The Remaking of Labour, 1987-1997

By Mark Bevir

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I. CONTACT INFORMATION

Dept. of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-1950, USA

Email: mbevir@berkeley.edu

II. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mark Bevir is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. His recent publications include New Labour: A Critique (Routledge, 2005); The Logic of the History of Ideas (Cambridge University Press, 1999); and, with R.A.W. Rhodes, both Governance Stories (Routledge, 2006), and Interpreting British Governance (Routledge, 2003).

Abstract

This paper advances a distinctive interpretation of New Labour by way of a study of the transformation of the Labour Party during the Major years. Many interpretations of New Labour assimilate it to the neoliberalism of Thatcher, with some observers coining the term "Blaijorism" to imply that there was no difference between Labour under Tony Blair and the Conservatives under John Major. These interpretations of New Labour imply that Blair simply abandoned Labour's historic principles. In stark contrast, this paper argues that New Labour is a product of a much longer process of remaking the Party and its policies, a process that began symbolically in the late 1980s with the launch of the Policy Review by Neil Kinnock. The paper shows how the Policy Review led to a transformation in Labour's economic, industrial, welfare, and foreign policies for the 1992 election. It shows how these policy shifts went along with attempts to reform the organization of the Party itself. And it shows how both the changes in party structure and party policy continued after John Smith replaced Kinnock as Party leader. In short, Blair's leadership rebranded the Party as New Labour but the new product arose from a long process of change deeply rooted in the Party and its traditions.

The Remaking of Labour, 1987-1997

Introduction

In 1987 the British Labour Party was a mess, having just lost a third successive general election to the Conservative Party, led by Margaret Thatcher. A remedy was necessary. 1990 brought some hope when John Major replaced Thatcher as leader of the Conservatives. But unless the Labour Party was merely to wait and pray for a Conservative collapse, the remedy would have to include a remaking of the Labour Party's own policies and organisation.

Looking back, the effect of the remedy is obvious. In 1997, New Labour was elected to government, after which it remained in office for over eleven years. The effect stands out as a dramatic and sustained achievement – the longest period in government in the history of the Labour Party.

The drama of an effect may obscure the historic processes that caused it. The very adjective "New" may hide historical continuity. New Labour did not begin overnight when Tony Blair became Party leader. New Labour – a Party with an organization and policies that won at least three successive general elections – was a product of a decade spent remaking the Labour Party. That decade began with Neil Kinnock initiating a sweeping policy review, continued with the implementation of the review and the reform of the Party under both Kinnock and John Smith, and ended with the coming of Blair.

A study of the remaking of Labour reveals the historical origins of New Labour. It also supports broader reflections on the nature of politics. Political scientists have become fond of formal explanations, couched in terms of models, correlations, classifications, or ideal types. New Labour has been explained, for example, by models of party competition, or by correlations

to the decline of the working class and other social changes. In contrast, historical explanations may challenge the ambition to reduce human action to formal patterns. Historical explanations can embody a conscious recognition of the way in which people make the social and political world through their activity, where such activity is not bound by formal patterns, but rather an expression of the human capacity for agency. Formal models, correlations, and classifications often imply that humans are automata, destined to act in accord with some given interest, norm, or pattern. In contrast, historical explanations may present humans as actively making the world through their participation in it. New Labour was not the inevitable outcome of party competition or social change. New Labour was actively produced by political actors as they struggled to understand and react to the situations in which they found themselves, as they debated the nature of the dilemmas facing the Labour Party and fought one another over how best to respond to these dilemmas. People, not social laws, make politics.

The Policy Review

The statistics of the 1987 election made grim reading for the Labour Party. Labour may have managed to hold on to second place ahead of the SDP-Liberal Alliance, but it had got only 31% of the vote to the Alliance's 22%. The Conservative government's majority may have fallen from 144 in 1983, but it remained in triple figures at 102. The Labour Party responded with a comprehensive policy review, beginning with "Labour Listens", an attempt to garner the views of ordinary people.

Origins

The Policy Review met with considerable opposition from within the Labour Party. Neil Kinnock, the Party leader, led those who favoured a review. His supporters generally came from the centre and right of the Labour Party. They argued that Labour had lurched too far to the left, losing touch with the voters. They wanted to return to the reformism of Tony Crosland but also to update this reformism to meet new circumstances. In contrast, the left-wing of the Party, led by Tony Benn, argued that the policy review was an attempt to abandon the socialist heritage of the Party. They wanted the Party to play a vanguard role, leading public opinion more than following it.

Labour's history had long been characterized by struggles between different ideological factions. All the main voices in the debate over the Policy Review reflected the cluster of Fabian, Marxist, and ethical strands of socialism that had come to dominate the Party at the expense of more non-governmental approaches to socialism. During the 1960s, the right wing had become identified with the Keynesianism welfare state and more particularly the reformism of Hugh Gaitskill and Tony Crosland. The left wing, in contrast, advocated a more interventionist state, placing greater emphasis on public ownership, planning, and class struggle.

Both the right and left wings of the Party could present their arguments as being true to the Party's historical commitments. The right could argue that the 1974 and 1983 manifestoes had been the outliers and that they were now trying to take the Party back to a more moderate position better suited to the mood of the electorate. The left could counter that they stood for a socialist heritage that had been attacked by the reformists of the 1960s.

The battle over the Policy Review reached a climax in 1988 when Benn challenged Kinnock for the leadership of the Party. After Kinnock won, the influence of the left-wing of the Party declined, and those in favour of the Policy Review press ahead rapidly.

Content

Following the Labour Listens campaign, the Labour Party established seven review groups to assess existing policies and explore alternatives. The ensuing Policy Review occurred over three stages. The first phase ended in 1988 with the production of two documents, Social Justice and Economic Efficiency, which described the basic goals and values and the major policy themes of the Labour Party. The second phase recommended explicit policies as means of pursuing these goals and themes. It led in 1989 to the Meet the Challenge, Make the Change, the most notable feature of which was the clear renouncing of public ownership. The third and final phase of the Policy Review was supposed to wrap-up any remaining issues and promote the Labour Party's new policies to the country, but it actually led to additional documents – Looking to the Future (1990) and Opportunity Britain (1991) – defining the Party's new policies.

The documents produced by the Policy Review advocated new policies that we may consider under the headings of economic policy, employment and the unions, the welfare state, and foreign policy.

(i) Economic Policy

Arguably the main debate in the Policy Review was that over economic policy. The debate was between neo-Keynesians, most notably Bryan Gould, and those such as Kinnock and John Smith who favoured a supply-side approach.

The neo-Keynesians promoted strategic intervention to regulate long-term cycles in the market. They generally acknowledged many benefits of a market economy, including its role in allocating scarce resources, responding to consumers' preferences, promoting efficiency, and

rewarding innovation. However, they also argued that the market had clear limitations, including a tendency to encourage short-term investment decisions that neglected communal goods. They were particularly worried that finance capital sought quick returns rather than investing in long-term industrial development. Gould and other neo-Keynesians proposed to deal with these issues through a Medium Term Industrial Strategy. The state itself would invest in industry so as to promote Britain's economic competitiveness.

Supply-siders argued that such investment, and Keynesian policies more generally, encouraged inflation. They wanted to leave industrial investment to the private sector: the state should not continuously intervene in the economy but only provide aid in accomplishing the things the market could not do or was unwilling to do. In their view, the main limitations of the market were its limited ability to provide for collective supply-side goods, including education, training, and research. They began to craft a socialism in which the state would act less to manage the macro-economy and more to promote supply-side efficiencies.

During the early stages of the Policy Review, the Labour Party's official documents sought a balance between the neo-Keynesians and the supply-siders. But the supply-side vision became increasingly dominant toward the end of the review process, especially after Gordon Brown replaced Bryan Gould as Industry Spokesman.

The Policy Review, with its neo-Keynesians and supply-siders, clearly began to distance the Labour Party from public ownership and widespread state intervention in the economy. Meet the Challenge, Make the Change praised the market. Looking to the Future, the Review's final document, suggested that water might be the only utility that would remain completely publically owned, and that the role of the state was primarily to facilitate industrial investment and economic effectiveness.

(ii) Employment and the Unions

As the Labour Party forsook Keynesianism, so it drastically limited the role of the state in promoting full employment. Even Gould and the neo-Keynesians had little faith in the ability of the state to manage aggregate demand without causing unacceptable levels of inflation. Looking to the Future clearly showed that Labour had ceased to be committed to Keynesian policies as a means of securing full employment and economic growth. The Labour Party's policy had come to emphasize the creation of a monetary framework that would provide long-term stability in exchange rates and interest rates.

The Policy Review led to a commitment to low inflation through stable exchange and interest rates. This commitment inspired a growing interest in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). Neo-Keynesians such as Gould remained skeptical of the ERM. But the supply-siders thought it would promote stability and monetary discipline thereby helping in the battle against inflation. Again, during the early stages of the Policy Review, the Labour Party's official documents sought a balance between these two positions. Meet the Challenge, Make the Change considered some possible problems with joining ERM, including its deflationary bias and so negative impact on employment. It proposed to accommodate these problems by requiring specific conditions for entering the ERM, conditions that included less use of interest rate policy, increased central bank cooperation, greater payment stability, and policies to promote economic growth in Europe. Later, after Brown replaced Gould in 1989, the Party became more firmly committed to the ERM.

An emphasis on low inflation carries implications for wages policy, since a powerful trade union movement with legal privileges may be able to force through higher wages and so

driving inflation upward. One of the Policy Review documents, Opportunity Britain, discussed industrial strategy in relation to the trade unions. The historic and financial relationship between the Party and the unions made this a difficult topic for Party's leaders. The Policy Review tried to appease the unions, who had seen their rights whittled away by the Conservative governments, while reassuring the broader public. Agreements were sought with the unions on matters such as picketing restrictions and abolition of the closed shop. Looking to the Future made it clear that the unions would not be given back the powers they had enjoyed in the 1970s.

(iii) The Welfare State

When Labour's Shadow Communications Agency researched voter attitudes on welfare spending in 1987, it found that voters were worried by the thought that the Party would increase taxes. The voters might have welcomed better welfare services, but not it seemed if they would have to pay for them. Labour responded to this gloomy news with a dual strategy. On the one hand, the Party promised to control public spending, and only to expand social programs when the money to do so already existed. On the other, the Party suggested that were it elected then only a small minority of voters (roughly the wealthiest 10%) would experience a net increase in taxes. Economic growth, not taxation, was to fund improvements in welfare.

(iv) Foreign Policy

Unilateral disarmament was widely seen as having damaged Labour more than any other policy in the 1987 election. Kinnock had spent much of his career supporting unilateralism, but he now turned vehemently against it, arguing not only that it had sunk Labour but also that the changes in the Soviet Union made it outdated.

The main Policy Review group addressing foreign policy and defense was "Britain in the World". The group decided to leave defense issues until after the first year. Then, in 1989, they proposed abandoning unilateralism for a multilateral alternative on the grounds that the latter was more likely to lead to a world free of nuclear weapons. Once the Policy Review process had come out against unilateralism, Kinnock threatened to resign if the Party did not support him in backing this decision. The Party Conference of 1990 backed him, rejecting unilateralism.

Implementing the Review

By 1990, Labour moved ahead of the Conservatives in the polls. The Policy Review had transformed the Party's commitments, especially in areas where it seemed most out of line with the voters, areas such as nationalization, trade union power, high taxation, and weak defense. The poll tax had eroded support for the Conservatives government, and together with disputes over Europe, prompted Conservative Members of Parliament to replace Thatcher with Major as Party leader and thus Prime Minister.

Nonetheless, the Labour leadership still had to ensure that the Labour Party stood firmly behind the new policies in the next general election. Perhaps most importantly Kinnock and his supporters wanted to reform the internal organisation of the Labour Party.

Reforming the Party

The internal reform of the Labour Party was meant to increase the power of individual Party members, strengthen lines of accountability, and not coincidentally thereby undermine the influence of the Bennite left.

Broadly speaking, Kinnock and his supporters advocated a principle of one member one vote for various elections within the Labour Party. Their proposals were generally opposed by the trades unions as well as the left-wing of the Party. This battle was fought over the procedure for selecting Parliamentary candidates until a compromise was reached in 1987. The compromise handed the selection of candidates to local Electoral Colleges within which 60% of the vote was based on the one-member one-vote system and the other 40% was granted to representatives of the trades unions. This compromise lasted until the early 1990s when it was suspended on the grounds that it was too opaque and cumbersome.

When Benn challenged Kinnock for the leadership in 1988, several Labour politicians encouraged the constituency parties to ballot their members. The result was dramatic. Kinnock and his deputy, Roy Hattersley, respectively got 88.6% and 66.8% of the vote, easily defeating their challengers. Then, in 1989, Kinnock and his supporters encouraged similar ballots for the constituency section of the National Executive Committee (NEC). As the informal spread of a principle of one member one vote thus gave greater power to the "modernizers", so they used their growing power to institutionalize that principle. Direct balloting was thus made compulsory in 1990. Again, the effects were dramatic. Prominent left-wingers lost their place on the NEC, including Ken Livingstone in 1989, Dennis Skinner in 1992, and Benn himself in 1993, and they were replaced by modernizers, including Gerald Kaufman in 1991, and Kinnock, Brown, and Blair in 1992.

The 1990 Party Conference agreed to other constitutional reforms that were to be implemented after the 1992 general election. A Black and Asian Socialist Society was formed, and given a place on the NEC. Mandatory quotas for women at different levels within the party were also established.

Of course there were also more informal changes in the internal operation of the Labour Party. The NEC actually lost some of its power. The Party centralized its campaign management and media communications. Kinnock and the Shadow Cabinet gained more independence in formulating policies and more control over presenting them.

The 1992 Election Manifesto

By 1992, the Labour Party had transformed its internal organization and its policy commitments. Its election manifesto, Time to Get Britain Working Again, expressed many of the conclusions of the Policy Review.

(i) Economic Policy

Public ownership was put to one side, with most of the Conservative's privatizations being accepted, including the railways. Similarly, the Labour Party clearly forsook Keynesianism for a supply-side socialism. Labour advocated state investment only in supply-side areas such as transport and education, while also proposing tax credits for private companies that invested in research and development.

(ii) Employment and the Unions

Labour rejected the goal of full employment in favour of an emphasis on low inflation, which was said to require an interest rate policy aimed primarily at monetary stability. Similarly, the Party proposed a minimum wage set at the comparatively low level of 3.40. Finally, just as the Policy Review proposed maintaining the ban on secondary picketing and the closed shop, so the Manifesto clearly rejected a return to the industrial relations legislation of the 1970s.

(iii) The Welfare State

In the 1992 election, the Labour Party constantly emphasized its commitment to fiscal responsibility. A Labour government would earn before it spent. There would be no increase in welfare provision unless public funds were already available. The Party's manifesto advocated maintaining income tax rate at 25%, severely restricting its commitment to raising pensions and family allowances.

When, during the 1992 election campaign, the Conservatives claimed that Labour's programme would require tax increases, Smith presented a shadow budget that proposed both increasing the higher level of income tax and eliminating the upper limit on National Insurance Contributions.

(iv) Foreign Policy

Multilateralism had clearly one the day. Labour advocated retaining Trident and current nuclear warheads while negotiating multilateral reductions. The Manifesto emphasized the Party's commitment to maintaining Britain's nuclear capability for as long as nuclear weapons existed.

The Manifesto was also a more or less mirror opposite of its predecessor on the European question. Labour proposed putting Britain at the heart of Europe, especially in negotiations over the ERM and the common agricultural policy.

The Smith Years

Despite the transformation of its organization and policies, and despite the polls all predicting victory, Labour lost again in 1992. Numerous explanations have been suggested, including Kinnock's leadership style, media bias, and the Conservatives negative attacks. After the defeat, Kinnock resigned as leader, there was a leadership contest between Gould and Smith, and Smith took over.

Smith offered a distinctive leadership style geared to unifying the Labour Party. He came across as a Party loyalist who might reconcile if not the left and right and least the modernizers and traditionalists among the centre and right of the Party. In practice, Smith's concern to unite the Party did indeed see an end to the kind of dramatic changes that had characterized the last five years, and both Blair and Brown were said to find his caution irksome. Equally, however, his leadership saw a gradual consolidation and even slight extension of the reforms introduced under Kinnock's leadership.

Reforming the Party

The role of the trades unions in the Labour Party was a prominent issue in the leadership contest between Gould and Smith. Gould in particular suggested that the trade unions were too influential, and pressed for the further extension of the principle of one member one vote. The ensuing debate dominated the Party for the next year or so.

Much of the debate followed lines set by the newly formed Trade Union Links Review Group, composed of trade union leaders and members of the Shadow Cabinet and the NEC. In February 1993, this review group suggested various alternatives ways of selecting parliamentary candidates, electing a Party leader, and balancing votes at the Party's annual conference. Almost all the options the review group placed on the table involved an electoral college for electing the

Party leader together with a system of selecting parliamentary candidates that relied either solely on one member one vote or on an electoral college that gave considerable scope to that principle.

Smith published a personal manifesto, New Paths to Victory, proposing one member one vote for selecting parliamentary candidates and an electoral college for selecting the Party leader. He tried to sell his proposals to the trade unions as a compromise in which they kept their privileged role in choosing the Party leader in return for accepting one member one vote in constituency selections of parliamentary candidates. But the unions remained unconvinced, and even began to suggest their own alternatives.

Finally, in 1993, Smith announced new policies in which talk of workers' rights and full employment and the introduction of a reduced rate of Party membership for individual trade unionists counter-balanced party reform. Under the party reforms, the election of the Party leader remained with the electoral college, but the representation of the trade unions in the college fell from 40% to 33% and the trade unions votes were to be based not on the historic block but on ballots among those levy-payers who were members of the Party. The trade unions also agreed to a reduction of their vote at the Party Conference from 90% to 70% with the possibility of a later reduction to 50%. These reforms were passed by a close margin at the annual conference.

Ideology and Policy

Smith further entrenched the policy reforms as well as the organizational ones. He formed a Commission on Social Justice, with Sir Gordon Borrie as its chair, to explore social and economic visions for Britain. The Commission quickly produced two reports, The Justice Gap, which tried to define social justice, and Social Justice in a Changing World, which looked at the

fortunes of the welfare state over the last fifty years. Soon afterwards, in 1994, the Commission published its conclusions in Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal.

The Commission restated, or even took for granted, many of the arguments developed during the Policy Review. It sought to describe the forces remaking the social world, to show how they required new responses, and yet to assert the compatibility of economic prosperity and social justice. The most novel feature of the Commission's report was arguably the vigorous and explicit nature of its moral convictions. In this respect, the report mirrored Smith's own faith in Christian socialism. Smith's Christian values clearly informed his defense of socialism as the ethical recognition of community as a necessary balance to individual freedom.

Although Smith lent credence to the idea that social democracy was primarily an ethical creed, he remained chary of revising Clause IV of the Labour Party's Constitution. Clause IV, drafted by Sidney Webb in 1917 and adopted in 1918, declared the aim of the Labour Party to be: "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 upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service." The right-wing and other modernizers had long had misgivings about this commitment. Gaitskell had tried to amend it following the 1959 general election. The Policy Review under Kinnock inspired a new statement of aims and values that some Labour leaders hoped would supplement or even supplant it. Although Smith opposed the revision of Clause IV, he considered publishing a revised and secularized version of his lecture on values as a more personal supplement to it.

If Smith's ethical turn of phrase clearly lingered on in New Labour, his main impact lay in his commitment to constitutional reform. Formally the Labour Party had been committed to

constitutional reform since the Policy Review. Meet the Challenge, Make the Change included proposals for devolution, some kind of decentralization in England, reform of the Lords, and a charter of human rights. The Party had also established an Electoral Systems Working Party, which recommended a form of proportional representation for a devolved assembly in Scotland. Most of these constitutional reforms found their way into the Labour Party's election manifesto in 1992. Nonetheless, constitutional reform was barely mentioned in the election campaign, and much of the Party leadership remained lukewarm at best. Smith helped to change that, bringing the various reforms together into a more coherent package and giving them a more prominent place in Labour's programme.

New Labour

Smith died from a heart attack in the summer of 1994. That July, Blair was elected leader of the Labour Party. Blair seemed younger, a different generation, and he quickly rebranded the Party as New Labour. Yet, most of the content of New Labour derived from the reforms already introduced since 1987. Kinnock's supply-side socialism remained as did the reviewed policies on employment, welfare, and foreign affairs. These policies were presented as means of realizing the moral values to which Smith had given expression. Moreover, while New Labour paid most attention to economic policy and the welfare state, it inherited a commitment to the constitutional reforms that, eleven years later, are among its most impressive legacies.

Rebranding the Party

Blair changed the Labour Party primarily by rebranding it. His early moves were often more symbolic than substantive. The phrase "New Labour" appeared at the Party's annual

conference a mere three months after he became leader. By 1997, the Labour Party was ready to fight the general election on the slogan “New Labour, New Britain”.

The act that most symbolized New Labour’s apparent break with the Party’s past was the revision of Clause IV. Blair expressed his wish to revise Clause IV at the end of his first platform speech as Party leader at the same annual conference at which the label New Labour made its appearance. He justified the revision in part by arguing that the old Clause IV was outdated given the kinds of policy shift that had occurred since 1987, and partly by explicit discussion of the importance of dramatizing the modernization of the Party.

In December of 1994, the NEC agreed to a Party Conference to vote on proposed changes to Clause IV. The draft of a new Clause IV was published in March 1995. The new version was adopted by a special Party Conference that April. The new Clause IV – perhaps more accurate and modern, definitely less elegant – gave expression to the ethical form of socialism that had risen to prominence under Smith and Blair. It read:

> The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.

Reforming the Party

As well as dramatically rebranding the Labour Party, Blair continued to press through the kinds of party reforms and policy changes that had become common since 1987. Reform of the

Party continued to press constitutencies to reduce the influence of the trade unions and activists. One member one vote was further extended. Similar reforms continued even after Blair became Prime Minister. The Annual Conference in 1997 backed his programme, Partnership in Power, which was billed as an attempt to smooth the relationships between the government and the Party and to increase participation in policy making. Partnership in Power modified the composition of the NEC, abolishing the women's section, reducing the number of trade union representatives from seventeen to twelve, assigning three places to governmental appointees from within the Parliamentary Party, and making six places dependent on a postal ballot of all Party members. In addition, Partnership in Power transferred control of Party policy from the Annual Conference to a National Party Forum. It is only if the National Policy Forum fails to reach a consensus on a matter of policy that it then proposes various options that are debated and voted on by the Party's Annual Conference.

Clearly the trades unions and the Annual Conference have been weakened and the Party leader strengthened. The changes were, however, little more than extensions of those introduced under Kinnock and Smith. Even the National Policy Forum was just a modified version of one set up back in 1993.

Ideology and Policy

New Labour's policies, like its party reforms, differed little from those that had arisen since the Labour Listens campaign. Most importantly, New Labour's economic policy was based on a fusion of supply-side initiatives with an overwhelming emphasis on monetary stability as the key to low inflation. Public ownership, management of aggregate demand in the economy, and state planning and investment in industry were things of the past. Moreover, the emphasis on

monetary stability and low inflation, rather than aggregate demand, kept New Labour from making any serious commitments on levels of employment.

The main policy development under Blair's leadership was arguably the greater clarity with which this supply-side economic programme was combined with social and even welfare themes. New Labour used an ethical language of equal opportunities, rather than one of equality of outcomes, to suggest that supply-side initiatives in education and training were important ways of promoting social justice. Similarly, New Labour suggested that global competition and a new knowledge-based economy placed a premium on a skilled workforce such that advances in education, society, and welfare were ways of promoting Britain's economic competitiveness.

Although Blair, as Party leader, and Brown, as Shadow Chancellor, argued persuasively for the link between welfare and economic competiveness, they still made it emphatically clear that the welfare state would not be expanded by increased taxation. Indeed, on the eve of the 1997 election, Brown announced that a Labour Government would stick to the limits on public spending proposed by the then Conservative Government. New Labour would improve the welfare state and the public sector more generally not by increased spending but by a process of reform and modernization.

Finally, with respect to foreign policy, Labour's 1997 manifesto supported the European Union, while rather unnecessarily affirming belief in the continuance of independent states rather than a fully federalized system. With unilateralism a thing of the past, the manifesto turned to alternative moral issues, calling for a prohibition on the sale of arms to regimes that would use them to repress their own citizens.

The 1997 General Election

The rest is, as they say, history. The Labour Party won the 1997 election. The margin of victory was staggering. Labour got 418 seats, with 165 going to the Conservatives and 46 to the Liberal Democrats. Some 10% of the electorate had actively shifted to the Labour Party since the previous election. No doubt many of them had become disillusioned with the Conservatives or even the Liberals. But some were also registering the long process that had remade Labour. In the 1980s about 50% of voters expressed some agreement when asked if the Labour Party was extreme; by 1997, that figure had dropped to about 15%.

Conclusion

A history of the remaking of Labour reminds us that New Labour was not created overnight in 1994. That history includes a range of competing voices – Benn, Gould, Kinnock, Smith, and all kinds of politicians, trades unionists, and Party activists – fighting various battles – about the Policy Review, the leadership, places on the NEC – that had consequences for very different policy areas – the economy, welfare, the constitution, and the organization of the Party itself. The complexity and contingency of this history thus questions more formal explanations for the rise of New Labour, explanations based on models, correlations, or socio-economic changes and their allegedly inevitable political corollaries. The remaking of Labour was messy. To win one battle, did not guarantee victory in the next. The adoption of one idea or policy did not entail the turn to others. Certainly the policies adopted by New Labour need not have gone together. Labour could have rejected unilateralism while adopting Gould's neo-Keynesianism, it could have adopted supply-side socialism while remaining hostile to constitutional reform. In short, New Labour should be explained as the contingent product of numerous local struggles over what were often only loosely connected reforms and policies.

When political scientists do take a more historical view, their main concern seems to be to condemn or vindicate New Labour. Critics denounce it as a betrayal of the Party's socialist past. Others present it as a sensible updating of the mainstream and reformist social democracy that had long dominated the Party. Of course, there is nothing wrong with having a view of the merits of New Labour and making that view clear. However, these historical accounts typically seek to flatten Labour's history so as to make either is left or right wing seem its natural heirs. A more accurate history presents the Labour Party as a constant site of struggles between all kinds of competing traditions and ideas that are continually overpowered, adjusted, and reinterpreted, their former content often being obliterated, in these very struggles. From this perspective, we may recognize historical narratives that condemn or vindicate New Labour as engaged in just such a struggle, overpowering, adjusting, and reinterpreting past histories for their own political purposes.

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