preferring to suggest to the CLPs that offering their support or attending meetings would merely be unwise. Tony Greenwood argued that conflict with VFS would provide unwanted publicity, and that he would prefer to speak to Stephen Swingler and ask him to limit the affair to strictly educational activities. At this point, Crossman felt that a long and 'disingenuous speech' by Ian Mikardo made it obvious that VFS was far more than an educational group. Indeed the announcements about 'a network of branches' had already gone to press, noting that 'all constituencies had already been circularised'.⁸⁸ However, Crossman's description of the reaction from the party leadership is rather different to Brivati's analysis of the affair. Though both see an impasse, Brivati describes Gaitskell attempting 'to meet VFS head on...a letter warning CLPs not to associate with VFS was dispatched and the leaders were brought in for a grilling'. He sees Gaitskell as strong, resisting this group of disparate left-wingers by telling them that they were going 'beyond the limits of what was permissible'.⁸⁹ Crossman felt this was not so much a 'victory' for Gaitskell, but a defeat for policy debate. He felt that Mikardo's inflammatory speech, was 'elephantine behaviour...irritating everybody', and that by his actions Mikardo had made 'all discussion infinitely more difficult in the Party'. However, he also described Gaitskell as 'as rigid as ever' and felt the 'trade unionists...clicked back into the intolerance which had marked their behaviour throughout the whole Bevanite crisis'. Crossman's final point is the most damning of all for the Labour Party as a whole. Bitterness and discord re-emerged on the surface. Crossman felt there

had been a managerial failure, not (as Brivati sees it) a managerial success. He stated that 'by the decision to take action and not merely to see Stephen Swingler, we had, so to speak, created the very split in the Party we were seeking to prevent'.⁹⁰ Indeed Morgan Phillips wrote to Stephen Swingler in strong terms, asking him to 'reconsider your decision [to hold meetings] and avoid the impression being created both inside and outside the Party of new divisions'.⁹¹ Once again - and as on policy - Gaitskell was not so much being 'tough', as being rigid - and constructive debate was to suffer.

VFS felt able to repudiate the charges laid at its door and defended its actions once again. Swingler argued divisions within the party were being avoided, and reiterated the desire to fight apathy in the ranks, defeat the Tories, stimulate discussion and promote socialist principles.⁹² As far as he was concerned, all were pulling in the same direction. At the launch meeting of the reconstituted VFS group at Denison House on 6 March 1958, Michael Foot derided the over zealous response from the party leadership by opening his speech with 'I come as a fully paid up member of the Labour Party' - receiving a big laugh to boot! Foot went on to defend the role of VFS and the right to issue policy statements: 'We are entitled to present the Labour Movement our views on the great issues of the day, and again on policies the Labour Party ought to adopt...It's not because we want to overthrow the leadership...we are concerned about some of the trends continuing in our Labour Movement'.⁹³

Importantly, VFS did finally begin attempts to influence policy and decision making. Public ownership remained a key theme and an attractive feature to many on the left, especially, as Ellison has shown, the ex-Bevanites Mikardo, Foot and Castle. In a letter explaining the

nature of VFS, Swingler argued for economic power to be placed in the people's hands, stating 'VFS stands for the nationalisation of the key companies and industries...this means emphatically the participation of the workers in the management of the industries in which they are employed'.⁹⁴ The pressure applied over the public ownership issue remained fairly constant. In July 1960 Sidney Silverman wrote to the NEC, who were set to hold a special meeting to discuss the current situation within the party and the problems facing it. On behalf of VFS, Silverman suggested that the

'National Executive Committee should start some major re-thinking and research into three fundamental questions, partly by using the apparatus of the Home Research Department, but also by enlisting the assistance of all the members of the Party who have knowledge and experience of these matters'.

The call for the use of experts seemed to suggest some possibility for developing a left alternative, as advocated by Crossman. Top of the VFS list came the publicly owned industries and enterprises. VFS was concerned about both how to administer those already publicly owned, and 'those which will be converted to common ownership in the future'. Importantly, this was not just a case of looking backwards and embracing old ideals. A recognition of change and the need for more change is clear. Firstly, the fact that nobody believed in 'the autonomous public corporation' as the 'ideal institution' any more was recognised. Nor indeed was it regarded as 'appropriate for all industries and enterprises'. Instead, it was suggested lessons could be learned from those who worked in public industries, not just taking on board

'the views of national officials of trade unions representing those workers. The workers are once again recognised as important, and as with the greater democracy campaign, it was felt that they should be consulted. It was suggested that there might be lessons to be learned by looking abroad. Not all the models that could be looked at would be good; but there would be lessons and experiences to be gained by examining public enterprises and mixed enterprises in 'Scandinavia, Israel, Mexico, the Soviet Bloc and Yugoslavia'.

There was the possibility of using the co-operative movement as a partner in a form of common ownership.⁹⁵ Here then is a genuine attempt to force a re-think. What is perhaps a shame is the fact that the left, and VFS (specifically after 1958), did not emerge in think-tank form bristling with ideas resulting from research and policy formulation. The type of constructive policy proposals - which Crossman had demanded in 1951 - had still to materialise.

VFS also embraced the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). The campaign was backed by *Tribune* and reinforced by Foot's passionate moral hostility to nuclear weapons. The large protest marches enthused a younger generation, none more so than London to Aldermaston, which 'has passed into the folklore of a generation'.⁹⁶ Yet Foot could not use CND as a springboard to lead a strong 'constructive' and radical group. As Jones states,

'The triumph of unilateralism at the Labour Party conference did not produce undiluted satisfaction with CND. Many of its activists looked with suspicion on the strategy favoured by the Executive Committee, most of whose (self appointed...) Members - Canon Collins, Michael Foot, Kinglsey Martin, Benn Levy - were also members of the Labour Party...The sceptics argued that a Labour Cabinet would always be controlled by either right wingers or by compromisers...Hence CND must be a mass movement free from contamination by the dirty world of 'politics'.⁹⁷

In his first address in *Tribune*, Swingler attacked 'the Party's failure to take a clear stand against the bomb'. He went on to argue 'survival [was] a key issue of the day'⁹⁸ and the anti-bomb principle remained an important feature within the VFS group. Having urged disarmament, VFS again urged the party to examine how manpower and resources released from working on armaments might be absorbed. It is in this field that VFS advocated the type of action which Wilson was later to embrace: science. VFS argued that outside the limited field of the nationalised industries and the universities, science in Britain was devoted either to 'armaments

research and development (which takes 60% of our scientific manpower) or to competitive commercial ends...progress towards disarmament and an extension of public ownership will create an urgent need for a new national policy for science'.⁹⁹ The fact that science could play a constructive role in a socialist Britain was trumpeted. Yet their attitude to both the bomb and to public enterprise were not shared by the Labour leadership. It is perhaps in part for that reason that whilst science galvanised the moment for Wilson, within VFS it was overshadowed by vociferous support for public ownership and CND. VFS's emphasis on non-domestic policy reflected the enthusiasms of its older, and its more recent, recruits. For Foot, the anti-nuclear movement was a passion, a moral crusade excitingly shared by a new and younger generation. Many VFS members were also members of the anti-imperialist Movement for Colonial Freedom, which VFS affiliated to and aided. This included Foot, Mikardo, Lee, Castle, Driberg, Swingler and many others. Here again was a moral crusade which could inspire; here was a *real* example of poverty and injustice to fight. It is perhaps not surprising that the MCF participated in joint discussions with VFS, *Tribune*, the *New Left Review* and others in 1959 to try and forge giant policies.¹⁰⁰

Once the leadership failed to take on board VFS's ideas, criticism of Gaitskell was not long in making itself heard. Following defeat in 1959, Gaitskell's leadership (or as far VFS were concerned, his lack of leadership) came under fire. They believed 'the immediate cause of Labour's crisis [was] the widening gulf between the views of its top leaders and most of the rank and file'. Gaitskell was compared with Attlee, who had told the Scarborough Conference in 1948 'I have always felt that the right course is to put my views before my colleagues, discuss them and then accept their decision'. Gaitskell was bemoaned as a party leader intent on stamping 'his

'image' on the party and making its policies conform to his personal views by any means open to him'.¹⁰¹ They believed Gaitskell was 'so far to the Right as to make him virtually indistinguishable from a Liberal in home affairs and a Conservative in foreign policy and defence'.¹⁰² This stinging rebuke also reinforced the deep-seated VFS desire to reform party democracy. VFS members firmly believed that Gaitskell was unrepresentative of the rank and file and out-of-step with the views of the majority of the party. Gaitskell was roundly criticised for his role in the party even before he achieved the leadership, neatly allowing VFS to lay some of the blame for the 1955 defeat at his door. His role in approving re-armament and including West Germany in NATO was attacked, and his role in attempts to expel Aneurin Bevan was denigrated. VFS argued these had caused dissension and demoralisation in the ranks and were 'major factors in the 1955 election defeat'. His failure to take on board the shopping list for nationalisation at the 1957 Brighton Conference and his overzealous commitment to the American alliance were attacked next. VFS felt Labour's inability to explain how it might fund ambitious social policies were major factors in the 1959 election defeat (Gaitskell's infamous gaffe during the election campaign was played upon. Spending promises on housing, health, education, pensions and super annuation had been used to trip Gaitskell up after he promised not to raise taxes. He could find no convincing answer on how to pay for the welfare measures).

A further sign of intellectual activity on the left of the party was VFS's response to the Labour Party's policy statement *Industry and Society* 1957. The response was the VFS pamphlet *Industry your Servant*. The pamphlet was more than just a rallying call for more public ownership - it was the antithesis of the revisionist school of thought. Its authors demanded planning and control of the nation's principal economic activities. The difficulty in controlling

private industry was a target for their attack. The group bluntly stated that

‘you can’t compel them [entrepreneurs] to spend their own money doing things which the national interest positively requires...It is true that...Some methods [were] used by the last Labour Government and projected by the next, for bribing or encouraging entrepreneurs to do what the national interest requires- but these methods are limited in effect and very costly’.¹⁰³

The authors saw the current economic situation as unworkable, unproductive and ultimately, unethical. It had led to a constant conflict of interest, whereby the central planner’s motivation would remain the national interest, whilst private industry sought profit. VFS sought to secure a change. Unlike Crossman, the group did not view a larger public sector bureaucracy as a danger to the effectiveness of public industry. Instead, VFS argued that the increasing bureaucracy came as a result of ‘the obstruction of central planning which is motivated by private profit’.¹⁰⁴ VFS felt that even during the war years, when the war effort should have prevailed as the driving force towards greater efficiency, private firms were reluctant to pool ideas or manufacturing techniques. They feared giving assistance to their potential post-war competitors. The central planners had to use more and more intricate policing techniques in order to satisfy the national interest, thus creating a wider web of bureaucratic control.

It was argued that only a strong socialist push towards greater levels of public ownership and more stringent controls over private firms could remedy the situation. VFS was amazed that despite the Monopolies Commission reports into the British Oxygen Company and the British Match Corporation (which had recommended different forms of public ownership) the Labour Party had no such plans. It had little sympathy with attempts to leave such ‘problems’ in private hands. It was argued that ‘central planning and control of privately-owned industry can never be more than a temporary partial substitute for social ownership’.¹⁰⁵

The VFS group were also keen to see Labour re-prioritise its spending and investment plans. Not surprisingly, the extent of defence spending was a major source of discontentment. It was argued that since 1951, the level of defence expenditure which had been maintained was far more than was practically necessary. The group argued that this unwarranted level of expenditure was only made possible by curbing expenditure on social services: 'when...Labour people accept the present level of armament spending as an inviolable premise they turn their backs on the concept of priorities and planning'. The VFS group felt that through their series of left-wing proposals, 'a full and balanced use of our resources'¹⁰⁶ would lead to a better planned and fairer society.

The VFS group proposed a range of measures aimed at the creation of a fairer society. They felt discriminatory interest rates, particularly regarding overdrafts, could be highly effective. Their system would exempt certain institutions (local authorities, nationalised industries or investors in development areas). Furthermore, it was argued that discriminatory taxation should also be employed. National planning, rather than revenue, was their key theme. For example, it was argued that taxes on profits which were ploughed back into the business should be minimal, whereas profits distributed to shareholders should be taxed at a very high rate. The group also believed that indirect taxes 'could be increased to discourage spending if the trend were towards inflation and decreased to encourage spending if the trend were towards under-employment'.¹⁰⁷ The proposals also included producers' subsidies, which could be introduced to encourage development or support the implementation of new ideas. Under-investment in the public sector and huge debts had left little or no scope for modernisation. VFS distanced itself from the 'break-even' policies employed by previous Labour Governments.

Investment could be provided beyond the earning capacity of the industry, in the national interest.

The secretive nature of private industry was also closely scrutinised by VFS. It was argued that it should be made compulsory for firms to disclose more information to government departments. They demanded that company accounts, as well as programmes for research and the results of research should be disclosed, in order to avoid wasting resources. It was felt that the 'Government should be kept more fully and continuously informed about what is happening in industry'.¹⁰⁸

The VFS group promoted a positive employment policy which they felt was central in their transition to socialism. The group recognised that in an increasingly modern and technical workplace, automatic machinery was reducing employment. This was viewed as no bad thing. With the increasing world competition, British industry needed to be efficient if it was to be competitive. However, workers needed to be protected from the consequences of changes in forms of production. They wanted 'to protect the interests of workers by negotiating and if necessary compelling, a system of compensation by employers whose workers have become redundant; by the development of schemes of re-training, re-settlement and re-employment through the agency of public authorities; and by local diversification of industry'.¹⁰⁹ With elderly workers or those with family responsibility, job security should supercede the need for efficiency.

During the transition to socialism, VFS argued that consumers needed protection. They

believed that under the capitalist system, the whole of the working class was economically vulnerable. This vulnerability stemmed from the fact that ‘the workers have nothing to sell but their labour power and no resources of property or income, other than that provided by the State, on which to rely if, because of sickness, incapacity, old age, or redundancy, they are prevented from selling their labour power’.¹¹⁰ VFS believed that the planning undertaken by a Labour government should be aimed at transforming the existing capitalist society into a socialist one. They were not prepared for the Labour Party to appeal to the electorate under the premise that it could run the mixed economy more efficiently than the capitalists. Even in the non-socialised sector, VFS suggested legislation should be produced to increase effective participation by the workers in the sphere of policy making.

VFS ‘proposals’ appear both vague and weak. They offered no suitable or realistic alternative to the detailed work of Crosland. The grasp of economics so obvious amongst the revisionists seems to be missing in the VFS group. Their ideas seem to have more in common with post-1974 Labour policy than ‘Wilsonite’ policy. Hence and unsurprisingly VFS proposals failed to win support from either the revisionists, or, more importantly, the centre-left. Wilson did not adopt the group’s ideas in the lead-up to 1964; nor did Crossman. Constructive politicians, anxious to make an impact in government needed something more concrete. By 1958, Crossman was detached from the Tribunate left, many of whom joined the re-launched VFS group. In order to avoid further splits in the party, and the bad publicity which would accompany it, Crossman was keen for the NEC to meet Swingler ‘to see if we can get him to limit the affair [setting up constituency links] to strictly educational activities’.¹¹¹ But he did not back them beyond this.

Following another convincing defeat for Labour in 1959 VFS attacked again, focussing once more on Gaitskell. The lesson that they believed Gaitskell drew from the defeat caused disquiet. 'Labour should cease to be a Socialist Party even on paper, and that it must cling to the nuclear deterrent strategy'.¹¹² The maintenance of links with the US and of US bases in the UK meant Gaitskell was regarded as an enemy, not just a recalcitrant opponent. The Clause IV controversy, which ended in defeat for the right, was regarded as 'utterly unnecessary'. Gaitskell was also seen as betraying party policy over disarmament, supported by the party conference in 1961. The 'Parliamentary Party disregarding conference decisions', Gaitskell had argued was acceptable 'on the grounds that it is responsible only to the electorate'. VFS felt a policy which allowed the leadership to ignore the majority decisions was not acceptable. Yet there was some hypocrisy here. Nye Bevan had stated during the Conference debate in 1948: 'It is for the Conference to lay down the policies of the Parliamentary Party and for the Parliamentary Party to interpret those policies in the light of the Parliamentary system'.¹¹³ Moreover, VFS ignored conference decisions for years, arguing they were undemocratic. As for the dwindling appeal of Labour, and the divisions within the Labour Party, the VFS group felt the solution lay in tying their colours firmly to the CND standard. In standing for peace, Labour would revel in a new 'unity and resolution'. Furthermore, it would rally youth to its ranks and attract hundreds of thousands who would not normally vote Labour. In attacking capitalism's dependence on war preparation and advocating peaceful co-existence, 'we can make the arguments for Socialism irrefutable and irresistible'.¹¹⁴

This vehement anti-Gaitskell stance developed well before the Scarborough Conference and culminated on 20 June, 1960, when VFS passed a resolution demanding Gaitskell's

resignation. As Brivati has stated, it condemned his leadership as a 'source of weakness, confusion and disunity'.¹¹⁵ Here again Crossman opposed VFS strategy. He felt 'nothing could have been more helpful to him'.¹¹⁶ He felt Gaitskell took full advantage of the situation and both tested and proved his strength by calling a full party meeting, where the vote went in his favour. An opportunity was lost. Benn noted trade unionists were 'strongly critical of Gaitskell and his little coterie of friends',¹¹⁷ whilst Crossman suggested 'the crisis of confidence is a crisis of confidence in the line Gaitskell has taken, obstinately since the election'. Hence Crossman shared VFS's view on the impact of Gaitskellism on the party and its members. He wrote 'The blunt fact is that nine out of ten of our active members believe that Gaitskell is trying to ditch socialism, and of those nine, at least seven feel he ought not to do so'.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately for the left, there was no rapprochement between Crossman and VFS, *Tribune* and others on policy. The left was seemingly content to attack the leadership on certain issues, to worry aloud about the party's future and to talk in broad sweeps about both the major policy ideas and the direction it felt the party should have been travelling. The nuts and bolts of policy, the fine tuning and hence that much vaunted workable alternative did not arrive, even from figures like Castle and Foot, who were later to be such constructive ministers. At Scarborough, Gaitskell emerged defeated but defiant over 'the bomb'. The defeat was by 297,000 votes, fewer than had been predicted. Gaitskell prepared himself once more to push for what he believed in and to 'Fight and fight and fight again'. The left's failure was widely recognised. In 1957 the *New Statesman* had noted that 'deprived of its leadership, it was revealed as an army without much discipline or theoretical coherence'.¹¹⁹ Historians have also highlighted Bevan's lack of 'leadership'. However, the problem went deeper. The real problem was the left's lack of a real practical policy alternative, which they could embrace and argue for within the centre ground of the party, together with the

left's preference for 'inspiring' crusades, notably the mass demonstrations organised by CND, and for socialist rhetoric based around the mobilisation of public opinion.

As is well documented elsewhere, Gaitskell's attempt to re-establish his personal authority began with a comfortable, though far from brilliant victory over Wilson in the leadership contest in 1960. He had vital support and assistance from those in the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS) who, Jefferys believes, 'sought to promote revisionists to key positions of power'.¹²⁰ Brivati described CDS as an 'effective well run organisation; it was also well financed'.¹²¹ The similar roles the CDS and VFS groups played, on opposite sides of the party are hard to escape. This grouping, dominated by the 'Hampstead Set', sought to influence the constituency parties as well as having a youth section and a manifesto. In their initial statement to the press the fact that CDS was established to fight back against VFS was all but acknowledged with a skilful slogan: 'Call us Victory For Sanity'¹²². The stage was set for a further, deeper, battle for the control - and the soul - of the party.

Left-wing thinkers like Crossman had tried to develop an alternative policy basis, and broad policy emphasis for the party. At the core of the more articulate left-dissent lay dissatisfaction with the way that nationalisation and collectivism was not leading to socialism, and the way that society was becoming more individualistic and hedonistic. Yet if Crossman's ideas and dissatisfaction with Gaitskell's manner, party management and assault on key party principles contained the potential for creating a core of centre-left opinion, VFS instead focussed on issues which could only lead to the polarisation of left and right. This is indeed what had apparently taken place by 1960, with factional groups arranged around each other. It remains

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to be seen however, whether this apparent polarisation was in fact as apparent away from London as it was at Westminster.

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Howard, *Crossman The Pursuit of Power* (London, 1990), p.157.
2. K. Jeffreys, *The Labour Party Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 1993), p.48.
3. D. Howell, *British Social Democracy. A study in Development and Decay* (London, 1976), p186.
4. Ibid., p190.
5. S. Fielding, *Labour: Decline and Renewal* (Manchester, 1995), p.41.
6. B. Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London, 1996), p.227.
7. N. Ellison, *Egalitarian Thought and the Labour Party. Retreating Visions* (London, 1994), p.59.
8. Ibid., p.52.
9. Ibid., p.52.
10. R.H.S. Crossman, *Socialism and the New Despotism* (Fabian Society, 1956), p.1.
11. Ibid., p.2.
12. Ibid., p.2.
13. Keynes proposed that the way to deal with unemployment was to dig a very deep shaft, bury millions of bank notes at the bottom and then pay wages to workers for digging the bank notes out again.
14. Crossman, op. cit., p.3.
15. Ibid., p.4.
16. Ibid., pp.4-5.
17. Ibid., p.5.
18. Francis is an exception here. He sees Labour's ethical socialism as a constant theme in Labour politics; that Blair echoes a 'moral tradition in British socialism to which the Attlee government had also fully subscribed'. See M. Francis, *Ideas and Policies under Labour 1945-51. Building a new Britain* (Manchester, 1997), p.vii.
19. Crossman felt that nationalisation had many good points, including government control of the capital investment, and the broad lines of nationalised industries policy. Crossman also felt that nationalisation had a stabilising effect, since it eliminated increases in unearned income as

well as capital gains, two factors which provoke wage demands and stimulate inflation.

20. Crossman, op. cit., p.7.

21. Ibid., p.12.

22. Ibid., p.7.

23. Ibid., p.12.

24. Ibid., p.15.

25. R.H.S. Crossman, *Labour In The Affluent Society* (Fabian Society, 1960), p.1.

26. Ibid., p.2.

27. Ibid., p.4.

28. Ibid., p.5.

29. Ibid., p.5.

30. Ibid., p.6.

31. Ibid., p.6.

32. Ibid., p.11.

33. Ibid., p.15.

34. Ibid., p.15.

35. Ibid., p.21.

36. Ibid., p.21.

37. Ibid., p.22.

38. Ibid., p.23.

39. B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992), p.88.

40. H. Wilson, *New Deal for Coal* (London, 1945), pp.207, 246, quoted in *ibid.*, pp.88-89

41. Pimlott, op. cit., p.89.

42. For a more detailed discussion see J. Campbell, *Nye Bevan. A Biography* (London, 1987) p.282.

43. J. Hughes, *Nationalised Industries in The Mixed Economy* (Socialism in the Sixties, October 1960), pp5-6.
44. Ibid., p.6.
45. Ibid., p.31.
46. Ibid., p.32.
47. Ibid., p.32.
48. Ibid., p.32.
49. Ibid., p.35.
50. Ibid., p.37.
51. Ibid., p.38.
52. Ibid., pp.38-39.
53. For a detailed discussion see L. Barrow & I. Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1996) chapters 2 & 3.
54. D. Tanner, 'The Red Dragon and the Union Jack: British Influences in Welsh Labour Politics', Centre for Advanced Celtic Studies Paper, 2001.
55. Walter Wolfgang & Hugh Jenkins, *Tho Cowards Flinch* (Victory For Socialism, 1958), p.19.
56. Ibid., p.3.
57. Ibid., p.9.
58. Ibid., p.11.
59. Ibid., p.12.
60. Ibid., pp.14-15.
61. Ibid., p.17.
62. Ibid., p.19.
63. Ibid., p.23.
64. Morgan Phillips to Fred Messer, General Secretary's Papers, Labour Party Archives. GS/VS/2.

65. Morgan Phillips to Frank Allaun, 22 February 1956, GS/VS/5.
66. Fred Messer to Morgan Phillips, 25 February 1956, GS/VS/12.
67. Morgan Phillips to Fred Messer, 7 March 1956, GS/VS/19.
68. Fred Messer to Morgan Phillips, 12 March 1956, GS/VS/21.
69. Morgan Phillips to Secretaries of CLP's in London & Southern regions, 21 March 1956, GS/VS/35.
70. Secretary Hornsey CLP to Morgan Phillips, 3 April 1956, GS/VS/59.
71. General Management Committee Woodford CLP to Morgan Phillips, 29 March 1956, GS/VS/60.
72. *Manchester Evening News*, 19 March 1956.
73. National Agent to Morgan Phillips, 6 April 1956, GS/VS/66.
74. *Behind the Gallup Polls* (News Chronicle, 1951).
75. B. Rogers to H. Jenkins, December 29, 1955. Hugh Jenkins Mss BLPES Box 6/9.
76. Ibid., p.1.
77. Ibid., p.3.
78. R.H.S. Crossman, *Memorandum on Problems Facing the Party*, p.1, NEC Minutes 26 April 1950.
79. Ellison, op. cit., pp.59-60.
80. The full list of those on Victory For Socialism's Executive Council was: Stephen Swingler, Bert Oram, Benn Levy, Sidney Silverman, Ian Mikardo, Sybil Wingate, Eric Messer, Hugh Jenkins, Russell Kerv, Ralph Miliband, Walter Wolfgang, Geoffrey Drain, Konni Zilliacus, Sydney Hyam, Frank Allaun, Howell James, Lyn Moston, Ted Bedford, Jo Richardson, Elizabeth Thomas, Donald Soper, George Doughty, Judith Hart and Ray Shaw. Data from Jo Richardson Papers, Labour Party Archives, Victory For Socialism General Purposes Committee Mins, 3 March 1958.
81. Ellison, op. cit., p.59.
82. Ibid.
83. *Tribune*, 21 February 1958.
84. Ibid.

85. Ellison, op. cit. p.60.
86. *Tribune*, 21 February 1958.
87. J. Morgan (ed.), *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, (London, 1981), p.668.
88. Ibid, p.669.
89. Brivati, op. cit., pp.318-19.
90. Morgan (ed.). op. cit., p.669.
91. Morgan Phillips to Stephen Swingler, 26 February 1958, GS/VS/73.
92. Stephen Swingler to Morgan Phillips, 27 February 1958, GS/VS/74.
93. VFS Rallies, 11 March 1958, GS/VS/162i.
94. Stephen Swingler to Secretaries of CLPs, 27 February 1958, GS/VS/85.
95. Sydney Silverman to Morgan Phillips 11 July 1960, GS/VS/167.
96. M. Jones, *Michael Foot* (London, 1994), p.229.
97. Ibid., pp.254-255.
98. *Tribune*, 21 February 1958.
99. Sydney Silverman to Morgan Phillips, 11 July 1960, GS/VS/167i.
100. S. Howe, *Anti Colonialism in British Politics: the Left and the End of Empire 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993), p.262.
101. VFS Draft Articles File, Jo Richardson Papers.
102. Ibid.
103. Victory For Socialism, *Industry Your Servant* (1957), p.3.
104. Ibid., p.4.
105. Ibid., p.7.
106. Ibid., p.8.
107. Ibid., p.8.
108. Ibid., p.9.

109. Ibid., p.10.
110. Ibid., p.13.
111. Crossman Diary, 28 February 1958, in J. Morgan (ed.), *Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (London, 1981), p.669.
112. VFS Draft Articles File, Jo Richardson Papers.
113. Ibid., 'Crisis in the Labour Party'. p.7.
114. Ibid., p.10.
115. Brivati, op. cit., p.366.
116. Morgan (ed.), op. cit., p.859.
117. Benn Diary, 29 June 1960, in R. Winstone (ed.), *Tony Benn Years Of Hope. Diaries 1940 - 1962*. (London 1994), p.333.
118. Morgan (ed.), op. cit., p.860.
119. *New Statesman*. 12 October 1957, quoted in Ellison, op. cit., p.61.
120. K. Jefferys, *British History in Perspective. The Labour Party since 1945* (London, 1993), p.53.
121. Brivati, op. cit., p.382.
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CHAPTER THREE

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 - Clause IV, part 4, of the Labour Party Constitution, 1918-95

GAITSKELL'S LEADERSHIP AND THE REVISIONIST VISION 1959-1960.

This chapter examines attempts made to reform and alter the balance of the Labour Party and its policies during and after the renewed outbreak of internal conflict between 1959 and 1960. If Crossman was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Bevan and the left's failure to create a constructive policy, so Crosland felt that Gaitskell was missing an opportunity to take the party forward with a unifying and constructive revisionism. Gaitskell's leadership has been attacked by Howell and others on the left 'unlike Attlee whose main concern was to keep in check Labour's divisive tendencies by offering leadership that was unattached to any group, Gaitskell used his position to promote a specific and controversial interpretation of labour doctrine'.¹ Gaitskell's biographers have been less critical. Brivati felt that 'for Gaitskell the concept of leadership was not simply to reconcile the opposing sides but to educate the Labour Party, by force of argument.'² Thus Brivati chastises the left's reaction - rather than Gaitskell's leadership qualities - in what he sees as Gaitskell's attempt to re-invigorate the party immediately after the 1959 general election defeat. Brivati lists those present at the meeting after the 1959 election which he describes as an 'informal 'post mortem''. Here Gaitskell 'wanted to talk things over with his friends and colleagues and begin to think about the future'.³ Whilst acknowledging 'it would perhaps have been better if Gaitskell had taken charge and organised his supporters' response to defeat', Brivati blames the left for believing that the weekend was to bring about the revisionist 'revolution in the ideological shape of the Labour Party'. The left felt this would be

'achieved by abandoning the commitment to nationalisation, breaking links with the trade unions and even forging an alliance with the Liberal Party'.⁴ Williams also argues that internal differences were 'not over domestic policy at all'. But those who argue 'for' revisionism or 'for' the left omit a key point, which places Gaitskell's leadership in an even more critical perspective. He was being pushed to develop a more constructive approach, a more positive policy: what he did instead was react angrily, vacillate, and irritate even his strongest supporters. He neither promoted revisionism, as Howell argues, nor educated the party, as Brivati has stated.

Gaitskell did not encourage Douglas Jay to argue for a revisionist approach which even included changing the party's name. He did not ask him to publish this proposal in *Forward*. But he did not condemn it either. Gaitskell allowed the battlegrounds to be drawn, attitudes to harden. Bevan was no better. He remained a reluctant Bevanite, displaying a 'conscientious effort to play the part of loyal front bencher'.⁵ At the same time, he did nothing to attack VFS and his old allies. The Tribunate left clung steadfastly to their demand for nationalisation, and the increasingly articulate centre left refuted the right's claim that a more socially acceptable society had emerged. It has been argued above that there was a 'sizeable 'centre' element within the party - many of whom believed that feuding was...futile' and that, 'at the heart of the bitterness...were differences of political style and emphasis, compounded by a rapid hardening of individual loyalties'.⁶ As Douglas Jay noted the 'protagonists know which side they are on, but usually can not remember why it all started'.⁷ There was an opportunity to mend these fences. Using hitherto unavailable sources, this chapter shows that Gaitskell did little to stop the factional fighting, even when he was encouraged to give a lead. Tony Crosland in particular sought to crush a narrow and bitter conflict, with a restatement of a radical reformism. Whilst

Crosland also encouraged Gaitskell to embrace a managerial system which limited the power of the unreconcilable left (an approach adopted later by Kinnock, Smith and Blair) Gaitskell resented the mild and constructive criticism which he offered. There is little detailed analysis of Gaitskell's inability to receive advice from his most trusted advisor in existing studies, though 'his habit of treating anybody who was not an uncritical supporter as a moral outcast as well as an enemy' has been noted.⁸ Indeed, Gaitskell chose to fight for the ascendancy of the parliamentary party against an increasingly restive and difficult group of party members, reflecting the managerial errors and confrontational politics adopted by MacDonald in the 1930-31. Thus this chapter shows how Gaitskell missed an opportunity to build on the left's weakened position, leaving others (like Wilson) to make the case for a 'unifying' reformism of neither left nor right.

I

Gaitskell's accession to the leadership in December 1955 did much to re-enforce the revisionists' stranglehold on the party. The election defeat earlier in the year was used to further weaken the left, and Hamilton has subscribed to the view that the Conservatives' victory 'led to the ascendancy of revisionism within the party'.⁹ Indeed, the general consensus of opinion amongst historians is that the right wing of the Labour Party was both progressive and organised during the Gaitskell years. However, the idea that the right was a cohesive and well organised unit must be questioned during the early period of Gaitskell's leadership. NEC elections showed that revisionists lacked strength. Nor did revisionists dominate the shadow cabinet, which included deputy leaders with a broader appeal (such as Morrison or Griffiths). If some urged Gaitskell to take a more decisive line, others always urged reconciliation through a 'new' centre

left approach. As early as 1952, Sir Richard Acland had told Gaitskell that

‘The world situation is such that Britain’s future, not for a year or two, but for several decades, is bound to be at least as hard if not harder than her present...On top of the economic inevitabilities, our inescapable moral obligation to under-developed countries must make the next couple of decades even harder economically than they would otherwise be. For these reasons...we need further measures of common ownership and of deliberate social control; for in hard times we cannot economically afford the waste of capitalism nor morally can we afford its spivvery. This line of thought (1) + (2) is markedly different from “Bevanism”...It is also markedly different from “Orthodoxy”...it is therefore a very great advantage that the emerging line of thought does not require that anyone involved in the present disputations should metaphorically kneel to anyone else involved and say: “you were dead right all the time and I was dead wrong”’.¹⁰

By May 1960, Tony Crosland was writing to Gaitskell (not for the first time), expressing both concern and disappointment at his leadership style, and more pertinently at some of his recent blunders. Crosland called for Gaitskell to modernise the Labour Party machine at Transport House and at the top level of operations. He was keen to see a series of structures set in place which would alleviate the burden placed on the party leader. Crosland was forthright in his approach, stating from the outset that ‘recent events demonstrate that your leadership still lacks a proper system of Intelligence and Forward Planning’.¹¹ His message was skilfully delivered. His criticism was clear enough. However he argued that there was a ready solution and that it could come from within the revisionist group. He felt that by laying down a proper system of internal advisors, and by employing the correct people in the correct positions, forward planning would be achieved. Gaitskell would remain well informed, and his recent gaffes would not be repeated. Crosland contended that some of Gaitskell’s performances in the Commons were hopelessly mis-informed. Firstly, Gaitskell had stated that the Blue Streak debate could not be lengthened in time or widened in scope due to a previous decision made by the parliamentary party. In fact, the debate had already been both lengthened and widened. Second, Gaitskell had

missed important news. He had stated 'that a shift of ground on the independent deterrent would cause trouble on the Parliamentary Committee and would probably cause George Brown to resign'.¹² However, George Brown had already changed his mind on this issue. In Gaitskell's defence he had been absent from Britain on foreign visits to New York, Paris and Haifa, but Crosland questioned the wisdom of Gaitskell's comments and pointed to his weak intelligence-gathering system.

Crosland was worried about Labour's lack of progress during the seven months following the 1959 defeat at the polls. He argued that during that time

'we have suffered a major defeat over Clause 4; we are now fighting an unplanned defensive battle over the H-bomb; we have achieved not one single one of the positive reforms which the moderates wanted (a change in the composition of the N.E.C. and Parliamentary Party, a new set up at Transport House, a systematic study of survey material, etc., etc.); your own position is weaker, and you yourself more criticised, than at any stage since you assumed the leadership; and the morale of the Right-wing is appallingly low...I am sure we would have done significantly better with a more organised system of intelligence and forward planning'.¹³

Crosland pointed out that Gaitskell held a virtually unique (if unenviable) position: 'that almost alone of political leaders in the whole world you have no full time staff'.¹⁴ For the man widely credited for his modernising zeal, this was an incredible position. Crosland demanded Gaitskell appoint a chief of staff who was a proven tactician and a quality party manager. It was a role which had been filled by Morrison during the Attlee administration. Crosland felt that the formal party machinery (N.E.C., Transport House and Parliamentary Committees) did not always serve Gaitskell effectively. He believed Gaitskell had to operate outside the traditional party machine. He argued that the N.E.C. and the Parliamentary Committees were weak, making imperative 'the creation by you personally of an alternative, personal and informal, machinery'.¹⁵ He wanted

individuals to be carefully chosen to become experts in certain fields, and to serve and inform Gaitskell. He felt areas of policy, reform of the party constitution and or public relations could benefit from continuous work by sub-committees. Crosland was aware of the party's many failings, and was partly stung into action by the findings of Butler and Rose's analysis of the 1959 General Election. This did not make happy reading for the Labour Party. Crosland argued that a small sub-committee of private individuals should be established to report to Gaitskell on Labour's appalling weaknesses in the field of public relations. He also felt more could be done by identifying public opinion through opinion polls, an area in which the Tories were active. Indeed, Crosland was aware that the Conservative Party had proved consistently more efficient and better organised than the Labour Party. He was keen to match their more professional approach. He felt that following the 1959 election defeat, a major weakness in the Labour Party was the 'total lack of any overall plan for changing the party'. He maintained that since the defeat for the right over Clause IV 'we have neither achieved nor indeed scarcely attempted, anything else. It is a sad contrast to the systematic efforts of Butler - Woolton - M. Fyfe after 1945'.¹⁶

Crosland felt it imperative that Gaitskell take the lead, and meet informally with a group of trusted figures ('Morgan Phillips, Harold Wilson(??) G. Walker, Tom Williamsom, and Webber or Birch'¹⁷) to discuss what changes were needed in the party. Though he acknowledged such a set up could lead to petty jealousies, he felt it was a small price to pay for the sort of effective leadership which would reverse the slide in party fortunes. In effect, Crosland was attempting to secure Gaitskell's long term position and implement an effective managerial system. Gaitskell's need for this is noted almost - by Williams:

'His tiny staff also worked hard. On a senior level he had no one until 1959, when John Harris came for the election campaign. Harris stayed on afterwards as personal assistant, public relations adviser and link-man with the press. Gaitskell's PPS was normally a fairly elderly trade unionist MP...and was used as a sounding-board for opinion in the PLP but not much for substantive matters'.¹⁸

Crosland was keen for Gaitskell to gain the confidence of more Labour members, whilst also attempting to win constituency support for the Gaitskellite revolution. He felt it was essential to gain control of the NEC and to ensure revisionists were selected as candidates in newly vacant constituency seats. He told Gaitskell 'Our greatest weakness continues to be the lack of machine-organiser-boss-figure...I am still tempted by Callaghan'. However, he went on to stress 'we must have a better system whereby a definite plan is made for every vacant seat. I feel very strongly that Gordon Walker should be formally asked by the leader to look after this'.¹⁹ He stated that 'every selection for a Labour seat must now be treated as a major operation, involving concerted action by yourself (through the National Agent)...We have let seats go by default in the past; we must never do so again'.²⁰ Gaitskell's tenure as Labour leader was the major concern of his chief strategist. Crosland laid down the objectives which he considered essential to Gaitskell's long term position. Before that year's Labour Party conference, the priority would be to strengthen Gaitskell's position in the PLP and elsewhere. Also imperative to the process was reversing Scarborough, 'by getting 2-3 block votes to switch while maintaining our hold of C.L.P.s', and strengthening the NEC, by ensuring moderates and Gaitskell sympathisers replaced those less likely to offer support to the Gaitskell regime. Crosland was particularly keen to change the make-up of the CLP section. After the conference, Crosland suggested a more ruthless approach, establishing 'absolute control over the PLP, which means your being re-elected leader by a substantially bigger majority...and expelling a section

of the extreme Left'. Once the control of the party was secured, Crosland felt the path would be clear to return to 'revisionism and modernisation'.²¹ Crosland believed that the fight against the left had left Gaitskell's speeches sounding inanely Conservative.

In order to win more union support, Crosland recommended that Gaitskell and George Brown meet with the more critical element within the unions and attempt to allow them to state exactly what they wanted from Labour. Crosland felt it would be a difficult but not impossible task. USDAW held the first union conference. This meant that attempts to win over Walter Padley, the crucial figure there, should begin immediately. Difficulties over the party's defence policy, faced by the revisionists at Scarborough, had to be avoided. Crosland felt that the need to reverse Scarborough, would be easier if a good deal of detail was dropped from the party's defence policy. He felt the 'ideal Labour defence statement would therefore be very brief'. He warned that detailed policies on defence could soon be rendered obsolete by new weaponry or strategic thinking. Crosland also argued that 'the greater the detail, the stronger the pressure for compromise formulae and papering over the cracks'.²²

Most of the blame for the party's malaise was laid at the door of the left, a group Crosland regarded as simply 'too strong'. The situation was both damaging and restrictive. He felt the progressive, revisionist element was constantly forced into compromises. He complained bitterly that the left 'constantly pulls us towards the left when the electorate is moving right...it makes the party virtually ungovernable'. Combined with his disappointment at Gaitskell's performance, these must have been trying times for Crosland, who felt opportunities had not been taken. There was still hope. He argued that the anti-leadership (and hence anti-revisionist)

section of the Labour Party did not simply consist of rabid irreconcilable left-wingers out to damage the party's right wing leadership. Crosland's analysis suggested that the left was a real mix. It contained roughly 10-15 genuine pacifists. He magnanimously stated that they 'of course must be allowed to stay in the party'. There was also a small group of 'malcontents...too trivial to worry about'. Those causing most concern were the twenty or so 'hard boiled extreme left, stretching from genuine fellow travellers to Tribune extremists'. Here, Crosland's benevolent mood ran out, as he bluntly stated: 'This is the crucial group which must be expelled - the whole of it; ie we want Tribune out of the party as well as VFS'. Whilst Crosland acknowledged that some might avoid expulsion, he stated: 'we must do the best we can'. Crosland was not pulling his punches. He wanted a purge on the opposition from within Labour's ranks which would send a message to others and simultaneously secure the revisionists' position at the party's helm. Crosland accepted, but was hardly positive about, Crossman and some others seen in this thesis as constructive reformers. He regarded a group of '30 New Statesmen or ex-ILP (Crossman, Greenwood, Wilson, sometimes Padley, etc.)...[as] intolerable and neurotic people who will always oppose us, but who nevertheless belong in the party'. He distinguished between this group and the group he regarded as the centre left. Crosland felt that only 10-15 people made up the Left of centre. He was keen to win the support of this group, which he felt had supported Wilson on his 'unity and compromise' stance when he stood as deputy leader in 1960. Whilst he acknowledged that the left's opposition could be defeated through the union block vote, he accepted that 'this is not adequate as a long-run tactic'. He felt that the Labour Party had to present a united front if it were to be attractive to the electorate; again recognising that relying on trade union 'hatchets is absolutely fatal electorally'. The job for the revisionists, and more pertinently for Gaitskell was 'to seduce some of [the *New*

Statesman and ex-ILP group],..to win over [the left of centre] completely, and of course to consolidate' your supporters. Crosland stated that, '*THE CRUCIAL TASK FOR THE NEXT YEAR IS TO ISOLATE THE EXTREME LEFT WING AND WIN BACK OR CONSOLIDATE THE LEFT-CENTRE*'.²³

Crosland certainly placed the onus for improvement on Gaitskell. He stated that personal contacts and consultation were the way forward, and that Gaitskell would occasionally have to swallow his pride or disguise personal dislike in order to achieve greater stability, and increase his personal support. Gaitskell was again told in no uncertain terms about the importance of his actions: 'if you can't do this, hateful as it is, you have no right to be political leader'. Trade union figures and politicians were targeted. A tough pragmatism should be the key to Gaitskell's future actions.

It was not an implausible suggestion that Gaitskell could unite sections of the party. Gaitskell was never opposed to all nationalisation.²⁴ He was known a known defender of the rights of coloured immigrants, attracting respect from people on the left in the process.²⁵ Similarly, on Europe and on Suez he was in tune with many on the left of the party.²⁶ Hence, if he could counter the impressions created in the recent past, there was some common ground.

Gaitskell's reluctance to take a recognisable opportunity were widely identified. His inability to deal with any form of criticism is reinforced by Patrick Gordon Walker, who wrote in his diary, 'I begin to fear that G [aitskell] has the seeds of self destruction in him - he almost wants to destroy himself...He is becoming distrustful and angry with his best friends and wants

to take up absolute and categorical positions that will alienate all but a handful'.²⁷ In a letter to Crosland, Tony Benn was also critical of Gaitskell's approach. He stated that he had worked assiduously for Gaitskell for ten years, and had voted for him in 1955 following Attlee's resignation. However, by the end of 1960, Benn was telling Crosland 'I am voting for Harold Wilson this time and could not possibly vote for Hugh'.²⁸ For Benn, it was Gaitskell's approach, rather than the substance of what he was saying which had alienated him. Benn's comments need to be quoted at length

'this has been a year when Hugh could have won the party over to do what he wanted if only he had gone about it the right way...The mistake he made at Blackpool was not that he raised Clause 4, but that his whole approach was wrong...We've got to face it, the public won't stomach it anymore. We are out of date...If he had said instead something like...We are entering the sixties and these are the problems of the sixties...here are the urgent tasks to be done and only the Labour Party can do them...the effect would have been electric...Instead, his speech descended into a wet blanket over a parrot's cage, damping our enthusiasm and shutting out the light. People like Dick Crossman and myself, who were urging modernisation and reform...had to withdraw...It's hard to believe...that he really wanted the Clause 4 thing to go smoothly. If he was anxious about it, it might have been more sensible to have consulted a few people who could have helped...after the conference, he is pledged to a course which will repeat the Clause 4 controversy...will stir the deepest resistance in the party and kill any prospect of modernisation...This has nothing to do with old-fashioned Socialism or our class image. It's a simple question of leadership and confidence. It's no good winning the argument. You've got to win the hearts of the party...if you really dislike and distrust a very large part of your party you can never lead it...It need never have happened, if only he had been prepared to consult, to listen and most of all to try to understand. I have tried hard enough in talking to him and writing to him over the year to get across my ideas. But I never felt they made the slightest impact...He sees things as a conspiracy against himself...it is just conceivable that he might be able to salvage his position...he will have another year in which to try...for the sake of the party - I hope he succeeds'.²⁹

Benn also wrote to Gaitskell, to explain his reasons for supporting Wilson in the leadership contest. Gaitskell's reply reflects his style, 'Thank you for your letter of the 28 October. I appreciate the spirit in which it is written, but I don't propose to reply'.³⁰

Wilson's leadership challenge (November 1960) was a clear expression of the belief within the Labour Party that there was another way - an alternative to Gaitskell. Following the now infamous - post 1959 election Froggnall meeting, at which Jay proposed a change of party name and an essentially Liberal approach, Wilson attempted to gain cross party support based on unifying the fractured party. Wilson also acted out of self preservation, having discovered from Crossman that Gaitskell planned to 'move Wilson' from shadow chancellor.³¹ Wilson played the unity card in his campaign and in doing so (ironically) provoked bitter tensions. As Pimlott states, 'the Gaitskellites never forgave him for treachery, he never forgot their hatred'.³² Crosland provided sound advice to Gaitskell, making him aware that the degree of his victory would dictate 'our possibilities over the next twelve months'. Crosland was quite categoric and totally unabashed in stating: 'to make sure his vote is as low as possible...we must resort to any degree of chicanery, lying etc. etc.'.³³ Crosland was also only too well aware of the likely approach of the Wilson camp, again bluntly stating that

'Wilson has one obvious and powerful tactical line: to paint you as intransigent and the man who is splitting the party, so to seduce the centre and leave you isolated on the right. To avoid this (as we failed to do over Clause 4) is our essential tactic'.

For Crosland, then, personality and leadership style was all important. Gaitskell had to avoid isolation, and link himself with '(i) Brown - Callaghan (ii) Reynolds - Prentice - M Stewart (iii) as many T.U. leaders as possible'.³⁴ Significantly, Wilson polled 81 votes to Gaitskell's 157, an appreciably better result than Bevan's challenge to Gaitskell in 1955.

Crosland was prepared to shoulder some of the blame for Labour's failure. He had written to Gaitskell, beginning 'Dear Hugh, my long letters have no effect, so this is a short one!'

Crosland stated that 'we were wrong (all of us) to go for doctrine; we should have gone for power'. In order to attain that power, Crosland persisted with his argument that Gaitskell must strengthen his position through 'systematic alliances'. Crosland hoped that Gaitskell would invite George Brown, Harold Wilson and James Callaghan

'for a talk...and say 'let's forget our disagreements over Clause 4 - that's all water under the bridge we're all intelligent enough to realise major changes are needed if the party is ever to win another election. Are you prepared to join me in a collective, systematic effort to get (1) change in relationship between NEC and Parl Cttee. (2) some method of avoiding domination of party politics by TU conference from Easter onwards (either change date of conf). (3) System of direct appointment by you to Parl Cttee. (4) Major reform of Tpt House. (5) Wholly new policy on public relations'.³⁵

Not for the first time, Crosland's seriously thought out deliberations based on securing Gaitskell's long term future received short shrift. Gaitskell's brief reply focused on his worries about the three people Crosland wanted him to work alongside. Gaitskell stated 'it would not be safe for me to speak frankly to them...one or other might use this against us in the present struggle'.³⁶

Importantly, Crosland increasingly viewed himself as detached from Gaitskell and his clique. Indeed, by the end of 1960, he had ascribed to the view (shared by many) 'that the middle class leadership (yourself, Gordon-Walker, Soskise, etc) is leading from an extreme and rather rigid Right-wing position,...[which] has no emotional desire to change any major aspect of the society in which we are living. The element of radicalism and discontent...seems lacking; even Kennedy sounds more radical than we do'.³⁷ By changing the nature of his speeches and policies, Crosland suggested that Gaitskell might begin to win back some of those erstwhile supporters. Moreover, Crosland's comments - notably on the need for pragmatic leadership on

an ethical basis and sense of radicalism - show he and those like him could find some common ground with the centre left. The problem was getting Gaitskell to act on such ideas.

Crosland felt that the leadership had to continue to fight hard on traditional issues such as pensions and rents, in order to satisfy traditional supporters amongst both the trade unions and MPs. He maintained that Labour under Gaitskell's leadership remained far too conservative. He told Gaitskell that 'we have been far more conservative than the Liberals, the Observer and even the Economist. It is Grimond, and not any of our own leaders, who make speeches about the public schools, the House of Lords and social privilege generally'.³⁸ Crosland advocated a coy tactical move. He insisted that an 'artificial move to the left' was certainly not wanted. However, he felt a certain amount of 'artificial dialectic' was required, and that 'as a matter of tactics, a certain move to the left is required'. Whilst stressing that it would be politically disastrous for Gaitskell to 'simulate left wing rhetorical anger', Crosland felt it was imperative that Gaitskell portray a more radical image. Thus, whilst Crosland was ideologically in favour of change he also emerges in a strategic role. He went on to suggest that 'in the next few months you should make a series of major and radical policy speeches...the obvious subjects are (a) Galbraith, (b) reactionary trends in the distribution of income, (c) rate of growth and Britain being second-rate, (d) town and country planning, (e) education, (f) Europe, (g) multilateral disarmament, (h) U.N. and World Government. They should be informed by one consistent theme - a radical protest against the terrible conservatism and complacency of British society'.³⁹ Crosland likened his proposals to Kennedy's campaign in America, and believed this was the correct course of action for a number of reasons. He sensed that such a course would also attract all important floating voters, including the middle-classes who seemed to have been increasingly

disenchanted with Labour.

In another parallel with subsequent shifts in Labour's managerial style, Crosland argued for tighter control of the party's composition and discipline. Crosland firmly believed that if Gaitskell took the initiative in such a way, he would win over many in the left of centre group, whilst deflecting attention away from the defence issue. Without such support, the revisionists could not begin to administer long-term changes to the Labour Party's policies and image. Different friendly groups, mainly revisionist, were to operate to produce a smoother running machine for the leadership. The Reynolds group⁴⁰ would organise inside parliament, pushing for support, winning votes, and ensuring revisionist policies were better received and co-ordinated. The Manifesto group (originally, a rebellious anti Clause IV group) had become more sympathetic towards the Gaitskell line, not least because of Crosland's close links with them; it would organise outside parliament, ensuring the right messages were delivered to reporters, and also maintaining a steady flow of tactical advice to Gaitskell.

Yet Crosland was not simply advocating a revisionist assault. This was a starting point only. Making the party a force meant attempting to make everyone pull in the same direction. He recognised that those traditionally opposed to the revisionists still had qualities to offer, and that giving them a modernising role could bring them 'on board'. Tony Benn was suggested as an important figure to win round. Crosland hoped Gaitskell would tap his undoubted expertise and consult him on the 'whole question of public relations, propaganda and reform of the machine, on which he holds quite enlightened views'.⁴¹ Crossman could be targeted for his public relations skills and his interest in opinion polls. Crosland also believed closer relations

between Gaitskell and Crossman would 'ease the position on the NEC'.⁴² Most interesting of all, Crosland felt Bevan could be approached for his contacts with the press. Just as Percy Cudlipp had served Attlee, so Crosland imagined Bevan could serve Gaitskell. His analysis of Bevan was that 'he is potentially absolutely all right, but undoubtedly needs a bit of jollyng along. (After all, he's Welsh)'.

What is particularly apparent is that Crosland returns time and again to the necessity for Gaitskell to make himself more easily available to members of his own party. Crosland recognised that personal relations were not Gaitskell's strong point and he stressed the importance of improving his relations with a number of Labour figures. Crosland felt he should ignore his 'personal dislike of some them'. He also reminded Gaitskell that 'Wilson makes it very easy for them to have close contact with him'. On the subject of relations with the press, Gaitskell was reminded that 'it is possible that Wilson spends more time with pressmen than you do'. It would appear that Gaitskell's aloof nature was a stumbling block to progress. Indeed, Brivati highlights Gaitskell's lack of personnel skills when he describes an incident in the relationship between Gaitskell and his 'champion' Crosland. Crosland had found himself without a constituency following his decision to abandon his South Gloucestershire seat for what was apparently the better bet of Southampton (which he lost in 1959). Gaitskell was desperate to secure a return to the Commons for Crosland at the earliest opportunity. 'When Kenneth Younger, the MP for Grimsby and colleague of Gaitskell's from the Attlee government, came to see the leader to tell him he did not intend to stand again, 'Gaitskell devoted exactly one sentence to expressing regret before asking Younger whether he thought the seat could be won by Tony Crosland'.⁴³

Crosland was clearly attempting to re-cast Gaitskell as an approachable and radical leader. He saw a break between Gaitskell and the Hampstead Set as a prerequisite of this process. Crosland urged Gaitskell not to waste valuable time meeting members of the group on an individual basis. He felt they were counter productive, a group with 'few contacts' and a 'clear liability'. He continued - 'the more you dissociate yourself from them, the better'.⁴⁴ Crosland hoped that Gaitskell would be able to find more time to listen to people's opinion within the party. By employing his deputy leader properly, he argued that some of the more mundane administrative jobs would be done for him. He urged Gaitskell to create a small group of key people with whom he would meet once a week to discuss strategy and tactical planning. Crosland was desperate to see a system in place which supported Gaitskell and his role as leader. By establishing such a group, Crosland felt that responsibility for intelligence, liaison and planning would be shared. He even provided Gaitskell with an alternative, in the form of an unofficial chief of staff should he have been reluctant to make use of the group system. Naturally he saw a role for himself in this, but he was also genuinely concerned with the short-term consolidation of support and longer-term reconstruction of the party's message and image.

Crosland felt the continuing failure to consolidate support was not the consequence of ideological division or of huge internal rifts. The problem was Gaitskell. Gaitskell's reply to Crosland's proposals suggests that he had not taken the criticism well. He rejected much of what Crosland had offered, believing that opposition within the party was far greater than Crosland had realised. Gaitskell did concede: 'We need more allies and, of course, more foresight. But we need more than a few friends at the top. We need first a much clearer appreciation of (a) how

we propose...to win the next Election'.⁴⁵ Gaitskell even suggested that Crosland was partly to blame for the lack of progress, because, 'I asked a long time ago that you and your young intellectual friends should work on this - but I can't see the results yet. Your pamphlet was excellent...but is still too vague on practical proposals'.⁴⁶ Crosland's frustration that Gaitskell had not replied to his earlier letters, let alone acted on them, was answered in a way which suggests that Gaitskell's social skills and man-management left a good deal to be desired. He told Crosland that the reason he did not reply or act on his previous letters 'was that most of the proposals were (1) based on ignorance of the facts, (2) not sufficiently realistic. (3) too vague and abstract...I did...think about them, though I admit that your second letter made me angry at the time'.⁴⁷ Gaitskell ended by asking Crosland to take a more pro-active role in day to day politics, an area which he seems to have found tedious. In calling for 'more questions and speeches from Crosland in the House and at party meetings',⁴⁸ Gaitskell failed to see how to make best use of one of his most high profile and potentially most effective players.

Dissatisfaction mounted. In 1961 Gaitskell easily shrugged off a leadership challenge from Anthony Greenwood, whilst his chosen deputy - George Brown - easily defeated Barbara Castle. However, when Wilson stood against Brown in November 1962, he was defeated by just 30 votes. If the left (represented by Castle) was not gaining ground, the centre-left (represented by Wilson) was doing so.

II

Gaitskell's ambiguous approach was reflected in that of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS), the right's equivalent of 'Victory for Socialism'. This provided neither the constituency support necessary to wage war against the left, nor the encouragement to

compromise with the constructive elements around Crossman. Attempts to increase the level of support for Gaitskell and the right wing of the party became increasingly the preserve of the CDS. The group had bold aims and lacked no ambition. In its infancy, the group was made up of thirteen members. Four were MPs, who were all 'leading members of the Hampstead Set'⁴⁹. They were Douglas Jay, Roy Jenkins, Patrick Gordon Walker and Tony Crosland. The latter two were the key figures, 'the rest journalists, local councillors, and little known parliamentary candidates; all were highly articulate'.⁵⁰ They planned a properly staffed and equipped London office, with regional representatives who would act as agents and work to produce good relations between the group and MPs. The group had been established after the Scarborough conference defeat on the defence issue in 1960, and fought to gain support for the revisionists' support for collective security and the Western Alliance. The group also formed close links with *Socialist Commentary*, and thus had a journal which advocated their beliefs. CDS was keen to match what it saw the superior left wing organisation of Victory for Socialism.

CDS regarded *Tribune* as a tremendous propaganda weapon. Its own newsletter was limited both in readership and numbers of publication.⁵¹ When *Socialist Commentary's* editors, Allan Flanders and Rita Hinden, closely associated themselves and the paper with revisionism CDS leaders were delighted. Ellison rightly states that the choice of policies which *Socialist Commentary* would support 'owed much to the relationship with the Gaitskellites which began in the early 1950s and continued for many years after Gaitskell's death'.⁵² *Socialist Commentary* consistently published articles and editorials which criticised the Bevanites for their approach to nationalisation and because of the centrality of this issue to their socialism. Following the 1951 defeat, Hinden felt that 'we have come to the end of an epoch...the great crusading Socialist ideas

of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century have been so digested into British life and thought that they are now common currency of all political parties...the social services, once a Utopia in the minds of socialist fighters, are there, firmly embedded in our national life...the key industries have been nationalised...in short, socialist ideas have triumphed'.⁵³ Hinden felt the result of these 'achievements' was that the party was caught in a 'blind alley'. She was consistently disappointed by the fact that the Labour Party did not seem to be offering any 'new vista for tomorrow'. Her answer, like that of the revisionists, was to target the inequalities which still existed in society. Hinden felt possession of wealth remained a huge source of inequality, and saw inequality as manifest throughout society. Housing, education, social advantages, the workplace, and the amenities and cultural treasures people had access to, - all were areas of inequality. The call for change in the party's outlook and the demand to examine how best to improve society remained a common feature. Certainly *Socialist Commentary* felt that at the next general election, Labour could not 'go forward again on our past record; the movement - and the country - awaits a new lead and a revived inspiration'.⁵⁴

The Labour Party toned down its commitment to nationalisation throughout this period. Its rebuke of public ownership was reflected in numerous *Socialist Commentary* articles. Over-centralisation was criticised, with a call for British nationalised industries to learn to allow managers greater freedom to manage by increasing their 'independence, authority and responsibility to make it possible for co-ordination and planning to be carried out by effective working teams all over the country'.⁵⁵ In the immediate post-1951 election defeat period, the aim of those writing in *Socialist Commentary* was to improve the existing nationalised industries. This included greater long-term planning, the 'introduction of specialists, scientific management

methods and the organisation of research'.⁵⁶ Hardly uniquely, it felt that entering into opposition the Labour Party had the perfect opportunity to examine the nationalisation experience in a detached and objective manner.

Socialist Commentary felt nationalisation was a liability. Labour MP Fred Mulley aired his view that whilst nationalisation remained important 'there are ...other aims which, at this stage must be given greater importance'.⁵⁷ Mulley was keen to look at different forms of public ownership as well as partial ownership. He was not prepared to advocate a list of industries to nationalise, a path he regarded as dangerous. Mulley felt that going to the electorate with a list of definite proposals would leave Labour with a mandate they would be obliged to stick to. He argued that 'we could not take over industries or firms not originally envisaged, however urgent this might become under changed circumstances'.⁵⁸

Following the General Election defeat in 1955, the revisionist grip on the party grew stronger. In line with the revisionists, *Socialist Commentary* insisted that Labour 'must be forward-looking' if it was to begin winning elections again. Playing on the fears of the past was seen as out-dated and unattractive. The old fears which had haunted previous generations - unemployment and mass poverty - had been dealt with. *Socialist Commentary* argued that the British public had moved on, the world was rapidly modernising and the electorate now saw 'no inevitable connection between nationalisation and planning...and a better life for themselves and their children. They want a policy which...seems relevant to their own times'.⁵⁹ *Socialist Commentary's* editorial presumed that increasing affluence had changed society and created a more consumer conscious public. This shift was something they believed Labour had to come

to terms with, for it was argued that 'good things are coming within everyone's grasp, the main pre-occupation is how to grasp them and to surround oneself with more and more possessions'.⁶⁰ The conundrum for Labour was not simply how to win elections (the non-ideological way being 'compete with the Conservatives in the race for personal and material satisfactions') but how to win them whilst insuring further socialist advance. The party required broad and radical policies aimed at equality. However, at a time when *Socialist Commentary's* writers were accepting the embourgeoisement thesis, they were failing to recognise its implications. The socialism they were demanding was one whose 'basic appeal is not to class, but to conscience and community'.⁶¹ In which case, they might have argued, it was necessary to gain as members all with a moral aim and community interest.

Theoretically, involvement of constituency activists was high on the agenda for CDS. Distributing manifestos, and asking for replies, was to be the first point of contact, but the group hoped to build up its core support and establish 'local groups of supporters in the main urban centres and wherever there is a sufficient nucleus'. The group was also keen to use the press to raise its profile, and to lift the morale of its local supporters. Without the press CDS recognised they would have little contact with the rank and file.⁶² Aware of the impact which the left wing Brains Trust had had on the constituencies, CDS did plan to send some of their key figures on tours in order to secure more support and establish local groups. The group planned a regular monthly meeting with Rita Hinden, the *Socialist Commentary* editor. Yet despite the evidently close correspondence between this group and Gaitskell and Crosland, it never really became a force for change. Although CDS were not just aiming at the intelligent readership of *Socialist Commentary* it reached few party members. Their early plan of action stated: 'it has been agreed

that we should publish propaganda material in a form simple enough for the least articulate members of the party to use'.⁶³ However, as the tone indicates, it was an elitist and disparaging group. The first phase of the operation was an attempt to establish cordial relations with as many people as possible. The group planned 'friendly relations -at least...tolerance-with...people...in key positions'.⁶⁴ It never got passed stage one. It was thus a group designed not to prompt Gaitskell into action, to be a constructive critic, or even to fight in the constituencies but to loyally support a beleaguered idol - and further the contacts of its principle leaders.

Brian Magee (a signatory to the group's manifesto) perhaps best encapsulates the views of the group: 'there were two short-term aims of reversing the conference decision on unilateralism and maintaining the leadership of Hugh Gaitskell'.⁶⁵ Lord Donoughue, a CDS, organiser reiterated the group's absolute commitment to Gaitskell. He stated that the group was 'very much...an organisation designed to fight on behalf of Gaitskell'.⁶⁶ Lord Donoughue also revealed his own belief in the need to modernise the Labour Party and gain power: 'I had campaigned with Kennedy in Massachusetts...when you come back from America the Labour Party really did look like something out of a museum. That was really very important. The need to win an election'.⁶⁷ However, and despite some claims to the contrary, CDS was limited as a constituency movement. As Patrick Seyd states, 'essentially CDS was...happy to manipulate opinion within the party amongst a small group of people. It did not actually go out and attempt to argue in the constituency parties'.⁶⁸ Nor did it seek to extend party membership, to democratise it, to make the party a party of the people, based on one member one vote.

CDS attempted to appeal to perceptions of current public opinion. As well as the desire

to use public opinion polls (the work of Abrams is referred to regularly), the electorate's desires were being recognised. The fact that voters felt it imperative that party leaders were 'strong' certainly appear to have shaped the CDS belief that Gaitskell's leadership style had to alter. The political world was evolving, personality was becoming increasingly important, and the CDS group increasingly believed that 'the party is identified with the personality of its leader to an exceptional degree. It follows that if we can get Gaitskell's image right, the party's image will improve accordingly'. After the turbulent years of in-fighting and disunity, there was an air of relief and the hope that 'it should be easier...to work on one man than on the whole party'.⁶⁹ Indeed, CDS grasped the idea not of remaking the party, but remaking opinion through its use of modern psychology and propaganda.

Despite the attempt to improve Gaitskell's standing, Labour's overall image remained tarnished in the public's eyes. CDS recognised that the 1959 General Election defeat was in part due to Labour's 'blurred, uncertain, schizophrenic image'. They felt the left was to blame for Labour's misfortune. They wished to see the left weakened. The new and strongly revisionist Labour Party's standing in the public's consciousness would then increase. Ultimately then CDS believed that the Labour Party had always suffered because of 'the need always to make meaningless compromise with the Left; the weaker the Left, the less this need'.⁷⁰ It offered not compromise, but warfare - but verbal warfare, not real action.

CDS included many modernisers who focussed on image not on policy. The approach they felt necessary - concentrating on a limited number of crucial issues - would lessen the high levels of disagreement involved when detailed policy documents had been produced and develop

issues of a contemporary character, 'calculated to appeal (far more than our 1959 programme) not only to the older working class, but also the young, the liberal middle class (where we lost dramatically in 1959) , and the new cross-pressured marginal voter'.⁷¹ Yet as later chapters indicate, this view was advanced slowly and was opposed by traditionalists. Nor was CDS any better at getting Gaitskell's attention than Crosland had been.

Following the Blackpool conference and Gaitskell's victory over defence, the left of the party was deflated. The damaging results of the Scarborough conference (from Gaitskell's perspective) had been reversed, and the Labour Party was committed to collective security and the Western Alliance. Crosland was keen to see the Labour party focus on becoming a good party of opposition. However, Crosland feared the left's re-emergence. He told his CDS colleagues that 'these dangers will be averted for the next two years, but without a drastic change in the composition of the Parliamentary Labour party they will return some time or other. In principle, therefore, I favour expulsion'.⁷² He identified fourteen 'communists or near communists' who should be expelled, warning 'S.O. Davies, Rankin, Baird, Griffiths, Warbey, Driberg, Mendelson, Swingler, J. Silverman, Parkin, Allaun, Swain, Kelley, Zilliacus; and there are two or three madmen'.⁷³ This was a much shorter 'hit list' than in the past. CDS shared Crosland's views, on this and other issues, but over time had tended to ignore their own stated aim of winning the party. They disliked constituency parties and politics, and left this to the Labour left. Party leaders, trade union grandees, and manipulators of image and policy would secure their ends. If CDS members like Roy Jenkins later complained about the 'rot' in the constituencies, it was a rot they had done little to remedy.

This chapter has demonstrated that pressure to adopt a more radical, reforming, policy did not just come from the left. Revisionists like Crosland were keen to see some decisive action, both in terms of action against the extreme left and on policy. Crosland was, to some extent, a conciliator in this respect. He met with a combination of hurt resistance from his leader (who could not accept even mild criticism) and incomprehension. Crosland was not on his own in suggesting a positive, radical form of social democratic programme: CDS offered support. However, the revisionists were an army without foot soldiers. The Campaign for Democratic Socialism never really tried to spread support through the party. Rather, it sought to address the party's image and build ties with the party's elite, to rule through power and not the power of opinion. It did not campaign either to encourage conciliation or to alter the constitutional structure of the party, to give an expanded and more 'respectable' party membership a voice. Like Gaitskell it assumed the right to govern the party and the validity of its own intellectual superiority. If the revisionists were more in tune with the pattern of social change than the left, it remained over-elitist and arrogant in its views, and failed to work with or reform Labour's creaking machinery. Indeed as the next chapter indicates, in discussions over the organisation and image of the party, revisionists were either silent or inept.

FOOTNOTES

1. D. Howell, *British Social Democracy. A study of Development and Decay* (London, 1976), p.205.
2. B. Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London, 1996), p.238.
3. Brivati, *ibid.*, p.330. Those present at the meeting constituted the Hampstead set: Hugh Dalton, Tony Crosland, Patrick Gordon Walker, Douglas Jay, Roy Jenkins, Herbert Bowden and John Harris.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.331-3.
5. J. Campbell, *Nye Bevan. A Biography* (London, 1987), p.279.
6. K. Jeffreys, *The Labour Party Since 1945* (London, 1993) p.40.
7. *Ibid.*, p.41.
8. B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992), p.245.
9. M. B. Hamilton, *Democratic Socialism in Britain and Sweden* (London, 1998), p.106.
10. Sir Richard Acland to Hugh Gaitskell, 10 October 1952, Gaitskell Mss, F10-2 (1). University College London.
11. Crosland to Gaitskell, 4 May 1960, Crosland papers, CROS 6/1 2, BLPES.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp.380-81.
19. Crosland to Gaitskell, no date, Hugh Gaitskell Mss, C282.
20. *Ibid.*, November 1960.
21. Crosland to Gaitskell November 1960, Crosland papers. CROS 6/1 10.
22. Crosland to Gaitskell, 11 November 1960, CROS 6/1.

23. Crosland to Gaitskell, 13. November 1960, CROS 6/1. My italics.
24. H. Gaitskell, 'Socialism and Nationalisation', *Fabian Tract* 300 (1956).
25. S. Fielding, 'Brotherhood and the Brothers: Responses to 'Coloured' Immigration in the British Labour Party c. 1951-1965, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 3 No 1 (1998).
26. See above pp.5-6.
27. Patrick Gordon Walker Diary, 12 May 1960, in Robert Pearce (ed.), *Patrick Gordon Walker, Political Diaries 1932-1971* (London, 1991), p.259.
28. A.W. Benn to A. Crosland, 31 October 1960, Crosland papers, CROS 6/1 91.
29. Ibid.
30. Benn Diary, 31 October 1960, in Ruth Winstone (ed.), *Tony Benn. Years of Hope. Diaries, Papers and Letters 1940-62* (London, 1994), p.352.
31. For a more detailed account see Pimlott, op., cit., pp.224-229.
32. Ibid., p.245.
33. Crosland to Gaitskell, no date, Gaitskell Mss, C282.
34. Ibid.
35. Crosland to Gaitskell, 1 September 1960, Gaitskell Mss, C282.
36. Gaitskell to Crosland, 4 September 1960, Gaitskell Mss, C282.
37. Crosland to Gaitskell Nov 1960, Crosland Mss, CROS 6/1 13. Gaitskell's failure to win support from those on the right of the Labour Party is given further weight: 'Gaitskell and his associates found themselves in essentially the same position as MacDonald and the old leadership. I cannot feel any sympathy with them, despite the dangerous absurdities of their "Left" critics. They have asked for it by their lack of frankness and courage and their "suspicious" attitude - they have always thought that they could "put it across" the common herd by their high level "intellectuals (sic)"! Reg Bassett (Former National Labour and MacDonaldite) to William (Mellor?) 4 January 1960, DURBIN Mss, 3/1.
38. Ibid., Nov 1960.
39. Ibid.
40. Gerry Reynolds Labour MP for Islington 1958-69. Minister of State for Defence, 1965-69. Gordon Walker saw the Scarborough Conference 1960 as marking the beginning of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism. It aimed at the establishment of an organisation in the Parliamentary Committee which would form the basis of revisionist communication. Reynolds

was to be the link between Patrick Gordon Walker and Gaitskell (as well as other 'reliable' figures). The anti - Harold Wilson feeling was also clear at this early meeting. See Patrick Gordon Walker *Diaries*, 30 December 1960, p.270.

41. Ibid.

42. Crosland to Gaitskell, November 1960, Crosland Mss, CROS 6/1 17.

43. Brivati, op. cit., p.239.

44. Crosland to Gaitskell November 1960, Crosland Mss, CROS 6/1 19.

45. Gaitskell to Crosland 4 September 1960, Crosland Mss, CROS 6/1 63.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Brivati, op. cit., p.362.

50. Crosland, op. cit. p.100.

51. CDS had their own newsletter, *Campaign*. Thirty-six editions were published between 1961 and 1964.

52. N. Ellison, *Egalitarian Thought and the Labour Party. Retreating Visions* (London, 1994), p.117.

53. R. Hinden, 'Towards New Vistas', *Socialist Commentary* Vol. 15, December 1951, pp.275-276.

54. Editorial, 'Active Democracy' *Socialist Commentary* Vol. 16, February 1952, p.25.

55. 'Thoughts on Nationalisation. 2. Problems with reorganisation', *Socialist Commentary* Vol. 16. February 1952, p.42.

56. Ibid., p.42.

57. F. Mulley 'What Mandate for Public Ownership?', *Socialist Commentary* Vol. 17. April 1953, p.84.

58. Ibid., p.85.

59. Editorial 'Equality with Quality', *Socialist Commentary* Vol. 19, July 1955, p.198.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.
62. Crosland Papers Part II. Campaign for Democratic Socialism, Circular 'The First Phase'. Crosland Mss, CROS 6/1 10.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. 'The Campaign For Democratic Socialism 1960-64', Witness Seminars. *Contemporary Record*, Vol. 7 (1993), p.369.
66. Ibid., p.369.
67. Ibid., p.368.
68. Ibid., p.379.
69. Crosland Papers Part II, Campaign for Democratic Socialism, Crosland Mss, CROS 6/1 60.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

'Perfect your organisation, educate your followers, look to the register, spread the light and the future is yours' - Keir Hardie

'We are still at the penny-farthing stage in a jet propelled era, and our machine, at that, is getting rusty and deteriorating with age' - *Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on Organisation 1955*. p7.

ORGANISATION AND ELECTIONEERING 1951-64.

Recurring election defeats in 1951, 1955 and 1959 forced Labour on a course of seemingly constant introspection. Organisation was blamed for many of Labour's electoral shortcomings. Here was another opportunity for modernisation, for turning Labour into a 'people's party', to grasp radio, TV, opinion polls and use them to project a new image. Important figures attached themselves to the organisation issue for different reasons and from different perspectives. For Morrison and Phillips, organisational work represented the moral faith of socialism, working for the good of the party. Individual volunteers represented the party's heart and soul. In an idealistic (and increasingly out-dated) vision, Morrison regarded voluntarism to be what made Labour great. Although he recognised the party's decline in support and activism was a major problem, he had few answers. Wilson seized the opportunity better than most. He grasped the organisation debate, skilfully showing himself to be a left-wing moderniser, in touch with the party's grass roots yet keen to take Labour into the 'jet propelled era'. Wilson also recognised that organisational improvement could appeal to many without any attachment to divisive left/right issues. By contrast, Gaitskellites again took a less conciliatory stance. For Crosland, organisational debate and local party workers were a hindrance. He was keen to secure the revisionist ascendancy in the PLP, rather than concerning himself with what he regarded to be mundane organisational issues. Whilst he sought 'modernisation' of campaigning techniques, he thus never gave the issue the attention which Wilson did. Another

'Gaitskellite' opportunity was lost. There was no attempt, it will be suggested, to create a 'people's party', nor to deflect attention from ideological conflict towards shared organisational endeavour.

I

The organisational position inherited by Labour in the 1950s was not good. The party had on paper, a huge membership. However, as Tanner has shown, the real position was weaker, as even formerly strong Labour organisations found it difficult to rebuild after 1945 when faced with the counter-attractions of employment, entertainment and the desire to rebuild a family life.¹

In areas where the party was historically weak, like London, the position was even worse as the following examples indicate. The London regional organiser's desire to improve organisation, ensure a full canvass, instigate membership drives, raise money, and generally plan ahead, floundered in the face of such difficulties. Typically, Westminster Abbey's annual meeting in 1948 revealed that the fully paid up membership was just 110 when there were 290 members on the party's books.² Nor were Labour's local leaders always helpful, especially in safe seats. The London regional organiser, J. Cattermole, discovered through his visit to Stepney that 'a large number of Stepney's councillors are more concerned with holding on to their own positions rather than with the welfare of the Party in the borough'.³ Even before the Bevanite controversy, various groups in the party were struggling for power. Rectifying such a situation was particularly difficult in London. The number of active party members was limited, and overhauling the council's personnel all but impossible.

In Chelsea, Cattermole tried to help the local party set up ward organisations. Some 1600

leaflets publicising a meeting to do this were distributed through an area dominated by working class flats. The attendance at the meeting proved to be 'disappointing' - just fifty turned up.⁴ The poor level of organisation was revealed by the 1949 London County Council elections. The organiser's report stated that in nearly all constituencies 'the cry was for more labour, and in many places there were complaints about borough councillors not pulling their weight'.⁵ It was found that 'in no place did the party have sufficient workers to ensure them polling the vote of every Labour supporter'.⁶

In re-establishing a local organisation, the need for a full-time agent was stressed by those interested in organisation. Local agents could drive a modernising agenda, and were to be the agents of political professionalism. However, as Fielding has stated, 'despite their perceived importance, an ever-declining minority of parties employed an agent: in 1951 there were 296, but by 1970, this had slipped to 144'.⁷ Moreover, agents were already finding that professionalism was difficult when faced with factionalism or an attachment to older ideas about the party's role. In Brixton, one agent had to resign because of such pressures in 1949. A second then fell foul of another faction.⁸ As London's regional organiser travelled around, he found similar problems with each visit to a different area. He filed critical reports on Uxbridge and Brentford in March 1952. He found Chiswick a 'very peculiar party', as well as very defeatist.⁹ He discovered that a lack of co-operation in Dulwich's two parties was hampering the council's success. There was the familiar story of insufficient workers in Lewisham. The same scenario was detailed in West Woolwich, where during county council elections Cattermole reported that 'there was a very inadequate supply of workers and it seems to me that this party is in decline'.¹⁰ To Morrison and others, the volunteer army of educated Labour workers was a sign of their commitment to the

Labour faith the moral and religious zeal which characterised Labour in its earlier years. To the Labour Party modernisers, it was a potential obstacle to the party's advance.

II

After the 1950 election victory, Morrison produced a detailed analysis of the election campaign for the NEC. Morrison felt 'it appropriate that we should consider the organising and policy issues in connection with the next General Election'. His paper focussed on technical and strategic aspects of electioneering. The Conservatives had closed the gap since 1945 and the Liberals had polled well, leading Morrison to note that 'an element of importance is the nature and the future of the 2,637,089 votes polled...by the Liberal candidates'. Morrison wanted to discover who the Liberal voters would support in the absence of a Liberal candidate. He was also keen to discover why they voted Liberal rather than Labour or Conservative. Here were more than two and a half million votes, many of which Labour would have to gain if the party hoped to retain and extend its position of power. For those advocating 'modernisation', this was good news: Liberals were unlikely to support 'Bevanite' issues.

Morrison was also at pains to target 'rural' constituencies. As well as the agricultural workers and farmers, he noted these contained county and other towns with craftsmen, tradesmen, professionals, members of the middle-classes and retired residents. Morrison felt that such people were too often overlooked. He was keen for a thorough investigation to be made into voting habits. Concerning the urban working class vote he added, 'If we could find out approximately how many urban working-class people voted against Labour and for what reasons...it would be political information of great value'. However, Labour lacked the mechanism to carry out such a large undertaking. Morrison advocated the gathering of

information, surveys and investigations: but full-time staff and organisers were a scarce commodity. In this sphere, as with most organisational issues throughout this period, the Tories were streets ahead of Labour. The Conservatives were able to make good use of opinion polls through their Public Opinion Research Department. As Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has shown, the Tory party used information supplied through the Gallup polls to continually re-assess their political fortunes. She also notes that the gender gap in voting behaviour not only favoured the Tories, but was responsible for their success. The Conservatives were keen to encourage and strengthen the standard of women's organisation at all levels within their ranks.¹¹

By contrast, Morrison relied on educated guess work when he discussed the results of the 1950 election. He commented on the middle-class vote in 'the Home Counties area outside the County of London and other dormitory or suburban areas elsewhere', arguing that 'the probability is that it was in this type of constituency we suffered our most marked set-backs'. His analysis seemed to have implications for the future direction of the party. He emphasised the importance of winning the housewives' vote, not simply for numerical reasons, but primarily because of their influence on the family. Morrison's 'enlightened' verdict was that 'married women are increasingly thinking for themselves politically, which in itself is a good thing'. What influenced them was rationing and austerity. He noted that 'the needs of the consumer and the problems of the housewife must be recognised as a real factor in politics, and party policy and propaganda should take full account of it'.¹² The Conservatives had felt they could win the housewives' votes and conducted a large campaign around the cost of living. They had succeeded. Labour needed to fight back.

Something did come of this. The Labour Party's response was a special women's campaign early in 1951. Woman's Advisory Council Conferences during the first three months of 1951 were devoted to political issues, in particular, to the cost of living. The party hierarchy was keen to see Women's Sections arrange special public meetings to deal with the problems of the cost of living and to recruit new women members to the party. Yet it would be a mistake to see Morrison - rooted in traditional organisational activity - as a post war 'moderniser'. In what seems a rather unlikely way of spreading the Labour gospel, the NEC believed 'the most effective work can be carried on by women members of the party in shopping queues, shopping centres and by house to house canvassing for membership'.¹³ The party also planned to issue various publications (*50 Facts on the Cost of Living*, discussion pamphlets, and *Speakers Notes*) to aid members of the movement argue against the Conservatives' campaign. Articles on the cost of living were also to appear in trade union journals. Furthermore, the *Daily Herald* was to print a weekly column dealing with problems of the cost of living and how they had affected individual voters. With the next election apparently imminent, Morrison recognised the need for quick thinking on organisation, policy and publicity - but it was a rethink within a conventional Labour framework. He still saw women as housewives, not as consumers or as individuals.

Much of Morrison's emphasis was on improving the party machine. He expected Regional Officers to be consulted about marginal constituencies and given 'a good deal of authority to act'.¹⁴ It was hoped marginal constituencies would become hives of Labour party activity, with special canvasses of voters who had not voted Labour previously, but who might switch sides. Morrison was keen to use 'expert "rural" Labour Party organisers who could devote a week or two to the stimulus of organising propaganda in such constituencies, giving advice to

people on the spot and getting them going'.¹⁵ Reinforcing Morrison's emphasis, Morgan Phillips thought that 'the lack of manpower and money remain the chief obstacles to our continued progress in the rural areas'.¹⁶ Day to day work was made all the more difficult by the scattered nature of these areas. It needed more than a week or two from an expert "rural" organiser to have any lasting impact. It was not just in the marginals that Labour found financial restrictions affecting the quality of its organisation. The 1951 General Election saw 613 Labour candidates, yet fewer than 300 full-time agents were employed. The majority of constituencies had to rely on the services of volunteers.

Morrison's recognition of the youth vote is also important. He hoped that the Leagues of Youth would be guided by suitable adult members, and that more propaganda and literature would be aimed at Britain's young voters. Morrison argued that 'youth literature may need revision and overhauling by experts capable of understanding the workings of the youthful mind'.¹⁷ Yet once again, this was something which had been apparent since the 1930s, it was thus hardly a recognition of a changing world. Moreover, as in the 1930s Labour promised much but failed to deliver.

Labour's ineffectiveness in 'traditional' areas of organisation also contrasted with that of the Tories. Labour's General Secretary at the time of the 1950 General Election, Morgan Phillips, noted that the Conservatives' long campaign included greater use of the press, advertising hoarding and literature distribution. This he felt 'in terms of effort, employment of manpower and finance, was unparalleled in British political history'.¹⁸ The Conservatives had clearly stolen a march on the campaigning front. The Labour Party had prepared a daily column

for the *Daily Herald* and prepared *Campaign Notes* which were published five days each week. There was also a General Election broadsheet, *The Thinking Voter*, which was published in three styles: a general four page issue, one special Welsh issue, and one with a blank front page for local overprinting. Overall though, the Labour newspapers and leaflets failed to match the might of the Conservative press. Moreover, this was still little different from the 1930s, and reflected the emphasis and tactics of Morrison's London Labour Party from before the war.

Like Morrison, Phillips was greatly worried by Labour's obvious slump in the areas around Greater London and in the less industrial areas of the Midlands and southern England. In 1950, the swing against Labour in the country as a whole was roughly 3 per cent. Ominously for Labour, in Essex it was 8 per cent, in Middlesex it was 8.5 per cent. As a result, Labour's representation in the five counties bordering London fell from 53 seats in 1945 to 28 seats in 1950.¹⁹ Yet the only answer to the various problems which both Morrison and Phillips recognised was hard and consistent work in the constituencies. In particular, Phillips felt that additional financial assistance would be needed 'in order to step up our propaganda and to secure the appointment of more full-time agents'.²⁰ The National Agent, R.T. Windle, also recognised that 279 full-time agents in the constituencies was not enough, and that 'others had to be appointed'.²¹ The view that the next election was not far away acted as a spur and gave a sense of urgency to this introspective examination. For the longer-term problem, Morrison argued for further development of political education. He felt a 'properly organised scheme of political education can bring people on and allow them to rise by merit to the sort of jobs they can do for the party'.²² He was keen to develop an informed and knowledgeable mass of party workers, as these would be more productive on door-steps whilst canvassing. Morrison hoped to see Political

Education Officers in every constituency. It was hardly a bold modernising initiative.

During the crucial period between Labour's 1950 election victory and the 1951 defeat, there was a major propaganda drive. It was noted that 'the abnormal Parliamentary situation...makes it difficult for Ministers and others to spare much time for meetings and conferences',²³ although the NEC hoped that special attention would be given to meetings in marginal and rural constituencies, which received assistance with the provision of speakers and with publicity. Some constituencies were to receive free literature whilst others were helped to produce literature of a local character. Workers were transferred to marginal constituencies to help with canvassing. The block grant awarded to the Regional Officer helped to meet these expenses. Head Office grants ensured a greater number of full-time agents in key constituencies.

Labour's 1951 defeat failed to set enough alarm bells ringing, because false comfort was taken from the 'victory in votes'. The mood was upbeat. *Socialist Commentary* was inclined to believe that 'the defeat had been so honourable that many acclaimed it as a victory...[and that] there was a tinge of relief at being released from the pressing strains of office'.²⁴ Morgan Phillips wrote that 'the Party is in good fettle. It enjoys increasing support in the country'. However, he ended on a note of caution, stating that 'we cannot overlook the fact that Labour's poll of 48.7 per cent of all the votes cast, only represents 40 per cent of the total electorate. And it is to the remaining 60 per cent, of whom many are trade unionists and their wives, that we must look for future victories'.²⁵ The last point was hardly the signal for a new approach. In order to achieve future election victories, Phillips wanted to raise individual membership numbers, improve local and national finances, increase the number of full-time agents, and intensify

propaganda and party education so as to counter Tory misrepresentation. Ultimately, Phillips argued 'we can be confident that final victory for Democratic Socialism is assured'.²⁶ Too often Labour's organisation was static, lacking cohesion, outmoded or missing entirely. For example, whilst recognising that Labour had received more postal votes in 1951 than they had in 1950, Phillips was dismayed enough to write that 'despite repeated reminders to agents, we again failed to get our maximum share of this vote in some constituencies'.²⁷ Improving the postal vote and other technical changes were also needed. Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo suggest at least part of the reason for this generally upbeat mood was because the 1951 defeat saw the Labour party relieved that it 'had suffered nothing like the electoral rout some had once feared'.²⁸ Significantly, Labour organisers not only sought organisational solutions to political problems: they also felt satisfied with what had been achieved. There was little push towards a modernisation of policy and propaganda.

Nonetheless, there were voices seeking change. Labour's organisation was clearly not what it could have been. An increasingly modern society needed increasingly modern techniques. Across the 1950s, and more particularly during the 1960s, television was to become an increasingly powerful medium for parties to get their election messages across. Labour's Research Department, with Michael Young as secretary, was quick to spot the potential of television. During the 1950 election, it devoted 'more time and effort...into this work than at any previous election'.²⁹ Young and his assistant William Pickles believed that television was the future and the way forward. They felt that television had been important during the 1950 election and argued that in 1951: 'television will be even more important'.³⁰ Forward planning was definitely taking place. Significantly, it came from the Gaitskellite Michael Young, who sought

to place more emphasis on consumer demands and individual demands, rather than a class-based organisation with collectivist values. Equally significantly, Young soon felt frustrated and took a job with the Consumer Association.

Various plans were forwarded. One plan suggested four fifteen minute television broadcasts. The first would speak in general terms on party policy, the second would have four or five short talks from different speakers, the third would reply to important points emerging in the campaign, and the final talk would be from a high level party leader. Young and Pickles felt their involvement in all the broadcast scripts would ensure a cohesive overall picture. They hoped to establish a broadcast team consisting of the performer, Young himself (for policy, ideas and accuracy) Pickles (for presentation, structure, broadcasting style and technique) and a further person, different in each case, whose role would be to produce the script. There is clear evidence that individuals in organisational roles within the party were keen to embrace these new techniques, which reached directly to the public psyche. Furthermore, there was a flexibility and willingness to experiment with different formats, styles, techniques, and of course with new talent. During the 1951 general election campaign, Labour MPs Hartley Shawcross and Christopher Mayhew became early exponents of television campaigning. Scripts of transmissions were released to coincide with the broadcasts, so gaining the TV and radio broadcasts considerable press coverage.

However, in 1951, television did not have anything like the impact it was to have later. A Gallup poll suggested that campaigning and propaganda pervaded the lives of 92 per cent of those asked. 82 per cent had listened to radio. The next biggest influence were the election

addresses, which 52 per cent of those questioned claimed to have read. Surprisingly 24 per cent had attended an indoor meeting. Only 12 per cent had watched a television address. The least effective methods were outdoor meetings, which reached just 10 per cent, and the much lauded canvass (the importance of which is stressed in party minute books throughout the length and breadth of the land). Only 3 per cent of electors could remember being canvassed by party workers. A further 3 per cent had undertaken some form of work for their candidate.³¹

Opinion polls began to assume more importance within the Labour Party, with greater credence being attached to their findings. Each month after 1950, the Gallup poll sounded the public out on the way it would vote if there were a general election. Labour was ahead in the polls until December 1950. By February 1951, the Tories had opened a fourteen point lead. The polls could provide valuable information on voting habits, trends and the issues to which people attached most importance, which 'revisionists' might use to support a new approach. In August 1950, the most urgent problem facing the public was the cost of living, with 56 per cent suggesting it was at the top of their agenda. Undoubtedly, the Labour government was blamed by the general public for price increases. Perhaps more damning was the fact that in November 1950, when the public were asked to say what they felt was the main cause of rising prices, government action or lack of it was the number one answer. A further key issue which tarnished the government in the eyes of the voters was a perceived failure in housing. However, whilst the Labour government was increasingly out of favour, its leader, Clement Attlee remained popular - certainly more popular than his government (see table 1).

TABLE 1. Attlee's popularity compared the popularity of the Labour Government.

| ATTLEE'S POPULARITY | | | | HIS GOVERNMENT | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| DATE | APPROVE per cent | DISAPPROVE per cent | DON'T KNOW per cent | SATISFIED per cent | DISSATISFIED per cent | DON'T KNOW per cent |
| 1950 | | | | | | |
| MAY | 50 | 39 | 11 | 39 | 51 | 10 |
| SEPT | 49 | 43 | 8 | 44 | 46 | 10 |
| OCT | 47 | 40 | 13 | 45 | 45 | 10 |
| DEC | 49 | 38 | 13 | 38 | 51 | 11 |
| 1951 | | | | | | |
| FEB | 44 | 47 | 9 | 31 | 60 | 9 |
| APR | 49 | 40 | 11 | 32 | 59 | 9 |
| MAY | 57 | 35 | 8 | 35 | 56 | 9 |
| AUG | 43 | 43 | 14 | 31 | 56 | 13 |

SOURCE: *Behind the Gallup Polls*. News Chronicle, p.19.

When the date of the election was announced, 50 per cent of the public supported the Conservatives, whilst 40 per cent suggested they would vote Labour. Some contemporary analysts in the Tory press explained the Conservatives' Gallup Poll support through the embourgeoisement thesis, arguing 'Conservatism grows rapidly with increase in income'.³²

Throughout October 1950, when replying to the question 'Which party do you think can do the best job in looking after people like yourself?' Labour remained between one and three per cent ahead of the Conservatives.³³ Labour was also regarded as the party best able to prevent unemployment, for whilst 29 per cent of people named the Conservatives; 50 per cent felt Labour was better equipped. Unfortunately for Labour, the only other area in which the majority of those asked felt Labour could cope better than the Conservatives was in keeping Britain out of war. In moving forward - in offering opportunities and freedom - the Tories were on top.

In fact, although Morrison and Phillips had identified valid organisational problems they did little to alter public opinion or to alter party policy. The 1951 General Election showed that Labour's organisation still required a good deal of attention. The polls confirmed what had been hinted at by the politicians: the Conservatives had the upper hand. They had canvassed 44 per cent, Labour only 37 per cent. The fact that 36 per cent of those canvassed became more interested and 29 per cent felt it had convinced them to vote,³⁴ suggests that purely on account of ensuring the vote was maximised, a thorough canvass was crucial. However, only 1 per cent of those asked stated that they had changed the way they voted as a result. The key problem, however, was Labour's image, with ex-Liberals, with women, with voters in the south-east. This was not something that a better canvass could cure.

III

The organisational position got still worse between 1951 and 1955, notably in areas like the Midlands - which Labour had to win in order to become a powerful electoral and campaigning force. Organisers' reports on such areas did not make happy reading. Calls for the appointment

of full-time staff, most noticeably for full-time agents, were regular discussion points in local organisations at all levels. However, organisers were often faced with local apathy and a general reluctance to change. As Fielding points out, the organisers would generally have been appointed by 'individual General Councils'. An effective agent, politically astute, well read, raising funds and increasing a CLP's membership 'would meet with considerable local opposition...for example, one agent was forced to seek alternative employment [due to]...some strong individualists in high places...wedded to the usual conduct of business'.³⁵ Hardly surprisingly, given such trying circumstances, the number of agents steadily declined throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the west Midlands, Labour's regional agent faced an array of problems. In-fighting and a general hostility to change were prominent features. In Rutland and Stamford, he reported that the officers were young and hostile to the older members. The area 'would not have a good Organisation unless the two can be brought together'.³⁶ The nature of the five wards in Nottingham Central varied greatly. The agent met officials from each of the five wards in an attempt to improve the level of organisation. The situation ranged from just about acceptable, to bad and worse. Market ward had 'hardly any organisation': organisation in Robin Hood ward was deemed barely sufficient. In Sherwood ward officers were fighting one another. Forest ward actually had a growing membership, seemingly the only silver lining, for St Mary's ward had just six active members.³⁷ Clearly there was much work to be done. In near-by Leicester, as late as 1963, long after the Wilson Report, the situation remained dire in certain areas. In St. Margaret's ward, there were six active workers and a membership of eighty; in Westcoats, eight active workers and a 180 strong membership, in Newton eight active workers and 215 members, and in Abbey, twelve active workers out of 213 members.³⁸

The situation was just as bad in East Nottingham, where organisation proved to be 'almost non-existent'. 'Personalities' seemed to have been responsible for the destruction of the local party's organisation. The agent reported in June 1952 that a Mr and Mrs Shaw had re-applied for membership and that the party had accepted them by 21 - 12. The Shaws had been a problem in Nottingham for three or four years. The regional agent stated that 'In my opinion they smashed our Central Ward organisation and practically did the same to these constituency parties'. He expressed the hope that they would not be accepted and recommended that they be asked to re-apply in six to twelve months. In an area such as East Nottingham, a complete overhaul was needed, together with a change of personnel at the top. The situation was not going to redeem itself. The Borough's Executive Council meetings were described as 'very acrimonious'. Indeed, the situation was such that 'personalities seem to play a much larger part in Nottingham than policy'.³⁹ There was no local desire to modernise the party, just a pressing need to improve if Labour was ever to meet its party - and campaigning - needs.

By 1955 the situation in Nottingham had deteriorated still further. In fact the situation was so bad that the comments of the Nottingham City party secretary featured in the Wilson Report. He stated that in 1955:

'The West Nottingham result was shocking. There is no excuse for the bad organisation which existed in this constituency...there was no machine. Just an incoherent collection of small parts each working on its own with little idea of what the end product was likely to be'.⁴⁰

Being singled out as a shocking example of things gone wrong in a document designed to shock is perhaps the most damning fact of all. Incredibly, Central Nottingham surpassed the low level achieved by West Nottingham. Wilson's description almost beggars belief:

‘Central Nottingham wasn’t lost by Labour it was thrown away. The lowness of the poll is a sad reflection on the state of party organisation in that constituency...I would be neglecting my duty if I didn’t stress that this constituency was thrown away by years of neglect. Everybody in the Party hierarchy in Nottingham must have realised the delicacy of the electoral situation here and it is disgraceful that the Tories have been allowed to gain this seat- not by any swing in public opinion or by the appeal of their policy or by the effectiveness of their organisation, but purely and simply by the ineptitude of our own organisation’.⁴¹

The Wilson Report felt that the increasing concentration on Borough-wide parties had led to a withering-away of CLP’s. A further concern of the Wilson Report was that borough parties tended to concentrate on the ‘day-to-day work of council groups’.⁴² It was felt this impinged on time which should have been devoted to the humdrum work of canvassing and party organisation generally. In this respect it is not calling for major changes. It did not call on the constituency left to be expelled (although they were becoming a disruptive influence in Nottingham and elsewhere). It did not call for a new middle class membership. It called for changes which could prevent seats being ‘given away’, for action, effort, for a re-assertion of campaigning zeal.

Such plans were popular with a section of the party. They were also unrealistic. Labour lacked the committed local support for such ideas to work. In Bolsover, attempts were made to implement a membership drive, with the agent keen to persuade a greater number of apparently reluctant miners to join as individuals. Unfortunately, local leaders frustrated his attempts: ‘The only opposition to the campaign came from the Constituency Party secretary who seemed to be quite complacent and satisfied with things as they are’.⁴³ Nor was this unusual. Mansfield had the second largest Labour vote in the Midlands (37,097). It had the lowest membership (386) and the local party would not commit itself to a membership campaign. The regional organiser saw ‘no reason why the party should not have a membership of at least ten times its present size. Of

course, it is the same old story of too few people trying to do too many jobs. This small membership of 386 has to find 43 Local Government representatives and 30 party officials...there is considerable duplication of officers with the result that little is done...apart from just about keeping the Party machinery ticking over'.⁴⁴ Whilst a membership campaign had been planned, local activists needed 'a shove' to get them going. Nor was the position much better elsewhere - with the partial exception of the reorganised Nottingham seats (see table 1).

Table 1. Actual Membership of Constituency Parties and Subscriptions Collected for the Year Ended 31st December, 1968

| CONSTITUENCY PARTY | NUMBER OF MEMBERS | SUBSCRIPTIONS COLLECTED | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| | | £. | s. | d. |
| DERBY NORTH | 270 | 110. | 9. | 6. |
| DERBY SOUTH | 373 | 153. | 5. | 10. |
| N.E. DERBYSHIRE | 576 | 39. | 14. | 6. |
| BOLSOVER | 391 | 63. | 16. | 0. |
| CHESTERFIELD | 389 | | | |
| LOUGHBOROUGH | 504 | 133. | 5. | 0. |
| HARBOROUGH | 391 | 85. | 4. | 0. |
| BOSWORTH | 132 | 39. | 4. | 6. |
| S.E. LEICESTERSHIRE | 159 | 95. | 8. | 0. |
| KETTERING | 750 | 311. | 0. | 0. |
| NORTHAMPTON | 503 | 224. | 5. | 6. |
| WELLINGBOROUGH | 850 | 117. | 9. | 7. |
| S. NORTHANTS | 628 | 194. | 1. | 11. |
| LINCOLN | 1500 | 252. | 16. | 9. |
| BRIGG | 782 | 243. | 0. | 0. |
| GRANTHAM | 250 | 101. | 0. | 0. |
| GAINSBOROUGH | 45 | 29. | 0. | 0. |
| RUTLAND & STAMFORD | 80 | 35. | 0. | 0. |
| LOUTH | 260 | 80. | 2. | 6. |
| N. NOTTINGHAM | 287 | 94. | 5. | 0. |
| CENTRAL NOTTINGHAM | 255 | 81. | 0. | 0. |
| BASSETLAW | 347 | 155. | 5. | 0. |
| NEWARK | 726 | 265. | 15. | 6. |
| RUSHCLIFFE | 437 | 144. | 11. | 0. |
| S. NOTTINGHAM | 468 | 157. | 0. | 0. |
| S.E. DERBYSHIRE | 846 | 226. | 0. | 0. |
| ASHFIELD | 500 | 121. | 13. | 6. |
| W. NOTTINGHAM | 292 | 74. | 0. | 0. |
| N.E. LEICESTER | 2550 | 71. | 0. | 0. |
| S.W. LEICESTER | 350 | 98 | | |

Source: East Midlands Regional Council Of The Labour Party, MSS 9/3/11/11.

The reluctance of some council or constituency members to enrol new members was not always an attempt to preserve their own position of power: it was about a conception of the Labour Party, rooted in the ethical ideas and the organisational values of earlier days. For example, the North East Derbyshire Labour council was, 'quite frankly opposed to anything in the way of a membership campaign. The chairman of the party for instance, said he was opposed to enrolling members of the party who would not promise to attend all party meetings...he had...refused membership of a number of people working in his pit because they would not give this undertaking'.⁴⁵ It was often the case in mining seats that few miners joined the party as individual members.

Given these weaknesses, a belief in organisational tactics as a means to win back support, and a commitment to the idea that few voters 'changed sides', Labour's focus on winning marginal seats through organisational tactics is unsurprising. This desire was accentuated by the Wilson Report. By early 1965, the East Midlands Regional Organiser certainly felt that 'much of the time of the organising staff over the past five or six years has been spent working in marginal constituencies in accordance with directions received from the National Executive Committee through the national agent'.⁴⁶

A further effect of the party's decline was their dependence on a few local figures, who could shift a party to the left. In certain areas of the East Midlands, 'constituencies in the more difficult and remote parts of the region are often kept in existence by the help and encouragement they received from the regional staff. In these areas, it is because we are kept on hand that local Labour Parties and Women's Sections are kept from going out of existence, and that campaigns

are organised and carried out for prospective Parliamentary candidates'.⁴⁷ In rural areas - like Brecon and Radnor in Wales - the candidate held the whole seat together. Safe seats could be even worse. In the East Midlands coalfield, the left thus became increasingly important - in an area where the electorate (and miners) were famously moderate.

In the east Midlands the miners' union certainly felt that Labour's Regional Council had not worked closely with their union. The Regional Council had refused to accept their late nomination for the Regional Executive Committee. The organiser appealed to the miners to become more involved in local politics, telling them that if they wanted to play an effective part in the Labour Party, 'it is at constituency party level [that] they ought to be taking action...In most constituencies...Nottingham Miners' delegates were not attending constituency party meetings and therefore not playing their part in the organisation'.⁴⁸ Progress was not particularly easy. One of the difficulties was that two of the full-time officers of the union were active members of the Communist Party. The regional organiser warned: 'It means therefore that whatever plans we discuss the Communist Party are fully advised of them'.⁴⁹ Such people did not want a broader membership or a revitalised (and moderate) party.⁵⁰

Society was changing. It is not difficult to see how the Labour party described above failed to adapt to the social changes in the 1950s. The thesis presented in *England Arise* suggests that there was a mismatch between the aspirations of the general public and the ideals being espoused by the Labour Party. Fielding et al. skilfully argue that the British public rejected the Labour Party's grand scheme, its new Jerusalem. The authors contend that the Labour Party's leading figures felt that 1945 symbolised the electorate's 'newly gained maturity. So long as

socialists continued to light the path...ordinary people would remain generally loyal'.⁵¹ Ultimately, the party would spend too long missing the point. Labour failed to connect with its electorate. It took their loyalty for granted. Morrison felt 'that Labour Party policy and organisation should continue to be directed to the scientific and determined cultivation of the marginal constituencies [thus] polling...the full potential Labour vote in all constituencies'.⁵² Whilst recognising that opinion polls were increasingly important, Labour seemed slow to learn what they indicated about public opinion. The force behind any desire to modernise and improve organisation continued to be election defeats.

With conventional organisation weakening, the media developing, and Labour's one newspaper failing to compete, the new media of TV and radio might have thrown Labour a life line. Yet the party moved slowly. In 1955, as had been the case in 1951, many within the Labour Party felt television, was a modern political propaganda weapon which would be a vital part of their campaigning armour. Morgan Phillips, still the Party's General Secretary despite murmurings about his inefficiency, sent a memorandum to election agents detailing Labour's general election broadcasts. Both television and radio broadcasts were listed along with the date, time and speaker in each instance. Phillips stated that TV 'is likely to be a more significant influence than at any previous General Election...We are anxious to secure large audiences for both sound and television broadcasts, and agents are advised to encourage Labour supporters who have television sets to open their homes to as many friends and neighbours as they can conveniently accommodate'.⁵³

Labour's Research Department again played a vital role in Labour's broadcasts. The LRD

was clear that 'political broadcasts - both sound and television - are in terms of audience reached the most important services which the Department can render'. Estimated figures from the BBC suggested between eight and fifteen million people listened to election broadcasts on radio. The LRD felt equally sure that 'there will be many millions watching television. Indeed the two media will probably be of equal importance at the next election'⁵⁴. In fact, television audience estimates proved far too high. Radio had much larger audiences than T.V., though radio audiences declined greatly from the 1951 figures. The drop in audience size can be partly explained by a 'loss of some listeners to television and the fact that the 1951 election fell in October - a month when listening is normally greater than in May'.⁵⁵

Yet whatever this interest, it was soon pushed into the background. By March 1955, it was time for Labour's stop-go party machine to become operational once more. Phillips wanted constituencies to appoint an election agent, intensify the canvass, up date records of Labour voters, trace removals, organise the postal vote, appoint an Appeals Officer, create election funds, list key workers, plan poster sites, check printing arrangements and the availability of halls. Phillips ended his call to arms with 'From now on the watchword is 'ready for the fight'.⁵⁶ Although strictly speaking that was four watchwords, the message itself was clear enough. Labour's antiquated organisation machine was to chug into operational mode.

Following the election defeat, Tony Benn appealed for new staff to help the party use television. This was rather late. Even before the election had begun, the Research Department admitted that its 'staff is not adequate for an election'. It was hoped some members of the Fabian Society 'could be borrowed for say a four-weeks election period', but this hardly evokes a picture

of a streamlined, highly effective and efficient team. Indeed, the National Executive were asked to recommend temporary recruits 'who would be useful in an election time'.⁵⁷

This inability to grasp the significance of the media, and to adapt a more professional approach to image creation, is even more apparent when one looks at the party's liaison with the press. During the 1950 general election, the Research Department wrote a column for the *Daily Herald*. During the 1951 general election the column was not written, mainly because of insufficient journalistic talent in the Research Department. After 1951 the situation deteriorated. Ironically, 'the Department is weaker than in 1951'.⁵⁸ Following the election defeat in 1955, the relationship between the party and the paper deteriorated still further. Members of the NEC were unhappy with the role the *Daily Herald* had played during the campaign. Dissatisfaction was expressed at what was felt to be both the paper's indifference to the general election as a whole, including Labour's case, until the few days prior to voting. It was further noted that, whilst this inadequacy 'suddenly became more marked during the election, it had been developing for some time and has continued to develop since'. Many in the NEC argued that Labour was unable to set the agenda and that the Tory press had succeeded in keeping the election off the front pages. As a result, it seemed no great issue was at stake. The press had fought a canny battle for the Conservatives, 'keeping the political temperature down...until the last few days'.⁵⁹ The *Daily Herald's* decision to begin the campaign with election news at the back of the paper added to Labour's sense of frustration. As a result, it was argued, Labour and its supporters began the campaign in a depressed state, were unable to raise the political stakes, struggled to fight the election on their own terms and were soundly defeated at the hands of the Tories.

This attitude was highly significant for what it indicates about Labour's inability to change. The party's critique contained a sense of moral outrage at the way 'serious' politics was being replaced by frivolity of a sensational kind.

'After the Municipal Elections, when it was vital to rouse the Labour supporters from their depression caused by the reverse, the *Daily Herald* continued to play General Election news down. On Friday 13th May, for example, the only election news was a single left-hand column, headed "Labour Loses Eleven Towns". The main front page story was of an attack on a schoolgirl and a nurse by a young man, headed, "Two Girls Attacked Near Forest". On May 19th, the left hand column headed with "Seven Days To Go", but prominence was given to... "Love Orgy Students are Sacked"... These indicate the change in the general character of the *Daily Herald*'.⁶⁰

The *Herald* had played up stories with a sex interest, whilst political stories received less attention. It was felt this added to political indifference throughout the electorate, with an obviously greater effect on Labour supporters, for this was the official Labour organ. It was felt such a situation confirmed the impression that Labour was offering no serious challenge to the government.

The following analysis of the *Daily Herald's* front page gives a clear idea of the problems Labour faced, and how it saw the problem.

The NEC felt there was a big shift in the nature and pitch of the *Daily Herald* during the two election campaigns. In 1951, over 60 per cent of the front page dealt with election news, political, industrial and international affairs. By 1955, the *Daily Herald* was projecting a different image. Indeed, only in the last three days of the campaign did the *Daily Herald* make the election headline news. 'In the previous three weeks at least half the headline stories were trivial, sensationalised or alarmist'.⁶¹

The NEC felt that the editorial appointment of Ainsworth (previously editor of *The People*) had played a decisive role in changing the nature of the paper. It wanted to increase the paper's circulation. It fully accepted the need for a realistic policy designed to stop the 'sag' and to increase the circulation, as a wider readership would benefit the party. However, the NEC argued that the journalistic standards and the quality of the paper could not be allowed to slip. Allowing standards to drop could be 'harmful to the good name of the Labour Party'. Furthermore, if such a scenario arrived, retaining the paper as its official organ could see the party 'suffer actual damage'. The NEC believed 'that at least 55 per cent of the *Daily Herald* readers are hard core Labour supporters...A news policy designed to gain, non-political readers which lost the hard core, would...be disastrous'.⁶² The trivial and the sexy story could not be allowed to dominate the serious. Labour was hardly accepting the concerns of a modern electorate and using them; it remained rooted in a different and less accommodating set of values.

The new media presented a new opportunity which was only partially exploited. The two main parties had only four sound broadcasts in 1955, compared with five in 1951. Labour's radio speakers were Jim Griffiths, Herbert Morrison, Miss M. Herbison and Clement Attlee, Labour's 'dynamic' performers. The broadcasts received favourable press comments. *The Observer* felt Griffiths's address had been 'a moving and sincere appeal to the idealistic voter'. *The New Statesman and Nation* felt Morrison had 'hit the top of his form' and *The Star* 'ran a favourable leader...on the subject of Miss Herbison's broadcast'.⁶³ However, despite the widely held belief that T.V. would be a gigantic influence on the mass electorate, *The Observer* noted 'that neither Party made the mistake of treating sound broadcasts as a poor second in propaganda value'. Indeed, following the election, the NEC recognised that 'although heralded as such by sections

of the press, it was not in the event a television election'.⁶⁴ Labour had three T.V. broadcasts. Its first had involved Mr and Mrs Attlee in conversation with Percy Cudlipp. Attlee received a good press. He was regarded as a consummate performer. The *Daily Mail* found him to be 'a formidable T.V. personality'. The *Manchester Guardian* saw it as an attempt to woo 'the timorous, coy and political floating voter'.⁶⁵ Labour's second T.V. broadcast was entitled 'Your Money's Worth' and featured Dr. Edith Summerskill and Mr Harold Wilson, and dealt mainly with the cost of living. Again, Labour scored a success. The *Manchester Guardian* felt that the broadcast had been 'good television politics...It was well thought of at Tory Headquarters, where for days afterwards they were answering the charges that had been made. The *Daily Telegraph* was even prepared to credit 'the simple and repetitive emphasis with which it made its points'.⁶⁶ However, Labour's final T.V. broadcast proved to be its coup de grace. The broadcast showed Herbert Morrison, Hugh Gaitskell, James Callaghan and Lady Megan Lloyd George answering questions put to them by William Pickles. The *Daily Telegraph* regarded it as 'by far the most professional of the three television broadcasts given by the Party'. The *News Chronicle*, whilst not endorsing the political content of the broadcast, thought that 'for pure entertainment value, this was by far the best of all election broadcasts'.⁶⁷ Those involved with the broadcasts were pleased with the results. However, William Pickles did exercise a note of caution by stating that 'Tory technique is catching up'. Pickles revelled in the fact that 'both Gaitskell budget talks, [the] Wilson - Summerskill T.V. [and] Mr Phillips local government rattled the other side...and [put] the Tories on the defensive'.⁶⁸ Labour had to accept that times were changing.

The pace of change was hampered by the fact that 'traditional' methods were still needed. In the aftermath of their election defeat the Labour Party recognised that the effect of television

on the electorate had been overestimated. In the run up to polling day, the *Economist* had expressed grave doubts over the influence T.V. would have stating: 'As there are now more than 4½ million T.V. sets in operation and the parties believe (on rather shaky evidence) that there will be an average of some 3 or 4 people looking at each set, politicians are reckoning that they can reach between half and two thirds of the 25-30 million people who will vote on May 26th'.⁶⁹ Projected audience estimates by politicians and even the more conservative estimates from newspapers proved to be well wide of the mark. Audiences averaged just under five million. The lowest viewing figure was 3.5 million, or 10 per cent of the electorate, who tuned into Harold Macmillan. The largest audience was 5.5 million or 16 per cent of the electorate, who were reached first by the Labour team headed by Morrison and Gaitskell and later matched by Sir Anthony Eden with the final Conservative programme.⁷⁰

The Gallup Polls conducted during the 1955 election suggested that the public's idea of electioneering did not match Labour's. To the question 'Which do you think is the best way of getting information about politics?' 47 per cent replied newspapers (surely adding to Labour's sense of frustration at the *Daily Herald*); 32 per cent stated radio, 18 per cent said talking to people, and a lowly 15 per cent said television⁷¹. The role television was to play at the 1955 election had been the subject of much speculation. Certainly, few expected audience figures to be smaller than 12 million. In fact, audiences were far smaller and so despite the apparent quality of Labour's broadcasts, their impact was a good deal less than the party had either hoped or anticipated. When Labour 'modernised', it still got things wrong - not because it failed to identify the pattern of change, but because it had identified the potential of television as a medium before the public had really had time to acquire new political habits.

Nevertheless, the growing importance of television continued to be stressed, particularly by those in Labour's Research Department. Labour was taking note of audience figures and planned to play to its audience. Yet the party remained aware 'of the danger of following professional critics into a playing down of sound radio for election purposes...It [radio] is...less distracting than T.V., and will carry more complicated arguments'. With this warning, and with the importance of radio during electioneering duly in place, Pickles went on to stress that between elections, radio broadcasts produced little more than a ripple, and 'so we ought to take up as many of the T.V. options as we can'. Pickles advised training 'a few top-level figures' in media techniques. He felt that the use of experts was needed 'if only because...the Tories intend to be much more adventurous in future'. Indeed Pickles felt Labour needed to use greater variation in T.V. between elections. He also argued that organisation needed some re-assessment. He felt the choice of targets, speakers and techniques were both technical and political matters. Thus, if Labour was to retain its advantage over the Tories, it needed 'better liaison between the Technical Sub-Committee and the Senior Committee...At present, the intermingling of the technical and the political takes place too late'.⁷²

The attitude of some of the leading 'modernisers' on the policy front to organisation was an evident obstacle to organisational renewal. Hugh Gaitskell felt anything but comfortable in front of a television camera. Following one rehearsal, Tony Benn had said to him "'At least there was one point when you did not look as though you had an ulcer!'"⁷³ Gaitskell supported Wilson's investigation into party organisation. He was keen to ensure better press relations (later, he was instrumental in appointing a public relations expert, A. J. McWhinnie). Early in his time

as leader Gaitskell felt that 'one of the things that has been going rather well lately has been our handling of the press. I don't think Clem ever bothered sufficiently with this...I think, in general, the presentation of the opposition as a serious, co-ordinated force is enormously helpful'. He continued, it would be helpful to 'see the Lobby regularly and tell them what you are doing, what your aims are...We also had a press conference for the foreign press...went off extremely well'.⁷⁴ Yet even this was hardly enthusiasm - in other areas he remained even more conservative.

Yet there was a 'modernising' pressure. Tony Benn and Gwilym Williams had both been closely involved with Labour's T.V. broadcasts, as well as serving on the Research Department's Senior Committee. Benn in particular grasped the modernising nettle. Following the election defeat, he felt that further changes were needed in Labour's T.V. broadcasts. He advocated forming a Radio and Television Department at Transport House and the appointment of a Radio and Television Officer. A call 'for special skill not at present available' was made. Although audience figures had disappointed, radio and T.V. still reached millions.

Those in the Research Department were clearly attempting to look forward, to plan ahead in a well structured, organised and professional way. Yet there was little incentive to adopt television and an approach based on capturing a non - Labour audience. There was no encouragement to try and create a new image and appeal. The BBC and others felt that parties would be preaching to the converted. They stated that 'there was a tendency for people to listen to more of the broadcasts of their own than of the opposite side'. Moreover, they seemed to suggest that viewers were passively observing, not actually listening to the new media, reflecting views about the degeneration of political values which were close to Labour's heart. The viewing

figures for each of the seven T.V. broadcasts during the election, it argued, varied little from the number watching the TV news. It concluded that 'election broadcasts did not, in general, either enhance or reduce the number of people viewing'.⁷⁵ When one particular election broadcast received an abnormally large audience, the BBC suggested that the programme following the election broadcast had the greatest bearing on the audience size. The largest audience, some 16 per cent of the total electorate, tuned into Labour's final broadcast. Again, the BBC felt 'it is significant that the election broadcast...preceded by the popular Grove Family, [sic] was seen by 22 per cent'. It continued 'while it would be unwise to conclude...that no viewers deliberately chose to view one election broadcast rather than another for political reasons,...the...differences...almost certainly owing much more to the accidents of placing'⁷⁶. TV at least had a wider audience penetration than radio. The BBC noted that: 'the average election broadcast in vision was seen by thirty seven per cent of the T.V. public, whereas the average election broadcast on sound was heard by only sixteen per cent of the rest of the population'.⁷⁷

These doubts about broadcasting reinforced the arguments of those who wanted to revitalise 'traditional' organisation. With two consecutive election defeats behind them, worries re-surfaced over 'Labour's declining and largely inactive membership...the inefficiency and ignorance of those who volunteered to help, harmed the party's electoral prospects'.⁷⁸ Yet throughout the 1950s the apparent indifference of many prominent revisionists to issues of either conventional or 'new' organisational issues frustrated people like Phillips, Morrison, Shore, Bacon, Ginsburg and Wilson - who did take reform seriously. Whilst finance limited activity and the number of full-time staff, membership remained at a depressing level. In a cash strapped party 'safe seats remained Labour's great un milked cash-cows'.⁷⁹ Poor organisation continued to

cost Labour seats. Here was an apparently 'non political' issue, where the centre-left and traditionalists could agree to act - but where most revisionists remained generally silent.

The 1955 election produced some classic examples of disappointing results, poor organisation, local level in-fighting, apathy and a distrust of directives and intervention from the national level. The National Agent's report on the 1955 election produced an illuminating array of failure, incompetence, inactivity and bad luck. Poor organisation contributed to the loss of several marginal seats. In Halifax, for example, Labour held a 763 majority in 1951. In 1955 that was turned into a Conservative majority of 1,535. There had been much internal quarrelling 'between the old guard and some new elements with extreme left-wing views'. The arguments had totally disrupted local activity. The report went on to state that 'The great increase in the postal vote [was]...almost entirely to the advantage of the Tories, as the Constituency Labour Party had done nothing about these matters in the last two years'. It was a desperate situation in what was a reasonably high profile seat. Not only had special help been granted, but prominent speakers including Clement Attlee and Lady Megan Lloyd George had spoken there. The perceived reason for failure in Halifax was spelt out in one sentence: 'the organisation is simply not there'.⁸⁰

Nor was this the only example. In Preston South, a Labour majority of 16 in 1951 was turned into a Conservative majority of 474 in 1955. The party felt it had suffered due to the re-housing of some two thousand working-class people in the neighbouring constituencies of Chorley and Preston North. In this case again, financial assistance had been given to enable the appointment of an organiser. Though the appointment had been made, it 'proved unsatisfactory

and ended after only a few months'. The most telling sentence this time was that 'there was no real co-operation locally in the effort to build up an effective electoral machine'.⁸¹

There were similar problems in southern Britain. In Maldon, Tom Driberg was replaced as candidate by L. Scutts. In this case, it was felt that Scutts simply 'did not have the same personal following that Driberg had'.⁸² The same was said in Watford, where A. Bramhall replaced John Freeman and a Labour majority of 508 was replaced by a Tory majority of 1,717. Labour still focussed on such issues - and with some justification; but this hardly encouraged the creation of a new approach.

IV

Following their defeat in the May 1955 General Election, the NEC decided that the time for organisational improvement was long overdue. On 22 June 1955, it established a sub-committee to 'enquire into the general organisation of the Party and to report to the National Executive Committee'. The committee was chaired by Harold Wilson.⁸³ Crossman felt that Wilson had pulled off quite a coup. The report placed him at the fore of the party's attention. Crossman stated that: 'with great skill Harold got it agreed, with Gaitskell's support, and got himself on it, along with three weaklings - Jack Cooper, Peggy Herbison and one other [Arthur Skeffington]'.⁸⁴ The sub-committee reported quickly. Before publication, Wilson had taken the report to Crossman, who recognised 'This really is a sensational document, since it provides detailed evidence from the centre, the regions and the constituencies for all the complaints about organisation which all of us, individually, have made. It is, in fact an annihilating destruction of Morgan Phillips and, to a lesser extent, of Len Williams'.⁸⁵ The report certainly did not do Wilson any harm in the eyes of Clem Attlee. He told Crossman that the report was 'Absolutely

first-rate! A superb job!' He further added that publication of the report would 'do the Party the world of good. Put new spirit into them. Why, in my constituency there was nobody under seventy in the committee rooms and they were doing the same old routine they had done for the last thirty years. Won't do at all!'. Despite the fact that Attlee had 'never taken much interest in organization,' he felt it was important that Wilson had done so.⁸⁶ Here was an opportunity for Wilson to argue that modernisation of the machine - and not of contentious areas such as policy - was sufficient 'restructuring' for the party to succeed in the future. The Wilson Report was based on thorough investigation. Evidence was collected

'by visits to each regional centre of the Party, by questionnaires and invitations to produce written evidence, by meeting with whips' groups of Labour Members of Parliament, and by visits to a necessarily small number of marginal constituencies. In addition we have received oral evidence, supported by documents, from the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents and from the Co-operative Party'.⁸⁷

In each region, the investigators met with the Regional Organiser, the Women's Regional Organiser, assistant Regional Officers (if they existed) and 30-40 full- and part-time agents. The investigators received written or oral evidence from 550 full-time or part-time agents, 140 Labour M.P.s and 164 Labour candidates. The conclusion was one of 'surprise, [not]...that the General Election was lost, but that we won as many seats as we did'. Issues which 'shocked' investigators most were the 'progressive deterioration of the Party's organisation, especially at constituency level. Constituencies...not particularly well organised in 1950 and 1951 have declined seriously since then'. A further problem, and one which would have dismayed the likes of Herbert Morrison, was that the investigators felt 'voluntary workers were fewer and less enthusiastic than at any previous time...with many it is habit rather than enthusiasm which provided the motive force'.⁸⁸ Volunteerism had remained a much cherished ideal within the party, and Wilson's report

recognised that ‘an attempt to build up a streamlined professional machine would be offensive to our traditions and our principles alike’. The report advocated proper staffing, finance, inspiration and advice⁸⁹ to aid the ranks of voluntary workers and the handful of paid officers. It was thus a ‘traditionalists’ *and* a ‘modernisers’ report, suggesting that a more professional version of their committed activism would work. Whatever its significance for Labour’s organisation, it was certainly a step forward for Wilson.

The reports authors stated that ‘even a limited improvement in organisation would have won us the election if only by a narrow majority’.⁹⁰ Indeed, the National Agent was able to list thirty-five crucial marginal constituencies won by the Conservatives, stating that these seats were ‘lost primarily through poor organisation’.⁹¹ The examples used in the report make it abundantly clear that the Labour Party had a serious problem. In one large city with three marginal constituencies not one house had been canvassed, either for the general election or the municipal election which preceded it. In another large city, constituency organisation was inactive when the election was called. Again, there had been no canvass. The limited door to door work was carried out by the candidate, his friends and his relatives. In one rural constituency right up to the polling day, the only party workers were the agent and the candidate. The lack of any solid Labour activity allowed coachloads of Tories to pour into a neighbouring industrial area, where they captured the seat from Labour. The investigators made it clear that cases of inadequate organisation could be found up and down the country. The answer to one question asked in the report provides an example of disastrous organisation:

‘1. The organisation of the postal vote; how far was it effective? - **No organisation**

of the postal vote was attempted.

2.The use of cars on polling day? - **No cars were available.**

3.Canvassing, what proportion of the electorate was covered? - **None.**

4.What were the chief Labour Party organisational weaknesses in the constituency?- **There was no organisation except that which I undertook myself.**

5.What kind of organisation existed in the constituency between elections? Were any organisational steps taken before the campaign started? - **A small group in the town of X - consisting of about three active members and six non-active. An election agent was appointed who was so physically handicapped that he could only carry out some clerical work. The regional officer induced me - much against my own inclination - to become candidate, after which I was left to shift for myself**.⁹²

The investigators felt that since 1945 organisation had been sidelined. They argued that both nationally and locally, 'arguments about policies and personalities...have tended to squeeze questions of organisation off the agenda of both the NEC and its committees, at one end of the scale and constituency ward (or village) parties at the other'. Whatever the symptoms which had caused 'organisation to become the Cinderella of the party', the remedy was clear. Organisation had to take a more prominent role, and 'those concerned with it be given more encouragement and support'.⁹³

The Wilson Report did not stress the need to ignore activists and focus on the new media. It agreed that much work needed to be done on 'conventional' organisation. 'The National Agent's Department [had] declined' and was continuing to do so. The NEC had been taking 'less interest in the problems of organisation'. Changes were being prescribed from the top to the bottom of the party. An overhaul of the 'day to day control of the Organisation Department, nationally and regionally' was deemed vital. The overlap between the General Secretary and the National Agent was holding back the party's organisation. The General Secretary's

responsibilities were too diverse for him to be involved in the day to day control of organisation. It was tactfully argued that it was asking too much, and that it was 'unfair to him' and 'detrimental to the party'. The organisation could not be allowed to continue as it stood in 1955. Ultimately, it was argued that control of organisation and reporting to the NEC, ought to be 'put fairly and squarely on the National Agent's Department. Unless action is taken, satisfactory organisation is impossible'.⁹⁴

The final change deemed necessary in the re-structuring process was the introduction of a Special Standing Sub-Committee of the NEC which, alongside the existing Organisation Sub-Committee, would supervise the organisational work of the party. It was hoped that this sub-committee would supply the necessary drive and support which had been clearly lacking. The Special Standing Sub committee could dedicate more time to organisation, as well as showing that organisation was regarded as important by the party.

The Wilson report reflected contemporary understanding of voting behaviour. It accepted that most voters did not 'change sides'. Rather than converting voters, the report thus focussed on maximising the efficiency of the current vote. It was argued that 'a disproportionate amount of time available during an election is still devoted to conversion [of voters], at the expense of the priority task of identifying the Labour voters and creating a machine to get them to the polls'⁹⁵. Thus it was argued that targeting Labour supporters who had failed to vote Labour would maximise Labour's vote and would win most of the seats it considered marginal. Whilst an astute politician might thus see the value of stressing 'core' party beliefs, the report did not discuss policy. Rather it argued that for this to be effective, a detailed knowledge of each

marginal constituency was essential. A marked register, regular canvassing, tracing removals and calling on new residents were vital to success. Effective organisation could make a difference. There was - implicitly - no need to abandon older Labour ideals, nor to engage in internal disagreements about the direction of the party.

Importantly, the Wilson Report redefined marginal constituencies as those 'where only half the available non-voters are needed to cancel out the 1955 Tory majority'.⁹⁶ This was found to be the case in forty seven seats. Each of these was by definition regarded as 'winnable'. Had Labour been effective in these constituencies in 1955 they would have had 324 MPs and a majority of 23. Furthermore, of the 35 seats listed by the National Agent as lost 'primarily through poor organisation', 28 appeared on the list produced by the Wilson Report. Again, the importance of good organisation between elections was paramount: 'if we are to mobilise anything like a full Labour vote, a permanent record of Labour voters is necessary in every marginal constituency...by September, 1957, [there must be a] marked register in every marginal constituency...and our planning, national and regional, must be directed towards it'.⁹⁷ Much of the responsibility for the implementation of the plans would fall on those working at the national level. They would have to provide the information, finance, plans and manpower. The new Special Standing Sub-Committee was prepared to shoulder a good deal of responsibility for the future success of the party's organisation. Thus canvass teams of students, canvass teams from safe seats or full-time 'missioners' were organised to ensure that each constituency carried out a canvass. The canvassing process was to be given a much higher priority and organised intervention was to ensure a higher level of consistency.

From 1956, marginal constituencies became the centre of Labour's campaigns. It was agreed that £50,000 be set aside each year for these constituencies. The bulk of this took the form of grants to enable full-time agents and organisers to be either appointed or maintained. There was also substantial spending on the employment of canvass teams (Labour's marginals were not all capable of carrying out such a task), the training of election workers and the provision of election materials. Whilst organisation and membership improved in these marginals, it was outside help and direction or instruction from central level which allowed the improvement to take place. Even so, the improvement was hardly spectacular. The target set had been to have a completely marked register in all marginal constituencies by the end of 1957. The target was not reached, though some comfort was taken from the fact that 'nearly all [the marginals targeted]...now have extensive records...being added to and kept up to date'.⁹⁸

The Wilson report felt that creating 'thriving ward organisations with election functions clearly allocated and known in advance' was a priority. Better organisation of the postal vote was stressed. A special canvass and closer work with the unions were suggested. As the Conservatives had more cars to call on, Labour was already disadvantaged, but the investigators again found a lack of co-ordination: 'In many constituencies there is no...pre-arranged plan, e.g. on old age pensioners' estates in the morning, or on new housing estates to which Labour voters have moved since the register was compiled'.⁹⁹ It was argued that Car Transport Officers were needed and that they would require training. Hard work, training, increased knowledge and an increase in central organisation would answer the organisational and electoral problems. Labour could turn the situation around.

The Wilson report pinpointed areas of weakness, brought problems to the surface and suggested ways of improving the various areas they had scrutinised. In certain instances, solutions relied on manpower. The report revealed that ‘the Party’s problem with full-time agents is that we have too few, those we have are badly distributed...although some agents are very good indeed, others are not, most applicants for new vacancies [are]...of very poor quality’. The Wilson report revealed that ‘during the past two years [1953-55], 100 full-time agencies have collapsed, and a further number are in the course of doing so’.¹⁰⁰ The threat to agencies in many marginal constituencies was taken very seriously, and the ‘first aid scheme’ which aimed to support these agencies financially, tried to ensure their survival and development.

By 1955, the job of the Labour Party agent could hardly have been less glamorous or less appealing. Morale was low, the salary was poor and the job itself was highly insecure. The Wilson Report noted: ‘real hardship is not unknown - especially where the agent has to live away from home - and the chronic insecurity, the scraping round to find the current month’s salary, even delays in payment, have caused the loss of many good agents and a serious deterioration of the candidates for agency posts’. The report felt progress could be made if ‘the party...declare[d] its aim of working towards a full National Agency Service’.¹⁰¹ As such, the investigators called for a plan to be drawn up for the ‘recruitment, terms of appointment and training of a small National Agency Service adequate to meet the needs of the Regional Schemes’.¹⁰² Long term security, improved wages and better prospects were also called for in order to make the job of an agent appear more attractive and to attract better candidates.

Again reverting to a traditional strategy for improvement, the investigators encouraged

an expanded membership. It was felt that no single action would or could 'do more for Constituency Party finance'. Collecting subscription fees on a regular basis was the bane of many CLP members' lives. The party's recorded membership was always considerably higher than the actual number of people paying regular contributions. Finding new members or re-recruiting old members was never a problem. The difficulty lay solely in the collection of the membership fee. Unfortunately, the Wilson Report was unable to improve the situation; for whilst acknowledging it was an area of deep concern, the investigators felt that having 'received such differing reports on the paid collector system...we are not in any position to make any recommendation about it'. However, the strong Labour areas were lambasted for 'not making anything like the effort, in terms of membership and affiliation fees of which they are capable'. In order to improve the situation, it was recommended that 'affiliation fees shall be 6d. per member, or £2 per thousand (or part of a thousand) Labour votes, whichever is the greater'.¹⁰³ Rather than increase 'real' membership, Wilson recommended a scheme which brought in more money and seemed to increase membership. It was, many might argue, a typically 'Wilsonian' slight of hand.

V

Following the Wilson report, it was hoped that constituencies would adhere closely to central directives on organisation emanating from the agent's office in London. It was further hoped that increased organisational effectiveness would encourage change and ultimately electoral triumph. By 1958, Labour's Campaign Committee reflected the increasing importance Labour was attaching to organisation on the national level. Those serving on the committee were political heavyweights, including Nye Bevan, Hugh Gaitskell, James Griffiths, Harold Wilson, Morgan Phillips, David Ginsburg and Ian Mikardo, with Barbara Castle in the chair. The 1958

organisation campaign was boldly titled *Prelude To Victory*. Each CLP was encouraged to hold two meetings for party members and delegates, one to brief active workers on party policy, the other to plan a campaign which would cover the maximum number of voters. A further important and significant step was that the Chairman's Sub-Committee became a campaign committee, with 'the power to bring others in for consultation when required and to take action and incur expenditure as needed'.¹⁰⁴

The most pressing desire from the national level was to see an increase in activity throughout the labour movement. It was hoped (rather than planned) that a short policy statement would be available in time to be launched with a T.V. broadcast. There were definite plans for national conferences for briefing and planning purposes, as well as a call for regional conferences to deal with more specific local issues. It was hoped that by following the national level proposals, there would be a structured and coherent national campaign. Every party was to hold meetings in conjunction with regional conferences, to canvass for new members, and promote the party. In marginal seats consultations on organisation would take place. Literature on how to organise and publicise an effective campaign would also be distributed to every local party. Those involved were satisfied they were taking 'steps nationally to ensure we get the movement seized with the importance of increasing its activity'.¹⁰⁵ The message and image which Labour was trying to put across was up-beat and positive. The summary of Labour's policies planned for November 1958 would reflect this attempt at positivism. 'We are proud of our policies. As positive proposals to attain social justice and equality of opportunity for the people they are unrivalled'.¹⁰⁶ Taking the campaign to the people was the central tenet. It was not a new message which was to come forward, nor a strategy based on listening to voters, but a revival of activism

and (professionally supported) commitment.

Increased use of TV and radio crept up - it was the preferred option of those Gaitskellite modernisers who expressed any interest. Once again, during the build up to the 1959 election, broadcasting was regarded as a vital medium for delivering the Labour message to a mass audience. In the Technical Broadcasting Committee report to the Campaign Committee (presented by Tony Benn), it was made clear that 'since the last election, the potential television audience has more than doubled. In 1955, it was just over 30 per cent. Now it is well over 60 per cent,...and rising at an average of 3 million a year'. As such, it was argued that 'television...[was] the main instrument for political broadcasting'.¹⁰⁷ By broadcasting after the nine o'clock news, it was felt that viewers would be retained and minimal disruption to T.V. schedules would be the result. Daily broadcasts in the two weeks preceding the election could become a feature of the campaign. The campaign broadcasts were to be a rallying cry to the faithful - but also an attempt to dismay the enemy by attacking where they were weak and defending against their attacks. Energy, confidence and belief were regarded as vital. The broadcasting campaign (both on T.V. and radio) was recognised as a part of a wider campaign. It was argued that there should be continuity in the broadcasts, thus allowing important policies and beliefs to be built up 'by repetition and the gradual familiarisation of certain symbols'.¹⁰⁸

Benn and his team sought to standardise the production - a filmed beginning, music, captions, a standard set, a televisual chairman (an anchorman to provide the introduction, and gain the confidence of the viewing public), a filmed ending, music and a super imposed slogan. It was argued that 'whatever else is different, these must be consistent'. A great deal of care and

attention had gone into the plans. Labour felt it should capture the audience's attention through the filmed beginning and the music; both were carefully chosen to create the right impression. Each broadcast was to begin in an attractive, modern, dramatic and hard hitting fashion. Indeed, after just 15 seconds of film captions and music, it was felt that the viewers

'have heard stirring music, stressing the humanity of man, and reflecting the ethical content of the party's philosophy. They have seen a picture of the lovely countryside of Britain and have seen how modern and up to date things are growing from it. They have been reminded by the caption that it is their country and that they must work for its future as a part of the great community, again, reflected in the singing. They are ready for the beginning of the programme'.¹⁰⁹

The role of the chairman or presenter was regarded as vital. The individual in this anchor role had to be 'friendly...not smarmy...set a cracking pace without...rush[ing]...He must be the friendly warm symbol of the Labour Party today'. This link between the party and the public would set the tone of Labour's broadcasts. The chairman had to build up a confident rapport with the viewing public throughout the campaign. Labour was keen to use one of its big figures, a political heavyweight such as Wilson or Crossman. Another theme was the need for the broadcasts to use 'the leader himself'. Gaitskell's presence on the programmes was carefully arranged 'he would be seen in a set specially created for him. The construction of this set is of great importance. The desk, the table lamp, the crystal ash tray, the globe, the bust of Keir Hardie, the wall paper...will all create the image of a Prime Minister waiting to take office'.¹¹⁰ Forward planning, a consistent structure for the programme, and the correct image were the priorities of those attempting to set up the broadcast campaign. This tone - with its apparent acceptance of 'the leader' as a central figure of presentation and policy - was positive, modern and consistent.

By 1959, T.V. was regarded as the ideal way of addressing a huge audience. It was also felt that it posed a serious threat to the numbers voting. Labour's moralism and traditionalism were again significant. Indeed, the Labour Party feared that many workers might return home from work and settle in front of their T.V. set - rather than go out and vote. Fears were expressed that 'the T.V. authorities might militate against a high poll by putting on attractive programmes at the most critical hours from the Labour Party's point of view'.¹¹¹ Doubts about the new consumer society lurked everywhere.

Despite these fears, T.V. remained an essential political tool, notably amongst revisionists. It was to be used to relaunch Labour's *Into Action* campaign in January 1959. The Labour Party firmly believed the general election would be called for May. Its initial programme was to be a documentary type inquiry. The programme would describe the sensational success of the pamphlet *Into Action*, defend it against criticisms and have various sections covering policy on pensions, education, housing, economic and foreign affairs. This was well planned and professional, but the all important jobs of chairman and producer continued to cause concern. The Campaign Committee felt that the party did not have anyone from within their ranks sufficiently qualified for the role. The Committee decided that the best way forward was to have 'a BBC producer seconded until the election. The Party would pay his salary, but he would retain his office and status in the BBC whilst working full-time for the Labour Party'.¹¹² Labour recognised that image was becoming increasingly important. Not untypically, the modernising leader of the party was reportedly keen on the idea. He 'sought the advice and guidance of a number of influential friends of the party with wide knowledge and experience in the field of public relations'.¹¹³ Whilst the suggestion that the party needed a full-time public relations officer

was rejected (because it would upset the office structure), the committee unanimously agreed on Gaitskell's proposal for a short term solution. The editor of the *Daily Herald* had suggested that Mr A.J. McWhinnie should be loaned to the party to undertake this job for a limited period, and even offered to continue to pay his salary. Labour was looking for a more stage managed appearance. It had McWhinnie's services until May, the anticipated date of the election. However, advocates of change had (at best) Gaitskell's ear, and never for one moment his real attention.

The Campaign Committee authorised expenditure of up to £10,000 for the party's election broadcasts. It was felt that the main objectives of the broadcasts were three fold: firstly, to put across Labour policy on specific issues of the election; secondly, to produce a lively and topical commentary on the progress of the campaign whilst keeping the initiative and thirdly, to project the correct image of the Labour Party and the Conservatives. McWhinnie began the process of improving Labour's image in the vital area of press relations. This 'new approach' involved giving assistance to all comers, irrespective of the politics of the particular paper. McWhinnie faced a good deal of hostility, noticeably from Hugh Chevins at *The Daily Telegraph* and his 'to Hell with Transport House' attitude. Equally negative was David Willis, an up and coming political journalist at *News Chronicle*, who stated that 'for a year now I've been Political Correspondent of my paper and nobody at Transport House has wanted to know me'. McWhinnie felt that Transport House had to change its attitude towards the press, that 'Transport House is working as a series of watertight compartments. There is big room for improvement here in developing a system of funnelling out news for use in the national and provincial press'. He argued that the fear of being blamed for a possible leak meant 'nobody says anything to

anybody. In the process we lose valuable space in the news columns'. Labour needed to repair and then nurture its links with the press. McWhinnie was a skilled operator, a clever tactician, capable of influencing the journalists: 'The truth is that a lot of material now being withheld wouldn't rate more than a few paltry lines as "news". But, let a reporter pick it up in the taverns or in the lobby, and the next stage is obvious to any professional journalist...all the page 1 disclosure details are there'.¹¹⁴ Through clever deployment of information, Labour could ensure a greater number of column inches and more television news. McWhinnie's journalistic expertise provided Labour with an insight into news management which it had previously failed to grasp. McWhinnie also echoed the sentiments of those involved in Labour's publicity and organisation departments. Labour must tell the world that it was active. The message had to be put across with 'pride'.

Press reaction was favourable. Gerard Fay, London editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, gave his seal of approval, telling McWhinnie he was 'looking forward to meeting again'. Edward Pickering, editor of the *Daily Express*, wrote to pass on his 'congratulations on your appointment. If anyone can ever effect a marriage between me and Transport House, it should be you'. Reg Cudlipp, editor of *The News of the World*, told him: 'it will be nice to deal with somebody who knows a Public Relations job'. Trevor Evans, Director of the *Daily Express*, hoped to see 'a lot of stories coming our joint ways. All the best in your new assignment. They could not have done better', and Stanley Dobson, the *Evening News* political correspondent, told how he was 'hoping to devote a lot of space to Labour Party news and look forward to your cooperation'.¹¹⁵ McWhinnie's appointment had begun to break down the mutual distrust which had grown up. His presence was definitely effective. By March 1959, the Campaign Committee minutes stated

that 'having Mr McWhinnie seconded to the party seems to have been a success'.¹¹⁶ Yet by May 1959, it was also reported that Mr McWhinnie could not be seconded for a further period and would be returning to the *Daily Herald*.

It was felt that Gaitskell, Bacon and Phillips should find a replacement. None of them did so. Instead, McWhinnie returned before the election. Though he had been effective, his full worth was never realised. Labour failed to grasp their chance to promote the party professionally and positively. The chance to unite the party behind a modern image and better organisation was also spurned. Having witnessed the professionalism, progress and success of McWhinnie, the party should have replaced him. It did not.

This was not because the issue was avoided. McWhinnie had told Morgan Phillips that Labour lacked 'provincial and Fleet Street trained, sound experienced reporters...who can spot news, dig it out, work it up and nudge it towards the right news columns...T.V. and radio networks'. He pointed out that most of Labour's pamphlets, leaflets and political articles merely preached to the converted. Labour was not reaching out to new recruits on a systematic or regular basis. He went to say that 'your Press Department is hopelessly understaffed and inadequate for modern publicity requirements...you have nobody available for finding news and getting it into...mass circulation'. Ultimately, Labour was lagging well behind the Conservatives who employed a large number of press staff at their Central Office, as well as Press Officers in each of the ten regions. McWhinnie believed such people were of tremendous value. They were thoroughly trained, news reporters. They knew how to influence the right type of people and keep the Conservative Party in the news. Labour had to modernise in the field of public relations.

McWhinnie stated that 'sooner or later you will have to employ a team of good, sound, swift reporters who know how to make news, and influence people who have a place to put it'.¹¹⁷ The appointment of staff with the correct professional and political background would relieve the burden on the overworked Press and Publicity department, help Labour hit the headlines and gain increased T.V. exposure - for all the right reasons.

McWhinnie offered the party a choice of proposals aimed at producing an efficient, streamlined and professional press service. The ideal situation was to allocate a news gathering staff reporter to each of the twelve regional organisers. A cheaper alternative was to have five regional assistant press officers based in Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Cardiff, and the final (and cheapest) alternative was a small 'flying squad' of reporters, based in London, but available to the regions when the news needs arose. McWhinnie wanted to 'cut down that 22½ percent of "Don't Knows"'.¹¹⁸ Media management was about converting floating voters, and not just about mobilising loyalists.

The head of Press and Publicity Department, Arthur Bax, supported McWhinnie, though not everyone felt the changes were necessary. On circulating McWhinnie's comments, Morgan Phillips attached his own - at best cautious - response to the proposals. He felt that the appointment of two newspaper reporters to the existing Press Department lacked 'any merit'. Of other ideas, he stated 'We cannot, of course, accept the proposal for the regional organisation of news gathering by the appointment of a reporter in each region, nor can we make an allocation of £20,000 a year for this purpose'. However, following the detailed analysis from McWhinnie and Bax, Morgan Phillips recommended that the party replaced McWhinnie when his

secondment period expired. The *underlying* point about the need to convert opinion through media management was pushed aside. Phillips accepted better co-ordination, not the philosophy of a pro-active system of news management. In doing so he accepted a strategy based on mobilising the 'traditional' and 'core' vote, not on expanding the basis of Labour support.

In the months before the 1959 General Election the party seemed to recognise the importance of organisation. CLPs received a great number of reminders of the tasks they should be performing. The key marginals received financial help to complete their marked registers, and there was better use of press and television; but without any positive impact on Labour's performance. The campaign targeted the sixty-six constituencies highlighted in the Wilson Report. By 1959, a further 28 constituencies were added, which might be won by a small swing to Labour or which were held by Labour with a narrow majority. Unfortunately for Labour, the Conservatives concentrated their efforts in the marginals too. The result according to Phillips was that 'the party machines tended to cancel each other out'. The concentration on 164 marginal constituencies saw a high average poll of 80.9 per cent compared with the national average of 78.7 per cent. However, the average swing against Labour in these constituencies was only slightly less than the national swing (0.93 per cent as against 1.15 per cent). He concluded 'In view of the national swing, it is reasonable to assume that, but for the organising work done in the marginal constituencies, more seats would have been lost and that seats gained would have been even fewer than the five which were won'.¹¹⁹ This was a strikingly upbeat view on an approach which bore such limited results.

Throughout the long Labour campaign, the party had made use of opinion polls. In April

1959, the polls placed Labour and the Conservatives equal with 35 per cent of the electorate. The Liberals had the support of 5 per cent, whilst the remaining 25 per cent were “Don’t Know”. The result of the polls suggested that Labour should target the high proportion of ‘Don’t Knows’. Whilst it was felt that around half of this group would not vote, senior Labour figures believed that the other half could be mobilised. The polls also revealed some worrying trends ‘one...depressing aspect of these unattached potential Labour voters is that in the ratio of 2 to 1 they think that the Conservatives will win the next General Election, ie they are defeatists...their defeatism may be due to the fact that according to their own accounts they had in recent weeks appreciably more visits from someone connected with the Conservative Party than they have from someone connected with the Labour Party. [Furthermore]...they claim to have seen twice as many examples of Conservative propaganda as they have seen Labour Party propaganda’.¹²⁰ The polls also revealed ignorance of Labour Party policy, even amongst Labour’s supporters. Organisers drew the conclusion that Labour still had much work to do. It’s organisational renewal had failed. The Conservative party’s organisation remained dominant. Labour’s message had not been put across with the same effectiveness as the Conservatives’.

In a striking departure from previous election, Labour responded by consulting experts in an attempt to improve the situation, broaden its appeal and bolster the party’s image. Labour’s Campaign Committee took advice from advertising experts who recommended that ‘the Labour Party should spend £22,000 on an advertising campaign in the national newspapers during June, July and August 1959’. Those involved believed the advertising scheme could ‘counter the Tory propaganda...and establish a sufficiently favourable image of itself in the eyes of the electors to win the necessary number of marginal seats’.¹²¹ It was felt that a newspaper advertising campaign

would have the maximum impact. The only alternative was posters, but it was felt that at best, posters should play a supporting role, with marginal constituencies targeted in the poster campaigns where ever possible. The party took a tentative step towards placing presentation higher on its agenda.

The sixty-six seats the Wilson Report termed 'winnable' were now regarded as vital to Labour's success. They were obvious targets. Labour's central figures felt that the newspaper advertising campaign could reach 75 per cent of the adult population. The party hoped to follow the expert advice and ensure that the message would be seen as often as possible. A mass campaign in various papers was planned, with one advert each fortnight in each newspaper. The advertisements would depict Hugh Gaitskell 'talking to a group of people in the following situations: on a building site, to old age pensioners, in a hospital, at a school, to seamen and to agricultural workers. The copy "People like us...back Labour"'.¹²² Here was another small indication of an attempt to broaden the party's electoral base.

VI

Following the election defeat, an extensive post mortem took place. The new 'tools' of psephological analysis were used to identify where Labour had failed. The Home Policy Sub-Committee compared election data from the previous general election. The Conservatives had continued to exert a stronger influence on women voters, though a slightly higher percentage of women voted Labour in 1959 than in 1955, 'this according to the Gallup Poll, is due to the fact that women form a higher proportion of people over 65'. Further analysis did not make for happy reading. In the 21-29 age group, a large defection took place and the 'substantial lead we have enjoyed in this age group in the past has virtually disappeared'.¹²³ Analysis of class voting

suggested little change amongst the largest group - the lower middle and working class. However, and again worryingly for Labour, support in the middle class declined. The only solace Labour could take was that amongst the poor, there was a big swing to Labour and that Labour's support amongst the elderly also increased. At least 'what we had to say about pensions did get across'.¹²⁴

Labour's Election Sub-Committee, which included such luminaries as Crossman, Driberg, Gunter, Bacon and Phillips, also analysed the Labour campaign and found a number of faults. In the first place there was no clearly stated policy priorities. The absence of such a directive made the planning work of the Broadcasting Committee nigh on impossible. Much of their work was not used. Furthermore, local candidates were unable to gain a clear view of Labour's campaign direction. According to the Campaign Committee, it was 'clear from the press reports that the image of the party as reflected in the national campaign was often quite different from the image presented by local candidates in their election addresses and speeches'.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, there were some successes. Daily press conferences had gained maximum exposure. Some good television programmes boosted the party's workers, whilst helping to give an idea of Labour's programme. Finally, Gaitskell had embarked on a successful nationwide tour, as well as appearing on T.V. and radio. However, several argued that Labour's ability to fight the campaign on its own terms ended when Gaitskell pledged (on September 28th) that Labour would not increase income tax. His pledge left Labour wide open for attacks on its financial policy and the integrity of the leadership was challenged. Following the incident, Crossman felt that 'we are struggling to maintain the image of the Party and to rebuild the image of integrity'.¹²⁶ Tony Benn apportioned the blame a little more equally between Gaitskell and Morgan Phillips. He felt that

'the pledge that there would be no income tax increases that Hugh gave in his

speech, coupled with the purchase tax pledge released by Morgan, has upset all. We feel the Tories have got us on the defensive...the purchase tax thing is just a muddle by Morgan and stems from old material that was hanging around the office. The income tax pledge was done to forestall an anticipated scare that there would be 2s.6d. on the income tax to pay for Labour's programme. Neither of these was discussed with Crossman before release'.¹²⁷

A lack of confidence in Morgan Phillips' abilities stemmed from before the Wilson Report. Gaitskell had asked Crossman to take over the running of Transport House for the election campaign, because he felt Morgan Phillips was not up to the job. Throughout Transport House there was a clear lack of confidence in the General Secretary. Those involved in the production of Labour's T.V. broadcasts felt Phillips' influence was not required, whilst confusion was expressed about 'how the chain of command is to work out. We are determined to insulate ourselves from interference from the General Secretary Morgan Phillips'.¹²⁸

The creation of a Campaigning Committee, improvements in organisation - and Labour's third defeat - meant that technical or structural aspects of party organisation could no longer be used as a scapegoat. Its analysis is especially significant because many of its members were drawn from the left. The Campaign Committee firmly stated their belief that the main reason for Labour's failure was 'much more fundamental'. They bluntly stated: 'We were defeated by prosperity: this was without doubt the prominent factor'.¹²⁹ No longer was 'poor organisation' the main 'cause' of defeat. The Campaign Committee stated that the swings against Labour were most prominent in prosperous areas. Swings to Labour were generally in poorer regions, such as industrial Scotland, the Lancashire cotton towns and some coal mining areas - regions which had not shared in the United Kingdom's general rise in living standards. According to the Campaign Committee a further significant feature was the high swing away from Labour in some

areas where there was an increased fear of unemployment. In the railway areas of Crewe, York, Darlington and Doncaster, there were heightened fears of redundancies in the rail industries. Furthermore, it was felt that 'Tory spread fears of unemployment due to disarmament in the event of a Labour victory also affected the votes in constituencies which included Aldermaston and other nuclear research areas'.¹³⁰ Nor were these fears simply an influence on the affluent. Labour's Campaign Committee argued that 'prosperity not only hardened the middle class against us but [also made] deep inroads...into our normal working-class support'.¹³¹ As a result, Labour had been unable to capture the new towns. The *Economist* was in no doubt as to the reasons why, stating: 'undoubtedly there has been some tendency for more workers to vote Tory as they moved into more comfortable surroundings, as indeed there had been a small swing to the right in the council housing estates throughout the land'.¹³² In London constituencies such as Shoreditch, Edmonton and Dagenham this swing was particularly noticeable. The fact that Labour was divided on the nuclear issue was also regarded as a hindrance.

The second factor identified concerned the credibility of Labour's policy statements. The right of the Labour Party argued that nationalisation was highly unpopular and counted against the party. The Campaign Committee - despite its left-wing bias - tended to agree. But they still felt that skilful Tory propaganda had duped the electorate into believing that 'Labour was the party of more and more nationalisation, and in playing on the fears of employees and their dependants of the "500 companies"'. This appears in many of the Tory election addresses and widespread local campaigns were organised'.¹³³ Better propaganda would have undermined the Tory approach, but it should have been propaganda aimed at 'modernising' policy. 'We probably underestimated the success of the Tory propaganda campaign...preceding the election. Too

many of the electorate saw us as an exclusively class party and a party of restrictions and controls'.¹³⁴ The polls certainly helped Labour assess who it should be targeting. Of the uncommitted voters, two-thirds were women, about half were under 35, about a quarter were Liberals without Liberal candidates. Some expressed dissatisfaction with the government on issues where Labour was strong. For example, 'in July 1959 43 per cent of uncommitted voters disapproved of the way the Government was handling social services, health, pensions etc, compared with only 27 per cent who approved'.¹³⁵ A radical reforming, but not class-based agenda - and one with less emphasis on nationalisation - might be successful. Ironically, some leading figures on the left were learning some hard electoral realities, at a time when Gaitskell sought not to build on this but to rail against them.

Following the 1959 General Election defeat, *Socialist Commentary* published in four consecutive issues the findings of a survey conducted by Dr. Mark Abrams under the title 'Why Labour has Lost Elections'. The NEC felt Abrams' survey was much more than a simple opinion poll. It was felt that 'the greater part of Dr. Abrams' questions are designed, not to test opinion on particular issues, but to explore the underlying attitudes and values that people hold and the broad picture of the political parties that they have formed'.¹³⁶ The *Labour Organiser* (a very positive and upbeat in-house agents journal) felt the survey was vitally important because it was 'the only serious attempt made so far to explore the underlying reasons for Labour's continued failure at the polls'.¹³⁷ Abrams had made his reasons for the survey and what he hoped to discover abundantly clear. He wanted 'to establish those attitudes and social values which had led the electorate to turn away steadily from the Labour Party over the last ten years, and to reject it decisively at the latest General Election'.¹³⁸

Abrams' survey was small. It represented 1 in 49,000 voters. As the *Labour Organiser* pointed out, 'Abrams' assertion that "a half of Labour's middle class supporters want more nationalisation" is based on no more than 10 actual interviews'.¹³⁹ However, Abrams had tailored his questions around the key issues of internal debate: material prosperity; the Labour Party's unfavourable image; nationalisation; and social aspirations. Abrams revealed that Labour was readily identified as standing 'mainly for the working class'; 'out to help the underdog'; 'would extend Welfare Services'; 'raise the standards of living of ordinary people'. People regarded as most likely to support Labour were seen as pensioners, factory workers and those who were interested in helping the underdog. Labour was identified with the working class by both supporters and opponents. The young, office workers, scientists and the middle class were not associated with Labour. The Conservatives were associated with some very different attributes. The Tories would 'make the country more prosperous'; have 'a united team of top leaders'; are 'most satisfying for men with ideals' and 'would give more chances for persons to better himself' (sic). Likely Conservative supporters were regarded as middle class, ambitious, forward looking, office workers and scientists.¹⁴⁰ The image of each party could not have been more radically different. Abram's findings added more weight to the modernisers' argument, and linked with the revisionist philosophy. It agreed with the line advocated by Jay and others, who regarded Labour as out of date and out of step with modern society.

However, and significantly, left traditionalists argued Abrams report failed the party 'by surrendering its moral vision to a cynical materialism'.¹⁴¹ Those pushing for a more modern party with an up to date image were keen to seize their moment. They began to suggest that Labour was being left behind in the quickly evolving and increasingly modern industries. In a *Socialist*

Commentary article 'The State of the Party' (1960) it was pointed out that 'manual workers were a declining portion of the nation and that the growing non-manual occupations in the new industries were imperfectly represented in the Party's membership'¹⁴². Abrams' work noted that traditional manual jobs were declining in number and that people who might be defined by occupation as working class had begun to regard themselves as middle class. For a party so linked with the working classes in the minds of the voters, this was a source of real worry. On the nationalisation issue, replies were rather contradictory. An increase in public ownership was unpopular, even with Labour supporters. However, the *Labour Organiser* argued that 'the suspicion that this antipathy reflects the extensive propaganda efforts of our industrial and political opponents gains support from answers to two further questions: first, over 40 per cent of the sample thought that a 'good deal' or a 'fair amount' of government regulation was necessary: second, very different attitudes were revealed when different industries were discussed'.¹⁴³ The *Labour Organiser*, the voice of agents rooted in the traditions of the party, could not bring itself to side with the modernisers. It thus reverted to arguing that poor results were the cause of the electorate's 'misunderstandings'.

Abrams' findings did not fully support the embourgeoisement thesis. However, what is indisputable is the fact that during the 1950s Britain basked in an era of increased material comfort through increasingly accessible consumer durables. Labour's Special Executive Committee certainly felt prosperity had had an impact, stating that 'during the 1950s the real national income increased by approximately 20 per cent, and that the working class shared proportionally in this increase, and its new prosperity to acquire washing machines, television sets, cars, refrigerators, etc'. Of course, those within the Labour Party were not convinced by the

argument that the increased availability of consumer durables had seduced the working classes and converted them into Tory loyalists. As the Special Executive Committee again noted, 'at least half the working class acquired durable consumer goods on at least as lavish a scale as their neighbours - but continued to vote Labour; ...their political loyalties were based on considerations other than ownership or non-ownership of durable consumer goods'.¹⁴⁴ The material which the committee utilised to draw this conclusion is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Proportions in various groups owning particular durable consumer goods

| | Whole Sample | Middle Class | Working Class Conservatives | Working Class Labour | Working Class others | Whole Working Class |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | per cent | per cent | per cent | per cent | per cent | per cent |
| Washing Machine | 40 | 49 | 36 | 36 | 33 | 35 |
| Refrigerator | 24 | 40 | 16 | 13 | 23 | 15 |
| Telephone | 22 | 46 | 14 | 7 | 14 | 11 |
| T.V. | 78 | 77 | 76 | 81 | 77 | 79 |
| Car | 27 | 47 | 17 | 16 | 21 | 17 |
| House* | 38 | 59 | 30 | 20 | 39 | 27 |

*Including being bought

Source: NEC Special Executive Committee, July 1960. 'Extracts From the Final Article in the *Socialist Commentary* Series: Why Labour Has Lost Elections'.

If the table suggested that consumer durables were not the driving force behind how individuals formed their political allegiances, the one glaring exception was that of home ownership. Even those who did not have their own home nonetheless had ambitions. Abrams

had discovered the general desire of people to move house. Indeed, 41 per cent of middle class and 49 per cent of working class adults stated that they would like to move in the next five years. 85 per cent stated that they wanted a complete house to themselves. The desire for better neighbourhoods, and a desire to improve on the size and state of the current accommodation, were also key factors. Labour's special executive committee acknowledged that 'It would be hard to over estimate the importance of housing as a real personal political issue for the man in the street and its power to affect party support; apparently, in the recent past it has affected it in a direction favourable to the Conservative Party'.¹⁴⁵ This was a key issue. Labour was keen to increase its support amongst younger voters, and these were the very people who were likely to be getting married, start families and want a house of their own. According to the research, their natural political allegiance was with the Conservatives. If Labour was to arrest its decline, its policy (and not just its organisational methods) would have to change.

Following the 1955 defeat, Gaitskell had written an article 'Understanding the Electorate' in *Socialist Commentary*. In it he stated that 'without the slightest doubt...the single most important factor behind the relatively greater decline in the Labour vote was the lack of fear of the Tories derived from the maintenance of full employment, the end of rationing and the general feeling that 'things were better'.¹⁴⁶ Gaitskell clearly felt that Britain's prosperity, shared by the population had dented the attractiveness of Labour. However, he did nothing to ensure that the party built on this evaluation. Rather, he left organisational and presentational issues to others, declining to identify key supporters (like Benn) and back them against party 'traditionalists'. At each election post-mortem party traditionalists in the National Agents Office argued that improvements in conventional campaigning techniques could provide the answer to Labour's

problems. Although modern approaches, designed at converting target groups outside Labour's 'core' working-class base grew in significance, these methods were seen as tools to be grafted on, not as part of a new approach. Those embedded in the party's moralistic traditions found such changes especially difficult. Indeed, accepting advertising was seen as 'giving in' to commercialism and 'Americanism'. It was not until after the 1959 election that modernisers gained in strength, drawing on Abrams' work to give the analysis credibility. Even some on the left had to face and accept harsh realities. However, by this time, modernisers like Benn were losing faith in Gaitskell, who in this and in other areas failed to give a lead. Instead they turned to Wilson - someone who had carefully allied himself with both traditionalists and modernisers. Gaitskell had missed an opportunity to drive the party forward, and to secure the support of a section of the party whose main aim was to win elections. Whatever their antipathy to change, their antipathy to defeat was even stronger. Whether this was only the case at Westminster - whether Labour was held back by a party immune to the need for change - is discussed in the following chapters, which focus on two areas where the left had always been strong.

FOOTNOTES

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9. Regional Organiser's report, Chiswick visit, March 1952, MSS 9/3/14/50.
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30. M. Young and W. Pickles, 'Notes on Next Election Broadcast Campaign', NEC mins, November 1951.
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35. 'Regional Schemes, Organisers Reports', Organisation Sub-Committee 7 May 1957 and 9 July, quoted in Fielding, op. cit.
36. Midlands Regional Organiser's report, Rutland and Stamford, 5 May 1952, MSS 9/3/14/82.
37. Midlands Regional Organiser's Report, Visit to Nottingham Central, 5 June 1952, MSS 9/3/14/105
38. Midlands Regional Organiser's report, North West Leicester, 1 February 1963, MSS 9/3/18/30
39. Midlands Regional Organiser's report, 26 June 1952, MSS 9/3/14/122.
40. Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on Party Organisation, 1955, NEC minutes, p.22.
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CHAPTER FIVE

DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT SORT OF FRIENDS YOU MAKE IN POLITICS. IF YOU MAKE THE RIGHT SORT OF ENEMIES, THE RIGHT SORT OF FRIENDS WILL RALLY ROUND YOU - Aneurin Bevan

THE STRUCTURE OF POWER IN LABOUR WALES.

The influence of party members on the image and approach of Labour in the 1950s and 1960s has attracted little attention. Yet it was nonetheless very significant. National attempts to reform Labour's local organisational machine could be thwarted by local apathy or opposition. Moreover, local traditionalists were as resistant to change as those in Head office, and were if anything even more attached to notions of commitment and moral endeavour. An ethos of suspicion focussed on both voters and new party members has been identified by Tiratsoo and others, with activists often expressing their disdain for their 'individualism' or acceptance of a modern commercial culture. Yet this chapter suggests that the 'rank and file' were not a single group. Regional and local officials, sections of the local leadership in many seats, and even some of the 'armchair activists', were keen advocates of practical measures. Even if rather few were ardent Gaitskellites, and even fewer were great diplomats, political conflict was not the dominant theme of party life. There was - in the constituencies as at Westminster - a growing interest in moving forward, in winning elections, in delivering relevant policies. This chapter makes these points through a case study of Labour's politics in Wales.

I

Two images of the Labour Party in post-war Wales predominate. The first is of powerful and oligarchical domination, a 'one party state'. The second is the image of Aneurin Bevan and the idea of Welsh militancy. The notion that Wales was the home of left-wing Labour activity

is deeply rooted. It rests in part on Bevan's own reputation, but also on that of the South Wales Miners' Federation. Welsh labour history is certainly full of radical protest. The Welsh party has also produced a succession of radical MPs. Yet Wales's individualistic Labour radicals have seldom been easily pressed into a united 'school'. Whilst there were many 'Bevanite' MPs in Wales, and many in the constituencies who felt he was a Labour hero, there was no Bevanite organisation, nor a ground swell of support for Victory for Socialism. Within Wales itself, the Bevanite position seemed contradictory. Whilst advocating accountability within the party and democratisation of nationalised industries, Bevan himself was at best ambivalent about devolution. This separated him from some potential supporters. Unlike Lloyd George, Bevan could not count on a Welsh power base to strengthen his British bargaining position.

VFS's image of the rank and file bore little relation to the world of Welsh constituency politics. This chapter will examine how oligarchies, cliques or even a powerful individual could become dominant in an area. These people, who could be 'left' or 'right', found their lives dominated by local issues and by getting things done, thus earning trust and respect in their localities. The well publicised, divisive and often bitter left/right national splits barely featured in local politics. Instead, local issues - neither 'right' nor 'left' in content or ethos - issues such as paving, lighting, parks, buses and houses remained at the centre of local politics. Politically divisive arguments only really occurred during selection or re-selection processes when groups or individuals would attempt to see their candidate succeed. Moreover, the Welsh Labour Party office in Cardiff promoted and reinforced local desires to get on with delivering a practical socialism. Crucially, they promoted a kind of unity behind a new programme of modernisation. This was not 'revisionism' nor 'Bevanism': in some respects it was Wilsonism before Wilson.

This chapter examines the constituency circumstances which supplied the basis for such an approach, and the ways in which it was promoted by members of the party machine in Cardiff.

Welsh Labour MPs with huge majorities could potentially act as they wished. However, the basis of Labour's success in Wales was not 'Bevanite' politics and Welsh Labour MPs did not flock to Bevan's cause. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that 'Bevanism' was an expression of youthful revolt against the Welsh Labour hierarchy. Lord Parry reveals that Pembrokeshire Labour Party was full of youthful radicals when Desmond Donnelly was returned as MP for the seat in 1950. They were, he argues, largely Bevanites. Parry felt that most within the seat had 'grown up with Bevan' and led by Donnelly - who was 'captivated by Bevan' - backed their hero. Between 1950 and 1953, there was little change in their outlook. However, he also suggests that this enthusiasm faded, especially amongst ambitious MPs. Again, Parry states that following a visit from Attlee, Donnelly - who had had Attlee staying with him during his visit - moved for a vote of thanks for Attlee, describing him not only as Labour's last Prime Minister, but also as the party's next Prime Minister. Parry states that it could not be clearer that Donnelly was no longer 'riding for Bevan'.¹ Indeed, Donnelly moved progressively to the right. Others too were strong supporters of Gaitskell - including Jim Griffiths, the much respected MP for Llanelli. Labour's national appeal was not unattractive in Wales. Throughout Britain, the Labour Party in the mid 1950s and 1960s adopted a radical rhetoric, presenting itself as a modernising party. This had been part of the 1945 government's aim and this commitment remained into the early 1950s. At the top of the party the intellectual advance of revisionism, led by Gaitskell and Crosland, helped Labour to shift the emphasis of its message, although modernisation remained to the fore. Crosland's commitment to higher public expenditure

through progressive taxation was appropriate within Wales, given the dependence of the Welsh economy on local industries. Labour's message - especially in Wales - was one of services and investment. Of course, Bevan - the apparent embodiment of Welsh Labour - at times opposed the leadership. However he, Jim Griffiths and many other Welsh Labour 'left-wingers' found much in the domestic Welsh programme which was valuable. Labour's national message provided great scope at the local level for creative, modern and attractive adaption to Welsh needs, as in the Welsh Labour version of the popular policy document *Signposts for the Sixties*. Even the new revisionist approach to nationalisation, seen in the 1957 document *Industry and Society*, was not a handicap with Wales, nor something which the Welsh left had to oppose. It stressed the desire for greater efficiency within nationalised industries; it did not advocate denationalisation. In the Welsh industrial heartlands, this message could be made highly attractive to miners and steel workers, who recognised the need for investment and efficiency in their own industries. In rural areas, London's national promise of higher investment was matched by what was being said on the ground, with commitments to new roads and social amenities. The desire to invest in and attract new industry was a major Welsh Labour emphasis, and an intent in which the party felt could be placed high on the UK agenda. Thus, the issues being discussed by UK figures could be seized on and used to promise practical benefits locally. Labour was the modernising and practical party talking about services, investment, planning, jobs, an improved infra-structure and a strong economy.

Table 1:

Welsh constituencies held by the labour party, general elections 1945-1966 (number of constituencies =36)

| 1945 | 1950 | 1951 | 1955 | 1959 | 1964 | 1966 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 25 | 27 | 27 | 27 | 28 | 28 | 32 |

Source: F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-49* (1983) and *British Parliamentary Election Results 1950-70* (1971)

The sheer magnitude of Labour's electoral domination in its Welsh urban heartlands can not fail to impress and amaze. In 1945, Labour's victory had been even more sweeping in Wales than in Britain as a whole. The trend of Labour's massive ascendancy in Wales continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Particularly in urban Wales, voting Labour was a way of life, passed on from one generation to the next. Safe seats really were safe seats. When Cliff Prothero, Labour's Welsh agent, heard a recount was taking place in the Labour safe seat of Abertillery, he was staggered that the results of the polling could be so close. The recount was taking place to see if the Conservative candidate had lost his deposit.² Thrashing Conservative opponents was the norm not an exception.

Whilst the party spent long periods in decline nationally between 1951 and 1964, in Wales quite the reverse was true. As Table 1 indicates, Wales became an even more pronounced bastion of Labour strength. It made substantial gains, returning twenty-seven Members of Parliament from thirty-six constituencies in 1951, extending this to 28 in 1959, and reaching a

highwater mark of thirty-two in 1966.

K.O. Morgan has noted how ‘the domination of the Labour Party and the trade-union movement over the social and political elites of the land became...seemingly impregnable between 1945 and 1966’.³ What needs to be stressed is the way that Wales became securely Labour (as it had not been in 1939) *through the growth of support in semi-industrial and even rural areas*. The kind of policies advocated by Bevan had little to do with this success. The party’s supporters in these areas were hardly radicals. Labour’s expansion into new areas was largely at the expense of the Liberals. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Labour Party was able to tap the Liberal tradition and exude a progressive, radical and modernising air. As a result it became increasingly credible in many areas of north and rural Wales. In the 1950 General Election, the Liberals retained five seats in Wales, all largely rural, and lost Pembrokeshire to the Labour Party. 1951 saw the Liberals lose their tenuous grips on Anglesey and Merioneth. The victory of Holyhead solicitor Cledwyn Hughes over Lady Megan Lloyd George in Anglesey symbolises the shift from Liberal to Labour. Hughes was a Welsh speaking radical from the professional classes. His father had been a prominent Holyhead Liberal. These important personal connections made his candidature as a Welsh radical all the more credible. Hughes gained much support from the working-class voters in Holyhead, an area of Labour weakness in the early 1920s, as well as in the less urbanised towns. He was able to present the Labour Party’s programme as progressive and modern. Electrification, rural housing, comprehensive education and the modernisation of agriculture meant Labour was able to paper over its lack of a firm social base to both win and then retain the seat. The fact that Hughes was not a Bevanite was of little significance, since the issues that defined such politics were of limited local

importance.

In Merioneth, Labour's victory in 1951 can be seen more as a consequence of a shift within the composition of rural communities. As Morgan argues, 'the workers in Blaenau Ffestiniog and Trawsfynydd were sufficiently numerous to return T. W. Jones, a senior trade unionist from Wrexham/Maelor, at the expense of Emrys Roberts'.⁴ In May 1955, the Liberals hung on to their three remaining seats, Cardiganshire, Montgomeryshire and Carmarthen. However, in February 1957 Lady Megan Lloyd George now standing as a Labour candidate, won Carmarthen with a 3,000 majority. Finally, Cardiganshire, a Liberal seat since 1880, was gained by the Labour candidate Elystan Morgan at the 1966 General Election. As K.O. Morgan again rightly notes the 'Welsh speaking barrister from UCW Aberystwyth, was precisely the kind of articulate, progressive young professional man who would have been a natural Liberal less than a generation earlier'.⁵ Labour was choosing candidates in these areas who would promote its image as a Welsh party of modernisation. 'Bevanite' politics scarcely surfaced.

II

In addition to absorbing an element of the Liberal tradition, Labour in Wales was not inattentive to the national issue. During this period there was greater recognition of Wales as a distinct political area within the Labour Party. K.O. Morgan has described the weakening of Labour's 'long-standing antagonism towards the separate political recognition of Wales dating from the end of World War One and Arthur Henderson and Sydney Webb's centralist ethic'.⁶ However, difficulties clearly arose over the form and extent of decentralisation. Constituencies sent resolutions calling for the decentralisation of administrative authority from London to Cardiff, and stronger demands came from Goronwy Roberts, S. O. Davies and other MPs through

their 'Parliament for Wales' campaign. They enlisted the support of Lady Megan Lloyd George, Tudor Watkins (MP for Brecon and Radnor) and John Morris, the future MP for Aberavon. Another group, comprising James Griffiths and his supporters, sought a Secretary of State for Wales. 'Nationalists' in Labour's camp were more likely to get a portion of their demands from Griffiths, Gaitskell's deputy leader from 1956-1959, than they were from Bevan.

The Labour Party in Wales had supported the idea of a Secretary of State with Cabinet rank since the 1930s. Whilst for some time this was part of a nationalist agenda, for the powerful south Wales trade unions and parties it was a means to get support for the modernisation of the economy of south Wales. The Welsh Regional Council of Labour, which replaced the Federation of Constituency Labour Parties in North Wales, and the South Wales Regional Council, had supported a Secretary of State for Wales between 1944-48. However, by 1948, the Regional Council sought only a greater measure of self-determination, feeling the appointment of a 'Secretary of State for Wales was no longer practicable'. It 'therefore, prepared an alternative policy of a more comprehensive nature, based on Democratic Devolution'. The WRCL called for the establishment of 'an Advisory Council composed of representatives of Welsh life, for the purpose of advising the Government and its Agents on the need for appropriate legislation to meet the requirements of Wales from time to time'.⁷ Following a deputation to the government, agreement was reached when the government formed a "Council for Wales Plan", to include representatives from the Local Authorities (12) Industry and Agriculture (4) Trade Unions (4) the National Eisteddfod (1) Joint Education Committee (1) University of Wales (1) Welsh Tourist Board (1) and the Prime Minister's Appointment (3). The Government then satisfied the Regional Council's requests. The Council of Wales played a

purely advisory role. It could neither legislate nor administer. Its first reports for the Labour Government in 1949 covered the issues of unemployment, marginal land and rural depopulation. However, the toothless nature of the Council was exposed once the Conservative government gained power.

Bevan's attitude towards a Secretary of State for Wales was wholly negative. He, like some English Labour figures, felt that 'any suggestion of devolution was seen as threatening to leave Wales in a state of permanent poverty'.⁸ As Jones and Jones have argued, Bevan sought the economic reconstruction of Wales, and he genuinely feared that a Welsh minister would be a 'potential hindrance rather than a facilitator in such a process'.⁹ It was a line which greatly frustrated those in favour of a Secretary of State for Wales. MPs such as D. R. Grenfell, W. H. Mainwaring and George Dagger were exasperated by Bevan's stand. They supported the view expressed (somewhat surprisingly) by Nigel Birch, the Conservative MP for Flint, who in 1946 argued 'I do not believe that Wales would have gone through what she has gone through [the inter-war depression] if she had a Minister in this House to speak for her'.¹⁰ The MPs S. O. Davies, Goronwy Roberts, Cledwyn Hughes and Tudor Watkins also saw the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales as a prerequisite on the road to a parliament for Wales. Bevan's stance on devolution helped minimise his support.

III

Welsh Labour was also more likely to develop a practical reforming agenda by working through the 'Gaitskellite' party machine and established Labour institutions - like the Council for Wales - than by supporting Bevan. As the Council for Wales has been studied largely as a retreat from devolution, its work and policy statements have received little attention. In fact,

under Labour's influence, the Council produced some valuable reports. Its emphasis was on achieving a platform for development by improving the infra-structure of Wales. Work on rural areas highlighted numerous problems and suggested ways of improving housing, roads, water, sewerage, and amenities. The Conservative government fully accepted the conditions were as described, but 'whilst accepting the Panel's diagnosis, the Government completely rejected the Panel's prescription'. The Conservative Government's poor working relationship with the Council was highlighted by its Labour Chair, Huw T. Edwards, who noted 'there was not a single instance of the Council or Panel being brought into consultation by the Government about its report and contents. The first indication the Council received of Government opinion was when it published its report'.¹¹

The main concerns of the Council of Wales were also the main concerns of the Welsh Labour Party. The Welsh Regional Council of Labour offered ideas on improving Welsh life. It was not simply the voice of south Wales trade unions. The Labour Party's attempts to break into Liberal or Conservative areas of rural (particularly north) Wales are clearly visible through the attention they gave to rural areas. The Regional Council's comprehensive agenda attempted to improve everyday standards of life, from housing, transport, work and the economy, to the more grandiose schemes: airports, the Severn Bridge, industrial estates, new road networks and new factories. Other sections of the Labour Party had even more ambitious schemes. For example, from 1945 the Parliament for Wales group, made up largely of north Wales Labour candidates, had established their own broadsheet, *Llais Llafur*, which 'promised not only a Secretary of State, but an economic planning authority for Wales, a radio corporation, an end to emigration and a north-south road link'.¹²

The Welsh Regional Council of Labour (WRCL) addressed real issues and long term problems. In rural areas, these problems included a lack of jobs, poor roads and the decline of old industries, as well as the need for water, electricity and mechanisation in some areas. These deprivations were seen as inegalitarian and as a spur to depopulation. The WRCL noted:

‘The greater part of the majority of school-leavers who can not be absorbed by the country towns, leave Wales to find employment elsewhere, hence low unemployment figures in these areas...not only bodies but also intelligence is being drained away from these areas at an alarming rate’.¹³

Caradog Jones, Labour’s candidate in Montgomeryshire throughout the 1950s, echoed such sentiments stating that:

‘youth and particularly the more vigorous elements could not find opportunities for satisfactory employment in Rural Wales. Thus emigration...is breaking down Welsh Rural Society and can only be arrested by developing the natural resources of the area’.¹⁴

The WRCL’s solution was clear: a healthy economy providing a variety of employment opportunities. The Council of Labour was also clear that: ‘this can be achieved with the minimum expenditure by the establishment in the main of ancillary industry to deal with the primary products and natural resources of these areas’. Not only did Labour believe this could be achieved with minimum expenditure but they also felt that ‘the establishment of the industry of the type proposed would bring a return on capital expended, and would help local authorities by providing them with additional sources of local revenues’.¹⁵

The introduction of new factories had begun successfully under the Attlee administration. Labour now set out more substantial plans. Having witnessed the introduction of trading estates in depressed industrial areas of Britain, the WRCL felt they had ‘proved their worth, socially and economically’.¹⁶ It demanded a variant of these estates for rural areas and called for similar

estates in the towns. The minutes of the Swansea and Wrexham Labour parties for the 1940s and 1950s are dominated by a concern to attract new industries, and other parties were similarly preoccupied.¹⁷ The WRCL's plans aimed at long term prosperity for Wales. Generally, they did not advocate throwing money at problems. The Severn Bridge scheme was to play a pivotal role, opening up the south and south-east of England to Wales, a link that would be a boon for trade.

Of course, these 'modernising' plans stressed the 'industrialisation' of the countryside, and were hardly what many rural traditionalists wanted. However agriculture was not entirely neglected. On the contrary, the WRCL felt improvements to agriculture were fundamental to the re-creation of prosperity in rural Wales. The rapid transition in the nature of the land, from lowland to marginal and hill farms was not ignored, with plans to increase fertility and improve drainage in upland areas and the proposal of a 'ten year programme'. Existing subsidies for fertilizers were to be maintained with additional aid for transport to remote hill farms. Farmers would receive financial aid to improve their pastures, as well as capital for building, drainage and water supply. Co-operatives were encouraged to reduce the excessive costs of agricultural machinery and food-stuffs, and to provide smaller farmers with the advantages of selling on a larger scale. Producer Marketing Boards would be introduced for eggs, poultry, pigs, cattle and sheep. It was hoped Marketing Boards would produce 'order and stability out of the existing chaos'.¹⁸ It was felt that the problematic drift of the young from the land could be slowed by providing training courses on cropping, land improvement and by improved teaching of agriculture in secondary schools. The package was completed by a scheme to improve unclassified roads, clear recognition that efficient farming practice necessitated reasonably modern transport facilities in rural areas. Forestry was also recognised as an expanding element

of life in rural areas which was to continue expanding. Proposals to increase the acreage of plantations were meant to create up to 15,000 jobs.

Other proposals were advanced to help develop rural/agricultural businesses. Making use of primary products from rural areas was important. The WRCL argued this provided the raw materials which sustained other industries. It called for numerous small concerns to be established. Medium sized abattoirs were encouraged in selected centres, the hides and skins to be dealt with in 'fellmongering' units and the wools and hides to be cured and tanned in these areas. The raw materials for a new leather industry were on the door step. Further plans were mooted for the creation of creameries to produce butter and cheese. As for the maturing forests, over the 'next ten years wood would become available in steady quantities in many parts of rural Wales. Steps will be taken to establish saw-mills, etc., to deal with felled timber...also furniture, window frames and doors could be produced'.¹⁹ The WRCL also commissioned surveys to discover whether deposits of lead had been exhausted in central and south Wales. Research was undertaken to discover if slate could be used for purposes other than the roofing of houses. Other once prosperous but now declining industries were to be given a new lease of life. The woollen textile industry had virtually disappeared by 1945 and there had been no attempts to re-establish it. The WRCL believed that given power, modern textile machinery and good designs, the industry could become a sound economic proposition. Small and medium sized industries based on Wales's raw materials were to be greatly encouraged.

The WRCL also looked beyond these local industries and suggested that industries bearing no relation to the resources of rural Wales needed to be enticed into these areas. Whilst

recognising towns were better able to attract such industries, the WRCL felt rural areas too could sustain light industries. Already, there were some engineering companies located in smaller towns and the WRCL felt the greater the volume and variety of light industry the better. James Griffiths was keen to create a large new town in mid-Wales. He felt such a scheme would prevent the de-population which had become all too common. Cwmbran (established in 1952) was held up as a successful example of what could be done. However, Griffiths's imaginative plan was not embraced by the local population. Morgan states that

‘Farmers were hostile. Welsh nationalists and others feared that the population of this new town might be drawn largely from...the west Midlands...Others suggested with racist foreboding, that these migrants might be black, brown, or yellow in hue’.²⁰

Ultimately the fierce local opposition, and Labour fears about the economic viability of the scheme, led to it being turned down in 1967.

The WRCL was a forward looking body, providing an all embracing package of economic proposals for rural regeneration. Social amenities were not neglected. Some schemes were already in progress through Labour local authorities. Improvements to housing and the development of water and sanitation were to proceed systematically. The need for ‘a progressive programme of road development’²¹ was a key aim. The WRCL recognised the need for local meeting places to provide better social amenities. Funds were to be made available, although loans with low rates of interest were the main proposal. Any outright grants would be for the provision of buildings and agricultural machinery, according to need and only after careful examination. In order to be successful each application would have to be judged as a viable economic and social venture. It was felt investment could be undertaken by private firms as well

as co-operative organisations, with the possibility of local councils and other authorities providing loans.

The fact that Welsh Labour drew back from major spending commitments was in part a reflection of tensions between Welsh priorities and British plans. For the first time, the NEC set up various Welsh study groups in the 1950s. By the end of 1955, a Tripartite Committee on Welsh affairs had been established. The committee included members of the Parliamentary Labour Party Welsh Group (Desmond Donnelly, T. Jones, Goronwy Roberts and Tudor Watkins), members of the Welsh Regional Council (including Cliff Prothero), and members of Labour's National Executive Committee (including David Ginsburg and Peter Shore). James Griffiths was the committee's chairman. The twin issues of attracting new industries into the rural areas and developing old and existing industries dominated proceedings. Goronwy Roberts advocated promoting and attracting new industry to urban areas, whilst Desmond Donnelly saw the provision of work in rural areas as the means to a full life in Wales. He also recognised the difficulties of attracting industry to rural areas and looked to 'Joint Enterprises', with the State providing some (or indeed all) of the early capital.

The Tripartite Committee found defining its objectives particularly difficult. Peter Shore felt the Committee's reports on new industry and reviving older traditional industries were confusing. He argued that unemployment was not a problem in rural areas, apparently missing the point that the reason for low unemployment was the high level of rural depopulation. However, Shore felt that attempts to revive agriculture would be restrained by physical limits and that if depopulation was the problem then 'it raised different problems to those we have

previously tackled in development areas and elsewhere'.²² Despite the discussions, reports and more discussion, by 1955 these fine ideas had failed to go beyond the discussion phase. At least an agenda had been set and discussions had reached higher levels within the party. Jim Griffiths in the chair, summed up the position. He redefined the objective as the 'use of socialist planning to preserve Welsh culture and traditions. This is what people of the area wanted and policy should be shaped as far as possible to meet their requirements'. In doing so, Griffiths took a far broader view than the Tripartite Committee had taken. Along with the members of the NEC, Griffiths seemed interested in more generalised plans, thus shelving the more detailed schemes emanating from Wales. Labour's 'failure' was that because it lacked ideas or commitment, but that it lacked the ability to turn Welsh ideas into real policies.

Nor can Labour be justly accused of seeking solutions solely of an economic form, through enforced modernisation. The WRCL felt that rural difficulties could not be solved on the cheap, and that winning public support was necessary. They attached equal importance to the

'psychology and tradition of the people in these areas which must always be in the fore...care must be taken to make people feel that any proposed development is what they want and need in the circumstances, and that is not to be imposed on them from above, or outside. This can not be emphasised too heavily or too often'.²³

The lack of progress made by the Labour Party in addressing the problems of rural areas did not lead to an upsurge of support for Bevanite radicalism. Rather, Welsh Labour hostility was directed at an unsympathetic Conservative Government. In 1961, Cardiganshire's Labour Party president Mr D. J. Davies lambasted the Tories, telling his AGM that he viewed 'with

disapproval the failure of the government to declare the County a development area and reaffirm the belief that the introduction of light industries was the only method of halting rural depopulation in the county'.²⁴ Aberavon's MP, John Morris, also laid the blame for lack of rural development at the door of the Conservative Government. Morris stated 'that in spite of the many reports which had been produced, nothing had been done. They have all been pigeon-holed and so our young people continued to drain away. No nation could afford this...the government should invest in essential works not luxuries. Factories not cinemas, houses not luxury flats'.²⁵

IV

Clearly Labour had a series of economic ideas, which it could not deliver whilst in opposition. Thus electoral success was vital. As with debates at the national level, locally such concerns were also a significant influence. Stressing more nationalisation, and supporting disarmament - standard Bevanite policy ideas - was unlikely to bring such success. Nonetheless, Labour's domination of local government meant that, despite financial constraints, it could deliver some positive policies, reinforce its 'modernising' image, and build Labour's image through achievements. Party minute books show that practical local issues and improvements dominated discussion at ward meetings, even in industrial south Wales where Bevan had his seat and the left was historically strong. Activists and councillors saw themselves as socialists, with a strong sense of civic pride. Issues such as street lighting and paving, bus routes and park benches, new buildings, new homes and attracting new industry hogged agendas. These were not easily described or perceived as socialist issues. However, they did affect the way that people lived, and, as Williams argues, the way in which the community viewed the councillors who served them. Typically, the Labour Party in the Llŵchwr District of Gower focussed on

important local issues, attempting in 1957 to set up a home help scheme and fighting to bring a new steel works into the area to provide its community with jobs. When unemployment increased in 1958, the ward requested that, 'the District Party organise a public meeting in Gorsienon on this subject with our MP'.²⁶ When a recession in the motor car industry began towards the end of 1960, concern was expressed about the effect it might have on the Gorseinon pressing factory. The ward sent details of their concerns to their MP. Unusually, the Llchwyr District also held monthly discussion groups on broader issues. It hoped that discussing topics such as health, housing, education, and election procedure would produce knowledgeable and well informed activists. More typically, the adjacent Brynlliw Ward Council spent even more time discussing local bread and butter issues. Each monthly meeting addressed different local concerns. The November 1960 meetings covered roads, house repairs and a park bench being placed in a children's play area. The ward also secured an assurance from the Water Board that in future warnings would be given before water was turned off. December brought dismay that lights for Bryncunling and the painting of various houses were not in the year's budget. The committee's disappointment may have been tempered by the fact that the engineer had recommended a new sports hall and bowls pavilion. In March 1961, the ward requesting that 1,200 new houses be built. Individual concerns over house repairs were also discussed. Clearly, left/right posturing was not a feature of local politics. The only time that national level politics really had an impact at the local level seems to have been over the Clause IV debate. Whilst Llchwyr deplored any alterations to Clause IV, Brynlliw ward was aggrieved enough to send forward a resolution which 'deplore[d] the conduct of Hugh Gaitskell in his attempt to break down Clause IV'.²⁷ Yet there were no other expressions of discontent with policy. Even less concern with the conflict between Bevan and Gaitskell is evident in the records of the Newport

CLP. Frank Soskice the Newport MP was asked to persuade Hugh Gaitskell to come and speak in the constituency. The Executive Committee readily agreed that if Gaitskell was unable to attend, Soskice should ask Bevan instead.²⁸ The speaker's political alignment did not matter. Having a 'big' political figure to speak did. Welsh CLPs may have been identified with 'the left', but most MPs remained 'loyal', invariably finding Gaitskell's policies more appropriate for Wales than Bevan's (almost non-existent) solutions. In practice, and despite an emotional attachment to Bevan as a symbol of protest, most CLP's also dealt with issues of a less prosaic nature and in a more unified manner.

V

At the same time, local organisational decline could leave the party in the hands of small cliques or under the control of a trade union. In the 1930s, Bevan's supporters had extended their domination of his constituency party in this way.²⁹ The 1950s and 1960s brought similar opportunities. Whilst Labour was reinforcing its electoral strength and expanding its policies it declined as a party of mass participation, a situation best seen through looking at the party's membership figures. They clearly reveal a period of contraction. For though high levels of membership were greatly encouraged by the national party and its Welsh organisation, they never materialised. The problems of collecting subscriptions in full and the general nature of the party's organisation in many wards meant little was actually done. Some powerful local figures were actually opposed to the idea of mass participation. New recruits could pose a threat to their positions of strength. From the point of view of British Labour's 'Gaitskellite' party managers, this should have been seen as an opportunity missed.

In Labour's industrial heartlands, potential membership levels were huge. As Fielding

has recently commented, 'safe seats remained Labour's great un milked cash cows'. Where there was not opposition, and organisers, agents and activists tried hard to increase membership, practical difficulties deterred recruitment: 'many activists did not want to recruit new members...[because this] would only mean more work for already hard pressed collectors'.³⁰ In north Wales, an area where the party was looking to expand electorally, membership shrank. Between 1951 and 1956, Anglesey's membership fell from 987 to 718, whilst Caernarfon's membership fell from 2,014 to 952. In Wrexham, an area of Labour strength, membership fell from 1500 to 774. In 1965, Caernarfonshire CLP expressed their concern that 'no Labour group is functioning in the county'.³¹ The situation was little better in Labour's south Wales heartlands. During the same period, Caerphilly's membership tumbled from 1,437 to 845 and Merthyr's fell from an already low 850 to an even lower 700. Pontypridd lost 200 members and the three Cardiff seats lost getting on for 1,000 members between them. Of course, these official membership figures cannot be completely trusted; closer examination often reveals that true membership levels were even lower. Fielding has described how in England 'official membership figures, whilst inauspicious, actually camouflaged the party's real decline'. The false impression given by official figures became even more pronounced when 'Labour increased the minimum number of members a constituency had to affiliate so as to send a delegate to conference'.³² As Table 2 indicates the minimum numbers were 800 in 1957 and then 1,000 in 1963.

At the same time, parties dominated by a declining membership did not become more radical and seek to change the party's direction. None of the MPs 'deselected' in this period were removed by 'Bevanite' rebellions. In the Gower constituency, it took considerable effort

to remove the long standing (though ageing) and once radical MP, David Rhys Grenfell. In May 1958, the minutes of the Llŵchwr District of the Gower Labour Party signal early signs of disaffection. Following discussion ‘concerning the future of our MP...the general feeling of the meeting was that Mr Grenfell should retire after the present government had run its course’.³³ Once in the open, this process gathered pace. By the July meeting, there were definite calls for Grenfell’s resignation. Though Grenfell had been a good MP, and had ‘given very good service in the past’, the meeting expressed the view that ‘he was not now able to carry out the duties expected of an MP today’.³⁴ A motion calling for his resignation was carried by an overwhelming majority and forwarded to the Gower Divisional Executive Committee. The younger members of the local party were looking to move on. They felt that their ageing MP had to be removed and replaced by a younger figure. For a man who had been the incumbent MP since 1922, this must have been a bitter pill to swallow.

In November 1958 Grenfell wrote to Ifor Davies (who ultimately replaced him) complaining about his treatment. Grenfell asked Davies for a clear view of his position with regard to the Labour Party in Gower; he also asked why Davies had not mentioned that trouble was brewing in the two days they had spent together at the recent Labour Conference. Grenfell was completely surprised. He had been summoned to a meeting at which he had not realised his candidature was to be an issue. He ‘was told that the Group, with whom you [Davies] are associated had decided to vote unanimously against me if I became a candidate at another parliamentary election in the Gower constituency’.³⁵ Cliques could be established and could hold onto power; but they could also be removed in the organisational manoeuvres which became common features of Welsh Labour politics. By February 1959, when a new

parliamentary candidate was being discussed, Ifor Davies was the nominee of the Pontarddulais joint wards and Pontybrenin and Loughor Ward Labour Parties. By April, he was the official Gower constituency candidate. He was returned to Westminster the same year.

Grenfell was not the only eminent and ageing MP to find himself deposed by a local party keen to move on with younger men. In Merthyr, disaffection with the veteran and even more radical socialist S.O. Davies (incidentally a Bevanite) had been growing since the election of the Wilson Government in 1964. As with Grenfell, the argument against S.O. Davies was that age left him unable to fulfil his role as MP properly. Robert Griffiths has also argued that ‘many of the activists who had slogged through thirteen years in the Conservative wilderness resented S.O.’s persistent attacks on the Wilson administration’.³⁶ Furthermore, the Merthyr Labour Party were keen that Davies should reflect their views rather than ‘pursuing his own political line’ (he was a notoriously independent MP, disciplined for breaking party policy and advocating Home Rule for Wales).³⁷ Davies was not opposed by ‘Gaitskellites’ but by people who felt the party should move on. With the blessing of the NEC, the local Merthyr political machine met to relieve S.O. of his job and select a new candidate. Davies spurned the meeting, recognising that the constituency figures were jockeying for both power and position. Astute as ever, he used both the local and national press to deliver his messages to the people of Merthyr. He told the *Merthyr Express* ‘I am still the Member of Parliament. Let the people of Merthyr decide whether they want S.O. or not’.³⁸ Standing as an independent, Davies was able to use the press to battle on, to self publicise, and to spell out his message. The respect S.O. had earned throughout his political life in Merthyr was to stand him in good stead. Though the trade union executives, notably from the T&GWU, NUM and AEU, had stated their support for the official

Labour candidate and trade union man Tal Lloyd, S.O. retained rank and file support from within these organisations. He won with a majority of 7,467. The Merthyr Labour Party expelled S.O Davies and three of his most active supporters, Megan Phillips, Elwyn Williams and Joe Lambert.

Those who dominated local government in Wales did not need, or have to gain, Bevan's support. If there was prestige in being 'a rebel' - especially in south Wales - there were other ways to gain esteem. Labour's overall ascendancy in Welsh local government meant that the majority of Labour's local 'Barons' or power brokers had huge local standing, in part because of the political benefits they could deliver. The papers of Alderman W Douglas Hughes (agent to James Griffiths and leader of Carmarthenshire Labour Party for three decades) provide us with a rich insight into how things 'got done' locally. If a helping hand was needed, Douglas Hughes' support could be a major advantage. His papers contain numerous letters requesting help or offering thanks for help received. One such letter requested his assistance in getting the son of a friend into the correct secondary school. Not untypically it begins 'I hope you will do me a great favour'.³⁹ Another, this time from the Welsh National School of Medicine, thanked Hughes for a letter supporting an application, but replied: 'unfortunately, we can not reconsider her application [for admission to the School of Medicine] now because all the places are filled'.⁴⁰ Though Hughes' support was not a guarantee of success he could certainly influence outcomes, as a newly installed Headmistress indicated by writing 'to express my sincere thanks to you for your kindness in supporting my application for the post of headmistress at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Carmarthen'.⁴¹ The power of local barons could be disturbed by scandals (Hughes survived several) or by internal political revolts. But when they survived, they could

regularly persuade constituency parties how to vote on national issues.

Bevan made few efforts to cultivate such people. Indeed, he had little to do with Welsh politics. In Bevan's seat in Ebbw Vale, Ron Evans, agent first to Aneurin Bevan, and then to Michael Foot, became the key public and political figure within the constituency. Bevan was always in demand outside Wales. In addition to his role at Westminster, he was a regular first choice speaker at meetings all over Britain. He spent little time in Wales. Numerous letters to Evans from Bevan's PPS reveal how little constituency correspondence reached him. Even less was dealt with personally. Evans ran the seat. Bevan was also increasingly seen - with some justice - as an absentee. Discussing one constituent's problems, Bevan's PPS recognised the situation 'seems a bit desperate', but passed the buck to Evans stating 'you will know about it best'. Evans was asked if he 'would mind doing the whole thing direct', because Bevan was on holiday and his PPS was also about to begin holidays. The secretary ends by stating that 'if this kind of letter can be kept away from him [Bevan] it will help'.⁴²

Evans provided much of the hard work for Bevan in his constituency. He was Bevan's eyes and ears. When Bevan failed to attend constituency meetings, Evans explained away the circumstances. When a Gaitskell speech received a poor reception in Cardiff, Evans gleefully reported the news to Bevan. However, he focussed on such matters rather than trying to create a Bevanite Wales. Of course, there were Bevanites in Wales, and resolutions from left-wing constituency parties. Nye Bevan was, and remains, a massive figure in both British and Welsh Labour folk lore. Despite the fact that Bevan did not seek support for the faction he led, support existed. In March 1955, during the debate on Churchill's defence White Paper, Bevan, along

with sixty-two other Labour MPs refused to support the official Labour amendment. The actions were regarded as a slight at Attlee and proved generally to be unpopular. The shadow cabinet (and particularly Gaitskell) was keen to expel Bevan from the party. Welsh rank and file support for Bevan was spontaneous and widespread. It seemed even those who doubted his actions were prepared to rally to his cause. As Patricia Hollis has noted

‘In Pembrokeshire, one party worker, Gordon Parry, brought dozens of members’ cards to a meeting with their local MP, Desmond Donnelly, put them on the table and stated that every one would be torn up if Nye was expelled’.⁴³

Nonetheless, across much of Wales - especially the Wales that Labour had to capture to expand - Bevanite views had little credence. In such seats, Labour had to focus on more mundane matters. For example, in Brecon and Radnor, far from a Labour Party heartland, the local party structure and organisation was incredibly weak. Not unusually, the Labour MP, Tudor Watkins, held a semblance of local party activity together. As a devolutionist in a marginal seat with a skeletal organisation, a ‘modernising’ agenda was more relevant. Watkins was the key Labour Party figure in the area (looking at membership levels it could be suggested he was the only Labour Party figure in the area). He constantly tried to improve the party’s level of organisation, to build up, improve, or indeed in some areas, create a local party structure. However, frustration and a lack of progress sum up the results of his efforts. The Labour party in Brecon and Radnor embarked on countless rural campaigns year on year in an attempt to attract rural workers. Results were disappointing, as they had been since the party was founded. Party minutes reveal the nature of the long standing problems. Watkins’ requests to ‘strengthen our list of contacts’⁴⁴ in May 1953 appears to have fallen on deaf ears, for in the November of 1954 he was ‘disturbed by the small number of village correspondents on file and stressed the

importance of the occasional visit to them'.⁴⁵ Brecon and Radnor was clearly an area where decrepit organisation, inactivity, in-fighting and apathy was common place. In 1954, a confidential Working Party Members Report on the standard of organisation in Brecon and Radnor's local Labour parties noted that Abercrave's membership had halved, with no more than 30 per cent of them active. Brecon's 1953 membership of 151 was 'purely a card membership...the number of active workers appear to be very few'.⁴⁶ The poor organisation was blamed on 'local personalities'. Brynmawr - a mining area - had a card membership of 140 in 1953 (90 in 1955 and 53 in 1959), though 'the same old trouble between the Local Party and the Women's section still remains' and 'personalities' were described as a 'danger to the organisation and long term planning'.⁴⁷ Bwlch had no members because it was defunct; Cefn-Coed's organisation appeared 'to lack any life at all'.⁴⁸ and attendance at meetings apparently peaked at five! Crossgates only met for their AGM. Colbren had just recently re-formed and in Crickhowell, though the 1953 individual card membership was 150, it was 'purely a card membership...[and it was] doubtful if even a quarter of these [cards] were ever issued quite apart from collections made on them'.⁴⁹ When a local party within Brecon and Radnor was doing well, one or two individuals were responsible. If, as happened in Llangynidr and Llanfrynach, they moved or became ill, the party ceased to function. In a more extreme case, though membership of the local party in Presteigne was good, nobody wanted to be seen as publicly working for the party.⁵⁰ Conflicts in this seat were seldom about national politics, more about trying to turn the inactive into activists.

This was not a unique example. In north Wales, Labour's organisation (whilst not plumbing the depths to which Brecon and Radnor's had sunk) apparently left 'much to be

desired'. Only two branches of the Labour League of Youth were functioning across the whole of Wales in 1954. 'The combined total membership is less [sic] than twenty'.⁵¹ Although the position improved, the role of youth sections was rarely political. Indeed a report on the state of the Young Socialists in north Wales revealed 'that in the main their activities were of a social nature'.⁵² There does not appear to have been a groundswell of Bevanite opinion. On the contrary, the organisational improvements advocated by the Wilson report seemed far more relevant.

However, parties in these 'moderate' areas were not attracting new, moderate, Gaitskellites. In north Wales, Goronwy Roberts and others promoted a moderate agenda, but this did not attract huge numbers of enthusiastic supporters. He relied on a personal machine. Yet nor did Bevanism fit with Roberts' agenda. He was striving to unite 'socialism and nationalism under the...umbrella of the Labour Party'⁵³. This view was shared by many in Welsh speaking Wales, as Andrew Edwards suggests. He identifies Roberts' 'articulate attempt to unite national sentiment and Labour sympathy'⁵⁴ as crucial to understanding Labour's political thrust in such areas, and as a key element in its success.

Bevan's lack of a Welsh angle to politics, alongside his emphasis on class conflict, was not attractive in Welsh speaking Wales. Goronwy Roberts (like many in Plaid Cymru) took Keir Hardie and his ethical socialism as their inspiration. To some extent they espoused a traditionalist Labour message rooted in the 1930s. Roberts, and those who sympathised with him, retained a belief in delivering 'bread and butter' issues to their locality, adding to this support for Welsh devolution. Roberts also fought to bring industry to Gwynedd, highlighting

depopulation and the lack of opportunities for the area's young people. In doing so, he questioned the impact of Labour's programme of nationalisation - which had been swiftly followed in some industries by Tory measures of de-nationalisation. For Roberts, government interference had changed the face of many industries - for the worse. This is not to suggest that he opposed state intervention. He stressed that Labour would 're-develop and extend the Dalton Industrial Dispersion policy which had been successful under the 1945 Labour government',⁵⁵ directly tackling specific local problems with water and electricity supplies to rural areas, and supporting educational provision and welfare packages encompassing health provision and pensions. Industrial growth and attempts to solve the problem of unemployment were the twin thrust of Roberts' (and Labour's) approach. Roberts was a moderniser, albeit one who also respected Welsh tradition, from the chapel to the language. Unfortunately, in the 1960s and more acutely in the 1970s, the national economic stability necessary to see these policy measures implemented did not exist.

The party's limited membership may not have been an indication of declining support for Labour's approach in south Wales, but in north Wales it reflected the party's shallow roots and made it difficult to build popular commitment. In north Wales, Labour could not prove it was a practical force by using its position on local councils. When the Regional Council of Labour received reports on the north Wales local government elections of 1958, the nature of the party's position became clear. Only Wrexham and East Flintshire CLP's had invited and endorsed nominations. The report concluded 'it was obvious that some of the constituencies do not interest themselves in County Council Elections, and in fact elections are not fought on political party issues'.⁵⁶ The Labour Party had its work cut out in providing a platform from

which it could expand. The aims of bodies like the Welsh Regional Council and its north Wales sub-committee were often thwarted by apathy at local level. In these areas, local party officials - like officials at national level - focussed less on policy than on organisation. Organisational issues dominated the discussions and plans for north Wales. The need for marginal constituencies to produce marked registers was highlighted at virtually every meeting of the north Wales sub-committee. By February 1958, it was stated that the 'marginal constituencies need a marked register'. Unfortunately, there was 'little progress'.⁵⁷ Some six months later the minutes reveal that 'there is much to be done to have a complete register in each marginal constituency'.⁵⁸ The minutes of the north Wales sub-committee revisited the same narrow organisational matters year on year. In May 1959, a report noted 'that much more work had to be done in order to have a completely marked up register in the marginal constituencies'.⁵⁹ Improvements were slow and hard to implement. Plans to improve the organisational situation of the north Wales CLP's included a week long school for election agents, as well as various weekend schools for key workers. Though some were successful, others, including the week-long school, failed to get off the ground, the 'poor response from the north Wales constituencies' being blamed for the school's cancellation. Regular demands for membership campaigns to be undertaken by the north Wales committee met with similarly unenthusiastic responses from constituency parties. The most promising of many statements about the state of membership across north Wales was in 1958, when the constituencies had 'reported some progress in their membership campaigns, though there is nothing really spectacular to report'.⁶⁰

TABLE 2:
1950-70: LABOUR'S ELECTORAL STRENGTH AND MEMBERSHIP IN ITS HEARTLANDS

| Constituency | | 1950 | 1951 | 1955 | 1959 | 1964 | 1966 |
|--------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Newport | % of Vote | 51 | 52.8 | 53.7 | 53.1 | 57.5 | 59.8 |
| | Membership | 3294 | 3040 | 2509 | 2116 | 1000 | |
| Neath | % of Vote | 72.9 | 76.9 | 76.4 | 71.4 | 73.5 | 79.7 |
| | Membership | 832 | 793 | 790 | 800 | 1000 | |
| Pontypridd | % of Vote | 68.9 | 72.3 | 71.1 | 68.2 | 71.3 | 74.9 |
| | Membership | 1591 | 1276 | 1416 | 1068 | 1476 | |
| Merthyr | % of Vote | 78.8 | 79.6 | 77.2 | 77.1 | 75.3 | 74.5 |
| | Membership | 850 | 750 | 700 | 800 | 1000 | |
| Rhondda East | % of Vote | 75.9 | 81.2 | 72.6 | 65.2 | 71.2 | 77.4 |
| | Membership | 329 | 377 | 319 | 800 | 1000 | |
| Rhondda West | % of Vote | 82.4 | 81 | 73.8 | 72 | 79.3 | 76.1 |
| | Membership | 389 | 347 | 459 | 800 | 1000 | |
| Abertillery | % of Vote | 86.5 | 86.9 | 82.7 | 85 | 85.9 | 88.1 |
| | Membership | 624 | 706 | 648 | 800 | 1000 | |
| Bedwellty | % of Vote | 83.4 | 83.3 | 82.4 | 81.1 | 83.5 | 86.2 |
| | Membership | 1050 | 1010 | 790 | 870 | 1331 | |
| Ebbw Vale | % of Vote | 80.7 | 80.7 | 79.3 | 81 | 83.3 | 85.1 |
| | Membership | 641 | 620 | 727 | 810 | 1477 | |
| Pontypool | % of Vote | 72.3 | 75.7 | 72.9 | 70.1 | 74.5 | 77 |
| | Membership | 861 | 885 | 567 | 800 | 1000 | |

Sources: Welsh Regional Council of Labour Annual Reports.

FWS Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1950-1970* (1970)

* Shaded boxes represent Labour victories.

Organisational ‘solutions’ also tended to predominate when Welsh Labour party committees discussed how to expand. However, some members of the Welsh Regional Council of Labour recognised the need to go beyond this, aiming to use the Welsh language and Welsh culture to promote the Labour Party in north Wales by developing real community links. Thus Tom Jones, a member of the north Wales sub-committee, persuaded his district committee of the Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU) to pay for space in *Y Cymro*, so that a Labour party policy document could be published in a serial form and in Welsh. Copies of the policy document could also be ‘run off’ cheaply, thus arming local workers with Labour Party material in Welsh. Owen Edwards, another sub-committee member, secured a promise from Cliff Prothero for financial help from Head Office towards the cost of publishing Labour Party material in Welsh. Nonetheless, whilst there was considerable thinking on policy for rural areas, there were few attempts at consulting rural communities, and little attempt was made to secure the local respect and credibility which would make Labour policy proposals seem real. Labour remained a pragmatic party, in which presentation and election psychology were marginalised. The decision to flood the Tryweryn valley in order to provide an additional reservoir was seen by some voters and activists as an indication of its limited sympathy for Welsh rural life. Every Welsh Labour MP voted against the Tryweryn bill. As Morgan has argued, ‘The decision to submerge the homes of a small community and to hand over the valuable commodity of water to the mighty English corporation of Liverpool, with the Welsh local authorities powerless to affect the decision, aroused much anger in Wales, from those in all parties and in none’.⁶¹ Plaid Cymru made the most of its opportunity, seizing on the emotive aspects of the dispute. Morgan is indeed correct. Bevanites made nothing of this example of how ‘modernisation’ did not serve Wales, and those Labour activists who felt strongly about the issue (like Huw T. Edwards)

turned to Plaid Cymru and not to Bevan. This was not just because of Bevan's hostility to 'nationalist' attitudes. Bevanites were usually rationalist urbanites, with little sympathy for preserving rural life.

A declining membership was less electorally and organisationally important in south Wales, where Labour MP's often had huge majorities, and local parties sometimes received considerable financial help from a trade union sponsor. Nonetheless, the party's emphasis on organisation and its importance still had some resonance with powerful local figures, who thus saw their role being valued. The party in south Wales still aimed at promoting organisation almost as an end, rather than a means to identify, reflect or create local opinion. There was little analysis of why people did not see Labour in the coastal areas as their 'natural' representatives when the party's hold weakened in the 1950s and no real 'Gaitskellite' attempts to broaden the party's appeal. Just as the party nationally took time to identify problems, so locally in south Wales it dragged its feet. Many seats were inactive until after the 1959 election, in which Labour's support was seriously shaken. Newport is a fine example of a once vibrant local party which ran into organisational and electoral difficulties. A moderate party before 1939, Newport had one of the largest party memberships in the UK, including an especially strong women's section. After 1945, the party came to rely on financial help from their MP Peter Freeman. In 1945, for example, he pledged to give £100 to the election fund and a further £400 per annum to the constituency.⁶² This was perhaps just as well, because as early as 1946 the problems of collecting membership dues and putting active ward committees together were becoming all too familiar. Re-established youth sections soon disintegrated. A formerly successful Labour Party newspaper, the *Newport Citizen*, was re-established but the expected success failed to

materialise. At the 1948 Annual General Meeting, 'anxiety was felt at the financial position of the party'.⁶³ The newspaper was suspended in March 1949. There were also attempts to organise ward organisation on Newport's ever growing council estates. However, such activity proved impotent. There was no official Labour participation in the activities of Tenants' Associations⁶⁴ or other 'new' community developments. Though a membership drive boosted numbers slightly, the party had lost its old energy.

Genuine efforts to improve the situation continued. There was a Youth Officer and a League of Youth representative on Newport's Executive Committee throughout the 1950s. The Women's Sections had some strong and positive features: women who could not attend meetings through illness were sent 'sunshine' (a present) by one of the appointed 'sick visitors'.⁶⁵ The impressive programme of talks, outings and socials meant that women continued to outnumber men amongst party members. Despite the fact that the Women's Section showed more life, imagination and vibrancy than any other section of the party, their efforts were little valued, reflecting a common enough Labour view of women's 'social' activities. The Labour agent told the St Julian's ward women's section in 1955 that the party had to 'foster [the] ideas and ideals of socialism' so that support was automatic. Hard work, not play was needed. The agent went on to say that 'whilst many members were eager to take part in any social activities, not everyone could or would do the various jobs of work especially the canvassing which is an absolute necessity'.⁶⁶ Making Labour a part of people's lives - including social lives - was less important to the party than turning them into (often menial) workers for the labour movement. This neither inspired nor wooed the voters. The downward trend in Newport continued. The once comfortable financial position reached its nadir in the late 1960s, when the party had to request

a bridging loan from Labour's Headquarters to 'assist your party to meet its pressing liabilities'.⁶⁷

Nor was this position unusual. Coalfield parties with huge majorities often lacked ambition. Caerphilly Labour Party's organiser reported to their 1951 annual conference his great pleasure at the state of the party's membership. However, the party decided against employing a full-time agent on financial grounds and followed that up by deciding that a local news sheet would be impractical.⁶⁸ Across the coalfield membership fell, the number of trade unions participating in politics seemed to be in decline, and parties relied on their affiliated trade union membership to keep in touch with the voters' needs. This meant that the 'organised workers' - Labour's traditional supporters - and not the middle classes, women or others who had supported the party less vigorously in 1951-50 were still seen as the party's main supporters. Labour's analysis of its problems again focussed on organisation, reflecting neither 'Bevanite' analysis, nor 'Gaitskellite' solutions, but a traditionalism neatly expressed in the Wilson report.

Ultimately, the Labour Party in Wales relied on a small number of dedicated individuals to carry out its work. There is clear evidence that many of the local individuals were tremendously hard-working, attending numerous time consuming meetings. They attempted to serve their community, to improve local conditions and amenities. Their reward was the faith that the electorate showed in them by returning them to office time and time again. This could allow them to indulge 'Bevanite' views, but on the whole Wales was not a stronghold of 'Bevanite' politics. Throughout the period, Labour attempted to impose itself as the party of all Wales. It had a series of economic and social ideas which culminated in a programme of radical and progressive proposals. Most local Labour parties were successful because of their

commitment to the delivery of a modernised Welsh economy and to the improvement of conditions in their localities. The Labour Party of the 1950s and 1960s preached in a radical tone. Modernisation was the key refrain. Organisational 'effort' was also called for by the London leaders - and this too struck a chord with activists. Finally, many - left and right - sought local progress through municipal control. Thus in Wales there was no Bevanite mafia. Bevanite support was sporadic and given on some national issues. It also declined once Bevan himself was no longer the inspiring leader of the revolt. 'Normal' Welsh Labour politics was predicated on another agenda, which was increasingly neither 'Gaitskellite' nor 'Bevanite' in tone.

FOOTNOTES

1. Interview with Lord Parry of Neyland, 22 February 2001. As Gordon Parry he was the candidate for Monmouth 1959 and for Pembroke 1970 and February and October 1974. He was president and secretary of Neyland Labour Party.
2. C. Prothero, *Recount* (Ormskirk, 1982), pp.57-58.
3. K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation. Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1982), p.340.
4. *Ibid.*, p.341.
5. *Ibid.*, p.342.
6. K.O. Morgan, 'Wales since 1945: Political Society', in T. Herbert and G. Elwyn Jones (eds), *Post War Wales* (Cardiff, 1995).
7. Quoted in Prothero, *op.cit.*, p.65.
8. R. M. Jones and I. Rhys Jones, 'Labour and the Nation', in D. Tanner, C. Williams and D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p.249.
9. *Ibid.*, p.250.
10. *Hansard*, 28 October 1946, quoted in *ibid.*, p.249.
11. *Ibid.*, p.137.
12. J. Graham Jones, 'The Parliament for Wales Campaign 1950-66', *Welsh History Review* 16 (1992), pp.207-36.
13. 'Memorandum on Rural Development' September 1955, D. Caradog Jones Mss File 1, National Library of Wales.
14. *Ibid.* 'Discussion Papers of Tripartite Committee', File 2.
15. *Ibid.*, File 1.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Minutes of the Swansea (and Wrexham) Labour Party, Origins and Development of the Labour Party Series, Microform Limited, NLW.
18. Welsh Regional Council of Labour, 'Development of Rural Areas in Wales Interim Report', Annual Meeting 1957, Welsh Labour Archives, NLW.
19. 'Memorandum on Welsh Rural Areas', Caradog Jones Mss File 1.
20. K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth*, p.331.
21. *Ibid.*

22. Caradog Jones Mss, summary of discussion of meeting, 15 December 1955, File 2.
23. Ibid., 'Memorandum on Welsh Rural Areas', File 2.
24. Speech at Cardiganshire CLP Annual General Meeting, January 1961, Loti Rees Hughes Mss in the Deian R. Hopkin Collection, NLW A1991/187/136.
25. Ibid.
26. Llŵchwr District Labour Party minutes, 19 March 1958, Gower Labour Party Offices.
27. Brynlliw Ward Council minutes, 9 March 1960, Gower Labour Party Offices.
28. Newport CLP EC minutes, 21 October 1957, Swansea University Library.
29. D. Tanner, 'The Pattern of Labour Politics, 1918-1939', in D. Tanner, C. Williams & D. Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, (2000), pp.113-139.
30. S. Fielding, 'The 'Penny Farthing' Machine Revisited. Labour Party Members and Participation in the 1950s', p.12-14 in C. Pierson and S. Tormey (eds.), *Politics at the Edge* (London, 2000).
31. Caernarfonshire CLP to Labour Party Head Office (Cardiff), 4 December 1965, Labour Party Wales Archive, File 31.
32. Fielding, op. cit., p.4.
33. Llŵchwr District Labour Party minutes, 21 May 1958.
34. Ibid., 16 July 1958.
35. D. R. Grenfell to Ifor Davies, (Gowerton), 12 November 1958, Grenfell Mss D207/1/Box 9, West Glamorgan Archives.
36. Robert Griffiths, *S. O. Davies. A Socialist Faith* (Llandysul, Dyfed, 1983), p.283.
37. Ibid.
38. *Merthyr Express*, April 1970, cited *ibid.*, p.285.
39. J. Davies to D. Hughes, 15 August 1953, Alderman Douglas Hughes Papers, Deian R. Hopkin Mss, NLW A/1991/187/43.
40. Welsh School of Medicine to D. Hughes, 29 August 1953, A/1991/187/43.
41. N. Evans to D. Hughes, 1 June 1953, A/1991/187/144.
42. Bevan's PPS to R. Evans 12 August 1959, Evans Mss, NLW, File 17.
43. Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee. A Life* (Oxford, 1997), pp.190-1
44. Brecon and Radnor Labour Party minutes, 16 May 1953 NLW.

45. Ibid., 6 November 1954.
46. Report on the standard of organisation in Brecon and Radnor Local Labour Parties Attached to the Brecon and Radnor minutes, 17 July 1954.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Meeting of the North Breconshire and Radnorshire Federation of Labour Parties, Brecon and Radnor minutes, 6 November 1954.
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53. Andrew Edwards, *Labour Domination and the Challenge of Nationalism: Political Action and Political Strategies in Welsh Speaking Wales*, unpublished M.A. Thesis (Bangor 1998), p.22.
54. Ibid., p.22.
55. *Y Cymro*, 24 September 1959, quoted *ibid.*, p.24.
56. Welsh Regional Council of Labour, North Wales Sub-Committee minutes, 15 February 1958.
57. Ibid., 15 February 1958.
58. Ibid., 22 November 1958.
59. Ibid., 16 May 1959.
60. Ibid., 23 August 1958.
61. K. O. Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp.381-2.
62. Newport Labour Party, Finance Committee minutes, 27 August 1945.
63. Ibid., Annual Meeting, 1948.
64. Ibid., 21 April 1947.
65. Newport Labour Party, St Julian's Women's Section minutes, 26 October 1954 and Malpas Ward Women's Section, 14 January 1958.
66. Newport Labour Party, St Julian's Women's Section minutes, 12 January 1955.

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CHAPTER SIX

FREEDOM IS MERELY PRIVILEGE EXTENDED UNLESS ENJOYED BY ONE AND ALL - Billy Bragg

THE RED REPUBLIC OF SALFORD

It could be argued that the Welsh case is untypical. Certainly across Britain the left became a stronger force in constituency politics after 1945, and especially in the 1950s. This chapter examines the extent to which 'revisionist' splits permeated local level politics, taking as its example another centre of 'leftism', the Red Republic of Salford. If comparatively little has been written about the 'Bevanites' at local level, even less has been written about Labour politics generally in its city heartlands. It has simply been assumed that Labour became more detached, bureaucratic, inefficient and even corrupt. However, if left-wing historians are correct there was every chance that a 'Bevanite' response to such problems would be successful. Jim Fyrth has argued that the people remained detached from the decision making process, despite Labour's post-war reforms. People lost faith in the institutions of post war Britain he argues because 'the people's experience of bureaucracy [failed to]...enthuse them'.¹ More democratisation was necessary. As early as 1948 the economist John Jewkes was critical of Labour's planning, which he perceived to be 'inefficient, unjust and undemocratic'.² Equally, it has been argued that the party workers - and the population - were ready to participate in a socialist revolution, which was led astray by Labour's bureaucratic moderation and stalled by 'managerial centralism'. Only Tiratsoo has examined a 'Bevanite' party, basing his analysis on 'radical' Coventry. He argues that 'there were a whole myriad of small initiatives by local Labour parties and councils aimed at educating and enthusing...Labour groups completed their own planning surveys...held exhibitions...more ambitiously, a few authorities even made films about local town planning.

The objective...[was] to encourage participation'.³ He also argues that the initiative failed. The left provided no real alternative.

Tiratsoo's view of Coventry is borne out by this study of Salford and extended beyond 1951. In Salford, attempts to involve the people, local councillors, civil servants and the professional planners were commonplace. Salford's long-term redevelopment plans were made available to the public in a cheap abridged format. Participation was actively encouraged. Urban redevelopments were well reported in the *Salford City Reporter* and the *Manchester Evening News*. This chapter notes how a practical but idealistic form of socialism continued to dominate Labour thinking into the early 1950s. However it is also suggested that this was increasingly not simply a 'left-wing' policy, but a policy around which even moderates could unite. As in Wales, where the emphasis was a little different, a unifying strategy emerged. 'National' controversy was marginalised. In Salford, however, it was not a desire to modernise infrastructure and organisation which dominated. Rather it was a programme of vital housing reforms which took a practical modernisation as their touchstone, rather than a socialist utopianism.

In the immediate post-war period, Labour local authorities were pre-occupied with physical reconstruction. Here Bevan had given a lead. Bevan criticised what he felt was the dominant pattern of socially segregated neighbourhoods. This created 'castrated communities', colonies of low income people living in houses provided by the local authorities and colonies of higher income groups living in their own sheltered and isolated estates. Bevan described segregation as 'a wholly evil thing'.⁴ In fact, as Tiratsoo has made clear, the better off (even working class) communities were more than a little reluctant to welcome an influx of slum

families. Moreover, councils had to face other realities - notably financial constraints which undermined some of the party's utopian emphasis on the rebuilding of community consciousness and civic identity. In Salford, there was a good deal of involvement in idealistic plans by those on the council, but the financial constraints meant the more ambitious plans - the civic centre, hotel and swimming pool - were compromised by a lack of money. It was a similar picture up and down the country, where financial constraints meant that councillors found 'their room for manoeuvre was usually small'.⁵

Labour's resolve to create communities with a sense of local pride and community spirit suffered greatly from post-war constraints. The war-time comradeship amongst the public was increasingly replaced by individualistic notions. Drawing on reports by the Family Welfare Association, Tiratsoo showed that in general people had been unable to forge effective or meaningful community relations during and after the war and had given up trying by 1951. People's desire for a better Britain generally meant a better way of life for them on an individual level. Political apathy also became an even greater problem after the post-war idealism had faded, a factor highlighted in chapter four on Labour's organisation. Large numbers chose not to vote in local elections and showed little interest even in issues which would directly affect their lives. This chapter shows how Salford's Labour Party struggled to address such problems, whilst delivering services and maintaining a commitment to their community. The ability to get things done and to serve the community proved to be the biggest factor in maintaining party unity. The 'vision' of 1945 - never really just that of Bevan anyway - was not replaced in Salford by right-wing bureaucratic management, but by a struggle to complete an agenda which united much of the party.

I

After the Second World War, Salford's housing situation was appallingly bad. The city contained poor streets with old decrepit properties, poor sanitation, no electricity and overcrowding; it lived up to the classic images of an inner city. Houses were often so damp it was joked that they had hot and cold running water. Unfortunately, it was down the walls! Throughout the 1950s, the situation remained desperate. Indeed, as late as 1955, the front page of *Labour's East Salford Voice* was taken up by a picture of a Salford street; its headline stated: 'Facts speak louder than words. In many Salford streets, even the landlords run away. Salford families deserve better'.⁶ For Salford's councillors, and Salford's various Labour groups, housing was the number one priority. A massive slum clearance scheme seemed to offer Labour the very real chance of rebuilding and expanding a new Salford. Eddie Hough, a long serving Labour councillor, membership secretary for Salford East and a highly respected left-wing figure in the city, summed up the scale and nature of the problem:

After the war, Bevan, as Minister for Housing talked of having ten people per acre and some such [houses] were built in Weaste. In Ordsall before the slum clearance, there were up to 78 people per acre. There were 231,000 people in old-Salford- 231,000 people in 5,000 acres.⁷

The plan Salford Labour Party developed had long-term implications for the city's redevelopment, laid out in a twenty-year programme. Though it took two and a half years for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to grant approval, the plans had been formulated in 1951, with an abridged version published in April 1952. In line with other Labour councils committed to public participation and the development of community spirit, Salford's Council had copies made to be sold to the general public for 7/6 (37½p) a copy. The council was anxious

that 'all members of the public who are interested in the future of the city shall have the opportunity of examining the proposals'.⁸ The publication of the report was not the only example of consultation with Salford's public. Public meetings were held to discuss the proposals. Councillor Hamburger, an important and influential Labour party figure and chair of the Building and Development Committee, addressed the meetings. The *Salford City Reporter* described a meeting where Hamburger described the twenty year development plan, outlining the problems involving space for new houses and the need to move people away from the centre. Little Hulton, a new town built by Salford's Labour corporation, was held up as the way forward.⁹ The initial plans were only a blue-print. The resulting programme and subsequent plans were to be reviewed every five years. Councillor Hamburger was bold in his thoughts and plans for the city. He expressed a strong sense of hope and civic pride. He appealed to all those involved to 'be far sighted in our plans and not [to] discard the desirable for the attainable - that which is right for that which is expedient. It is not our duty to complete the work but that does not relieve us of the obligation to commence it'.¹⁰ It was this commitment which continued to dominate and unite the Labour Party in the early part of the 1950s..

Salford's 52,000 houses were the planners' chief concern. Virtually half of them dated from before 1890. The majority of which were in central Salford. Salford's residential heartland was generally old, decaying and sub-standard. Some 12,355 houses had been marked for slum clearance by the Medical Officer of Health. With industrial concerns dotted around many of the residential areas, redevelopment was difficult. Again, the industrial buildings were often old and decaying. Many had newer sections attached to the older decaying parts. Salford's problems were such that even by the end of the twenty-year programme, there would be some 10,000

houses dating from before the 1890s. Thus, in spite of the large slum clearance programme, by the end of the programme and with the expected further dilapidation of the old houses, there would still be a formidable problem.

Clearing was only the first step to re-building. Ultimately space (or rather the lack of it) was the problem. In Salford, there were 4.12 acres of open space (including public and private open space) per thousand people. Many of the likely difficulties were recognised. It was stated that 'the city is now almost fully a "built up area", with few vacant sites for new development'.¹¹ The Twenty Year Development Report recognised 'this is inadequate to serve the present population'.¹² The use of suburban 'overspill areas' was seen as the way around the problem. Thus 'migration' was necessary, not only to allow redevelopment but also as a way of decreasing Salford's population to a more manageable level. Fifty-six thousand people were earmarked for overspill resettlement and 4,000 more were to leave through voluntary migration. This would be a huge task and one which could not easily be combined with the utopian vision.

The major restricting factor on re-development in Salford was the limit on overspill numbers. Slum clearance would add to the numbers displaced who would require alternative accommodation. Despite this pressure on housing space, Salford's Labour Party had to fight to retain residential areas against the pressures of industrial and commercial expansion. This could result in conflicts, not between 'right' and 'left', but between those responsible for change and those responsible to individual communities. In 1954, West Salford Labour Party was expressing great concern 'at the attitude adopted by the Highways, Housing, Building and Development Committee in recommending the Council demolish a row of houses and close a street to permit

an industrial concern to extend its premises on land made available, in an area zoned residential, [and] where the problem of housing is acute. This action can hardly be appreciated by local residents'.¹³ For the first five years of the programme the problems were clearly recognised. The report stated that 'Salford's housing programme within the City is limited by the availability of sites. New sites were few and sites to be cleared are dependent on the rate of building elsewhere to help re-house dispossessed tenants...several of the sites to be cleared are small and closely hemmed in with existing buildings'.¹⁴ Thus, Salford was heavily dependent on Lancashire and Cheshire County Councils' ability to deliver their promises on the number of overspill houses in the time-span they had specified. The essential factor was collaboration between the overspilling authority and the reception authorities. Only if good relations were maintained could Salford be both relieved and re-built.

Labour's vision had to be tempered by practical realities. The initial investigation had discovered that Salford suffered from three types of overcrowding. Firstly, there were too many people per house; secondly there were often too many houses per acre and thirdly there were too many built-up areas per district. Though Salford suffered from each form of overcrowding, the report noted that 'its principal problems arise from the second and third [issues]'.¹⁵ What becomes evident is that the layout of Salford itself was a problem. Salford had grown and expanded in an ad-hoc manner. Residential re-development was greatly hampered by the fact that it had to take place in, around and between industrial islands. The situation was further compounded by communication difficulties. Again, structure was the problem. Roads, railways, canals, and the River Irwell formed a complex pattern 'far from satisfactory but not easily capable of modification'.¹⁶ The railway lines in particular were a hindrance to road

improvements. Salford's roads were very much part of a larger system of roads centred on the Manchester/Salford conurbation. Although Manchester and Salford Corporations set up a Joint Planning Committee to coordinate road planning as well as planning for a good deal of road widening, as expected, difficulties persisted because Salford was so built-up. Widening roads was often simply impossible. Fiscal shackles were a further block, with the report concluding that 'it is difficult to foresee any great relief to traffic problems unless road improvements receive a much higher priority in national expenditure than they have done in the past'.¹⁷ Indeed, in 1951 there had been no road widening scheme in Salford for some twelve years.

The mass urban sprawl that Salford had become also lacked any sort of a centre. The fact that Salford lay in Manchester's shadow was blamed by local figures. The developers of 1945-51 were keen to rectify the situation. Again, and as in other Labour authorities, Salford's Labour's vision is evident. Hasegawa has shown how the Labour Party in Coventry pursued bold and imaginative reconstruction plans, with its civic centre, traffic free shopping, school of art, art gallery, adult educational institution, police office, law courts and the like.¹⁸ In Bristol, the Labour Party's municipal programme read 'To us now is given a chance that is truly priceless - the chance to plan and build a city that will be worthy of the ancient traditions of Bristol and its glorious future'. The socialist side of this was made explicit. There would be 'no vested interest, no selfish profit making...The Labour Party...is only concerned with the greatest good of the majority of the people'.¹⁹ In Salford, it was believed that the absence of a shopping centre left the city lacking a 'focal point and thus [it] suffers a psychological as well as a physical deficiency'.²⁰ Salford was in need of major changes. One of the first actions taken in the long-term plan was to divide the City into zones. The re-location of industry into industrial zones

would be helped by the clearance of slum properties and the urban exodus. The remaining communities would be safer, more pleasant, with more amenities and space.

The planners were unconcerned about the potential reduction in industrial sites. They felt unemployment was not a factor in Salford, nor did they consider it would be in the future. Indeed they 'anticipated...very high level[s] of employment in Salford' from the wide range of industries already in the city; the all-knowing, all-seeing planners felt other areas suffered more with heavy unemployment and so concluded 'it was not the present policy to encourage new industry, which would make heavy additional demands on the existing labour force, to locate in Salford'.²¹ Salford's main industries (engineering, clothing, textiles, food, timber, chemicals and metal goods) were seen as long-term future sources of employment. In the long-term, the decision not to try and attract new industry left Salford rooted in the past.

The planners also took stock of the social services available in the city. The city's schools were of some concern. Salford's Education Committee produced a report in 1946 which proposed the provision of some new schools as well as the adaption and extension of others. Unfortunately, most of the schools in the city were on cramped sites, hemmed in by buildings which could not be removed. Most schools lacked playing fields or play areas. Many schools were to have extensions and alterations, though this would create even smaller play areas. Fourteen new infant and primary schools were planned in existing areas, with a further three in the newly developed Trinity and Islington wards. The plans for secondary schools were even more ambitious. There were to be eleven new secondary schools, housing more than 6,000 pupils. The educational planners were also forward looking. Their plans included provision of

two special schools, each containing 150 educationally sub-normal pupils; the replacement of six hatted nursery schools by more permanent buildings, and the provision of a further twelve nursery schools. Salford had one open air school at Claremont Farm, for 'delicate' children - another was proposed. Each would accommodate ninety junior and sixty senior pupils.

In the area of health care, Salford's Hospital Board controlled and was well served by three big hospitals - Salford Royal, Hope and Ladywell. Expansion of services was to come in the form of much needed community clinics and centres. Maternity and child welfare, mental health and day nurseries were all to be built. The biggest plans covered divisional and local health centres for maternity and child health clinics. Although historians such as Michael Savage have argued that an emphasis on planning in the 1930's moved Labour away from a concern with 'neighbourhood' developments, Salford's Labour Council wanted to develop local community provision. To serve such areas as part of its local 'plan'.

II

From the start, it was clear that the re-development programme would be difficult. Many areas of Salford would be untouched by the alterations. The worst areas would be dealt with, but the initial programme could not cover all areas of need. Furthermore, the whole process focussed on new developments and new areas. The considerable problem of mixed developments, residential and industrial, could not be overcome in the twenty-year plan. In residential

development zones the hope was for new flats and houses at reduced densities. The need for open spaces and green areas was being recognised at last, but they could not be achieved overnight.

In the 1950s, it was estimated that the twenty-year plan for Salford was going to cost twenty million pounds. Five million of that figure was to cover the costs of works outside the city. The remainder was required to implement the proposals for developments within the city, the major proportion of which was to be spent on housing. This was not just a concern for the planners. It was a party and public preoccupation.

Local election addresses and party newspapers devoted the majority of their column inches to the housing situation. At the municipal elections of 1951, Councillor Dewhurst's election address in the Docks ward typically dealt with housing issues. Dewhurst highlighted the importance of housing by stating that it was:

‘the most pressing of all our needs...I feel that it is my duty to leave no stone unturned to try and help those unfortunate people on the housing list to reside in homes of their own...I know the anxiety felt by families living in overcrowded conditions’.

Such was the scale of difficulties facing those attempting to tackle the problems, that Dewhurst was further prepared to ‘support any effort or suggestion’ which would result in families having houses of their own.²² The slum clearance programme involved the setting up of a scheme to use overspill areas. As a result, the first stage of this programme saw over three hundred houses provided for those cleared from the Salford slums in Worsley, whilst the Cheshire authorities also agreed to take large numbers of displaced Salfordians to ease the situation. However,

problems soon arose. The minutes of Salford's Labour Party reveal the fear that the overspill rehousing scheme would break down because rent levels in the new areas were higher. As a result, the desire to move there was dampened.²³ In 1956, problems were still being experienced and the Salford Labour Party Group report stressed the 'difficulties being experienced re. providing suitable alternative accommodation for slum clearance families'.²⁴

III

Whilst tackling the large scale housing problems, Salford's Labour Party also had to face potential problems presented by the Conservative government's Rent Acts. Labour sought action, popular involvement and gave practical assistance. In 1952 sub-committees from Salford East and the City Labour Party combined to discuss the Rent Restrictions Act. As a result, protest meetings and a march were planned and a press release was issued detailing the party's intentions on the issue. By 1954 the party was holding a 'Rents and Repairs Bill Conference'. Public protests and campaigning funds were preceded by a big publicity drive with posters, handbills and a door to door canvass. Activity levels were high. Plans were made. Trade unions, district branches and shop stewards were to be approached. Unlike parties in other cities Salford's encouraged participation in such protests. The sixteen Salford wards were to play a key role in setting up Tenants' Defence Leagues. Meetings would then be thrown open, with tenants encouraged to set up small provisional committees to be co-ordinated on a city-wide basis. This was perhaps a reflection of a left-wing belief in external pressure. However, the plan for the Tenants' Leagues was a practical one as well. They were to guide the tenants, legally and otherwise, against exploitation by landlords and advise on tenants' rights and any other issues. Of course, this was not enough and Salford's Labour Party agreed it should continue to agitate

for the repeal of the Bill if it were to become law. All these plans received the unanimous support of the seventy-three delegates present at the conference to discuss Labour's strategy.

Most of Salford's wards took up the battle cry and began publicising the Rent Bill's implications and the strong opposition to it in Salford. St Paul's Ward produced a circular as the Rents and Repairs Bill was going through its final stages in the House of Commons. The circular asked 'how many members realise the impact it is going to have on the incomes of the citizens of Salford?...your rents could be increased by 4/7d (23p). Therefore we ask you to come along to the next ward meeting, where your councillors will discuss various points on the Bill and its effects on you'.²⁵ All Salford parties were united in their enthusiasm not just for housing, but for a campaigning sense of popular involvement and protest.

By 1956, Salford East CLP was congratulating Salford's Housing Committee for having avoided putting up the rents on council dwellings in the city. However, the fear expressed was that the pressure to increase rents would grow and Salford, along with other local authorities would have to pass the burden of the Conservative government's policy on to Salford's tenants and rate payers in general. The effect of such action would, it was feared, lead to anger and blame being directed against the Labour controlled council rather than the Tory government.²⁶ Salford East was prepared to stand firm. The ward urged the council to continue to resist pressure to increase rents. Even if this led to a deficit in the housing accounts, the CLP urged that the deficit should not be passed on to ratepayers. It requested that 'the Salford Labour Representatives at any conference on housing [should] press for this policy to be adopted by all Labour controlled Authorities in the Country'.²⁷

In view of the fact that left-wing Labour councils have regularly made their politics clear by resisting restrictive national legislation, it might be tempting to see Salford East's action as 'Bevanite'. In fact there was no national Bevanite strategy on resistance to Tory legislation and opposition to the rent increases was not universal amongst left-wing members of Salford's Labour Party. Eddie Hough - a left winger - was one of a significant minority, who disagreed with Salford's CLP, as well as with Frank Allaun, the Bevanite Salford East MP. Hough stated:

Frank Allaun fought against the increases. I disagreed with Frank. I thought the increases were all right so long as there were landlords' repairs being carried out. The housing was bad. You could wipe water off the walls...Mrs Dignam lived on Franklin Street, the same as me-in Ordsall Ward. Her walls had started to crumble. You could get into her coal shed and all her coal was pinched...they were two up two down, with families of seven kids, nine kids. In my house, me, my Dad and brothers had one room and my Mum and my sisters had the other. I argued for rent increases. Some rent levels were dating from way back and they were very low, and some included rates. Not all landlords were bad...There was high employment and overtime was available. People wanted repairs. It was Tory legislation but we got repairs.²⁸

Whilst not fully supporting the legislation, Eddie Hough simply hoped to see fair rents paid to good landlords, who would, in turn carry out decent repairs. The concerns of the Labour Council Group were made clear in a press statement issued by Labour's Press and Publicity Department.

much property has changed hands and speculators have taken over the ownership of many rented homes. They are interested only in profits and are increasing rents, even for very old property, in every legal way...Cases have been reported where following a change of ownership, the tenants had to pay rent increases of seventy five to one hundred percent under threat of eviction.²⁹

Landlords' failure to carry out repair work on their property was both a big and an expensive problem. In 1952, a report by Salford's Finance Committee stated that 'the corporation has

already spent £80,000 and is still having to spend well over £1,200 a month',³⁰ for repair work on houses in default of the owners doing the job. Bernard Birchill, a Labour councillor and Chairman of Salford Corporation's Direct Labour Committee, recognised that much of this money would not be recovered because the houses would not last. Repairs to decaying properties continued to be a drain on local finances. Unfortunately, too often the repairs would not be up to the highest standards. Birchill again honestly assessed the problems, saying 'Let's face it. Even when the job is done it can seldom be satisfactory to the unfortunate people who have to live in this sort of property. When you are faced with a block of houses with the entire roof sagging, the walls are so bad you are afraid to touch them and the whole place tumbling to pieces. The sort of money you can afford to spend isn't going to make much difference'.³¹ Repairs often cost more than the value of the house and landlords wishing to get rid of a decrepit property would sell the house to an inmate for as little as a pound or two. The new owner could not afford to pay for the repairs, so again the costs would fall on the corporation.

Salford was fighting a losing battle much of the time. Demand for new accommodation massively out weighed supply and the bold slum clearance schemes only added to the numbers on the waiting lists. Meanwhile, the opportunity of moving to Cheshire or Worsley was increasingly unpopular due to higher rents, increased travel costs and the desire to stay in ones community. David Robinson, a Salford Councillor felt that housing remained 'topical and dominant throughout the period', so much so that 'everything else took second place. In fact, it could be argued that other amenities were neglected. For example, Salford had a bad reputation in the library profession and the book fund was poor'. Robinson clearly recognised the grand scheme of things and stated that 'the main aim was getting rid of the slums. It was

hoped that new housing would be accompanied by an infra-structure of educational provision and other amenities. The aspirations were definitely there. Unfortunately, they were shackled by financial considerations'.³² Whilst the rhetoric of opposition to the rent acts was Bevanite, and Salford's councillors showed a preference for state solutions common on the left, the drive towards resistance came from the nature of Salford's housing crisis. This was a response vested in reality, not rhetoric.

Despite the recognition that repairing slum houses was often a waste of money, the repairs had to go on. Although the slum clearance programme was under-way (with the worst areas being cleared first) the large scale problems continued. In January 1953, Salford's Health Department made a survey of more than two hundred houses 'shared by two or more non-related families'. In a minority of cases, the survey revealed levels of squalor and dirt which shocked the investigators. The problem of over-crowding also becomes abundantly clear. In many large old houses, each room was occupied by a different family. 'In some cases a tap in the yard was the only source of water supply and in others, an average of twelve families shared one toilet. In fifty five cases there was no gas or electricity'.³³

IV

Salford had embarked on a twenty year programme and the overspill feature was an integral part of the scheme. Unfortunately, problems soon surfaced. In Cheshire, unlike Lancashire, the limited availability of houses affected the timetable for moving Salford's overspill population and caused difficulties. By March 1953, Salford should have received 360 houses from Cheshire County Council. In fact only sixty had been provided. Furthermore, there

was no sign of any acceleration in the rate of progress. Over the twenty year lifetime of Salford's programme, Cheshire County Council was to provide some four thousand houses. The effect of the shortfall meant Salford's plans were being thrown into chaos almost before they had got under way. The lack of any land in Salford itself added to the pressure to build upwards with high-rise flats. Indeed, following the failure of Cheshire County Council to deliver its promises on housing, Salford's Housing Committee did an about-turn on its attitude to high-rise. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that 'because of the growing difficulties, the committee...decided at yesterday's meeting that it was now necessary to go ahead with seven-storey flats on a site in Liverpool Street'.³⁴ By 1954, over 13,000 houses were due for clearance. This would have added to the 6,397 families (some 21,000 people) on Salford's housing waiting list. Salford Council also sought to acquire land which was zoned for industry. This land was used for the city's plan to build flats. At the public enquiry into this, Mr H. Wilkinson, speaking for the corporation, argued that 'the city itself was built up, there were no open spaces on the outskirts, and overspill housing had proved disappointingly slow...The demand for industrial sites had almost ceased...Flats could be built on the area immediately. The alternative was a risk of the extensive slum-clearance programme coming to a halt'.³⁵

Rather than act as an over-centralised and remote party, Labour investigated the troublesome overspill schemes to discover tenants' views on the merits and problems of the proposals. Three years after the first residents arrived in the overspill area of Worsley, Lancashire County Council surveyed the 152 'new' householders. The Worsley experiment was of national interest because, it was the kind of town development recommended by the government for general adoption. For Salford's Labour Party, the results must have been

worrying. Fifteen percent of the families allotted houses in Worsley had moved back to Salford - mainly because they could not afford to stay. About half of the remainder stated they would go back to Salford if they could find housing of equally good quality. The residents who had been there for less than one year were so glad to have a decent house they could not find fault with anything. Those who had resided in the 'new' area for longer pointed to some problems: the higher rents and fares to return to Salford to work; the 'more expensive shops, and the cost of removal and settling in on their standard of living; the shortage of local employment, poor transport facilities; obsolete schools and the lack of entertainments and playgrounds near their homes'.³⁶ New shops, schools and playgrounds were needed. Worsley did not have the sort of infrastructure necessary to accommodate the increasing population. The main items requested were a community centre, cinema, public phone, dance hall, and of course a public house. The survey's conclusion was that 'nothing would do more to ensure the success of the scheme than the speeding up of the transfer of industry into the Worsley district'.³⁷ The survey also highlighted the likely causes of any future problems; stating that 'some of Worsley's problems are aggravated by the distorted age structure of the 'new' population. Over 45% are children under sixteen - nearly twice the national proportion - and fewer than 4% are over fifty-five, compared with more than 20% in the Country at large'. Salford's overspill population in Worsley was not representative of the general population. Again the survey looked to the near future, warning Worsley would be hard pressed to educate and entertain the high numbers of young people.

'Idealism' did not vanish. The joint venture between Lancashire County Council, Salford Corporation, the overspill families and Worsley, sought to discover how the 'new community'

was settling into their imaginatively titled 'Mount Skip' Estate. The *Manchester Guardian* described this cooperation as a 'promising alternative to the "new town" concept and also the old style steam-roller of the expanding city'.³⁸ Furthermore, the survey provided planners with a clear indication of the apparent shortcomings through the eyes of the tenants. Thus the survey served to provide useful information for future developments. For the residents of Mount Skip, improvements were not far away. Needs were to be met. A new primary school, more shops and a public telephone were all in the pipe-line. The need for more local work was to be satisfied at least in part with three new industrial concerns due to set up on sites near the estate. Mount Skip was to be the first of four completely new neighbourhoods. Once the new estates were built and populated, Worsley was to have a population of 23,000. By surveying the first wave of residents, it was hoped many of the problems would be ironed out and the future resettlement programmes would run more smoothly. In 1953, at the time of the survey, Worsley had just 638 new inhabitants. By the time the resettlement programmes had finished that number would reach 4,000. The 'modernising' ideals of 1945-51 remained, as did the desire to create real communities - but they were tempered by practical constraints.

In housing there were always opportunities to address problems, and practicalities to consider. There were central government grants for housing and redevelopment. An area named Little Hulton was built up from nothing on land given to Salford by Lancashire County Council. People from Salford were then invited to live there. Eddie Hough remembered that 'the dockers were reluctant to move so far away'. The problem of travelling further to get to work was the main stumbling block - though a factor which Hough felt soon started to ease, 'In the 1960's there were more cars. That was the first stage, buy a car, then you can move further out'.³⁹

Indeed, the late 1960's and early 1970's saw an increasing desire to leave city centre areas as upwardly mobile families and individualist aspirations led them to suburbia.

V

Salford's Labour party developed a municipal approach which was shared by many across the UK. This was very much part of a national emphasis, rather than a Bevanite agenda. Labour's pattern of development did not see missionary zeal replaced by electoral pragmatism, but by the logic of the housing system and the nature of the social problem. The housing problem was not ignored. It was just difficult to tackle. One 'solution' developed across the UK was 'high-rise' council flats. This might be seen as collectivism in action. However, 'collective' council blocks were not opposed by either the Tories or Gaitskell. On the contrary, they seemed to be the 'modernisers' preference and a practical solution.

All the Labour councillors interviewed for this project vividly remembered the process of change. Ivor Zott remembered 'slum clearance was the priority. The first area was Ordsall...wholesale demolition and then quick re-housing...generous government subsidies built the tower blocks. After 1964, some national policy went against high-rise flats. The policy was amended and in Salford more houses began to be built'.⁴⁰ Hough too described the outside pressures, accepting the generous government grants, but recognising 'they wanted speedy redevelopment'.⁴¹ Joan Bryans, like the others, believed high-rise was the way forward. It was a much heralded innovation, the future of housing in cities. It was believed Salford was at the forefront of all that was modern, setting new standards. She remembered being told that the high-

rise block was 'like living in a street only stood up'. With hindsight Bryans recognised that the new tenants were not from the same areas. There was no sense of belonging or community. Later, when the Broughton area was being re-built, 'they put people from the same area together in flats'. Unfortunately, the tide in favour of high-rise had begun to turn and they were not as sought after. Bryans' belief was that the Councillors were told that this was the way forward. They had no reason to doubt these words and of course, as Bryans pointed out, 'if you didn't go along with the government's plan for high-rise buildings then you didn't receive funding. It was as simple as that'⁴². The City Engineer, McWilliam, had produced a plan for Hanky Park, a particularly difficult and troublesome area because of its mix of factories, houses and engineering works. His plan for factories, public houses and housing was turned down by central government who felt more housing was needed. They appointed Professor Matthew, a leading light in his field to investigate. His plans and models all had a big impact on the decision making councillors and the actual plan for the re-building of Salford came from him. Hough stated 'we all saw the model and thought "marvellous!" The plans had allowed for more green areas and trees. The high-rise blocks allowed space'.⁴³ High-rise was thrust upon Salford as it was seen as the way forward by the experts, the councillors were content with what they had been told, and supported the plans. In fact, Salford's councillors were tremendously impressed by the plans and designs presented to them.

The desire to build a better and brighter Salford was clear. It contained some of the spirit evident in 1945 and some modernising enthusiasm. The local Labour figures were keen to build what the Salford people wanted. They had not lost touch. But they were not 'Gaitskellites', nor did they act as 'Bevanites'. When Eddie Hough objected to a big celebration for the Freeman

of the City on financial grounds, Paul Foot, a renowned journalist visited him to cover the story and expressed his pleasure in the fact that Hough was putting up a socialist fight. Hough told him ‘these people [ie the residents on his street] don’t care about socialism. They care about rehousing, not socialism’.⁴⁴ Hough and people like him were striving to meet the needs of the community. It was a realistic approach, from a figure who lived amongst the people in the community that he sought to serve.

In fact, Salford Labour politicians often responded to local pressure, not national politics. Slum clearance, redevelopment and rehousing were covered in detail by the *Salford City Reporter*. So too were new developments the first flats in Salford were Ladywell, and opened on 27 November 1951. Their opening and intake of residents from Sidmouth Street in the Trinity area allowed the Trinity slum clearance to begin. The demolition process was quick, with Sidmouth Street and St. Stephen’s Place demolished by mid-December.⁴⁵ A further newspaper report told how the first six tenants of the Islington flats were to receive their keys, less than twelve months after the first spadeful of earth was turned on the site.⁴⁶ Progress was quick, but as expected, advertising such success meant it failed to keep up with demand. In January 1954, over 5,400 people were on Salford’s housing waiting list. “Skyscrapers”, eight storeys high, were begun in the same year. They contained 96 two-bedroomed dwellings and were to be completed in 12 months. Before the new land had become available, these flats were seen as the answer to Salford’s housing problems. Such was the belief in the success of the venture that Clement Attlee opened the first block, carrying his name, in May 1956.

Communities were changed by redevelopment and the high-rise accommodation. High-rise did not remain popular for long. Initial reactions might have been favourable, but there were bad tenants as well as good tenants and the state of many of the flats deteriorated quickly. Hough felt that there was much more vandalism than there had been in the old slum areas, though Ivor Zott felt that the flats became unpopular due to an increase in the building of new houses. By 1954, there had been huge strides made in the rebuilding programme. The *Salford City Reporter* stated that more than 1,000 new houses had been built in the Little Hulton overspill area.⁴⁷ As Zott stated, 'we still had to fill the flats and so the control and management gave way to economics. At that stage people became the factor in whether the flats would be a success. Another problem was the high cost of maintenance...if you had to repair a tenth floor window, it would involve scaffolding'.⁴⁸

The major part of Salford's re-development was done by the Direct Works Department. *This* was what Salford's Labour councillors and local parties saw as socialist policy. Their first venture into large-scale building was the Lower Kersal estate, where twelve blocks of 9-11 storey flats and six shops with maisonettes above were built. *Salford's Labour Voice* gave great support to direct labour, and saw it as an essential socialist policy to 'develop a Direct Works which was capable of building anything under the sun'.⁴⁹ Municipal Election Specials also made political mileage out of the tremendous advances made by Salford's Labour controlled council in 're-building the City to make it a healthier and brighter place to live in'.⁵⁰ The use of direct works added to the sense of pride and local achievement. Salford was increasingly looking like a new city, built by city workers and lived in by proud Salfordians. By 1961, the boasts (like the flats)

were getting bigger. Election Special headlines proclaimed 'Forward with Labour'. The paper felt able to claim:

Labour in Salford is proud of the support it has had from the electors...because of this...we have gone forward with our policy, knowing we were carrying out the wishes of the people...That is why we drew up our [latest] five year programme...the next five years will see a decisive leap forward. £20 million on housing, the building of 1,750 new homes...17 new schools...4 new Health Centres and clinics...£100,000 on street lighting; £182,000 on improved parks, 2 new swimming pools...2 Old Age Pensioners homes...4 homes for the Children's Committee.⁵¹

The Labour Party in Salford was promoting itself as a progressive party. It was keen to show that it had a constructive and purposeful image. Its scheme meant direct labour, a big effort for the people, campaigning against the Tories. Yet Salford's Labour Party also adopted a 'Gaitskellite' push for modernisation. In reality, both were easily contained in the same people, because national differences, or caricatures of these differences, bore no resemblance to real politics on the ground.

VI

Divisions and conflicts were not unknown within Salford Labour politics. As in other boroughs dominated by Labour - other 'one party states' - often the most difficult task on the council was fighting off opposition from other Labour party people. In his autobiography, Albert Jones, a Salford Councillor who held a series of prominent positions in Salford's Labour politics, including Secretary and Chairman of Salford City Labour Party, revealed that securing the candidacy for a position was often the most contentious local process. Once selected as a candidate, the process of being elected often became a mere formality, but the process of getting selected left tensions. In January 1951, Jones was selected as candidate for Salford's Crescent Ward. In securing the candidacy, he had defeated the ward's chairman, Laurence Mossom.

According to Jones, 'this caused a touch of bitterness'. When going round the ward collecting membership money with Mossam, Jones was being introduced as the new candidate. At one door, Jones had not been introduced and so did the introductions himself, finishing off with: 'I take it you will be voting for me?' Her forthright reply was 'No!' Stunned rather by this response, Jones asked 'Why?' Her reply again surprised him: 'You're a communist'. Jones said, 'Am I? Who says I am?' 'He did. He told me,' came the reply as the lady pointed at Mossam.⁵² Jones argued that having defeated Mossam, this was his way of getting back at him. Indeed, such was his bitterness, that Mossam moved over the boundary to Regent Ward and worked in the ward there instead.

Jones was a young, up-and-coming local political figure and like the active Crescent Ward members desired change. Other similar changes took place. The powerful figures within the local party began to manoeuvre against Salford East's incumbent MP, Alderman Ted Hardy. In 1954, there was a move to replace Hardy before the forthcoming general election on the grounds that he was too old. He was 68 years of age, and described by Albert Jones as 'a staunch Labour man on the right wing'. Jones also felt that 'the real reason for replacing him was the desire by the left-wing to have someone more politically motivated and preferably on the left'.⁵³ Ivor Zott, Eddie Hough, Harry Ratner, Peter Grimshaw, J. Wilcox and H. Williams were the key left-wing figures behind the move. Ted Hardy was approached behind the scenes and it was put to him that he should stand down for a variety of reasons including his age, his responsibilities as an MP, and his strenuous workload and duties as a City Alderman. Hardy's refusal to stand down saw the campaign against him increase with moves to undermine his position. He quickly realised that he did not have the support necessary to continue and informed the party that he

would not be standing in the 1955 election. His decision led to a battle between left and right wing factions of the local Labour party to get their candidate elected. The choice of the left was Frank Allaun. The right chose the very respectable figure, Alderman James Park OBE. Park was a financial expert and was also described as a friend of Hugh Gaitskell's. His main advocate was Tommy Mason, a leading catholic in the city who, Jones felt, was 'a tough battler, and when it came to in-fighting and political intrigue he was someone to be reckoned with'.⁵⁴ Albert Jones was also nominated by his union, the AEU; but not being the choice of the left, he fell into line with the campaign to elect Allaun. The left worked hard to organise support for Allaun in the wards and eventually, he won the candidature, followed by the inevitable victory in the parliamentary election. Good organisation, tactics and planning saw the left-wing clique secure a victory for their man and produce the result that they had wanted.

A second and similar conflict took place in 1962 when Charles Royle, the Salford West MP, let it be known that he would not be seeking re-selection for the 1964 General Election. This set the selection campaign off again. Albert Jones was nominated by the Salford AEU, Weaste Ward, St. Paul's Ward, Seedley Ward, St. Thomas Ward, Claremont Ward, West Salford Young Socialists, Clerical and Administrative workers, NUGMW 167 and 168 branches, National Union of Vehicle Builders- Salford Branch, Broughton AEU, Pendleton AEU, West Salford Women's Section, Seedley Ward Women's Section, the Socialist Medical Association, COHHE-Salford Corporation, National Association of Plasterers, and Manchester Branch of Cable ETU. In all, twenty four organisations nominated Jones. The local press described a 'One Horse Race', and a 'Foregone Conclusion'.⁵⁵ Jones was nominated by seven AEU Branches. Stan Orme was nominated by one T.U. branch, where the chairman was an active communist.

Jones received nominations from six party organisations. Orme received the nomination of one - Charlestown Ward, where Eddie Hough was dominant. Jones states 'Hough was...a most sincere individual who always spoke his mind at meetings without fear or favour. I was only sorry he was not battling for me. He worked hard for Orme'.⁵⁶ This had little to do with 'Bevanism', and suggests instead the importance of local power bases. Key constituency figures lent their support to Orme. Jones had secured the bulk of support from Salford. Orme had the support of most of the people who mattered, the fixers, the figures with influence, the people who were the local decision makers. Unsurprisingly, then, Orme would emerge as the victor.

From the late 1950s and early 1960s, there had existed in Salford a 'Broad Left' movement, composed of communists, Trotskyites and left-wing Labour members. Stan Orme and Albert Jones were both members of the movement, which met regularly as a caucus group to organise support for a particular line of action, or to support a particular candidate in an election or selection campaign. The Broad Left Movement had agreed to support Orme. Jones was not contacted by the organisation to discuss his situation. He stated that 'the powerful Broad Left machine then organised in favour of Orme. [however] I have to say that I was at no time...condemned by the caucus. Jones stated that 'the group's argument against me must have been a masterpiece of political diplomacy [they argued Jones was vital to Salford, and that Salford could ill afford to lose him]...the work Albert is doing in the city (on the council) was so important, that he was more valuable in the city than in parliament. As chairman of the Salford City Planning Committee [Jones] played a leading role in introducing to the City council the biggest re-development scheme in Europe'.⁵⁷

Jones described how the Broad Left chairman Ken Brett, a dynamic organiser, co-ordinated Orme's campaign. The planning and organisation was such that at the beginning of the selection procedure there were over seventy bona-fide delegates entitled to attend West Salford's General Committee. By the time the closing date for nominations had arrived, there were some 137 delegates. 'After the final selection meeting on 9 December 1962, we never saw about fifty of them again'⁵⁸. At that time, the constitution of the Labour Party allowed a person to be a delegate if they were paying the political levy to their union. These individuals did not have to be an individual member of the Labour Party.

Furthermore, on the morning of the final selection meeting, Ken Brett organised a meeting of the Broad Left. For the first time, Jones did not receive an invitation. It was also the first time that a Broad Left meeting had been held in Salford. Manchester had always been the venue. The meeting was clearly a final rallying call to ensure Orme received the maximum support. Orme not only had the backers to send him to Westminster, but also the key organisations, both official and unofficial. He won the selection by 52 votes to 46. The close contest would have been even closer had four of Jones's supporters not arrived late to the meeting after drinking in the Weaste Hotel. Their late arrival excluded them from voting. Such were the 'ideological' complexities of local Labour politics.

Behind the scenes campaigning and fixing was a way of life in local politics. Powerful, hard working oligarchies, cliques and individuals could secure victories for ideas and individuals alike. It is difficult to see hard ideological divisions at work, nor any external 'network' of left-wing organisations having any influence. Moreover, in order to retain electoral popularity local

issues had to be dealt with in a positive and productive manner. Most Labour activists were keen to tackle local issues and serve their public. In return, the electorate retained faith in them, returning them time and time again. Rival factions and personalities affected the local political situation more than national ideological debate. A report to the Trinity Ward by Councillor Dr. Jaffe, cut to the quick when he reported 'there was little of outstanding interest in the council meeting which seemed overshadowed by the clash of rival personalities to the detriment of local government'.⁵⁹ It was this, rather than ideological differences, which split Labour in local government.

VII

In Salford, Labour politics were not driven by the national divisions. Nor did the national desire for a well organised mass membership party or an emphasis on affluence and its consequences permeate very deeply into its political strategy. One part of Wilson's plan to revitalise the party was to rebuild it as a campaigning organisation. Here was an area around which the whole party could unite. Yet the efforts made in Salford after the Wilson report was as much a failure as earlier efforts. The desires of national politicians were simply ignored. A case study of one burst of activity in Salford indicates the scale and nature of the problem.

In 1957 Trinity Ward embarked on a large membership drive. In typical fashion their renewed and vigorous activity came after seats were lost in the local elections. The membership drive was to begin on Sunday 6 October, and the first stage saw a canvass of the new flats. The following April saw the ward preparing itself for the forthcoming municipal election campaign. The election agent, Councillor Flanagan, spoke of the necessity of dividing the ward into two

areas to ensure an intensive canvass. Due to re-development, Salford's population had become transient in many areas. Councillor Ferguson, one of the few local figures to involve himself with organisation, was calling for the register of votes to be brought up to date. On this occasion, the desire for an improvement in the ward's organisation came because the ward was about to introduce the Reading system.⁶⁰ In March 1959, Ferguson asked for volunteers to go canvassing consistently each Sunday, eventually securing the services of a few members. Ferguson was determined that Mr Bryne - leading the campaign in Trinity ward - should be provided with 'all the information necessary for him to carry on and complete the Reading system'.⁶¹ Ferguson led by example, canvassing every Sunday and showing how important the leadership of one or two individuals could be. His report to the ward in April 1959 told how he had been in and around the ward giving out handbills. He had sorted out the postal votes and was in the process of arranging cars for election time. The turnout in the ward for the 1959 General Election was 69 per cent. However, the turn-out in the ward for the municipal election was only 45 per cent and Labour lost again. A further sign of the generally disappointing level of activity in the ward can be seen by the fact that the editor of *Salford's Labour Voice*, Peter Grimshaw, had written to the ward 'asking if we could increase sales of "The Voice"'.⁶² In fact, Grimshaw's letter was the embodiment of tact and diplomacy for not a single copy had been taken by the ward committee. In Trinity ward, Salford Labour Party's message, told in its own words and through its own paper, was simply not getting through because of poor local organisation.

A more concerted effort was needed from more people in the ward. A report related the need to 'organise along more efficient lines, especially with reference to our membership and finances, and...keep Divisional officers up-to-date on such matters'.⁶³ Discussions following the

report concluded that 'the state of affairs was more the outcome of bad luck than ill-management and [would] soon be rectified'.⁶⁴ The treasurer's report declaration that the ward had only £1-9-9 [£1.49] in the bank paints a distorted picture. A £20 cheque received from Mr Flanagan's union for municipal expenses reveals that wards were poor, unions were slow to respond, but that money could be found if required.

By the end of 1960, the ward seemed to be getting itself well organised. Sales of *The Voice* were well above 50 each month. Membership drives were being well received, with regular reports of new members. Unfortunately, this growth and the promise of a brighter future was shortlived. By January 1961, it was reported 'that there was a big drop in ward collections'⁶⁵. The ward's 'collections compare very unfavourably with the majority of other wards'. Following discussions, the ward decided to concentrate 'on re-collecting old members rather than undertaking new membership drives'.⁶⁶ The minutes show membership drives being initiated, successful campaigns reported, but eventually collections ceasing or a failure to collect all the subscriptions. It would appear that gaining new members was not a difficult process; the problem was maintaining the membership levels. It required man-power and numerous volunteers to be thoroughly effective. In October 1962, yet another membership drive saw 39 new members signed up in half an hour by three party members.⁶⁷ The problem of maintaining the membership levels was recognised when the membership secretary for Trinity ward stated in April 1964 that 'it was necessary to find some collectors to maintain contact with new members'.⁶⁸ In Regent Ward too, calls to distribute a membership leaflet with Ordsall ward met with the response that 'the problem was one of collectors'.⁶⁹ It was not felt that the distribution

would help. Indeed, it would only compound the existing difficulties in making regular collections.

Throughout the period little changed. Organisation in Trinity ward was much talked about. One or two individuals were keen but activity levels were generally low until a month or so before polling. Immediately after each election, issues which had been discussed after other elections were discussed again. As late as 1963, apathy was blamed for the low turn out of 49.6 per cent for the municipal election. Others at the ward meetings felt that 'some didn't bother to vote thinking that Councillor Ferguson would win easily'. However, others identified a different set of problems: 'many votes had been missed at Little Hulton [a newly built area of Salford] which the Tories had cultivated'. Ferguson himself felt that 'the organisation was at fault but thanked the workers for their efforts'.⁷⁰ By November 1963, during 'Any Other Business', the meeting was told that the condition of the ward's organisation was in fact not altogether bad. It was stressed that 'the main essentials of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer were there and that progress would be made if we all pulled together'.⁷¹ This call to arms obviously failed to strike a chord. The following two monthly meetings were cancelled due to poor attendances. In December 1964, three people attended and January 1965 saw three people turn up again. In February, a meeting took place - though with only four people present - and the March meeting had to be cancelled again due to poor attendance.

Trinity Ward was not filled with left-wing firebrands, prevented from activity by right-wing leaders; nor was it led by left-wing Bevanites, anxious to keep out moderates. If politically it was not that active, socially it made up for it. Dances and the sale of Christmas cards raised

money for seventy-five food parcels which were distributed to local old age pensioners during the Christmas week of 1958.⁷² There was also a “tinned food bank” run by the ward which was distributed amongst the old age pensioners at various times. Children’s outings, dinner dances and other social events also featured prominently on Trinity’s social calendar. Newspaper reports of the ward’s senior citizens party in March 1963 managed to cause quite a stir when it was reported that the number of people present outweighed the ward’s total membership!⁷³ Trinity ward was the worst offender in its generosity to non-members and their families. In Mathias ward in the late 1950’s, the children’s day out and presents for the elderly were stopped by the city party. Eddie Hough stated that ‘they were giving out boxes of chocolate which cost 10 shillings and membership fees were 6 shillings! They were running their socials to subsidise it’. A further problem recognised by Hough was the high number of inactive members. Hough could remember a large membership of 4,000 in Salford. ‘West Salford had a very high number of members. The highest in the region. They had a good Labour Club which subsidised the local Labour party in return for high membership’.⁷⁴ If you joined the club, you were a party member. Salford East, Hough’s constituency, did not have a club. Nor did Hough, the membership secretary, recall correspondence with anyone on the national level, even after the Wilson Report. What Hough did recall was that ‘The [membership] cards were not well controlled. It was difficult to control the cards, but in some wards, they were giving them out like confetti. Even after 1955 it was still loose on membership cards. The national level never asked for records. I know lots of cards were wasted and so the national figures were false’.⁷⁵

If Salford’s Labour Party produced cases of corruption, this was not one of them. Ward politics were even more removed from national politics, or from such political calculations. The

attitude to social activity was another manifestation of localism, of a desire to 'look after' the people.⁷⁶ Other local issues continued to dominate. In Regent and Trinity Wards, bread and butter local issues were regularly discussed - play streets, housing and rents, sand-pits for children, baths, and Salford's twenty year development programme were all on the agendas. In Regent Ward though, even greater significance appears to have been attached to local issues. Play streets were certainly an issue, with roads being closed to traffic to allow safer playing areas for children in Salford's cramped confines. The improvement of lighting and street paving (particularly in side streets) was a target for those within the ward. Indeed, the desire to provide better services pervaded into the sphere of home improvements, for in July 1961, Regent ward resolved 'that corporation tenants should have a larger selection of tiled fireplaces'.⁷⁷ The housing situation remained the main source of discourse. "Years of Tory neglect," was a common cry. Facts and figures were always on hand too. In September 1962, a report on the housing in Salford reminded members present that there were 26,000 houses in Salford with no baths or hot water. A more telling statistic though was that when twenty houses were built in the ward, there were more than 580 applications to rent them!⁷⁸

Regent ward was little different from Trinity ward. Both were Labour strongholds. Regent ward's minutes only run from 1958 to 1962. However, the occasionally listed membership figures throughout the period show a steady decline, indicating a party with a diminishing need to campaign. Membership campaigns were undertaken, though collectors were apparently the problem. In July 1959, with membership around 260, it was decided 'that there is a need for a start on a membership campaign'. It was resolved that the membership campaign

would begin on the Regent flats.⁷⁹ Despite their efforts, by October 1960, the membership had fallen to 223.

REGENT WARD MEMBERSHIP 1958-1962

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| January 1958 | 406 |
| September 1958 | 328 |
| November 1958 | 330 |
| January 1960 | 256 |
| October 1960 | 223 |
| August 1961 | 240 |
| January 1962 | 222 |
| April 1962 | 224 |

SOURCE: Regent Ward Minutes 1958-62.

In Irlam too attempts were made to improve membership levels and numbers attending ward meetings. In February 1952, the decision to have a membership secretary was taken. Public meetings and the local press were used at election times as a matter of course. Importantly, though, attempts were made to attract better attendances at ward meetings. Topical subject which affected members were to be discussed. The price of coal was the first discussion point, with MP's salaries and food rationing to follow. An attempt to open up political discussion was undertaken. Discussions of this nature were never the priority though and would regularly be deferred due to a lack of time.

As in other wards, local issues which affected day-to-day living received a high profile. This had always been the case. Hence, January 1951 saw discussion take place on the progress

of the conversion scheme from gas to electric lamps in side streets, the state of the building programme and the purchasing of dustbins. By March, agenda items included improvements to existing bus services, Higher Irlam's sewers and the increased rates (caused by county council increases of one shilling and three pence). In June 1951, damage in parks was a source of concern, whilst Bank holiday entertainment, an evening bus to Park Hospital and new drainage systems were on agendas. Some twelve months later, issues of local importance included zebra crossings, school buses, the opening of a bowling green, new houses, sewerage, parks (again) and children's bank holiday entertainment (again).⁸⁰

The continuing fall in membership was a cause of great consternation for West Salford's CLP. It did discuss the direction of the party in January 1956 and found diverse opinions. Some felt the wards should be flooded with literature; others felt that full employment had led to a growing state of apathy; others argued that the party had to do more to attract younger people into the party.⁸¹ At this time, West Salford was 'in between' membership secretaries. At the September meeting, the position was offered again. There were no volunteers.⁸² Despite this, in the September of the same year, West Salford CLP produced a rare resolution which revealed its Bevanite politics

'It is the considered opinion of the West Salford CLP, that the reason for the decline in membership of the Labour Party in recent years, is mainly due to the negative policy of the Labour Party. We feel the failure of the NEC and the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party to combat the stranglehold that the rich classes have on the economy of the country has created a feeling of complete frustration amongst many Labour Party supporters both active and otherwise'.⁸³

When it came to the appointment of a membership secretary Salford West's members were indeed not 'active' but 'otherwise'. The Salford Party was committed to local affairs, but

committed to rhetorical Bevanite posturing on national issues. It was not working to convert people to socialism through becoming members, nor campaigning on national, socialist issues. Nor did it have a 'Bevanite' local alternative. Rather it accepted policies which all wings of the party could - and did - generally accept; because they were practical policies, rational politics, aimed at addressing a real local problem.

In June 1958, Salford West's membership was still in decline, though a membership secretary had been appointed. When the decline continued, another membership drive was agreed in February 1959. Unfortunately, in the period between that meeting and the meeting in November 1961, Salford West's membership fell from 3,115 to 2,145.⁸⁴ Inactive wards shouldered much of the blame for allowing so many members to be lost. A report on the latest membership drive led by the new secretary told how St. Paul's Ward gained 49 new members in one night, whilst St. Thomas' Ward, somewhat less spectacularly gained 35 new members during their campaign. Of greater satisfaction was the start of a League of Youth. Karpin reported that there were now 'nine members of the youth section...[They were] holding various activities, tennis etc., but no political activity yet'.⁸⁵

The foundation of a League of Youth pleased many in the party. We might expect a Bevanite party to embrace youthful radicalism with enthusiasm. However, it was to be a short honeymoon period as problems soon occurred with the youth section. Complaints were received from the steward about their behaviour and the condition of the pavilion after each of their meetings. Councillor Gowen went on to say that 'he was not happy about the activities of the youth section but hoped the future would be brighter'.⁸⁶ It was to prove a forlorn hope. The

League of Youth did continue, though numbers remained relatively small and political activity was non-existent. In June 1963, complaints and worries about the youth section's antics resurfaced. Salford West's Executive Committee took exception 'at the way the youth section is being run. They have failed to pay any money to the division for cards issued... There was little political work being done'.⁸⁷ The youth section was given until December to get its house in order. By January 1964, the sections youthful secretary retired and the chairman took over. By June, the West Salford CLP were told that things were going quite well with the League of Youth and that there were 25 regular attenders.⁸⁸ Five months later, the officers of the party 'suspended the youth section for unconstitutional actions'.⁸⁹ The meeting was given a summary of events leading up to the suspension: 'Illegal literature, noisy meetings with no semblance of political discussions... at no time had they helped in local elections, and Thursday meetings were little more than an evening for dancing'. Despite being suspended, the youth section turned up on their meeting night and demanded to hold a meeting. 'On this particular evening, the Youth section were very abusive and refused to leave the premises when asked... The scene outside the club became quite ugly'.⁹⁰ The behaviour of the members of the youth section was discussed further. The agent for Weaste Ward said that during a recent election campaign, 'handbills were thrown all over the streets and the youths were running round, shouting and ranting in a riotous manner'. In summing up, it was stated that having heard all the discussion, no one 'could state a case where the youth section had in any way been of any help to West Salford or the Labour party in general'. The meeting resolved that 'as from Tuesday 24 November [1964] membership of the young socialists in West Salford be withdrawn and that all future applications for membership to the youth section should be accepted by this division before they be accepted by members of the youth section'.⁹¹ Whatever the Salford left's rhetorical sympathy for recruiting

radical young socialists - and however much some left-wing Labour activists supported such people in the 1980s - at this time sympathy was muted. Subjecting people to conventional party behavioural norms was more important than 'politics'. The party's traditional values and its moralism dominated and determined attitudes to 'correct' party behaviour. 'Bevanism' on national issues was part of that 'correct' behaviour, but it did not produce inactivity or result in policies that could provide a broader alternative.

Salford Labour party was dominated by the left. Some of its MPs were active Bevanites. But such considerations did not dominate local politics. Other issues and aims dominated the agenda, and involved a good deal of shared commitment from all sections of the party. Nor did the Bevanite Salford party take active steps to create an alternative or to link with other Bevanite constituencies. There were differences of emphasis when compared with some other parties - more support for protest through Tenants' Leagues, more support for direct labour, less enthusiasm for organisation, - but these were not considerable. At the same time, if this suggests that the push for unity under Wilson would have some mileage, the first sign of this - the call for organisational improvement - attracted only a section of the membership. It is easy to see how a city like Salford could become a centre of active opposition to a moderate national leadership, but this did not happen between 1951 and 1964. Nor, however, did the party show much enthusiasm for a 'Wilsonite' approach, even if its political actions suggested it might have been sympathetic. Rather, the party pursued its own direction, selecting MPs from amongst its own, looking after its own, and occasionally unleashing a complaint at those who lived and operated in the strange and alien world outside Salford.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. Fyrth (ed.), *Labour's High Noon. The Government and the Economy 1945-51* (London, 1993), p.270.
2. Quoted in N. Tiratsoo and J. Tomlinson, *Industrial efficiency and state intervention : Labour, 1939-51* (London, 1993), p.137.
3. *Ibid.*, pp.140-141.
4. Quoted *ibid.*, pp.138-139.
5. *Ibid.*, p.146.
6. *Labour's East Salford Voice*, 1955 Election Special.
7. Author's interview with Eddie Hough, 8 April 1997.
8. Salford City Council, *A Twenty Year Development Programme for Salford* (1951), p.4.
9. *Salford City Reporter*, 25 April 1952.
10. *A Twenty Year Development Programme for Salford*, p.4.
11. *Ibid.*, p.6.
12. *Ibid.*, p.6.
13. Salford Labour Party minutes, March 1954, p.302, Working Class Movement Library.
14. *A Twenty Year Development Programme for Salford*, p.10.
15. *Ibid.*, p.7.
16. *Ibid.*, p.7.
17. *Ibid.*, p.12.
18. J. Hasegawa, *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre* (Buckingham, 1992), p.32.
19. *A Twenty Year Development Programme for Salford*, p.87.
20. *Ibid.*, p.7.

21. Ibid., p.11.
22. F. Dewhurst, Dock's Ward. Municipal Election Address 1951, Election Addresses File, Salford LP Mss.
23. Salford City Labour Party minutes, 5 March 1953.
24. Salford City Labour Party Group Report, 4 January 1956.
25. St Paul's Ward Circular, 5 March 1954, attached to Salford L.P. minutes.
26. Salford City Labour Party minutes, 4 January 1956.
27. Salford City Labour Party minutes, 4 January 1956.
28. Author's interview with Eddie Hough, 8 April 1997.
29. General Secretary's Papers. Press and Publicity Department, 3 August 1960, GS/PIONP/24iii.
30. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1952.
31. *Manchester Guardian*, 8 February 1962.
32. Author's interview with David Robinson, 3 April 1997.
33. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January 1953.
34. Ibid., 17 March 1953.
35. Ibid., 23 February 1954.
36. Survey Results, 20 January 1953. Published in *Manchester Guardian*, 20 January 1953.
37. Ibid.
38. *Manchester Guardian*, 20 January 1953.
39. Author's interview with Eddie Hough, 8 April 1997.
40. Author's interview with Ivor Zott, 7 April 1997.
41. Author's interview with Eddie Hough, 8 April 1997.

42. Author's interview with Joan Bryans, 13 April 1997.
43. Author's interview with Eddie Hough, 8 April 1997.
44. Ibid.
45. *Salford City Reporter*, 23 November 1951 and 14 December 1951.
46. Ibid., 18 May 1956.
47. Ibid., 21 May 1954.
48. Author's interview with Ivor Zott, 7 April 1997.
49. *Salford's Labour Voice*, December 1957.
50. *Salford's Labour Voice*, Municipal Election Special. 1958.
51. *Salford's Labour Voice*, By Election Special. 1961.
52. Albert Jones, *From Dock to Dock* (self-published, 1985), p.139.
53. Ibid., p.155.
54. Ibid., p.156.
55. Ibid., p.190.
58. Ibid., p.190.
59. Ibid., p.191.
60. Ibid., p.191.
61. Trinity Ward, Group minutes, 29 July 1962.
62. Ibid., 4 December 1958.
63. Ibid., 5 March 1959.
64. Ibid., 7 July 1960.
65. Ibid., 28 July 1960.

66. Ibid., 28 July 1960.
67. Ibid., 4 Jan 1961.
68. Ibid., February 1961.
69. Ibid., 4 October 1962.
70. Ibid., April 1964.
71. Regent Ward, Group minutes, 18 March 1958.
72. Trinity Ward, Group minutes, June 1963.
73. Ibid., November 1964.
74. Ibid., 4 December 1958.
75. Ibid., March 1963.
76. Author's interview with Eddie Hough, 8 April 1997. For similar circumstances in London, see S. Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government. A Study of Changing Interests, Politics, and Policy in Southwalk from 1919-1982* (Edinburgh, 1988).
77. Ibid.
78. The powerful positions held by local Labour men in the constituencies often led to accusations (and indeed convictions) for corruption. In Salford, Albert Jones was one such figure who fell victim to financial temptation. As the title of his book suggests (*Dock to Dock*), he was tried, convicted and sent to prison for his actions.
79. Regent Ward minutes, July 1961.
80. Regent Ward minutes, 10 September 1962.
81. Ibid., 20 July 1959.
82. Irlam and Cadishead minutes, Higher Irlam Ward, Salford Archives Centre, Ref: U118/AM1/2.
83. West Salford CLP minutes, 10 January 1956.
84. Ibid., 20 March 1956.
85. Ibid., 11 September 1956.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 9 October 1957.

88. Ibid., 9 October 1961.

89. Ibid., 11 June 1963.

90. Ibid., 9 June 1964.

91. Ibid., 10 November 1964.

92. Ibid., 10 November 1964.

93. Ibid., 24 November 1964.

CONCLUSION

Having a true faith is the most difficult thing in the world. Many will try to take it from you' - Steve Prefontaine.

This thesis has presented a reassessment of some aspects of Labour politics in the period 1951-64, and of the position of this period within the historiography of the Labour party. It has examined the ways in which ideological conflict permeated the party, and the way in which these conflicts were increasingly opposed by 'modernisers' who stressed shared party concerns and reforming interests. It is part of a newer approach to Labour political debate (and political debate in other parties). It is increasingly common to stress the broader concerns behind policy and organisational disputes, and the ways in which those with less stridently ideological views invariably pushed the party back towards its 'core' values and concerns.¹ The existence of a modernising and practical socialism, submerged after 1951, but gradually re-emerging thereafter, is a central theme of this thesis. But 'modernisation' had its limitations. The thesis has also noted Labour's limited understanding of, and sympathy with the mass electorate - because of its 'individualistic' and 'American' concerns. Whilst it notes the ideas of those who wished to modernise organisational methods and accept the nature of social change, it is clear that many did so reluctantly, believing that traditional campaigning methods and collectivist values were morally 'better'. Here the thesis moves forward and sustains arguments recently used by others to explain Labour's electoral defeat in 1951.²

Labour's defeat in 1951 encouraged the party to take stock and consider its position. Some Labour theorists were eager to take up the challenge, recognising that, in defeat, Labour needed to present a positive, rational and progressive image. The party had to prove its ability to meet the demands of the modern world through radical and attractive policies. Generally,

however, defeat at the polls set few alarm bells ringing. In fact, the party remained buoyant in defeat, blaming the electorate and looking for scapegoats in organisational weaknesses. In many respects party officials and analysts failed to move on following their term in office. Importantly, Crossman was one thinker determined to set an agenda. He warned against in-fighting, stressed the need to move forward and was determined to begin positive ideological debate. He created the signposts to the world he envisaged Labour occupying.³ He did not take the party with him. Crossman recognised that nationalisation had shortcomings and was keen to tackle the problems head on. However, the common ground between the centre left on the one hand and Crossman and the emerging revisionist section of the party on the other, was neither fully examined nor fully exploited by the party. Indeed, the common ground was not fully identified. Ideological differences were substantial; and many accounts have stressed the different opinions about social ownership. However, what emerges from a deeper examination of the years immediately following the 1951 election defeat is the desire for a modernising approach, an approach embraced not just by the revisionists, but also by the emerging centre-left. An examination of party committees highlights how a broad cross section of the Labour Party attempted to recognise the vast changes in society. Rather than reiterate the abstract discussions of theorists, or the personal feuds between left and right-wing champions, the emphasis in policy committees was on changing ideas on equality, economic thought, the instruments and techniques of state control, workers participation, the role of managers, and Labour's relationship with public and private industry. This was not pulled together. Different committees evolved different emphases, which were not always compatible or cohesive.⁴ Ultimately, the 1951-53 period emerges as one of missed opportunity and failure. The failure to unite the party is clear; the failure to think out a constructive policy agenda is highlighted; the failure to co-ordinate the

efforts of thinkers such as Crossman and the various policy committees which were attempting to set out policy proposals is apparent.

The signs of failure within the party are evident when one examines the left between 1951 and the early 1960s (as discussed in chapter 2). Frustration was common. Uncomfortable as the leader of a dissident group, Bevan failed to set out any policy agenda and ultimately abandoned his supporters by tying himself to the Gaitskellite party - apparently the very antithesis of what he and his supporters believed. In particular, Crossman had looked to Bevan to offer the lead, to push for a solid and well thought out set of policy proposals, but he was constantly disappointed. Although Crossman and his centre left colleagues rejected the revisionist vision, they had no outlet within the party for their views. With around fifty sympathisers at best within the parliamentary party, and little support in the trade unions, the Bevanites would have to convince those with no deep commitment to revisionism that they had a way forward. Bevan's attempts to encourage such developments were limited. His input was inadequate and unenthusiastic. Ultimately he returned to the idea that he should fight to alter party policy from within the shadow cabinet. Nor were the failings Bevan's alone. The Bevanite left had the potential to reach out to large numbers of the party, through its newspaper *Tribune* and the travelling 'Brains trust'. However, the group clung steadfastly to its belief in nationalisation as the only means of achieving socialism and failed to seriously think out a full policy agenda. Moreover, its 'ethical' sense of socialism - socialism as a moral crusade - meant it tended to be concerned with non-domestic issues, notably the movements for unilateral disarmament and for decolonisation. Since the desire to fight war, fascism and imperialism had brought many of the Bevanites into the party in the 1930s, it is unsurprising that they continued to emphasise such issues.⁵ Yet this was hardly likely to inspire the electorate. Nor did the Bevanite Victory for

Socialism movement spread support into the constituencies, or provide any kind of centre-left alternative. However, a more practical and policy-oriented centre-left group did emerge, with Crossman and then Wilson at its core. They refuted the revisionist insistence that a more socially acceptable society had emerged, but were increasingly frustrated by inaction on the left and their inability to influence decision making within the party elite.

Gaitskell's domination of the agenda of debate was thus never really in doubt. Nor was his control of the party, provided he did not attempt anything outlandish. A powerful group of unions, led by Deakin and Lawther, lent strong support. Whenever challenged as leader, he won with ease. *New Fabian Essays* also gave the revisionists the intellectual ascendancy. Yet revisionist intellectuals were not popular. The revisionists never really anchored their beliefs within the traditions and values of the party, nor did they build bridges to those who preferred a positive and radical programme, rather than internal division and crippling disputes. The party's suspicions began with the backgrounds of those involved. Gaitskell was not born into the party; he chose it. He was a public school boy from an upper middle-class background, a university economist, an intellectual. He moved in circles far removed from Bevan, the son of a coal miner, who felt rooted in traditional Labour values and championed the membership's enthusiasm for attacking the Tories and proclaiming the value of socialism. Bevan's earthy working class roots, oratorical skills and charming public persona made him a doyen of the left and a crucial symbol of what Labour stood for. Gaitskell was a paradoxical figure: his private and public faces were poles apart. Publicly, his persona was cold and machine like. Privately he was warm, affectionate and fun loving. To the left and those outside his circle he was the cool academic, who lacked Bevan's charisma and relied heavily on his close friends in the 'Frognalet Set'. They

were an exclusive group, and their presence added to the bitterness within the party. To those who knew Gaitskell, he was a man of principal and intellect, inspiring commitment and affection.

That Gaitskell relied too much on the Frogmal Set was a charge set against him not only by the left (who felt excluded from the corridors of power and decision making) but also by his most trusted advisor, Anthony Crosland, who recognised the damage and friction Gaitskell's association with his narrow clique of friends would cause. Indeed, Gaitskell's leadership was a source of much frustration.⁶ He was not a natural leader. His channels of communication were poor. He could not accept criticism in any form; and surprisingly for a man with a modernising mantle, he failed to establish any real party organisation at the top level which would ensure the continuing domination of his sympathisers or the credibility of his modernising platform. He neither waged war on the left, using the Campaign for Democratic Socialism as his foot-soldiers, nor appeased the left. Indeed, CDS showed little enthusiasm for such a fight. With little interest in the mundane nature of local politics, CDS reflected Gaitskell's problems, rather than moderating them. They too were content with dominating the party through the trade unions and party discipline. There was clear frustration within the differing wings of the party over the lack of quality leadership from those who wanted to move forward, rather than debate the precise extent and value of public ownership. The party's inability to think out policies which would unite the warring factions, and provide the reforming agenda necessary to change Britain, meant that the centre left group expanded, as increasingly large numbers within the party were looking for an alternative approach. Wilson and Crossman formed the basis of such a group, which had sufficient support to mount a strong campaign for Wilson to become deputy leader of the party in 1961.

The disputes at the top of the party had a surprisingly muted impact at the local level. Certainly, there was no attempt from the ‘modernising’ revisionists to turn the Labour party into a ‘people’s party’. Blair's later attempt at invoking a sense of belonging and inclusion, and creating a party which would include and represent 'middle Britain', did not feature in organisational debate. The revisionists and CDS did not campaign solidly for one member one vote in the constituencies, nor campaign for a larger membership. It did not promote an active citizenship and community campaigning, as social democrats in the Liberal party were to do a decade later. The roots of battles to be fought in later periods did not spread back this far. Instead, Gaitskell was happy to use the block vote to dominate the party conference. Nonetheless, organisational issues raised at national level are studied in detail in chapter four of this thesis, because they illustrate three significant points. Firstly, however much noisy factions within the party debated the merits of socialism and revisionism, the chapter shows that the party's main concern and interest was winning elections. Second, the chapter shows that despite this the party could not welcome the ideas of those modernisers who were happy to see the emergence of a 'new' British culture, which placed more emphasis on consumption, the market and choice. Thirdly, as a result, those who were the backbone of the party at the centre were much happier with a pragmatic and partial set of changes, which 'modernised' the party's campaigning approach where necessary, but which remained attentive to the party's gut values and traditions. Wilson’s involvement in organisation, predominantly through the eponymous Wilson Report, provided him with a perfect opportunity to win a great deal of support amongst key constituency figures. Wilson stressed the essential nature of the work such individuals were carrying out. His association with organisation also allowed him to avoid the tangle of

ideological debate. Through stressing reform of the party organisation, he could be the moderniser, bringing the party into the 'jet age'. He could justifiably claim to be taking the party forward with the unifying aim of electoral success.

The thesis further extends our understanding of Labour politics beneath the surface layers of party debate by examining party activity at the local level. Here the key theme is the absence of intense rivalry between 'Bevanite' and 'Gaitskellite' factions. In Salford and Wales, the areas chosen for detailed analysis, the rivalry between Gaitskell and Bevan was not the burning issue. Though bastions of the Labour left, neither area consistently railed against Gaitskell's leadership or actions. The emphasis throughout the period was on the delivery of local services and meaningful policies. Civic pride or a commitment to the betterment of one's community was the major motivating force. It was a period of excitement and hope, but also of major logistical problems. In Salford, the dominant Labour council was rebuilding areas blighted by years of neglect and decay. Local politicians and councillors believed that they were operating at the cutting edge of modern society, eradicating slum areas, providing services, and invigorating their city. Whilst constrained by hard economics, they embraced the advice of experts to create high rise flats and later on conventional housing for the general populace. In Wales, the thesis shows that left/right issues simply did not impact on the provision of park benches, street lights, bus services or bowls pavilions! Even in 'Bevanite' seats, the position was complex. Whilst Bevan was undoubtedly a talismanic figure, popular for being radical, anti-establishment, and Welsh, his popularity was not necessarily sustained nor based on policy.⁷ 'Left-wing' opinion could be mobilised on occasions. In Salford the party showed some support for popular resistance to Tory Rent Acts. Gaitskell's attack on Clause IV led to critical

resolutions from across Wales, and in Salford too opposition was intense. There was some emotional support for nuclear disarmament, although this was less pronounced, even on the left, than one might think.

This thesis sees these conflicts rather differently to existing accounts. It is argued that neither Clause IV nor disarmament were simple matters which divided 'left' from 'right'. They were statements of belonging. Clause IV was the party's Holy Grail, its symbol and *raison d'être*. Both left and right within the party could unite against Gaitskell over this issue. The left did not have a local strategy which was fundamentally different or more radical. As a result moments of conflict were rare and did not necessarily draw attention away from the 'prime' local concerns of the party. The only other times that left/right tensions emerged was over the selection of candidates or frustration with the incumbent candidate. To gain the 'correct' candidate local apparatchiks pulling the necessary strings, made the necessary rhetorical noises. But as often as not, even these battles were not simple conflicts between the 'left' and 'right', but conflicts based on personalities, personal or local factions, or even genuine differences over who would do the best job. Conflicts could become bitter and lead to long-standing personal feuds, the origins of which became lost in the mists of time. But to see the Labour party outside London as a party locked in conflict is not borne out by the case studies conducted above.

In this respect and through this approach, the thesis differs substantially from earlier accounts. Minkin, Shaw, and Howell all examine the way in which power - particularly the managerial control of conference with union support - was used by the revisionists despite the views of the rank and file to force through change. In such works, Labour politics seem to be

based almost wholly around the conflict between leaders (Bevan and Gaitskell) or thinkers (Crossman versus Crosland, in isolation from politics in the main). 'The party' is seen as being out of touch with, and at odds with 'the members'. Of course, there were major differences between those with strident views, notably over social ownership and defence. The events of 1945-51 fed these differences. Yet such concerns were neither new nor necessarily dominant. It has been argued here that the fundamental conflict within the Labour party was different. Whilst there were elements at the centre (and in the constituencies) who wanted a war of ideological purity, there was a centre-left grouping at the centre *and* in the constituencies, which was anxious to put such conflicts aside and get on with the real business of Labour politics.

The disputes at the centre which are highlighted by many writers were short, intense and not as all-embracing as many have suggested. The Bevanites were a relatively small group before the 1951 resignations. Campbell suggests they numbered 'no more than a dozen'.⁸ However, by 1952, the group had grown considerably. For a few short months, the Bevanites looked set to dominate the party. One of the earliest indications came when fifty-seven MPs failed to toe the party line, refusing to back the party's official amendment to the defence estimates. By the end of 1952, the situation had changed once again, with the banning of all unofficial groups within the party. Jeffreys recognises the dramatic impact on the Bevanites who:

'had no option but to comply. This resolution restricted Bevanism in the PLP to a smaller, private lunch discussion containing Bevan's closest followers: Michael Foot, Ian Mikardo, Richard Crossman and Harold Wilson'.⁹

Nonetheless, the implicit emphasis on central party management's role in 'crushing' the left is unwarranted. Bevanism was not an alternative approach, but an episode, and 'Bevanism' failed because of its own internal inadequacies. 'Managers' in fact managed lightly. The disputes

lacked the acrimonious expulsions which had typified periods of bitter dispute during the 1920s, 1930s and the 1980s. Gaitskell never waged war, he waged discipline, but he did it so badly that he turned the issue into a huge conflict. The aura and magnitude of Clause IV meant that opposition to Gaitskell's greatest blunder was not restricted to the left. Whilst the left naturally opposed what they regarded as a reprehensible plan, the trade unions (hitherto Gaitskell's loyal backers) also refused to back him. Traditionalists maintained their faith in the public sector, whilst arguing that Clause IV was a fundamental part of the party's life blood. Equally over defence and over Europe, Gaitskell alienated groups of supporters, or mystified his allies with his aberrant views and tactics. The real nature of opinion within the party - the party's core of shared ideas and priorities - was obscured by *poor* management and by Gaitskell's *limited* control over debate, especially when compared with subsequent leaders such as Kinnock, Smith and Blair.

It could be argued that the centre-left, those who wished to 'move on', were simply pragmatists, taking organisational reform as a substitute for policy debate as a means of masking fundamental ideological divisions within the party. In particular, Wilson has been seen in this light by Shaw and others. Political rivals and enemies, like Dennis Healey, have made similarly critical comments. Again, there is some validity in their verdicts. Wilson was certainly a tactician, and his record from 1970 onwards has rightly prompted doubts about his sincerity and morality. At the same time, this ignores the way in which organisational improvement could no longer be an alternative to policy review by the early 1960s. No matter what Wilson may have done to earn his reputation, behind Wilson in the early 1960s there was an approach to policy which endorsed neither the market nor state control, neither revisionism nor socialism, but a

combination of the two. Crossman and others like him were not pragmatists. Indeed, for Crossman writing in 1960, a socialist party which was simply interested in power would 'destroy itself'.¹⁰ Moreover, what is now seen as 'pragmatism' by critics, was then seen as skills which allowed Labour to climb out of the quagmire created by Gaitskell's confrontational approach. As *Newsweek* commented, 'one time left winger Wilson had to soothe the fearful right wing Labourites with assurances that Hugh Gaitskell's moderate policies would be preserved and at the same time produce a flurry of ideas to satisfy at least in part Labor's (sic) radical wing'. His deftness at this balancing act so impressed Denis Healey, Labour's shadow defense (sic) Minister, that he could claim "for the first time since 1945 we are going into a General Election as a completely united Party".¹¹ Whatever Healey's subsequent position, in 1964 Wilson was seen as a political saviour.

Indeed, Wilson had taken account of what previous elections had revealed about the nature of people's wants and needs. Nationalisation had been an area where Labour had been misrepresented, and it had cost them dear, so Wilson skilfully re-packaged its appeal. Fashionable phraseology provided nationalisation with a modern appeal. The 'white heat' would rely on state regulation and intervention, but was based on an appeal to progress, growth and technical development, proving (along Crossmanite lines) that public ownership could be modern, successful and attractive. Labour planned little more than nationalising the remainder of the private steel industry, but its ideas for national economic plans, regional development, investment and technology transfers all required substantial state investment and direction. It was state technocracy, a Fabian direction of state affairs, because the market could not do so on its own.

At the same time, under Wilson, the Labour Party pounded away at the bread and butter social issues, with spending ideas which recognised Keynesian economics as a tool of policy. In too many of the big cities housing was often old and dangerous. Only too well aware of the importance of the housing issue, Wilson proclaimed that 'Housing...must be tackled like a war time operation. When we needed the guns and tanks...we mobilised the resources of the country to produce them without regard to private interest or private profit'.¹² In education too, Wilson talked a good game, echoing Crosland in his description of education and opportunity as the real way of ending class inequality. In particular, he targeted university education, where he hoped to increase opportunities for all to reach degree level. Also Labour promised more places in higher and technical education by equipping young people with the new skills needed to work in modern industries. It planned to abolish the 11-plus exam, raise the school leaving age to 16 and organise secondary education on comprehensive lines. Wilson's most important cry came with his attack on the failure of British industrialists to keep up with technological advances, a failure which had led to the 'brain drain'. In stressing the 'white heat' of modern technology Wilson captured the mood of the country. He would create a modern, efficient, Britain which once more could lead the world in the technological era. Wilson's own rhetoric contributed to the modernising image. In his speech to delegates at the TUC, he said 'I am optimistic and confident enough to believe that we can and shall, in a measurable period of time, lift the economy of this country to a level of unsurpassed strength and virility'. It was typical of Wilsons' bold upbeat message. Labour would create 'the new science-based Britain - providing undreamed of opportunities for those who will be pouring out of our schools'. The future which Wilson and Labour offered was one of 'opportunity for all...to break through man-made barriers

of privilege and snobbery, and be free to give their talents and energies in service to their country'. His confidence in Labour and Britain's potential was matched by the confidence he had in himself, for he was to offer 'leadership, not gamesmanship'. Indeed, Wilson planned to lead Britain 'to a more worthwhile concept of our duty to ourselves and our neighbours. It is...a time for greatness, a greatness of mind and heart that can kindle a new sense of purpose in our national life and the will to build a new Britain'.¹³

Labour released an abridged version of its 1964 manifesto, *The New Britain*, which reflected the new image Labour was presenting. It was a bold statement reflecting a new-found confidence. Labour would increase production steadily, 'and with the aid of both sides of industry, will draw up a national economic plan...The publicly owned industries freed from restrictions will help this plan'.¹⁴ Wilson personally defended nationalisation during an Election Forum on the BBC. He was asked why, if Labour was so convinced of the value of nationalisation, it had stopped at steel, transport and water. He cleverly deflected the attack, by stating: 'If the Conservative Party is so convinced of the evils of nationalisation, why haven't they denationalised the vast majority of the industries they took over?'.¹⁵ Wilson further maintained that Labour would judge each case on its merits, remaining adamant that issues such as efficiency and monopolies would determine outcomes. Industrial training and an adaptive workforce were seen as essential. However, Labour did not neglect workers' rights with transferable pensions, trade union representation, protection against arbitrary dismissal and equal pay for equal work. Regional plans, in support of the national plan, stressed regeneration and progress. Labour believed each area could 'develop its industries, clear the slums, [and] create new towns'.¹⁶ Wilson was riding high. His refusal to speak out against nationalisation wooed

the left, whilst his up-beat message of growth and prosperity in the jet age, with Britain as an economic world leader, appealed to all sections of the party.

The Labour Party was also better prepared for Tory attacks on their policy in 1964 than at previous elections. Labour defended itself against the Tory argument that Labour would nationalise everything. Heads of the Labour Party Research Department, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, wrote an information series on Labour's key policy areas. Nationalisation was put into context, indicating it was a 'practical' not an 'ideological' policy. Liberal and Conservative Governments had also been responsible for many measures of nationalisation. Indeed it was argued that nationalisation had already proved itself an indispensable economic technique to both Liberal and Conservative governments. The strong practical case for each measure of nationalisation was presented. 'Traditional' policy areas were repackaged.

The campaign was also more co-ordinated and based on clearer themes. Years of debate in organisational committees had finally borne fruit. In July 1964, a circular entitled *Constituency Facts and Figures for Parliamentary Candidates in England and Wales* was sent to each constituency. In it, each candidate was asked: 'Have you obtained facts and figures about your constituency ready to use at the Election?'.¹⁷ The key subjects were housing, education, health, national assistance and employment. This was all about showing the practical relevance of Labour's policies to local voters. The topics to investigate within each subject area were further broken down for the ease of those with little time for details. For example, the housing list read: overcrowding, household deficiencies, housing tenure, council waiting lists, slum clearance, improvements and house building. In the sphere of education, it was felt that information should

be gathered on the provision of grammar and comprehensive schools, class sizes, university entrance and building cuts. In health, doctors lists, hospital building, age of hospitals, the conditions of local authority homes for the aged and welfare services were the issues most likely to affect the local populace. The numbers on national assistance, numbers employed and the future employment prospects of an area were the final areas in which candidates were expected to extend their knowledge. Each candidate was expected to be aware of what his potential constituents would regard as priority issues.

Labour also began to look even more closely at opinion polls, to escape the problems of previous defeats. Labour's research department focused on the women's vote. They concluded that 'women were more conservative than men' and noted that 'according to the Gallup poll (*Telegraph* 24th September 1964) 'the increasing shift towards the Conservatives...[has] been much sharper among women than men'.¹⁸ Mark Abrams's survey of 63 Conservative - held marginal constituencies seemed to reinforce these findings. Abrams's findings were 'that men are holding firm, and women are shifting to the Tories'. His analysis suggested that the biggest shift was amongst wives in white collar work who were "'cross pressured". Solidarity with their husbands inclines them to Labour; solidarity with their white-collar colleagues inclines them to the Conservatives'.¹⁹ The task of winning over more women voters was problematic, for whilst women generally believed that Labour would do a good job creating housing, keeping down rents, improving education and pensions, they firmly believed that Labour would raise taxes, and would not do a good job increasing prosperity or on military defence. Most women thought they would have been worse off had Labour governed for the previous five years.

For the 1964 election, then, Labour planned to target white-collar women in two ways. Firstly, Labour planned to make it clear 'that we are aware of them'.²⁰ Images of homely middle-aged women who worked in offices and young ex-office workers with children would be used in Labour's broadcasts.²¹ Secondly, Labour would plug away on issues with a direct impact on their lives: education (for the sake of the children), pensions (for the sake of grandparents) and housing (for the sake of everyone). This was perhaps not greatly different from the traditional Labour approach, but it was both more professionally presented and more sensitive to women who would not respond to Labour's class appeal.

Behind the scenes, Labour's organisation has also tightened up by 1964. The increasingly stage managed nature of Labour's campaign was noticeable. The new General Secretary, A.L. Williams, sent out an internal Transport House circular to members of the Head Office Staff. The message was clear. Loose comments to the press would not be accepted. Williams stated that 'all press enquiries must be put through to the Press Information Unit. Only those authorised by the General Secretary to do so shall speak to the press'. Following a suggestion from Tony Benn and Jonathon Boswell of the Publicity Department in 1963, the newly image conscious Labour Party decided there might be value in compiling a list of prominent people who would be prepared to declare themselves Labour supporters for the forthcoming election. A list of about 100 names was produced. The exercise was dropped but was picked up again sixteen days before polling day at the suggestion of Michael Young, who had come in as head of the Research Department to replace Peter Shore during his illness. Here was a striking example of what happened when a consumer-minded revisionist replaced an 'old Labour' warrior. Swift changes were made in the plans for the party's political sound broadcast of Tuesday 6 October, when 'half

a dozen people from various professions...[were] given a minute or so each in the broadcast...to explain why they would be supporting the Labour Party in the Election'²². Labour used actress Vanessa Redgrave and the President of Amnesty International, Dr. Arnold. They also used a lawyer, a county doctor, a grammar school headmaster, and a Bishop. The campaign was reinforced by a middle page spread in the *Daily Mirror*, which pictured seven people who would be supporting the Labour Party, each giving their reasons why. Michael Young and Tony Benn, modernisers both, 'formed the impression that there was a very good case for this kind of propaganda work as part of an election campaign'. However, and in not untypical Labour Party style, they felt 'that it must be started much earlier if it is to be organised properly'. Essentially, Labour's staff regarded the exercise as a purely defensive one. The feeling was that 'everyone knows that many eminent people support the Conservative Party. The point that we should try and get across is that many eminent people also support the Labour Party'.²³ This was at least a step away from the rather amateur, puritanical, almost proudly plebeian approach adopted in previous Labour campaigns, but it was 'modernisation' constrained by party tradition.

A final example of the shift in the style and culture of Labour's organisation was its approach to publicity. The bulk of the party's expenditure in 1964 had gone on publicity. The party's pre-election campaign cost in excess of £300,000, including newspaper advertising (the single largest cost), posters, constituency press relations and broadcasting. A considerable amount had also been spent on making the General Election broadcasts. Williams backed this decision despite acknowledging the fact that much of the film was not even used: 'only a small amount of film was in fact used...it was felt that the material had to be available if needed'.²⁴ Williams' backing of the high-tech and expensive use of film was a clear sign that the hierarchy

of the Labour Party accepted the need for modern electioneering techniques. Television was regarded as a vital part of the campaign strategy. Nonetheless Labour's anti-Americanism remained a factor in their reluctance to embrace modern techniques, notably advertising and market research.

Labour's campaign in 1964 was once again the preserve of the Campaign Committee. The Committee's experience provided vital professionalism and co-ordinated day-to-day activities. Having guided the party to a rare victory, Williams called for the 'early re-establishment of the Campaign Committee' after the election. He argued that Labour's situation in power was 'vastly different from what it was last October'. He felt that a 'new strategy' had to be worked out in good time. He had no doubt that the Campaign Committee was best equipped 'to undertake this task'.²⁵

Despite these changes, Labour's organisation in 1964 contained familiar weaknesses. The continued trend of poor or makeshift organisation is, on the face of it, all the more surprising given Wilson's obvious awareness and his detailed organisational knowledge. However, Ben Pimlott felt that 'The Wilson Report remained a monument to what should have happened rather than what did...When leader, Wilson made no further attempts to modernize organisation. At elections he relied on his own staff, did his best to ignore Transport House, and hoped for the best in the constituencies',²⁶ yet it was his report on organisation that had helped him gain a solid reputation within the party. To party workers, he appeared in a favourable light, as a man who believed in the type of work they carried out. They were at last being valued by an important figure. Yet he had not reached the top of the greasy pole after years working at the daily grind

of constituency politics, and he did not see it as especially significant. Wilson was a progressive moderniser. He accepted the need for a professional, highly skilled, highly organised and a reasonably well paid party machine, and for media-management. He wanted control, and he delegated to well-chosen professionals. His interest in conventional aspects of 'organisation' had been in part an astute political calculation and in part irritation at inefficiency. It was an area to which he apportioned little time and energy as leader of the party.

A *Socialist Commentary* study, entitled *Our Penny Farthing Machine*, published in 1965 returned to the issue of organisation and again exposed the shoddy nature of Labour's organisational machine. Ten years after *The Wilson Report*, Labour's organisation remained underfunded, poorly run and resembling a relic from another age. The introduction contended that at the 1964 Election, 'Labour lost ten to fifteen seats through sheer inefficiency...The result...a Labour Government with a majority of three and an uncertain future instead of [sitting] comfortably...for a full term of office'. The malaise in the party's organisational machine was deemed responsible. A 'constructive overhaul of the party organisation' was deemed 'absolutely essential'. The report bluntly stated that 'the penny-farthing bicycle of the Wilson Report...is barely holding together...Then it was a joke; we can not afford to let it become a tragedy'. *Socialist Commentary* felt that the attitude of the party 'to the tools and amenities of the modern age' was suspicion - more over, 'up and down the country cosy squalor and amateurism are our main hallmarks'.²⁷ It was rather too late for the revisionists to take such matters seriously. What it did show was that the 'cosmetic' nature of some of Wilson's concerns was already being exposed, leaving him open to the allegation that the whole of his political agenda had been a sham. This allegation was to grow in strength over the next ten years, finding its way into many

history books. Yet as those who rightly challenge such approaches argue,²⁸ viewing the 1964-70 governments with hindsight, and ignoring the ways in which economic and other factors deflected Wilson from his chosen course, has resulted in this modernising approach being seriously misunderstood. The Wilson governments had more in common with the Attlee years than many might suggest - and the years in between were spent developing the new version of that older approach.

Wilson's great skill was drawing out a range of policy ideas with broad appeal, basing his amalgam on what had been taking place within the party's policy committees in the 1950s and 1960s. Even his most famous (and derided slogan), his reference to the 'white heat of the technological revolution', had its origins in such discussions. As early as 1954, Labour produced a pamphlet stressing the value of technological change. 'Lets put Our Heads Together - Talking About Labour's "Challenge to Britain"' argued that a modern and prosperous economy, employing an expert workforce in well equipped industries, was essential. In fact, such calls were made even before 1914 and had been developed under Attlee.²⁹ This version suggested Labour would 'spend more money on more scientific research, technical education, and the study of industrial management'.³⁰ The party was also determined to develop industries where the demand for products was expected to increase, such as aircraft production, engineering, shipbuilding and chemicals. The 'modernising' vision may have crashed under the weight of economic pressures, personal rivalries and inadequate funding - it may have suffered from opposition from within but it was a real vision for all that.

In placing this study of the period between 1951 and 1964 in a broader context, this thesis

has shown that there were substantial continuities within Labour policy across the period from 1931 to 1970. In different contexts, and in different ways, Labour offered an emphasis on modernisation - and a modernisation in which there was a substantial role for the state. In this respect too the thesis differs from some recent work. Many historians focus on the relationship between the politics of the 1950s and 1960s and the politics of the 1980s and 1990s. For Shaw and Howell, the 1950s and 1960s were part of the long, downhill, unchecked slide into pragmatism and away from socialism. Howell states that 'by 1955 nothing seemed more secure than the control of the party coalition of trade union and parliamentary loyalists'.³¹ Shaw argues that the 'leadership saw off the challenge [of the left] and then, free from restraint, it was able to complete its task of converting the party into a vehicle of moderate and modest social reform'.³² For Tudor Jones, Gaitskell's party followed an early manifestation of the politics pursued by the SDP and later by Blair. These groups were building on 'Crosland's legacy'.³³ In *Gaitskell*, Brivati identifies a man brave enough to initiate what Blair has finished; in *Callaghan* Morgan identifies a man able to stand between the two extremes of revisionism and socialism and carve a compromise.³⁴ Yet to impose the values of the present onto the past distorts the history of what was a very different period, and creates a false paradigm for understanding Labour's post-war history. Gaitskell's period as leader was very different to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and created very different responses. Gaitskell did not challenge the unions' domination of the party, as later modernisers did. He did not support entry into Europe. On the contrary, at the Brighton conference in 1962 he wrapped the party in the Union Jack, thus rejecting the spirit of the EEC. He did not attempt to amend party structures, to work at recruitment or internal democracy. He did not stress image over the content of policy. He was not a prototype for some later revisionism, but a product of his own time and his own values.

Even Tudor Jones's emphasis on the paramount nature of social ownership within post-war Labour ideological debate is a little unhelpful in understanding how the period between 1951 and 1964 fits into the broader analysis of post-war Labour politics. The role of public ownership may be a key difference between socialism and social democracy in theoretical texts, and it may have been an area of conflict at times since 1945. However, to see this as the defining feature of Labour politics would be a mistake. In the real world of Labour politics there was not constant disagreement over the principles of public ownership but support for some (reformed) public ownership and more state regulation. Whilst Gaitskell did not advocate extending social ownership, he was less opposed to it than either Crosland or 'extreme' revisionists like Douglas Jay. He remained committed to equal opportunity, and felt that in order to achieve such a goal, 'privately owned wealth...[must be] fairly evenly distributed'.³⁵ He stressed the need for democracy in industry. Gaitskell's criticism was that nationalisation 'has been regarded not as *a* means to achieve the ideals of Socialism but as the *only possible means*'.³⁶ Even so, it remained Gaitskell's contention that

'nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange should assist the advance to greater equality, contribute to a full employment policy, associate with the power to make important economic decisions a far greater sense of national responsibility, ease the development of industrial democracy, and diminish the bitterness and friction in economic relationships'.³⁷

Moreover, whilst there were many who advocated more nationalisation, and as a policy option it was evidently a symbolic and significantly popular idea, in reality many were willing both to limit more social ownership and to focus on other ways of effecting state control. What emerged in 1964 was not something which revisionists found abhorrent, nor was it something which the left thought was reprehensible. It was not 'Blairism' before Blair.

The differences between Gaitskell and his successors do not mean he was a failure, simply that he was a politician of the 1950s and 1960s. It would be futile to condemn him, as it is futile to attempt to make him fit into a role which he did not occupy. Gaitskell reacted to contemporary issues. He sought to establish a role of the Labour Party in a rapidly evolving post 1951 world. Similarly, it would be futile to attack Labour for attempting to use public intervention to solve economic problems which have still not been addressed, either by market economics or by Blair's approach to policy. Of course there were problems that were not addressed, weaknesses that were not identified or errors of Gaitskell's for which he must be criticised. Labour's inadequate internal policy forums did not help it to develop new ideas. The party showed a marked reluctance to accept the electorate's desires, as it had done between 1945 and 1951. Gaitskell showed tetchily poor leadership and the left a preference for moral causes over practical realities, as was the case in previous and subsequent periods. However, by 1964 and despite these obstacles, the party had created a modernised version of the approach constructed across the 1930s and implemented in 1945. Labour's internal warfare inhibited its progress. Its ideological conflicts were real enough; but neither ultimately prevented the party from putting forward practical ideas, which were closer in content and tone to the party's real origins and values than many have been able or willing to accept.

FOOTNOTES

1. D. Tanner, 'Ideological debate in Edwardian Labour politics: radicalism, Revisionism and socialism' p.271-294, in E. Biagini and A. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism : Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour, and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991). M. Francis, *Ideas and Policies Under Labour, 1945-1951 : Building a New Britain* (Manchester, 1997). For this in other parties, see E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics, and Ideology of the Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London, 1995).
2. S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo (eds.), "England arise!" : The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain (Manchester, 1995). N. Tiratsoo, 'Labour and the Electorate' in D. Tanner, P. Thane and N. Tiratsoo, *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000).
3. See Chapter One above, pp.28-43.
4. Labour's Committees included the Policy and Publicity Committee, Campaign Committee, Sub Committee on Socially Owned Industry. There were also 'Policy Formation General Directive[s]' and Fabian Report on Nationalised Industries. See Beatrice Webb House Conference, Campaign Notes and NEC Notes, pp. 44-55.
5. D. Tanner, 'The Recruitment of the Parliamentary Labour Party in Britain' (1931-1950), in G. Orsina and G. Quagliariello (eds.), *La Formazione Della Classe Politica in Europa (1945-1956)* (Rome, 2000), pp.615-618
6. See Chapter Three above, pp.118-131
7. See Chapter Three above, pp.214-215, 221-2, 235-240
8. J. Campbell, *Nye Bevan. A Biography* (London, 1987), p.254.
9. K. Jeffreys, *The Labour Party Since 1945* (London, 1983), p.41.
10. N. Tiratsoo, 'Labour and the Electorate' op., cit., p.297.
11. *Socialist Commentary* July 1955 p.27. Hugh Gaitskell, 'Understanding the Electorate'.
12. Ibid., p.27.
13. Harold Wilson speech to delegates at the Trades Union Congress 7 September 1964, 'A Time For Choice', pp.1-7.
14. Folder: Press Circulars - Master File Labour Party Manifesto - Shortened Version PP/GE/3, p.1, 1964 General Election Box File.

15. Folder marked: File Number 1. 25 Jan- 25 Sept 1964, 1964 General Election Box File.
16. Ibid.
17. Research Master File. Constituency facts and figures, July 1964, p.1, 1964 General Election Box File.
18. Research master file. GE/RD/30/September, 1964. 'The Women's Vote - Note for Broadcasting Committee', Michael Young and Peter Willmott, p.1.
19. Ibid., p.1.
20. Ibid., p.2. Fielding re-asserts the belief that Labour had a particular problem attracting female voters. S. Fielding 'Labour, Women and Social Change in the 1960s' p.1. Paper presented to Gender History Conference, IHR London, 2000.
21. In a 1959 election broadcast, Labour MP Eirene White was shown returning home with the shopping and described herself as a 'working housewife'. See Fielding, *ibid*, p.8.
22. Box File General Election 1964. Citizens for Labour Exercise, 9 November 1964. p.1.
23. Ibid., pp.2-3.
24. Ibid., p.2.
25. Ibid., p.3.
26. B Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London, 1992), p.196.
27. 'Our Penny Farthing Machine'. pp.iii-iv *Socialist Commentary* October 1965.
28. R. Coopey 'Industrial Policy in the White Heat of the Scientific Revolution' in R. Coopey, S. Fielding and N. Tiratsoo *The Wilson Governments, 1964-1970* (London, 1993), pp.102-123.
29. N. Tiratsoo and J. Tomlinson (eds.), *Industrial Efficiency and State Intervention : Labour, 1939-51* (London, 1993).
30. 'Lets put Our Heads Together - Talking About Labour's "Challenge to Britain"', p.5. Labour Publications Department, June 1954, Box No. 329.12, NMLH.
31. D. Howell, *op. cit.*, p.186.
32. E. Shaw, *op. cit.*, p.50.

33. G. Brown, 'Equality then and Now' p.35-48 in D. Leonard (ed.) *Crosland and New Labour* (London, 1999).

34. K. O. Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life* (Oxford, 1997), pp.169-234.

35. H. Gaitskell, 'Socialism and Nationalisation', *Fabian Tract No. 300*, p.1.

36. *Ibid.*, p.5.

37. *Ibid.*, p.18.

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