The Rhetoric behind the Making of New Labour

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ABSTRACT

Antonio Gramsci claims: “to write the history of a party is to write the general history of a country from a monographic point of view”15, this paper is an attempt to discuss the rhetoric of the language, analyse and interpret the poor performance of the Party from its origins to the birth of new Labour. This would allow us to have a better reading of British politics, economy and society in the last century. Of course, Labour cannot seriously be examined without reference to the context in which it has existed.

A party is very much a product of the society within which it develops its ethos, resources and support - or criticism. Many Labour leaders have understood that they were living in a changing world, parties that do not change die. The motives behind changing the ‘identity’ of the Labour Party have arguably been twofold; first and foremost, offer a ‘project’ that will make them ‘electable’ and then hold on to power for a few terms of office. Labour understood that they can do no more than interfere with the consequences of social change. They were the victims of social change and were also responsible for their own difficulties. Thus, it has been claimed that government, business, the media and the parties themselves can structure political perceptions. The new Labour leader -Blair- has claimed that he is not motivated by ‘ideology’ but he is a pragmatic politician for whom ‘what matters is what works’; hence a new strategy -marketing- had to be developed. There is good basis for taking the marketing of ‘New’ Labour seriously. The relationship between ‘politics’ and the media is a structural feature of the contemporary politics. Thus, Labour had to offer some ‘changes’ and ‘court’ the media in order to earn some admiration from their former ‘foes’ and win votes.

The world is changing very fast, yet, Historians of British politics distrust the cult of the ‘New’. Continuity rather than novelty appears to be the norm. ‘New’ is a word more commonly associated with US politics; Wilson’s ‘New’ Freedom at the beginning of the twentieth century , and today’s America ‘Neo Conservatives’ speaking of a ‘New’ World Order’. In Britain, the adjective ‘New’ was unusual, but it has become commonplace since Tony Blair’s Conference speech in 1994 in which he repeatedly spoke of ‘New’ Labour and ‘New’ Britain. Thereafter, ‘New’ Labour has become the ever-present watchword in the language of many British politicians. Yet, the almost universal idiom of post-war British politics has been novelty, reform and modernisation. - Reactionary politics in the literal sense has become almost unthinkable; ‘newness’ and modernisation have a particularly insistent place in the lexicon of ‘New’ Labour. A single word captures the essence of ‘New’ Labour’s social and political project; it is ‘modernisation’. The jargon and rhetoric of modernisation have flourished within the discourse of ‘New’ Labour government. All governments want to claim their novelty in contrast to opposing political parties; ‘New’ Labour too wants to emphasize its distance from ‘Old’ Labour. Critics of ‘New’ labour have generally accepted this claim to novelty, seeing it as a regrettable retreat from the socialist aims of ‘Old’ Labour. It can be said that ‘New’ Labour represents, for some, a major ideological retreat and an acceptance of the dominance of the market and private property. (Fielding, S, 2003). It is highly probable that de-emphasising the old/new Labour dichotomy has left the party freer to capture a sense of direction, looking to the future, but informed by the past. (Meredith, S, 2002)

15 Edward D. Said, Culture and Imperialism, p 142, quoting Antonio Gramsci
In ‘rebranding’ itself, ‘New’ Labour, with the entire associated advertising blitz, Blair has effectively claimed that the party’s modernisation is over. In so doing, he has also served to complete this modernisation by distancing himself and the party symbolically and rhetorically from its past. Yet ‘New’ Labour’s relation to this past is by no means uncomplicated, because current concern of political science lies with the extent to which Tony Blair and his colleagues by *force majeure* or malign intent, have accepted the triumph of the so-called Thatcherite settlement over the so-called post-war settlement. Any comparisons are likely to involve the governments of Thatcher and Major rather than those of Wilson and Callaghan, whose experience can safely be regarded as obsolete since it occurred before globalisation.

Under its new name of ‘New’ Labour the British Labour party has undergone a metamorphosis, but there is much less agreement about the nature and shape of that transmutation. There has been a voluminous debate about its policies and ideology - about how significant and deep-seated the changes are and what they mean for the actions of Labour as the UK’s ruling party. What does New Labour stand for – and for whom? To sympathetic commentators, ‘New’ Labour's ‘Third Way’ (Anthony Giddens 1998) creed may represent an effective means of pursuing the traditional social democratic ideals of social justice and solidarity today. To critics, in contrast, the Blair Government owes more to a neo-liberal appreciation of the world than to any social democratic perspective. It reflects the neo-liberal belief that the notion of an interventionist state imposing collective decisions upon an economic system is outmoded and irrelevant’. (Heffernan, R, (2000); Hay, C, (1994).

A number of competing interpretations of ‘New’ Labour have been used to understand the meaning of modernisation. (Powell Martin, 2000). Is it the name of the process whereby Labour adopted a Thatcherite agenda; a simple continuation, perhaps culmination, of the party reforms first attempted by Gaitskell; or is it an empty term hiding the single sin of having nothing to say? How far do these interpretations underestimate the novelty of the political approach of New Labour and the complexity of forces, structural and ideological; to which they are responses? Does ‘Modernisation’ represent the response of ‘New’ Labour to a range of social conditions and academic processes? There are more immediate questions: what is ‘modernisation’? Is it just a word? Do words matter that much? Are we not, perhaps, too accustomed to accepting the idea that there is an easy opposition between rhetoric and reality? Why has Labour used the discourse of modernisation in a rhetorical way to persuade and motivate the British to vote for them? Is ‘New’ Labour all spin - a package marketed by the media-? (Chadwick and Heffernan, 2004), here are some of the core questions.

Of all the problems encountered in analysing Blair’s ‘New’ Labour party, one of the most difficult tasks is the problematic significance of that label. Those debating the nature of change within the contemporary party cannot even agree how best to transcribe it. Some employ a cautious ‘new Labour’, an assertive ‘New Labour’, a wholly qualified “New Labour”, or, as hereafter, a sceptical “New” Labour’. (S. Fielding, 2004). Is ‘New’ Labour a con trick perpetrated on the electorate, one designed to obscure the party’s real ‘obsolete’ character. ‘New’ Labour terminology is questionable, (Hay Colin, 1994). One has doubt whether Labour has been transformed at quite the pace and scale its leader would suggest. Blair’s ‘Old’/’New’ Labour dichotomy has after all reflected the ill-informed prejudices of wavering Conservative voters. Was it conceived to serve as rhetoric? Or should one accept the idea that the ‘Old’/’New’ division is an intellectually rigorous and historically accurate means of conceptualizing the party's development. Have the changes and transformations, carried in the party, been introduced only after 1994?

Without some knowledge of the past, it is likely that we will misinterpret the present. The very dichotomy upon which the ‘Blair Cohort’ hoped to revive the party’s fortunes - which divided Labour

16 Anthony Giddens, allegedly one of Tony Blair’s favourite intellectuals, has been able, through his books, in particular, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of radical Politics*, (1994) to offer a new appeal for Social Democracy to Labour’s soft Left.
The rebranding of Labour as ‘New’ and the rewriting of Clause IV have been the most visible steps in this reckoning and reformulation, but the effort was broader and deeper than these more symbolic moves, but to what end? Those were the issues on which ‘New’ Labour’s critics have focused most intently, though the precise complaint had been typically messed up. For some ‘New’ Labour has simply lost sight of its roots, abandoned socialism, reconciled itself to the domination of capital and become virtually identical with Thatcherism. In office, the Conservatives fostered economic changes that altered the nature of the electorate. As a result, Britain became a richer society; the decline in size of the manual working class is undoubted. The rise of service-based employment produced a corresponding increase in lower-middle class numbers. Some argued that the proletariat had merely exchanged blue overalls for white collars. ‘New’ Labour’s leaders and strategists have become aware of the shifting social geography of Britain. Has Labour accommodated to an emerging ‘Thatcherite’ (or post-Thatcher) settlement or has it merely updated its political strategy in the face of modernity? It is difficult to deny that the experiences of the ‘Thatcherite’ years have not forced the party to recast its political strategy. ‘New’ Labour might not be a ‘Thatcherite’, yet it is thought that it has been ‘Thatcherised’. Has the press not used the term ‘Blatcher’ to refer to Blair? Labour seems to have drawn the conclusion that the ‘New Right’ hegemony was there to stay. In order to rebuild the party’s shrunken electoral base, halt its decline and win any forthcoming election, it had to offer a ‘new’ image, style and purpose. Is ‘New’ Labour merely a marketing concept, or is it a ‘by-product’ of a changing world?

A look at the relationship between what is today described as ‘New’ Labour and that which came before would allow us to explore various facets of contemporary Britain. In order to go beyond the dichotomy of ‘New’ Labour, ‘Old’ Labour one needs to assess the causes of the change, the means and the rhetoric behind it. Thus, instead of thinking of ‘New’ Labour as a deviation from the party’s past, it is better understood to be a reworking of Labour’s dominant ‘revisionist’ tradition which caused deep splits within the party in the late fifties; one of the main problems with the very notion of ‘New’ Labour - and its antithesis, ‘Old’ Labour - is that it promotes a largely mythical and dichotomized view of the party’s past. Society in the nineteenth century was standardised between ‘upper’, ‘middle’ and working classes’; Britain was becoming a ‘modern’ and complex society. The trade unions which began to be formed in the early eighteenth century were still in the direct tradition of the craft guilds. At first, they looked to the State for protection, when this failed to materialise; representatives from the Trades Union Congress, the Independent Labour Party, the Social Democratic Federation, and the Fabian Society,

17 Since winning office in 1997 ‘New’ Labour has received numerous donations from big businesses and has recently even contemplated limiting its financial ties with the unions, i.e. putting cash limits to the unions’ funding of the party. (See “The Guardian, Dec 2006)
18 People’s thinking about society is a long debate between abstraction and actual relationship. In fact, the reality of a society is the living organisations of men, women and children, in many ways materialised, in many ways constantly changing. At the same time their abstract ideas about their society, or about any particular society, are both persistent and subject to changes. (Raymond, Williams).
formed in 1900 the Labour Representation Committee’s with the purpose to represent the interests of trade unions in Parliament. In the early period, the Party’s only mandate was not transforming society, but advancing the interests of the wider working classes. (Henry Pelling, 1971).

Indeed, Labour’s big idea was socialism; the key statement was, of course, Clause IV in the Party constitution of 1918. Inevitably, socialism merged with planning in a vision of state ownership and direction over the economy, though endless debate attended the discussion of what both would mean in practice. Labour’s greatest electoral success came in the 1945 general election. They created the modern welfare state; it also established the so-called ‘collectivist consensus’ to which both Labour and Conservative governments adhered for much of the fifties and early sixties. However, they were cautious and lacked a true commitment to socialism. When in opposition in the 1950s, some of its leaders and thinkers retained their faith in the state and in collectivist policies. But, Labour’s third loss in a row prompted a rethinking and to update the party’s image and programme. Many politicians in Gaitskell’s circle had already drawn a conclusion about the need to change the party’s programme, its policies, its images, its links with the unions, and some thought, its very name. These heretical thoughts were fought against ‘teeth and nails’ by their opponents.

Labour governments’ pasts, from the mid sixties moving to their major electoral ‘humiliating’ defeat of 1979 and the split, led the party doubting whether it could regain office ever again. Harold Wilson’s technocratic collectivist version of socialism failed, though the Wilsonian principle was based upon a technological approach to both service delivery and economic planning. Wilson was probably the first to stress the related theme of modernisation in order to improve the nation’s economic performance. Indeed, Labour’s specific measures, outlined in its 1964 manifesto, ‘The New Britain’, stress the need for Labour to offer a scheme which carried an ‘economic purpose, social purpose, world purpose’. In the 1970s Labour’s burdened relationship with the unions became problematic to the party’s fate. The key political question was: how would Labour respond to its defeat? Labour’s unpopularity was caused by its inability to control its ‘natural’ allies. The period from 1979 to 1983 represented an all-time low for the Labour Party. The need for deep rethinking was, perhaps, missing within Labour’s rank and file. What was new was not that the global economy had dictated the policy of Labour and that those in charge of preached the positive virtues of the market. It was no longer an evil, but the best way forward. The effects offered Thatcher a unique break to put their stamp upon a ‘New Right’ political order.

The recognition of Labour’s failure was widespread both outside and inside the party After 1979 the debate within the Party around the redistribution of power within the Party led to an Electoral College which caused a fracture, followed by the emergence of a substantial ‘third force’ in British politics. The birth of the Social Democratic Party was to be a decisive setback for Labour. Labour had to undergo a far-reaching metamorphosis after 1987, but the question of the point of origin for the transformation tells us little about Labour's changes. Kinnock’s move to restructure the party were only measure of a package to save Labour from the threat of the S D P and the ‘Loony’ left; it was seen as adaptation to the changes in the British socio-political structure. The very first fruits of the choice to become ‘electable’ were the appointments Kinnock made to his staff and structure of the party’s headquarters. Modernisation was not an especially political issue, but an organisational necessity. The battle over the party’s link with the unions was unequivocal; the unions still clearly regarded the party as their creation and property.

‘New’ Labour enigma addresses directly questions to the extent to which it represents change or continuity with the party’s past. It is necessary to examine two key figures in the making and branding of

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19 Generally referred to as the Post-War Consensus; it rested on four main pillars; Keynesianism, The Welfare State, Trade Union Reconciliation and the Western Alliance -NATO
‘New’ Labour- Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The trips to the US in the early nineties were turning points for Blair; he courted the press assiduously. Blair had thus begun to put in place many of the elements for his plan to take Labour to power. Blair brought new themes - a package, appropriately marketed, was more than sufficient to please the electors and the media. One of his key themes was the need for ‘national renewal’; he would soon be talking of the need to reinvent Britain as ‘a young country’. Blair’s election in 1994 to Party leadership has been seen as a typical example of significant ‘intervention’ of the media producers in the internal electoral process of a political party and as an example of the political issues being submissive to the candidate’s media friendly image.

Blair is very much a product of his party, both of its values and of the historical forces; he understood them and rode them better than anyone else. Yet, the ‘Blair project’ has always been defined in an Anglo-American context. Indeed, Robin Ramsay discusses how the Labour Party and the wider Labour movement have been influenced by US backed groups21. The motives behind changing the ‘identity’ of the Labour Party since the early eighties have arguably been a process of accommodation; Blair embraced the fundamental ideas of early ethical socialism. However, ‘social-ism’ did not rest easily with Clause IV, ‘the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange’ As long as Clause IV remained “the formal expression of Labour’s socialist myth” (Jones, p 141). Labour leadership was constrained, thus Clause IV had to be abolished, if not, at least, rewritten.

Of course, Blair was looking for a symbol which would visibly demonstrate to the country how much Labour had changed. The 1994 party conference was surrounded by ‘signs’ and ‘images’ announcing the birth of ‘New Labour, New Britain’ and clearly marking the distance between ‘New’ and the ‘old’ Labour Party. One may argue, so as to catch up electorally with the Tories ‘New’ Labour had scrupulously ‘neo-liberalized’ party policy. (Hay Colin, 1999) By the 1997 general election, the ‘Sun’ announced that it would be backing Tony Blair to win. On May 1, 1997 ‘New’ Labour won a resounding victory. ‘New’ Labour triumphed with the largest landslide victory in the history of the Labour Party, out in scale Attlee’s famous victory of 1945.

The analysis of the Labour Party since its creation emphasises the complex nature of the elements that came together, in the late nineteenth century, to procreate it. First it is apparent that the difficulties and divisions it had, for most of the first half of the twentieth century, were mainly due to the nature of the British ‘capitalist’ society and the heterogeneous groups who wanted to lead it to ‘New Jerusalem’. Second, Britain and Labour had chosen, after 1945, to belong to the ‘Western’ World, which meant that the Party could not ‘be allowed to’ move towards ‘collectivism’, i.e. the ‘East’. Interestingly enough, Labour had fewer opportunities to govern Britain after its 1951 defeat (64-70 and 74-79) and internal disputes were particularly intense during the Gaitskell’s leadership, with his attempts to rewrite Clause IV. The restoration of Labour’s confidence and outlook began under Neil Kinnock, consolidated under John Smith and Tony Blair. Tony Blair was able to draw upon the results of the change of internal structures to present to the 1997 electorate a tightly disciplined and more united Party, which appeared more able to become a responsible government.

The election landslides in 1997, 2001 and 2005 (albeit very thin in terms of the national vote) gave ‘New’ Labour opportunities to enact policy with popular mandates, untroubled by opposition dissent in Parliament, which it had never enjoyed before. It may well be many years before the party again enjoys such advantages; Blair’s immediate successor might not be so fortunate (Gordon Brown is already facing some internal problems). Indeed, Anthony Charles Lynton Blair, (Today’s The UN special Envoy to the

21Robin Ramsay, (1996), Prawn Cocktail Party: The hidden power behind New Labour This highly controversial book will only add to the worries of those who would like to understand Blair’s blind support of the US invasion of Iraq. It investigates how the Labour party has been taken over by a Thatcherite clique and why its policies are dictated by the City, big business and US brokers in Washington.
Middle East and one of Mr (Lord Levy ‘Cash point’ -money for Honours- close friends) like most British Prime Ministers, cares for his place in history. He has the satisfaction having taken further the modernisation of the ‘New’ Labour Party and led it to the three greatest General Election victories in its hundred-year history. He transformed the perception of Labour from a dubious and amateurish force in the 1970s and 1980s into a serious party of responsibility and power - a colossal achievement. He showed that Labour could provide stable and competent government; he gave the country stability and social peace. He showed that ‘New’ Labour could manage the economy as well as, if not better, than the Tories (though this last achievement was really Gordon Brown’s). Blair oversaw a wide-ranging set of constitutional reforms in his first term. Crime fell and the public services, particularly health and education, improved by 2007 when judged by many key indicators. Blair carved out a domestic agenda which might well shape a new consensus in the future.

Yet, it must be said that ‘Interests’ were initially very much behind Blair and the ‘New Labour Party. (Parties are, indeed, made up of groups of interests seeking power). No Labour Prime Minister on coming to power had so enjoyed the affirmation of business, the media, academia and the professions (the ‘spin doctors’). No leader had dominated the party as Blair did; of course, he was an admirer of Mrs Thatcher and probably very much influenced by her dictatorial style. Yet within five years Blair had alienated or disappointed many of these interests at home and abroad. The Treasury under Brown acquired exceptional power over domestic policy and proved a constant obstacle to Blair -The Deal: Blair/Brown-. The ‘New’ Labour Party became increasingly hostile to him from 2003, above all because of the Iraq war and the controversies over its ‘real’ motives. By 2004, many sections of the most powerful interests in Britain - the press, judiciary, Civil Service, the military, business and the professions - had become disillusioned, as had the EU and many other foreign leaders -Blair resigned from Party Leadership in mid 2007-.

Tony Blair’s description of his party as ‘New’ is not entirely deceitful. It has not been transformed simply as a result of Blair becoming leader, in fact, since the 1980s Labour changed in a number of important respects. Doubtless, ‘New’ Labour’s origins go back much further than 1994 or even 1979. Many of these roots can be discerned in the writings and actions of the party’s revisionists during the post-war ‘golden age’. Figures such as A. Crosland and H. Gaitskell encouraged Labour to take account of those social and economic developments which were changing the electoral landscape. It was only in the 1980s that the effects of these changes became most starkly apparent. ‘New’ Labour’s roots can also be found in the 1974-9 Labour governments. The early 1980s saw a deep discord within Labour, this was followed by an unprecedented left-wing route and so paved the way for the Prolonged Tory period in power. (Many within the right were hoping the left would do its own Hara Kiri). Yet, it was to help Labour better challenge this Conservative dominance that Kinnock (from the soft left) redirected the party down a less unfamiliar path, a process that culminated in Blair’s assertion of ‘New’ Labour, Despite the appearance of profound novelty, the period after 1994 was a further attempt in Labour’s prolonged effort to adapt to its ever-changing electoral and economic environment.

‘New’ Labour, like all reforming governments, exaggerated the novelty of their proposals. Thus, for example, we know that it was the Wilson government of the 1960s that used the ‘rhetoric of the ‘white heat’ technology to modernise and build a ‘New’ Britain. ‘New’ Labour in the 1990s had a double incentive to overstate their novelty, willing to distance itself from the Conservatives, but also to offer a ‘new’ party with a ‘new’ image and style, anxious to distance itself from ‘Old’ Labour past (Cronin, 2004). The consequence of this was not only to embellish the novelty of their policy proposals compared with the outgoing government, playing down the extent to which globalisation was already emerging as

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22 Tim Bale in “The logic of no alternative,” (1999) sought to show that the changes in the Labour party which occurred since the General Election disaster of 1983 were not a further capitulation to a market capitalism made hegemonic by Margaret Thatcher, but rather a return to the ‘Croslandite Revisionism’ which supposedly dominated Labour from the 1950s.
the terms of the dominant policy discourse, but to self-consciously distance themselves from the economic policies associated with ‘Old Labour’.

Tony Blair’s successful bid in 1995 to rewrite Clause IV of the Labour Party Constitution may with justification be regarded as the height of a revisionist project within the Party - concerned both with demoting public ownership and with endorsing the market economy - that was initiated in the 1950s. In a wider sense, too, Blair’s achievement may be seen from that perspective as a fulfilment of the desire of Labour’s revisionists and their successors clearly to establish the Party’s identity in the mainstream of European social democracy. Rubinstein’s (2000) article ‘A New Look at New Labour’ argues that changes in policy under Blair have been a reaction to profound economic and social changes that have taken place since the 1970s. Change has been a sound response to new circumstances. It is arguable whether ‘New’ Labour’s perception of ‘new times’ is an accurate one or whether its responses are the best or only possible ones.

An awareness of ‘New’ Labour story is as important as internal party battles and electoral necessity. It can be said that the fall of the ‘Wall of Berlin’ - i.e. the demise of Collectivism’-, the ideas of ‘globalisation’, the ‘information society’ and the ‘new economy’, as well as, are clear responses to new working patterns - in particular, the labour market -; they are central to Labour modernisers’ arguments for revising the party’s economic and social policies. Reasonable or not, the fact is that shifts from ‘Old’ to ‘New’ are in part a response to what are perceived to be changed world circumstances. ‘New’ Labour is believed to be a ‘post-Thatcherite’ Project. Thatcherism was in part about the ‘Right’ responding to ‘new times’ - and it is inevitable that Blair’s ‘New’ Labour Party has responded to the Thatcherite agenda of ‘new times’ - and a ‘New Economic Order’. (Driver, Stephen, and Luke Martell, 1998). For us, Thatcherism was always more than just four Tory governments in a row; it included a critique of Labour’s post-war social democratic agenda and a response to a sustained period of economic decline, stagflation, a ballooning public sector and changing welfare roles. As such, the idea of ‘post-Thatcherism’ involves a response to such wider factors, too, and not just to the Thatcher governments themselves. Yes, the Thatcher consensus, just like the ‘post-war consensus’, was never as sound as often portrayed. (See Magister thesis). In the 1980s a fundamental challenge to the values and policy instruments of the left had taken place. The new ‘new left’ that emerged in the early 1990s was, in part, shaped -and influenced by the media, -opinion makers- by these engagements with the forces of Thatcherism. This is, perhaps, why New Labour is not just like any ‘Old’ Labour.

‘New’ Labour might differ from ‘Old’ Labour in some broad ideological sense, (expressed in the novelty of such actions as the re-writing of Clause IV of the party constitution), it also possesses what Tomlinson John in, ‘Nothing New Under the Sun? Understanding New Labour’ describes as ‘a continuing attachment to an understanding of British society which drew heavily on declines themes.’ (Tomlinson, 1999, p 19) These involved threats of competition, the need to respond to supposedly irresistible terms and forces such as ‘globalisation’ and a continuing belief in the primacy of education if similar decline is to be resisted in the future. Claims to novelty are standard fare in political rhetoric and, in the case of New Labour, “they hide some worryingly doubtful assumptions about economic performance and its determinants”. (Tomlinson, 1999, p 22). Tony Blair’s success in rewriting Clause IV may with justification be regarded as the culmination of a revisionist project within the Party - endorsing the market economy - already attempted in the 1950s, but failed.

As Bale Tom (1999) in, “The logic of no alternative: Political scientists, historians, and the politics of Labour’s past” argues, there is a general agreement, on both sides of the recent ‘accommodationist’ versus ‘revisionist’ debate concerning the origins and character of Labour’s apparent transformation; “Blairism has to be seen as a break with the supposed ‘Keynesian Welfare Statism’ of ‘Old’ Labour”, barring the period 1945-8, Labour leaderships were cautious about public ownership and higher direct taxation, ... by the late sixties less than sanguine about the possibility and even the desirability of continued full employment’. (Bale, 1999, p 13)
Indeed, seduced by the appeal of novelty and the portrayal of (absolute) ‘newness’, one must not hurry to distance their subject from its past and the significant parallels, patterns and continuities that lie therein. As forewarning to both the propagandists of ‘New’ Labour (with a highly malleable media) and the academic history and political science professions alike tells us. As the chief supporter of the ‘accommodationist’ thesis suggests, perhaps ironically, ‘New Labour’s chant of novelty should not be seen to imply a strictly chronological, far less linear, conception of historical time’, (Hay, 1999, pp 5-8) and that even New Labour itself has not sought to reject its past outright. There have been moments of selective (and occasionally revisionist) historical memory and nostalgia: in its somewhat stylised reconstruction of its own history; the Labour Party has sought to reclaim as much as it has rejected whilst going to considerable trouble to distance itself from the ‘old Labourist’ politics of the Wilson/Callaghan government.

There has been a strong desire from the ‘New’ Labour leadership to connect the ‘myths of triumph’ surrounding its 1997 general election victory with fresh ‘foundation myths’ concerning ‘the birth of New Labour’ (Wright, 1997), mythologies have always been part of Labour history - and indeed other parties. It is important to analyse Labour’s development in terms of ‘established political traditions through the notion of ‘path dependency’. Current ideas have emerged out of the history of the party’s thought and practice, as well as in relation to some of the broader traditions of the polity. It is argued that: ‘New Labour’ can only be understood through attention to the selective mobilization of important intellectual and ideological lineages within British politics’. (S. Meredith, 2002, p 11)

Blair and New’ Labour (if leader and project are allowed to be combined), then, represent a re-evaluation of pre-1914 ‘New Liberalism’ and a more positive re-examination of the Gaitskellites as well as the Wilson years’. Blair’s emphasis of the revision of Clause IV was significant because it was the stumbling block that led to the failure of the Gaitskellites’ alleged failure to modernise the party in the 1950s: ‘New’ Labour and Blair could now successfully demonstrate that he had ended the legacy of the late 1970s and early 1980s and had returned to the reformist traditions of the party. Hence, liberal socialists stress their commitment to social-democratic norms and values - nowhere more so than in Britain. They talk about increasing life chances, equality of opportunities, social justice, reviving the spirit of solidarity, a fair deal and giving a new ethical basis to society. The identification of earlier start-points for Labour's transformation (which do not themselves negate identifications of other later causes of change) suggests that existing analyses are simplistic in that they tend to identify a set of causes or processes which will be limited in number by virtue of their being contained within a narrow period of time.

No longer can transformation be said to start clearly and uncontroversially with Kinnock or the implementation of the Policy Review. We have rather traced a complex and gradual development of interactive causal processes which brought about significant changes. Adaptations had their moments of sudden shift, yet these must not be confused with absolute points of origin. We have attempted to demonstrate that the earlier causes identified here and there are themselves subject to prior factors. In order to explain fully those earlier causes, we have explored such matters as the origins of the soft left in the 1970’s, the discrediting of the revisionist tradition under Wilson and Callaghan and even something as specific as the internal dynamics of the campaign for constitutional change between 1979 and 1981. An identification of the point origin in the transformation is itself a simplification since there were always prior significant causes. (Lent, A, 1997, 12 and Heffernan, R, 1998, pp8-12)

Another main point to make is that the language of class structure and inequality has vanished from ‘New’ Labour’s lexicon. All too often, Tony Blair asserted, “we were concerned with the distribution of the national cake between profits and wages, and too little concerned with increasing the size of the cake itself”. (Blair, T, 1997, p 58). The discourse of class has been regarded as old-fashioned. Indeed the conception of a social order composed of structurally-differentiated social positions to which correspond markedly disparate life-chances cannot be easily reconciled with image of a fluid and...
individualistic society based on free and voluntary transactions which heavily influences the Government’s thinking. What matters is less how resources are distributed than whether all people have the opportunity to better themselves by dint of effort, ability and enterprise. ‘New’ Labour has redefined its representational role as a business-friendly party. ‘New’ Labour is pro-business, pro-enterprise (Osler David, 2002), it is believed that there is nothing inconsistent in encouraging people to be enterprising, make colossal profits and a ‘just’ and ‘decent’ society.

The electorate has changed, and the party’s image, structure and product have changed. ‘New’ Labour saw a shift in the market; it identified a new consumer need and a market opportunity. Through research, it developed a product and a strategy for placing it, found a chief salesman -Blair- who could embody the company’s values, and oriented itself so as to claim the future. Therefore, ‘New’ Labour’s relationship with the media is that its image and style has been developed. It was a response to developments in the electronic media, to the overall social formation and developments that make plain the extent to which government is just a signal point in much larger networks and flows of power and resistance.

To conclude with, ‘Old’ Labour under Gaitskell failed to face the British/Western dislike of collectivism; Wilson attempted to ‘modernise’ and make of Britain a ‘New’ country, in order to stop Britain’s Decline. Kinnock, Smith and Blair have stressed on the need to ‘modernise or die’. For they believed that without modernisation, adaptability, creativity, ‘Labour’ and Britain would fail to keep the pace, and fail to fulfil their aims. The more recent growth area, in today’s advanced countries, has been in the importance of knowledge, reflected in the increased readiness of firms to train their staff, work at more long-term learning, and pay for them to take MBAs and so on. There has also been the growth of the corporate university dedicated to the permanent re-skilling of the work force.

Ultimately, Blair sought to ‘modernise’ the state by bringing it in one with business best practice (rather than find ways of changing business so that it acts in accordance with the interests or wishes of the people). This is symptomatic of the times. Business is believed to act in the best interests of the people, as it is people who are the customers and competition will engender the right results. Having closed off the option of intervening in the private affairs of business, Blairism attempted instead to make the public services more like modern businesses. Modernisation came to get rid off of state bureaucracies. (Osler David, 2002, pp 86-89) The rhetoric of modernisation could be seen to function as a levy to win the electorate. The rhetoric is the emphasis on the nation and the way in which modernisation is embedded in Britishness itself. Unsurprisingly, perhaps The Christian faith provided three vital contributions to the success of New Labour - contributions vital to its initial electoral success, and to its subsequent success in Government too. Christian faith provided leadership, as a remarkably large proportion of the Government's leaders professed an active Christian faith.

It provided a new language, new linkages to groups and communities whose support proved to be critically important. There is nothing new in Labour professing Christian faith; the Party at its foundation in 1900 was a coalition of Marxists, Christian Socialists and Fabian middle class intellectuals. It is widely

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23 Central to contemporary Britain politics is the relationship between the media and the political parties. The media spend considerable attention on the personalities, policies and practice of national politicians and in turn the politicians and political parties expend a great deal of energy on media relations, image management and ‘spin doctoring’. For the politicians a central but largely unspoken assumption is that the media in general and the partisan press in particular, have either a potential or actual impact on the way the public think about and evaluate the political parties.

24 Mrs Thatcher famous slogan was ‘innovate or liquidate’ and Blatcher, i.e. the Thatcher clone - Blair- preferred to adopt the war cry of ‘modernise or die’
claimed that the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than Marxism. Tony Blair\textsuperscript{25} set out the key principles of ‘New’ Labour and spoke of his Christian faith. He highlighted the importance he attaches to prayer and worship. Such an appeal to the nation is not unique to Blair; indeed it can be found in the oratory skill of many leaders. Finding itself rooted in the history, traditions and character of the British people, the ‘Blair’ project presents itself as simply operating in conformity with them; Blair needed this kind of rhetoric to get to the heart of the British. The party needed a ‘team’, a ‘community’ of some sort to be the body that both experiences and undertakes modernisation. ‘New’ Labour needed it because it provided the Party - and Blairism- with a social or collective dimension that differentiates it from neo-liberalism; the ‘modernisation’ project introduced the dimension of civil society. It is project of which everyone is a part and having everyone in is a part of it. Here lies one of the things that define it and Blair found the ‘spin doctors’ with the help of the persuasion ‘industry’ (media) to carry his project and make it acceptable to the British

Notes and references

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\textsuperscript{25}Tony Blair, the principal architect of ‘New’ Labour, is a Christian Socialist. In a series of three television interviews examining his five years in office, he spoke about his Christian convictions and their impact on his life. (BBC Television, 2002). In New Britain: my vision of a young country, Tony Blair had set out the key principles of ‘New’ Labour and gave a chapter to his Christian faith. He highlighted the importance he attaches to prayer and worship
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