

Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite

›Class‹ in the Development of British Labour Party Ideology, 1983–1997*

This article examines the nature of the ›modernisation‹ of the Labour Party between 1983 and 1997. After losing to Margaret Thatcher in 1979, Labour spent eighteen »wilderness years« in opposition; after 1983 Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair (and to a lesser extent John Smith) undertook a process of ›modernisation‹, and Blair won a landslide victory in 1997.¹ But modernisation was controversial at the time, and has remained so since, particularly because opponents within the Labour Party claimed that modernisation represented a capitulation to ›Thatcherism‹ and thus the abandonment of Labour's traditions.² Drawing on my larger project on the place of ›class‹, ›community‹ and ›individualism‹ in British political ideologies of left and right between 1969 and 1997, this paper assesses the nature of Labour Party modernisation by examining rhetoric and ideas about the subject of ›class‹, the ›working class‹, ›socialism‹ and ›social democracy‹. It challenges the claims of anti-modernisers that New Labour abandoned the working class and class-based appeals, thus hollowing out collectivism or ›class politics‹. In fact, there was an active attempt to understand and connect with the lives of a majority centre-ground of what the modernisers called ›ordinary people‹, many of whom might traditionally have been thought of as ›working class‹, and many of whom certainly came from working-class backgrounds. The appeal to these voters was no longer couched in terms of ›class‹; this did not, however, entail an abandonment of policies designed to benefit the majority, and to improve the living standards of working people. Collectivism remained at the heart of New Labour politics, though importantly, the concept of socialism was reoriented to mean collectivism, in opposition not to capitalism *tout court*, but to the selfish individualism which the modernisers associated with the Thatcher years.

I start by examining the place ›class‹ occupied in Labour Party traditions before 1983, and the meanings given to the terms ›class‹ and the ›working class‹. This introduces a discussion of the methodology I use to interrogate rhetoric, language and ideology, drawing on techniques from a range of historiographical traditions, from the history of political thought, political science and the ›New Political History‹. The substantive body of the essay begins by mapping the wide range of narratives of the ›decline of class‹ circulating in left-wing circles in Britain in the late 1970s and 1980s, suggesting that Labour modernisers were selective users of narratives of the ›decline of class‹. I then examine what use they put these narratives to, analysing rhetoric about class, the ›working class‹ and ›middle

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1 »The wilderness years« was the name of a BBC documentary about the Labour Party between 1979 and 1995 which aired in 1995.

2 Contemporaries from the revisionist wing of Labour, as well as from a New Left milieu, charged that Blair was a ›Thatcherite‹; eg. *Stuart Hall*, Son of Margaret, in: *New Statesman*, 6 October 1994; *id.*, The Great Moving Nowhere Show, in: *Marxism Today*, November/December 1998, pp. 9–14; *Roy Hattersley*, Why I'm No Longer Loyal to Labour, in: *The Guardian*, 26 July 1997. See also, for example, *Simon Jenkins*, *Thatcher and Sons. A Revolution in Three Acts*, London/New York 2006.

class< under Kinnock and then Blair, and examining the language of ordinariness and work that was used in place of a language of ›class< to denote a majoritarian constituency in the ›middle<. The final section of the article draws on work from think-tanks, political scientists and historians to examine the policies New Labour put in place to improve the economic position of this constituency.

I. THE SEMANTICS OF ›CLASS< IN THE HISTORY OF THE LABOUR PARTY: CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

›Class< and ›socialism< had always occupied contested positions in Labour Party traditions before 1983. As Ross McKibbin pointed out in a seminal article in 1984, the lack of a mass Marxist or rejectionist socialist party in early twentieth century Britain was an apparent conundrum. The British Labour Party differed dramatically from almost all the other major European working-class parties in the Second International. This might appear particularly surprising given that Britain was at the forefront of industrialisation, and was where Marx wrote »Capital« and Engels observed the slum life of the new urban industrial labouring poor. But the Labour Party was never Marxist (the Marxists in the Social Democratic Federation left the newborn Labour Party in 1901), and had »serious debates« from its beginnings in the Labour Representation Committee of 1900 over whether or not it should even call itself a ›socialist< party.³ Similarly, there were from the early years debates over who the Labour Party aimed to represent; these were uneasily resolved in Clause IV of the 1918 constitution, written by middle-class Fabian Sidney Webb, which famously committed the party to secure for »workers by hand or by brain« the fruits of their industry, on the basis of »the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange«⁴; this was typically taken to mean nationalisation. This clause represented a fragile compromise: it bound ›socialism< to nationalisation in Labour Party doctrine, and it suggested that the party's constituency would include the progressive intellectual sections of the middle classes. As Laura Beers has shown, Labour's image in the first half of the century was strongly rooted (as its name suggests) in the working class of heavy industry and the trade unions (quite naturally, given that the party grew out of the trade unions' desire to protect their interests); but elements within the party also consistently advocated a »national«, cross-class appeal.⁵ The class basis of the Labour Party, and its very nature – as a socialist, social democratic, or ›labourist< party – have, ever since, been the subject of heated debate within the party itself and among historians and commentators.⁶

3 Ross McKibbin, *Why Was there No Marxism in Great Britain?*, in: *The English Historical Review* 99, 1984, pp. 297–331, here: p. 297; see also Duncan Tanner's work on the importance of revisionist socialism and ethical radicalism as formative influences on early leaders like Ramsay MacDonald: *Duncan Tanner, Ideological Debate in Edwardian Labour Politics: Radicalism, Revisionism and Socialism*, in: *Eugenio F. Biagini/Alastair J. Reid* (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism. Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1991, pp. 271–293.

4 *The Labour Party, Constitution: Adopted at the London Conference, February 26, 1918, and Amended at Subsequent Conferences to October, 1924*, qu. in: *Richard Jobson*, ›Waving the Banners of a Bygone Age‹: Nostalgia and Labour's Clause IV Controversy, 1959–60, in: *Contemporary British History* 27, 2013, pp. 123–144, here: p. 123.

5 On Labour's political communications in its first half-century, see *Laura Beers*, *Your Britain. Media and the Making of the Labour Party*, Cambridge, MA 2010.

6 On ›labourism< see *Eric Shaw*, *Labourism*, in: *Raymond Plant/Matt Beech/Kevin Hickson* (eds.), *The Struggle for Labour's Soul. Understanding Labour's Political Thought since 1945*, London/

In 1989, Kenneth Morgan, later made a Labour peer, traced the fortunes of ›socialism‹ and ›social democracy‹ in the Labour Party, arguing that Labour had been consistently dominated by Social Democracy, though there had always been proponents of »more aggressive, class-conscious forms of socialist doctrine« within the party, muddying the picture.⁷ In the two decades after the Second World War the moderate social democratic vision of thinkers like Evan Durbin and Tony Crosland increasingly prevailed within the Labour Party, reaching its apotheosis with the leadership of Hugh Gaitskell, who attempted to revise Clause IV in 1959–1960 – a symbolic but failed gesture, opposed by the ›Bevanites‹ within the party, who appropriated the label of the ›left‹ for themselves.⁸ Harold Wilson (leader from 1963–1976) claimed to be a socialist, but, Morgan argued, had jettisoned »much of the socialist baggage«, and had »little place« for »Clause Four, controls, [or] class-war dialectic«. ⁹ With Wilson’s and James Callaghan’s governments running into major difficulties in the 1960s and 1970s, however, the 1979 defeat saw the culmination of an unusual rise in influence of ›socialism‹ within the Labour Party; Michael Foot won the leadership and the left won several major battles.¹⁰ Within just two years, the assertiveness of the left wing provoked four major Labour figures to leave the party to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP).¹¹ The moment of socialist dominance was very short-lived, however, and the left was routed with the major electoral defeat of 1983; the election was fought under a manifesto which was denounced by those on the Labour right, such as MP Gerald Kaufman, who called it »the longest suicide note in history«. ¹² In the wake of the 1983 defeat, Neil Kinnock was elected leader, and, though from the soft left of the party, proceeded to lead it over the next nine years down the route of ›modernisation‹; the pace of modernisation intensified after the loss of the 1987 election, where Labour was generally thought to have had the slicker presentational machine. Unpopular policies, particularly nationalisation and unilateral nuclear disarmament, were

New York 2004, pp. 187–205; as formulated by the Marxist John Saville in 1973, ›labourism‹ was little more than a pejorative term for a social democratic programme which aimed to improve the position of the working class through the existing system; the term also implied that Labour was imbued with the (limited) ethos of the trade unions.

7 *Kenneth O. Morgan, Socialism and Social Democracy in the British Labour Party 1945–1989*, in: *AfS* 29, 1989, pp. 297–325, here: p. 324.

8 See *Jobson, ›Waving the Banners of a Bygone Age‹*; various historians have posited Gaitskell’s and Crosland’s revisionism as precursors of 1980s modernisation, for example: *Martin Francis, Mr Gaitskell’s Ganymede? Re-assessing Crosland’s The Future of Socialism*, in: *Contemporary British History* 11, 1997, pp. 50–64; *Tudor Jones, Remaking the Labour Party. From Gaitskell to Blair*, London 1996.

9 *Morgan, Socialism and Social Democracy*, p. 314.

10 On the rise of the left, see: *Paul Whiteley, The Labour Party in Crisis*, London 1983; *Patrick Seyd, The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, Basingstoke 1987; *Eric Shaw, The Labour Party Since 1979. Crisis and Transformation*, London/New York 1994; *Lewis Minkin, The Contentious Alliance. Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, Edinburgh 1992; *Steven Fielding/Duncan Tanner, The ›Rise of the Left‹ Revisited. Labour Party Culture in Post-war Manchester and Salford*, in: *Labour History Review* 71, 2006, pp. 211–233; *Lawrence Black, The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951–64. Old Labour, New Britain?*, Basingstoke/New York 2003.

11 Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams; on the SDP, see *Ivor Crewe/Anthony King, SDP. The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party*, Oxford/New York etc. 1995.

12 Kaufman’s denunciation was widely reported, see, for example, *Martin Pugh, Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*, London 2011, p. 372. The manifesto called for withdrawal from the EEC, re-nationalisation of recently privatised industries, and unilateral nuclear disarmament; see *Labour Party Manifesto, 1983*, URL: <<http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1983/1983-labour-manifesto.shtml>> [30.6.2013].

ditched. Over time, the influence of trade unions was curtailed somewhat, though the unions remained Labour's key source of funding.¹³ In 1989, Morgan concluded that Kinnock's brand of modernisation could be seen simply as a movement back towards the »kind of social democratic consensus« that had characterised the party since 1900.¹⁴

In the 1992 General Election, Labour failed to win despite the Tories' unpopularity, and Major's perceived weakness as leader. Kinnock resigned and was replaced by John Smith, who passed an important reform in the form of »One Member One Vote«, but who did not share most of the modernising sympathies of Kinnock and Blair. Smith rejected the idea of further reform and called for simply »one more heave«. ¹⁵ On Smith's sudden death in 1994, Labour got its arch-modernising leader in the form of Tony Blair, who declared the inauguration of »New Labour« in his conference speech of the same year, and who went even further than Kinnock in cutting ties with unions, seeking different sources of party funding, and embracing the free market.¹⁶ In 1995 he amended Clause IV, marking a decisive break with the totemic policy of nationalisation.¹⁷ In 1997, »New« Labour won a landslide victory, but the nature of the »project« was always controversial. Some historians, as Morgan had done, continued to focus on continuity between New Labour modernisers and earlier revisionist strands within the party.¹⁸ But others asserted that the break was more dramatic and fundamental.¹⁹

Kenneth Morgan's treatment of »socialism« and »social democracy«, wide-ranging and insightful though it is, demonstrates some of the limitations of earlier approaches to the history of political ideologies. Morgan tends to view »socialism« and »social democracy« as ideologies which can be given timeless definitions (socialism aims to transform the

13 The place of the unions in modernisation is contentious: Diane Haytor has argued that moderate unions were key to reasserting the control of the leadership over the party in the mid-1980s; she suggests they were unfairly sidelined and demonised after the 1992 election by modernisers who had always been hostile to unionism; see: *Dianne Hayter, Fightback! Labour's Traditional Right in the 1970s and 1980s*, Manchester 2005.

14 *Morgan, Socialism and Social Democracy*, p. 323.

15 See, for example, *Peter Mandelson, The Third Man. Life at the Heart of New Labour*, London 2010, pp. 149ff. The focus of this essay is principally on Kinnock and Blair; I do not discuss John Smith at any length because of his short period as leader, the fact that he never led Labour into a General Election, and above all because he was not wholly committed to »modernisation« in the way that Kinnock and Blair were.

16 On the development of New Labour policy and performance in power, see: *Anthony Seldon, Blair*, London 2004; *Stephen Driver/Luke Martell, New Labour*, Cambridge 2006; *Anthony Seldon, Blair's Britain, 1997–2007*, Cambridge/New York etc. 2007; *Polly Toynbee/David Walker, The Verdict. Did Labour Change Britain?*, London 2010; *Patrick Diamond/Michael Kenny (eds.), Reassessing New Labour. Market, State and Society under Blair and Brown*, Chichester 2011.

17 See *Peter Riddell, The End of Clause IV, 1994–95*, in: *Contemporary British History* 11, 1997, pp. 24–49.

18 For example: *David Coates, Labour Governments. Old Constraints and New Parameters*, in: *New Left Review* 219, 1996, pp. 62–78; *Tim Bale, The Logic of No Alternative? Political Scientists, Historians and the Politics of Labour's Past*, in: *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 1, 1999, pp. 192–204; *Steven Fielding, The Labour Party. Continuity and Change in the Making of »New« Labour*, Basingstoke/New York 2003; *James E. Cronin, New Labour's Pasts. The Labour Party and its Discontents*, Harlow 2004; *Stephen Meredith, Mr Crosland's Nightmare? New Labour and Equality in Historical Perspective*, in: *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 8, 2006, pp. 238–255.

19 For example: *Leo Panitch/Colin Leys, The End of Parliamentary Socialism. From New Left to New Labour*, London 1997; *Colin Hay, The Political Economy of New Labour. Labouring under False Pretences?*, Manchester 1999; *Richard Toye, »The Smallest Party in History?« New Labour in Historical Perspective*, in: *Labour History Review* 69, 2004, pp. 83–103.

capitalist system; social democracy is more reformist).²⁰ But this often looks unsatisfying: for example, while some revisionists preferred the term ›social democratic‹, others felt it perfectly proper to label their ideas ›socialist‹ – such as Durbin and Crosland.²¹ Morgan’s definitions clearly do not always fit with those that contemporaries gave to these contentious terms, and misses the fact that key battles were *fought over* and *through* the meanings of ›socialism‹ and ›social democracy‹. Much recent historiography has demonstrated the need for historians to put these linguistic nuances and shifts at the centre of our study.

In many ways, historians of political thought have led the way; Quentin Skinner’s work on early modern political thought, for example, has long focused on the ways in which concepts get their meanings from context, and has shown that politicians’ arguments in one debate can subsequently constrain their room for manoeuvre in words and in actions.²² Historians working in other traditions have also come to argue for the importance of political rhetoric and language. In his work on Stanley Baldwin’s interwar Conservatism, Philip Williamson argued that political ideologies are both developed and revealed over time in speeches and public statements, as politicians have to present their ideas to the electorate. Public rhetoric thus reveals and structures politicians’ beliefs and framework for thinking.²³ Political scientist Michael Freeden has argued that political ideologies should be seen as »distinctive configurations of political concepts« creating »specific conceptual patterns from a pool of indeterminate and unlimited combinations«; thus historians need to study the way concepts are defined in relation to each other, and the way priorities shift over time to bring about change.²⁴ The ›linguistic turn‹, and postmodernist or poststructuralist ideas associated with it, have also pushed historians to pay attention to discursive battles over the meaning of words, and the power language has to construct the world, as Willibald Steinmetz has sketched out.²⁵ Drawing on these influences, I examine in this article debates over changes in the ›class‹ structure in Britain, the Labour Party’s class constituency, and the nature of modernisation as socialist, social democratic or Thatcherite. My purpose is, first, to place the rhetoric used by modernisers about ›class‹ in the context of ongoing debates in the 1980s and 1990s with both other factions on the left and with the Tories; and second, to take ›New Labour‹ seriously as an ideology.²⁶ New Labour has often been dismissed as

20 Though it is sometimes slightly unclear whether Social Democrats do also count as ›socialists‹ in some sense, as when Morgan suggests that »Socialism has been a force of great intellectual distinction and political dynamism in twentieth-century Britain. The Webbs, Tawney, Cole, Laski, Strachey, Durbin, Jay, Crossman and Crosland have contributed to a central pivot of modern British history«; *Morgan, Socialism and Social Democracy*, p. 324.

21 *E. F. M. Durbin, The Politics of Democratic Socialism. An Essay on Social Policy*, London 1940; *Anthony Crosland, The Future of Socialism*, London 1956.

22 See, for example, *Quentin Skinner, Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas*, in: *History and Theory* 8, 1969, pp. 3–53.

23 *Philip Williamson, Stanley Baldwin. Conservative Leadership and National Values*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1999, pp. 15ff.; see also *Philip Williamson, The Doctrinal Politics of Stanley Baldwin*, in: *Michael Bentley* (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine. Essays in British History Presented to Maurice Cowling*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1993.

24 *Michael Freeden, Ideologies and Political Theory. A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford/New York etc. 1996, p. 4.

25 *Willibald Steinmetz, New Perspectives on the Study of Language and Power in the Short Twentieth Century*, in: *id.* (ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes*, Oxford/New York etc. 2011, pp. 3–52, here: pp. 4ff.; for an example of recent work which interrogates the highly contested term ›affluence‹ in postwar British politics, see *Stuart Middleton, »Affluence« and the Left in Britain, c. 1958–1974*, in: *English Historical Review* (forthcoming 2014).

26 Though I use the term ›ideology‹ not, of course, in the sense Blair used the term – to signal a rejection of what he saw as the extremism of the Labour left in the 1980s, as when he declared in 1995 that the age of »grand ideologies« was over; see *Tony Blair* qu. in: *Andrew Grice, What’s*

superficial or derivative by detractors, but this article demonstrates that it was not merely an incoherent jumble of policies triangulating between different groups.

Understanding the nature of ›modernisation‹ is difficult because over the course of the 1980s and 1990s the terms used to describe Labour Party doctrine changed. As I have noted, many moderate, revisionist thinkers in the 1940s and 1950s called their thinking ›socialist‹. By the late 1970s, prominent figures within Labour were foregrounding the language of ›democratic socialism‹, in order to stress their commitment to the parliamentary process, in contrast to entryist groups infiltrating the party, like Militant (originally the Revolutionary Socialist League), whose ultimate aim was revolution and whose extremism was felt to be scaring off potential Labour supporters.²⁷ Under Kinnock, the label ›social democratic‹ was eschewed – particularly because many within the Labour Party felt that the breakaway Social Democratic Party had betrayed the Labour movement. In a Fabian tract in 1986, Kinnock championed the ›third way‹ of democratic socialism, which he saw as different from both the ultra-left and from pale Social Democracy, which, he suggested, lacked a critique of capitalism, which was vital to democratic socialism.²⁸ ›Socialism‹ was still Kinnock's favoured term. Under Blair, however, ›social democracy‹ began to supplant the language of socialism, though ›democratic socialism‹ did still appear, for example, in the reworded Clause IV.²⁹ In 1996, Peter Mandelson and (ex-Liberal) Roger Liddle argued that New Labour was ›firmly in the social-democratic tradition‹.³⁰ They argued that »the general public is not at all interested in the bandying around of labels. If it is socialist to be committed to community and a strong society, to justice and fairness, to maximising the life changes of all our people and preventing the exclusion from society of any, then New Labour is socialist«; thus New Labour *could* be called ›socialist‹, but it was not entirely clear that Mandelson would choose to do so.³¹ In 1996 Blair declared that Labour was the party of »modern social democracy«, and argued that »social democrat« and »democratic socialist« were »interchangeable terms«.³² In 2002, Mandelson and Liddle stressed even more strongly that New Labour should be seen »in the proud philosophical tradition of modernising social democracy«, and called on New Labour to »trace its roots more openly and directly« to this tradition.³³ The first question this article addresses is the significance of this shift in language from ›democratic socialist‹ to ›social democratic‹. This is a contentious question because, as I have already indicated, a key debate about New Labour has been whether it represented a capitulation to ›Thatcherism‹ and thus the abandonment of Labour's ›socialist‹ heritage.³⁴

Left?, in: *The Sunday Times*, 23 July 1995; see also the speech Blair made after his constituency result was declared on 1 May 1997, qu. in: *Andrew Rawnsley*, *Servants of the People*. The Inside Story of New Labour, London 2001, p. 9.

27 See *Michael Crick*, *The March of Militant*, London 1986.

28 *Neil Kinnock*, *The Future of Socialism*, Fabian Society Pamphlet no. 509, London 1986; and see List of terms used by NK, April–July 1985, *The Papers of Neil Kinnock*, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, KNNK 2/1/93, which comprised the following at the top of the list of ›positive‹ terms: »Democratic Socialist policies«; don't keep »quiet about socialism«; we »Socialists«; »Social justice«; »we are Democratic Socialists«.

29 *Riddell*, *The End of Clause IV*.

30 *Peter Mandelson/Roger Liddle*, *The Blair Revolution. Can New Labour Deliver?*, London 1996, p. 4.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 29ff.

32 *Andrew Grice*, *The End of Socialism*, in: *The Sunday Times*, 1 September 1996.

33 *Peter Mandelson*, *The Blair Revolution Revisited*, London 2002, pp. x and xxviii–xxix.

34 The contemporary debate over whether modernisation was a capitulation to Thatcherism has been repeated in the political science and historical literature: see, among others, *Michael Freedon*, *True Blood or False Genealogy. New Labour and British Social Democratic Thought*, in: *The*

The place of ›class‹ and the ›working class‹ within New Labour ideology is even more contentious, and again can be traced back to the apparently mixed messages prominent figures within the self-defined ›modernising‹ camp appeared to give on the subject. In 1996, for example, Tony Blair suggested that the »whole purpose« of his changes to Labour was »to escape from being simply a narrow, class-based party«.³⁵ Charles Clarke, Neil Kinnock's Chief of Staff and later Home Secretary under Blair, told journalist Andrew Rawnsley that Blair was »pretty contemptuous of class politics«.³⁶ Peter Mandelson, who had been involved in the modernisation project since 1985, when he became Labour's Director of Communications, suggested in his autobiography that he, Gordon Brown and Blair saw their task after 1994 as ditching Labour's »class-defined prospectus«.³⁷ Given all this rhetoric about the ›end of class‹, it might be surprising to find both Blair and Brown in the mid-1990s talking about Britain as a class-bound society. But both did: Brown wrote in 1995 of the »crippling effects of the British class structure«³⁸, while Blair said in the following year that »[w]e have a class-ridden and unequal society«.³⁹ There is an apparent conundrum, then, as it seems that leading modernisers believed that in some senses Britain was still a class society, whilst also arguing that New Labour must move away from being a political project based on class or a movement based on the ›working class‹. The second question this article examines is, therefore, how modernisation changed the Labour Party's approach to ›class‹ and why.

This is a question which has often been answered in a hostile manner by those who argue that modernisation involved the abandonment of class analysis in general, and the working class in particular.⁴⁰ Such accusations continued even after Blair stepped down as leader in 2007; for example, in his campaign for the deputy leadership in that year, Jon Cruddas criticised Blair for effecting a supposed »retreat from class for perceived electoral advantage«, and charged that Blair turned Labour into a »middle class party«, fostering the view that the working class was »literally withering away«, and that »[c]lass, inequality and issues of power can be overcome by individual self-actualisation«.⁴¹ Journalist Owen

Political Quarterly 70, 1999, Special Issue, pp. 151–165; *id.*, The Ideology of New Labour, in: *ibid.*, pp. 42–51; Richard Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism. Political Change in Britain*, Basingstoke/New York 2000; Leo Panitch/Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism. From New Left to New Labour*, London 2001; Fielding, *Continuity and Change in the Making of ›New‹ Labour*; Matt Beech, *New Labour*, in: *Plant/Beech/Hickson, The Struggle for Labour's Soul*, pp. 86–102; Cronin, *New Labour's Past*; Driver/Martell, *New Labour*; Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons*; Pugh, *Speak for Britain*.

35 Grice, *The End of Socialism*; Anthony Giddens echoed this in a retrospective look at the New Labour project in 2010, stating that New Labour could »no longer represent sectional class interests alone«; Anthony Giddens, *The Rise and Fall of New Labour*, in: *New Statesman*, 17 May 2010, pp. 25–27.

36 Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, London 2010, p. 230.

37 Mandelson, *The Third Man*, p. 114.

38 Gordon Brown/Anthony Wright, Introduction, in: *eid.* (eds.), *Values, Visions and Voices. An Anthology of Socialism*, Edinburgh 1995, pp. 13–30, here: pp. 24ff.

39 Tony Blair, *My Vision for Britain*, in: Giles Radice (ed.), *What Needs to Change. New Visions for Britain*, London 1996, pp. 3–20, here: p. 7.

40 See, for example, *Tony Benn/Ruth Winstone, The End of an Era. Diaries 1980–1990*, London 1994, pp. 521–523, entry for 2 October 1987; Linda Bellos, qu. in: *Ronald Butt, New Bottle, Same Old Whine*, in: *The Times*, 2 October 1986; *Chris Mullin/Ruth Winstone, A Walk-on Part. Diaries 1994–1999*, London 2012, p. 164, entry for 18 May 1996; *Ruth Lister, From Fractured Britain to One Nation? The Policy Options for Welfare Reform*, in: *Renewal* 5, 1997, no. 3/4, pp. 11–23, here: p. 21.

41 Jon Cruddas, *After New Labour*, in: Tom Hampson (ed.), *Labour's Choice. The Deputy Leadership*, London 2007, pp. 25–36, here: pp. 25 and 27.

Jones made a strikingly similar argument in his popular polemic »Chavs«, arguing that New Labour attempted to »scrub class from the country's vocabulary« in order to »[skirt] the issue of inequality«.42 Both argued that the working class, if properly defined, still formed the majority in Britain, and both arguments were clearly designed to advocate a return to what the authors saw as a »proper« class politics.⁴³

Given the highly political nature of these claims, it is surprising to find just how frequently they have been repeated in academic studies of New Labour and in the nascent historiography. For example, political communications scholar Dominic Wring has charged that the »new right« (as he thought New Labour should most accurately be termed) had abandoned »class and poverty«⁴⁴; while political scientist Alan Finlayson has suggested that the modernisers relegated »class« to a »subjective perspective and cultural identity«, meaning that they had no language with which to talk about structured economic inequality, and, therefore, neglected it entirely.⁴⁵ Historian Eric Shaw has argued that »the whole notion of class structure and inequality has vanished from New Labour's discourse, dismissed as obsolescent«⁴⁶, while Norman Fairclough, in his study of New Labour's language, went even further, charging that »New Labour has abandoned even a residual orientation to collectivism and to social class«, talking an inherently individualistic language of »deals« which was opposed to »the traditional collectivism of the centre-left and the left«.47 And Robert Taylor has argued that Blair severed links with trade unions, which he saw as »relics of a bygone age of cloth caps, mills and pits«⁴⁸, turning Labour into a party of business and the middle class. Thus, the claim that New Labour abandoned »class« involves the arguments that New Labour severed ties with the working class, and stopped defending its interests; that abandoning the »working class« meant abandoning a majoritarian constituency in favour of the middle class and big business; and that because New Labour stopped using the language of class, they had no way to talk about, or tackle, poverty or inequality. These are highly political claims, mostly designed to refute the arguments of New Labour politicians, and are therefore deserving of some interrogation.

»Spin« has long been a source of controversy when it comes to judgements on New Labour. The introduction of new marketing professionals into the party machinery in the mid-1980s was contentious, partly because some of those who saw themselves as defenders of Labour's traditions felt threatened by the influx of influential, middle-class advisers like

42 Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonization of the Working Class*, London 2011, p. 98; unsurprisingly, Cruddas had much praise for Jones's book (though also some cautions), calling it »a bold attempt to rewind political orthodoxies; to reintroduce class as a political variable«; Jon Cruddas, *Book of the Week: Chavs. The Demonization of the Working Class* by Owen Jones, in: *The Independent*, 2 June 2011.

43 Cruddas, *After New Labour*, pp. 28ff.; Jones, *Chavs*; this has been a common move on the left as a way of shutting down arguments that »class« has changed and that Labour needs, therefore, to move away from class; for example, Eric Shaw also suggested in 1994, drawing on the work of J. H. Westergaard, that the »working class« should be seen as all those, white- and blue-collar, in routine jobs; Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979*; John H. Westergaard, *Class of '84*, in: *New Socialist* 15, January/February 1984, pp. 31–32.

44 Dominic Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*, Basingstoke/New York 2005, p. 123.

45 Alan Finlayson, *Back to Class: Lessons for the Labour Party*, in: *Diamond/Kenny, Reassessing New Labour*, pp. 165–177, here: p. 165.

46 Shaw, *Labourism*, p. 197.

47 Norman Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?*, London 2000, p. 40; see also John Welshman, *Underclass. A History of the Excluded 1880–2000*, London 2006.

48 Robert Taylor, *New Labour, New Capitalism*, in: *Seldon, Blair's Britain*, pp. 214–240, here: pp. 226ff.

Peter Mandelson and pollster Philip Gould, brought in to head up the new »Shadow Communications Agency«.⁴⁹ The media (in somewhat reflexive fashion) whipped up a storm around the idea that New Labour was a project driven by ›spin‹ in the 1990s.⁵⁰ Gould's use of focus groups was particularly contentious: some argued that focus groups were driving policy, and, what's more, that unrepresentative groups of swing voters in marginal (often middle-class) constituencies were the main subjects of focus groups.⁵¹ Ever since, there has been a debate over whether New Labour had no ideals, but was shaped merely by the desire to win.⁵² Norman Fairclough's analysis of New Labour's language was designed to show that it was a hollow project driven by the compulsion to come up with ever more effective ›weasel words‹ to attract voters.⁵³ However, there has recently been a less pejorative and more nuanced historical approach to the use of polling, focused not on criticising but on understanding how new polling techniques ›actively constructed core elements of the political process and changed the ways in which politics were understood‹, transforming political parties, but also the ›body politic‹ itself.⁵⁴ This article draws on such work to examine how the work of pollsters like Gould changed politicians' understandings of British society.⁵⁵

This leads me to a discussion of one final problem found in some of the historiography on New Labour: that is, a tendency to see changed understandings of British society as the result simply of objective social change, rather than taking into account the important influence of technologies and ideas. Many of the modernisers argued that modernisation was necessary because social changes had brought about the ›decline of class‹. This claim has sometimes been repeated without interrogation; for example, Robert Taylor has written that »the continuing decline of a skilled manual working class«, because of »[r]apid

49 See *Colin Hughes/Patrick Wintour*, *Labour Rebuilt. The New Model Party*, London 1990.

50 See, for example, *Bruce Anderson*, *Mandelson's Burden – Blair's Spin-doctor Divides Labour Party Against Itself*, in: *The Times*, 14 August 1995; *Seamus Milne*, *The Leader's Little Helper*, in: *The Guardian*, 11 February 1995. The BBC's »Panorama« ran a programme about New Labour's ›spin‹ in 1996; see: *Francis Wheen*, *Beeb Puts Blairites in a Spin*, in: *The Guardian*, 25 September 1996; and see work by BBC journalist Nicholas Jones, including: *Nicholas Jones*, *Sultans of Spin. The Media and the New Labour Government*, London 1999; *id.*, *The Control Freaks. How New Labour Gets Its Own Way*, London 2001.

51 See, for example, episode 4 of Adam Curtis's documentary series »The Century of the Self«, »Eight People Sipping Wine in Kettering«, first broadcast 7 April 2002. Philip Gould's »The Unfinished Revolution« was largely designed to argue that the methods of marketing helped the democratic process, aiding Labour in listening to, communicating with, connecting with, and leading its constituents: *Philip Gould*, *The Unfinished Revolution. How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, London 1998.

52 The media obsession with New Labour's ›spin‹ sparked a wave of interest in Labour's political communications, present and past, for example, *Bob Franklin*, *Packaging Politics. Political Communications in Britain's Media Democracy*, London 2004; *Martin Moore*, *The Origins of Modern Spin. Democratic Government and the Media in Britain, 1945–51*, Basingstoke/New York 2006; *Laura Beers*, *Whose opinion? Changing Attitudes Towards Opinion Polling in British Politics, 1937–1964*, in: *Twentieth Century British History* 17, 2006, pp. 177–205; *ead.*, *Your Britain*.

53 *Fairclough*, *New Labour, New Language*.

54 *Anja Kruke/Benjamin Ziemann*, *Observing the Sovereign. Opinion Polls and the Restructuring of the Body Politic in West Germany, 1945–1990*, in: *Kerstin Brückweh/Dirk Schumann/Richard F. Wetzell* et al. (eds.), *Engineering Society. The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880–1980*, Basingstoke/New York 2012, pp. 234–251, here: p. 239.

55 Gould was widely seen as a figure of major importance in the modernisation of Labour, and his death in 2011 led to the collection of a book of essays reflecting on his impact: *Dennis Kavanagh* (ed.), *Philip Gould. An Unfinished Life*, Basingstoke/New York 2012.

occupational changes in society« led to New Labour⁵⁶; electoral geographer Charles Pattie similarly suggested that New Labour's electoral strategy was a response to the decline of the manual working class and »dealignment«.⁵⁷ Geoffrey Foote did the same in his study of the Labour Party's political thought, while Steven Fielding rehearsed the sociological arguments of key political and social scientists in his »Continuity and change in the making of New Labour«, appearing to set them up as a straightforward ›reason‹ for New Labour.⁵⁸ And James Cronin has argued that modernisation in the 1980s was largely a re-run of revisionism in the 1950s and 1960s, the difference being that »while affluence was largely a prospect when it was first discussed [...] by the late 1970s it was *increasingly real*«. ⁵⁹ But social change is only ever described and understood through language. Paying attention to that language, and to the concepts and techniques used to measure and interpret social change, is thus vital. This article, therefore, begins by examining the roots of the modernisers' narratives of the ›decline of class‹ in 1980s Britain, in order to demonstrate that such accounts of social change were constructions with a political purpose, and not simply neutral descriptions of the world.

II. NARRATIVES OF THE ›DECLINE OF CLASS‹ IN 1980S BRITAIN

Shortly before the 1983 election, »Guardian« journalist Peter Jenkins wrote that if Thatcher won, 1979 would assume a retrospective significance as the »watershed election« in which long-term social changes, particularly the decline of the working class, finally meant that the Labour Party could no longer win.⁶⁰ In fact, by-elections in the late 1970s had already provided clues about Labour's growing problems; they were followed closely by most politicians, and would continue to be so throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, providing the most immediate barometer of social change and political fortunes.⁶¹ However, the 1983 election disaster (Labour polled just 27.6% of votes and was nearly overtaken by the self-consciously centre-ground, ›classless‹ SDP) was stimulus for a major stock-taking, and Jenkins' prediction came true.⁶² A consensus of sorts emerged from the debate, around the idea that Labour could not blame poor presentation or hostile media, but must undertake a serious re-evaluation, including examination of how society was changing. Two prominent voices in this debate were political scientist Ivor Crewe and Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm.

⁵⁶ *Taylor*, *New Labour, New Capitalism*, p. 238.

⁵⁷ *Charles Pattie*, *Re-electing New Labour*, in: *Steve Ludlam/Martin J. Smith* (eds.), *Governing as New Labour. Policy and Politics under Blair*, Basingstoke/New York 2004, pp. 16–33, here: p. 18.

⁵⁸ *Geoffrey Foote*, *The Labour Party's Political Thought. A History*, Basingstoke/New York 1997, p. 326; *Fielding*, *Continuity and Change in the Making of ›New‹ Labour*, pp. 79 and 86ff.; see also *Peter Kellner*, *The Death of Class-based Politics*, in: *Diamond/Kenny*, *Reassessing New Labour*, pp. 152–165.

⁵⁹ *Cronin*, *New Labour's Pasts*, p. 206 (emphasis added).

⁶⁰ *Peter Jenkins*, *The New Map of Mrs Thatcher's Britain*, in: *The Guardian*, 13 May 1983.

⁶¹ In the 1974 (October)–1979 Parliament, there were 30 by-elections; in 7 cases the seat changed hands. In five of these cases, Labour lost to the Tories, in one Labour lost to the Liberals, and in one the English Defence League lost to the Conservatives. *Fred W. S. Craig* (ed.), *Chronology of British Parliamentary By-elections, 1833–1987*, Aldershot 1987, pp. 242ff.; significant losses included Roy Jenkins' seat, Birmingham Stechford, which had been solidly Labour since the 1950s, and Ashfield, in the coalfields of Nottinghamshire, which had also been considered a Labour safe seat.

⁶² *David Butler/Gareth Butler*, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900–2000*, Basingstoke/New York 2000, pp. 236ff.

Hobsbawm's arguments about social change, from »The Forward March of Labour Halted?«, his famous Marx Memorial lecture of 1978 onwards⁶³, have often been discussed in the historiography as a source of inspiration for the modernising project.⁶⁴ His work was published in »Marxism Today« and often reprinted in the »Guardian«.⁶⁵ The complexity of Hobsbawm's thinking meant it could justify various different policy responses. He argued that while the vast majority of the population were still proletarians in the Marxist definition of the term, the class consciousness of the British labour movement had been built largely on the class identity of unionised manual workers in heavy industries. Since, Hobsbawm pointed out, the proportion of the workforce involved in such work had declined hugely in the postwar period⁶⁶, Labour's solid base was crumbling. Meanwhile, the growth of monopoly capitalism, nationalisation, and women's work had led to an increased sectionalism within the working class, an »economistic« consciousness that was damaging for the Labour Party's prospects.⁶⁷ The party must win back the working class by demonstrating that it stood for »their interests and aspirations«, but because this group was declining, Labour also needed to appeal »across class lines«, to »all who want democracy, a better and fairer society [...] »workers by hand and brain«.⁶⁸ Hobsbawm cautioned against pessimism, suggesting that »marxists are not economic and social determinists«, and arguing that if many of Labour's unpopular policies, like unilateralism, were explained properly the working classes would realise they were in their true interests.⁶⁹ Kinnock himself emphasised Hobsbawm's importance: he was quoted by Communist Party publication the »Morning Star« in 1983 claiming that Hobsbawm was »greater« than a »prophet«⁷⁰, and chaired a Fabian Society lecture by Hobsbawm at the 1983 Party Conference.⁷¹ Martin Jacques, editor of »Marxism Today«, stressed in 2013 how vital it was to have a major intellectual figure on the left making what was, in 1979, an »iconoclastic« argument about social change.⁷²

63 *Eric J. Hobsbawm*, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, in: *Marxism Today*, 1978, pp. 279–286, repr. in: *Martin Jacques/Francis Mulhern/Eric J. Hobsbawm* (eds.), *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, London 1981.

64 See, for example, the discussion of Hobsbawm in *Cronin*, *New Labour's Pasts*, pp. 206ff. and 304ff.; and see *Foot*, *The Labour Party's Political Thought*, p. 26; *Jones*, *Remaking the Labour Party*, p. 115; *Driver/Martell*, *New Labour*, pp. 19ff.; left-wing journalist Martin Kettle has pointed out the way in which Hobsbawm's 1978 lecture was mythologised as a turning point for the Labour movement: *Martin Kettle*, *Ed Miliband and Tony Blair Have More in Common than Those Stuck in the Past Can Allow*, in: *The Guardian*, 3 October 2012.

65 See, for example, *Eric J. Hobsbawm*, *Labour's Lost Millions*, in: *Marxism Today*, 1983, pp. 7–13; *id.*, *Labour: Rump or Rebirth?*, in: *Marxism Today*, 1984, pp. 8–12; *id.*, *Change the Party, not the Workers*, in: *The Guardian*, 3 October 1983; *Labour's Way Forward is with the Masses*, in: *The Guardian*, 20 February 1984; indeed, Martin Jacques said at the memorial for Hobsbawm held at Birkbeck College, University of London, 24 April 2013, that the »Guardian« never turned down an article of his.

66 In 1951 over two thirds of working British people were involved in manual work; by 1981, less than half the working population were manual workers; see *Duncan Gallie*, *The Labour Force*, in: *Albert Henry Halsey/Josephine Webb* (eds.), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, Basingstoke/New York 2000, pp. 281–323, here: p. 292.

67 *Hobsbawm*, *The Forward March of Labour Halted*, p. 285.

68 *Hobsbawm*, *Labour's Lost Millions*, p. 9.

69 *Hobsbawm*, *The Forward March of Labour Halted*, p. 285.

70 Qu. in: *R. W. Johnson*, *Labour's Most Effective Election Poster Would be the Iron Lady in Full Hectoring Cry*, in: *The Times*, 29 September 1986.

71 *Eric J. Hobsbawm*, *The Forward March of Labour Reversed? Labour Party Conference fringe meeting*, 1 October 1983, see *Fabian News*, September 1983.

72 *Martin Jacques*, speaking at the memorial for Hobsbawm held at Birkbeck College, University of London, 24 April 2013.

Hobsbawm gave Kinnock legitimacy. But Hobsbawm's was not the only contribution to Labour's thinking about sociological change in the 1970s and 1980s; other political scientists and sociologists also warrant consideration.

Ivor Crewe was one such political scientist who loomed large in the public debate. His arguments about social change were developed in a series of publications after 1974, and presented in numerous »Guardian« articles after 1983.⁷³ Crewe argued, first, that the size of the manual working class was decreasing, and what he called the »new« (prosperous, home-owning, often non-unionised) working class was expanding.⁷⁴ And second, he suggested that »class dealignment« was taking place: »expressive« voting, where a vote was cast for a party felt traditionally to represent the voter's social class, was declining, so that among »traditional« workers (unionised workers in heavy industries), as well as among Crewe's »new working class«, Labour needed to appeal not to class solidarity but to voters' individual needs and desires.⁷⁵ As we will see, these two arguments were strongly reflected in the modernisers' rhetoric about social change. This is, perhaps, not particularly surprising, for Crewe had numerous links with the Labour Party: he had worked on Labour's 1979 campaign⁷⁶, and in 1984 co-organised a conference involving academics, pollsters and campaign managers from all three main political parties to discuss the election of the previous year.⁷⁷ Those on the right of the Labour Party like Austin Mitchell had long been aware of his arguments: Mitchell highlighted the importance of the »class dealignment« thesis in a 1979 Fabian pamphlet⁷⁸, and Giles Radice, later author of the »Southern Discomfort« pamphlets which set out in the early 1990s to illuminate the attitudes of the »new working class«, also drew on Crewe's work in his own writing in the »Guardian«.⁷⁹ There was thus a powerful set of academic voices setting out arguments about social change and the decline of the working class in the early 1980s.

There were also important changes in marketing techniques in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which introduced new ways of segmenting and imagining the population. One of these was the »Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles« methodology (VALS), developed by American social scientist Arnold Mitchell, and set out in a 1978 paper from the Stanford Research Institute; Mitchell described the fragmentation of US society and demonstrated how and why the population now needed to be segmented into a far larger number of groups based on (as the title suggested) values, attitudes and lifestyles, rather than the cruder demographic, economic and occupational factors traditionally used.⁸⁰ Neil Stewart, Kinnock's

73 See particularly, *Ivor Crewe*, Do Butler and Stokes Really Explain Electoral Change in Britain?, in: *European Journal of Political Research* 2, 1974, pp. 47–92; *id./Bo Särilvik/James Alt*, Partisan Dealignment in Britain 1964–1974, in: *British Journal of Political Science* 7, 1977, pp. 129–190; *Bo Särilvik/Ivor Crewe*, Decade of Dealignment. The Conservative Victory of 1979 and Electoral Trends in the 1970s, Cambridge/New York etc. 1983.

74 *Ivor Crewe*, The Disturbing Truth behind Labour's Rout, in: *The Guardian*, 13 June 1983; see also *id.*, The Electoral North Marches South, in: *The Guardian*, 30 April 1984.

75 *Särilvik/Crewe*, Decade of Dealignment.

76 *Gould*, The Unfinished Revolution, p. 45.

77 *Martin Linton*, The Insiders' Guide to a Labour Nightmare, in: *The Guardian*, 24 February 1984; the papers were published as *Ivor Crewe/Martin Harrop*, Political Communications. The General Election Campaign of 1983, Cambridge/New York etc. 1986.

78 *Austin Mitchell*, Can Labour Win Again?, London 1979, p. 6.

79 See, for example, *Giles Radice*, In Search of a Manifesto that Will Capture the White Collar, Home-owning Labour Voters, in: *The Guardian*, 8 July 1983.

80 Mitchell went on to set out his nine-fold segmentation in *Arnold Mitchell*, The Nine American Lifestyles. Who We Are and Where We're Going, New York 1983. And see *Colin McDonald/Stephen King*, Sampling the Universe. The Growth, Development and Influence of Market Research in Britain Since 1945 (edited and introduced by John Goodyear), Henley-on-Thames 1996, p. 161; *Joe Moran*, Mass-Observation, Market Research, and the Birth of the Focus

Political Secretary between 1989 and 1992, highlighted the importance of this work⁸¹, which gave politicians a new way to imagine the electorate not based on occupation. Increasingly over the course of the 1980s, the Labour leadership became dissatisfied with the traditional polling, as undertaken by Bob Worcester, the party's regular pollster at »Market & Opinion Research International« (MORI – which he had founded in 1969).⁸² Worcester continued to use the industry-standard National Readership Survey (NRS) approach to segmentation, breaking the population into six groups, A, B, C1, C2, D, and E, based on occupation.⁸³ But a paper for Kinnock on approaches to polling in 1984 noted that the recent »endless books and articles on the changing nature of British Society and the nature of class« meant that a new approach to breaking down the electorate seemed desirable.⁸⁴ In 1986, another paper considered the potential use of »area demographics« techniques, developed by various British market research companies in the 1980s to segment local populations using both demographic and attitudinal/cultural factors.⁸⁵ By 1988, Gould and Mandelson were bringing in different pollsters with new approaches, leading to a near-complete breakdown of relations with Worcester.⁸⁶ This was the background to the coining of terms like ›Mondeo man‹, to describe narrow segments of the electorate based not only on income and occupation, but also on consumption habits and values (in the case of ›Mondeo man‹, the sort of person who drove a particular sort of mid-range family saloon).⁸⁷ Developments in marketing thus provided another spur for rethinking the segmentation of the electorate. Susan Igo has pointed out that »national polls and surveys« in the US »were as much responsible for creating a mass public as they were reacting to its arrival«; later techniques from the 1960s onwards which aimed to study »a newly diverse America« were always going to find the diversity they sought.⁸⁸ Segmentation tech-

Group, 1937–1997, in: *Journal of British Studies* 47, 2008, pp. 827–851, here: p. 846. The influence of such American techniques does not mean to say that the story of political marketing in Britain is one of simple ›Americanization‹ – see critiques of such a narrative in, for example, *Margaret Scammell*, *Designer Politics. How Elections are Won*, Basingstoke/New York 1995; *Stefan Schwarzkopf*, *Who Said ›Americanization‹? The Case of Twentieth-Century Advertising and Mass Marketing from a British Perspective*, in: *Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht* (ed.), *Decentering America*, Oxford 2007, pp. 23–72.

81 Author's interview with Neil Stewart, 28 May 2013.

82 See *Robert M. Worcester*, *British Public Opinion. A Guide to the History and Techniques of Public Opinion Polling*, Oxford 1991.

83 A comprises people in higher managerial, administrative or professional occupations, B intermediate middle class occupations, C1 supervisory or junior managerial, administrative or professional jobs, C2 skilled manual workers, D semi- and unskilled manual workers, and E casual workers and those dependent on state benefits.

84 *Dick Sorabji*, A different approach to polling data, 19 June 1984, KNNK 2/1/104.

85 The contribution of area demographics to political targeting, 21 July 1986, KNNK 2/1/92; the paper discussed three census-based neighbourhood classifications: ACORN from CACI Market Analysis, PIN from Pinpoint Analysis, and Superprofiles from Demographic Profiles Ltd. For a discussion of these techniques, see *Moran*, *Mass Observation, Market Research, and the Birth of the Focus Group*, p. 848.

86 See, for example, the letter from Worcester to Kinnock, 25 October 1988, KNNK 2/1/106.

87 Blair discussed an archetypal man ›polishing his Ford Sierra‹ during the 1992 election campaign in his 1996 conference speech: Blackpool, 1996, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=202>> [22.4.2013]. In 1993 the Sierra, a family saloon, was replaced by the Mondeo in Ford's range. By the mid-1990s, use of such terms was proliferating on left and right: see, for example, *Catherine Bennett*, *Classless Society That Never Was*, in: *The Guardian*, 16 October 1996.

88 *Sarah Elizabeth Igo*, *The Averaged American. Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public*, Cambridge, MA/London 2007, pp. 5 and 288.

niques like VALS could, in the same way in Britain, be responsible for creating a ›fragmented‹ public as much as they reacted to its development.⁸⁹

Though many of these academic voices and marketing techniques were available from the late 1970s, at least, Kinnock was cautious during his leadership campaign in 1983, wanting to win with a broad base of support⁹⁰; yet even at this point he was publicly arguing that British society had changed, requiring a response from Labour. His public statements picked up on themes developed by Hobsbawm and by Crewe. In a Fabian pamphlet where all the leadership candidates set out their pitch for the position, Kinnock wrote of Labour's ›failure to respond to a reshuffled class system‹; by contrast, his future deputy, right-wing Roy Hattersley, focused on values rather than on an analysis of social change in his manifesto.⁹¹ In a speech in July 1983, Kinnock argued that ›[t]he harsh electoral reality is that Labour cannot rely merely on a combination of the dispossessed, the ›traditional‹ working class and minority groups for the winning of power‹⁹², implying with the quotation marks around ›traditional‹ that the lines of class were being drawn too narrowly if the Labour Party saw its constituency as centred on manual workers in heavy industries; and in September, Kinnock suggested that Britain had seen ›old habitual voting patterns break down and electoral responses become more volatile‹, meaning better use must be made of marketing professionals.⁹³ This was not particularly radical, but it was enough to provoke headlines in some newspapers to the effect that Kinnock was ›preparing to woo middle class voters‹.⁹⁴

Kinnock was, no doubt, paying attention to the public debate about the reasons for Labour's defeat. He was also receiving advice from internal sources which stressed similar arguments about social change. The ›Labour Co-ordinating Committee‹ (LCC), a left-wing organisation set up in 1978 (and in its first three or four years closely linked to Tony Benn)⁹⁵ had been thinking about social change even before 1983. A 1982 pamphlet on ›mass politics‹ suggested baldly that there had been a decline in ›expressive‹, class-based voting, and ›more and more [voting] based instead on the political approaches and images of each party‹.⁹⁶ The 1983 election led to a widespread stock-taking, including among many on the left of the party⁹⁷, and after the defeat, the LCC Executive published an iconoclastic special issue of ›Labour Activist‹ entitled ›After the Landslide‹, which argued that ›working class collectivism has broken down to be replaced with a privatised life-style and new aspirations‹, and that to win, Labour would in future have to appeal to the ›aspirations of the upwardly mobile working class‹.⁹⁸ There were obvious ghosts of

89 A study of the development of market research in Britain, published in association with the Market Research Society, often used words like ›individualism‹ and ›fragmentation‹ in relation to the 1970s and 1980s, positing these as developments market researchers responded to; *McDonal d/ King/Goodyear*, *Sampling the Universe*, for example pp. 51 and 57.

90 See *Martin Westlake*, *Kinnock. The Biography*, London 2001, p. 221.

91 *Neil Kinnock*, in: *Labour's Choice*, ed. by Fabian Society, London 1983.

92 *Neil Kinnock*, in: *The Times*, 18 July 1983, qu. in: *Westlake*, *Kinnock*, p. 232.

93 *Neil Kinnock*, speech at Stoke-on-Trent, 12 September 1983, qu. in: *Westlake*, *Kinnock*, p. 222.

94 Mr Neil Kinnock, the Leading Contender for the Labour Party Leadership, *Is Preparing to Woo Middle Class Voters*, in: *The Sunday Times*, 11 September 1983.

95 *Paul Richard Thompson/Ben Lucas*, *The Forward March of Modernisation. A History of the LCC, 1978–1998*, Labour Co-ordinating Committee 1998, p. 2; *Peter Hain*, *Outside in*, London 2012, p. 132.

96 *Charles Clarke/David Griffiths*, *Labour and Mass Politics. Rethinking Our Strategy*, London 1982, p. 6; other contributors included Peter Hain, Eric Shaw, Nigel Stanley and Audrey Wise.

97 See note on Kinnock's campaign for the leadership, no author, June 1983, KNNK 2/1/20.

98 ›After the Landslide‹ issue, *Labour Activist*, LCC newsletter, 1983, KNNK 2/1/20; the LCC also put on a conference called ›Has socialism a future?‹, which stressed how ›out of touch‹ Labour was; see *Thompson/Lucas*, *The Forward March of Modernisation*, p. 4.

Crosland and the 1950s revisionists’ arguments about social change; but the LCC, as a left-wing Labour group, did not highlight these links.

Two LCC members who had been involved with the 1982 pamphlet, Nigel Stanley and Peter Hain, who had moved towards the Labour left, having been a Young Liberal, wrote to Kinnock in June 1983 suggesting that the party needed to »show some public awareness of the erosion of our working class base, particularly the ›upwardly mobile‹ section of it«, and build a »new popular coalition« for socialism out of the traditional base *and* what they, following Crewe, called the »new working class«; »[t]his could be part of our ›modernising socialism‹ appeal«, the authors suggested.⁹⁹ Hain reiterated this argument in a piece for »Tribune« written with Harriet Harman; they argued that »Labour has been steadily shedding support from the ›upwardly mobile‹ section of the working class«, to whom Thatcherism appealed with policies like council house sales; »[m]eanwhile, Labour’s principal appeal has been to the old, automatic class vote, where supporting the party has been habitual, and which in any case has been declining with the contraction of traditional manufacturing industry«.¹⁰⁰

Another internal note for Kinnock’s campaign also argued that Labour needed *both* the »more traditional working classes« *and* »those working class people who have achieved material, educational or social progress«.¹⁰¹ Thus private advice from left-wing Labour MPs and pressure groups, as well as from academics participating in the public debate, backed up Kinnock’s identification of a two-pronged social change, with an expanding aspirational »new working class«, and a general decline in »expressive«, class-based voting. The historiography has not largely recognised the sheer plurality of voices making these arguments about social change in the 1980s. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, to find that in 1986 Kinnock stressed the need to win over the »new working class« or »modern working classes«.¹⁰²

After the 1987 defeat, a core team of modernisers including Patricia Hewitt, Peter Mandelson, and pollsters Philip Gould and Deborah Mattinson advocated a sociological review, to be conducted by experts, of the changing social landscape.¹⁰³ »Labour and Britain in the 1990s« was presented to the Shadow Cabinet and National Executive Committee in 1988, and subsequently published as a pamphlet for the party at large. It stressed the same key points about the »decline of class«: first, that the »class composition of British society has been changing significantly since the early 1960s«, reducing »Labour’s share of the vote [...] by around 6 per cent«; and second, that »›traditional‹ class voting »may

99 Nigel Stanley and Peter Hain to Neil Kinnock, Robin Cook and Charles Clarke, ›Labour leadership election‹, 24 June 1983, KNNK 2/1/20. They subsequently allowed extracts from this note to be published in »Tribune«, blurring the lines between public and private debate over the meaning of social change for Labour: The Modernising of the Labour Party, in: Tribune 47, 7 October 1983, p. 9.

100 Peter Hain/Harriet Harman, Labour Cannot Afford to Be Only the Party of the Radicals and the Poor, in: Tribune 47, 29 July 1983, p. 2.

101 Note on Kinnock’s campaign for the leadership, no author, June 1983, KNNK 2/1/20.

102 Neil Kinnock, The Future of Socialism, in: M. M. Sankhdher/Subrata Mukherjee (eds.), Essays on Fabian Socialism, New Delhi 1991 (first pub. 1986), pp. 171–187, here: p. 173.

103 Gould, The Unfinished Revolution, pp. 84ff.; Hughes/Wintour, Labour Rebuilt, pp. 60ff. Andrew McIntosh, a Labour peer from IFF Research Ltd contributed data; Andrew Shaw and John Curtice from Liverpool University analysed polling from the last twenty-five years; Rex Osborn, Walworth Road political intelligence officer, analysed quantitative polling, and economist Paul Ormerod of the Henley Centre for Forecasting (more usually found producing forecasts for businesses or business federations on the future of their markets) predicted trends in the next decade (Ormerod had been on Stockwell council with Mandelson in early 1980s; Mandelson referred to him as a »fellow [...] moderate«; Mandelson, The Third Man, p. 64).

be of less force in the future [because] ›I've always voted Labour‹ is, by definition, true of a declining number of voters. And fewer voters see themselves as ›working class‹.¹⁰⁴ This last point had ›struck very forcibly‹ one of those carrying out focus groups for Labour in the mid-1980s, who reported back the worrying fact that almost all those who said they would vote Labour ›gave as their reason the fact that they had ›always voted Labour‹.¹⁰⁵ In the 1990s, sociologist Anthony Giddens offered a further analysis of the decline of tradition and what he celebrated in ›The Third Way‹ in 1998 as a ›new individualism‹; Giddens, it has often been noted, was claimed as an important influence by Blair and other modernisers in the 1990s.¹⁰⁶ But even before then, new forms of individualism had loomed large in the minds of modernisers in the Labour Party. As Frank Mort has pointed out, academic debates over the restructuring of capitalism in the 1980s usually saw ›fundamental changes in consumer demand‹ arising from a growth of individualism as of central importance. In this, the academic debates mirrored the narratives emanating from the world of market research, which stressed that new forms of consumption were ›driven by the appearance of intensified forms of individualism‹.¹⁰⁷ ›The Henley Centre for Forecasting‹, which was involved in ›Labour and Britain in the 1990s‹, was a particularly important market research organisation in this regard: in 1986 it produced an influential report, ›Planning for Social Change‹, which suggested that ›the authority of class [...] has declined‹, followed up with further reports on the same theme over the following years.¹⁰⁸ The huge increase in narratives about consumerism in 1980s Britain, and the explosion of the market research sector, traced by Mort, thus formed an important backdrop to the developing thinking of modernisers about a rise in individualism and concurrent decline in ›class‹.

Tony Blair's understanding of social change was stimulated by his experience as candidate in a 1982 by-election in Beaconsfield (which he lost, but which was important in his subsequent selection for the safe seat of Sedgefield in 1983), and bolstered by the work of Ivor Crewe. In a lecture he gave later that year, Blair commented that his experience canvassing on cheaper private housing estates and council estates suggested that the hard left was wrong – Labour did not lose because it was not socialist enough for the working class, as left-wing Labour activists such as Geoffrey Hodgson argued¹⁰⁹; rather Labour lost because ›there are growing numbers of young often socially upward-moving people who are simply not prepared to accept our basic ideology just because their forefathers did [...] we rely to a dangerous degree on the loyalty vote amongst older citizens‹.¹¹⁰

Blair referred approvingly to a 1982 essay in which Crewe argued that Labour lost in 1979 because of improvements in working class life over the past two decades which meant that working-class interests ›are not obviously served by the Labour Party's traditional faith in the steady growth of public expenditure, welfare benefits, trade union power and public ownership‹.¹¹¹ Three of Crewe's works found their way into the bibliography

104 Labour and Britain in the 1990s, Labour Party 1988, KNNK 2/1/96.

105 Brian Gosschalk, MORI, to Robin Cook, Patricia Hewitt, Labour Party, Personal reaction to group discussion findings, 11 October 1985, KNNK 2/1/104.

106 Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 35ff.

107 Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption. Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*, London 1996, p. 4.

108 *Ibid.*, pp. 104ff.

109 Geoffrey Hodgson, *Labour at the Crossroads. The Political and Economic Challenge to the Labour Party in the 1980s*, Oxford 1981.

110 Tony Blair, *The British Labour Party Today*, lecture, Murdoch University, Western Australia, August 1982, qu. in: Paul Richards (ed.), *Tony Blair. In His Own Words*, London 2004, p. 8.

111 Ivor Crewe, *The Labour Party and the Electorate*, in: Dennis Kavanagh (ed.), *The Politics of the Labour Party*, London 2010 (first pub. 1982), pp. 9–49, here: p. 45.

of Philip Gould's ›The Unfinished Revolution‹, the most for any political or social scientist except David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh's ›British General Election‹ series, demonstrating the continued engagement of the modernisers with Crewe's arguments.¹¹² Evidence from by-elections and the experience of defeat were important in stimulating Blair's thinking about social change. It is also clear that Blair, like Kinnock, was engaged with the public debates, both among left-wing intellectuals like Hobsbawm and academics like Crewe, to shape and bolster his thinking.

Kinnock and Blair both also identified the revisionists of the 1950s and 1960s as important influences on their own thinking about social change. In his 1987 Conference speech, Kinnock argued that those who had been damning about ›affluence‹ in the 1950s and 1960s had been wrong¹¹³; and in 1986 he wrote a pamphlet with the same name as Crosland's ›The Future of Socialism‹.¹¹⁴ In 1982, Blair suggested that ›Crosland was right in 1956 when he identified [...] major alterations in British society; in particular, the rise in living standards of sections of the working class and the emergence of a new white-collar class‹. (Though Blair thought Crosland had been wrong about other things, particularly in his faith in the state and in economic growth).¹¹⁵ Revisionism was present, thus, in the thinking of Kinnock as well as of Blair in the early 1980s; Kinnock, however, did not want to be seen to depart too quickly from his left-wing, Bevanite roots, and so did not stress the link back to revisionism as forcefully as he might have. Blair was wary in the 1990s of appearing too similar to any part of ›old‹ Labour, and hence did not often foreground the influence of revisionist thinking on his approach.¹¹⁶

Kinnock and Blair both argued in the 1980s that society had changed, with the decline of the traditional working class and ›class dealignment‹, and both argued that Labour would, therefore, have to change to survive. This analysis obviously had intellectual credentials, particularly in the work of Crewe and Hobsbawm. It is worth noting, however, that there were serious academic alternatives which laid more stress on the autonomy of politics and on the continuing salience of the working class as traditionally conceived, to which Kinnock certainly had access and which he glossed over. One such alternative came from Anthony Heath and colleagues, who argued that the majority of the working class still saw themselves as such, and would vote for a party that really seemed to represent their interests.¹¹⁷ Just as the authors of the ›Affluent Worker‹ study, published in 1969, had argued that the working class was still a distinctive group despite many workers

112 *Gould*, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. 421.

113 *Kinnock*, Conference speech, Brighton, 1987, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=193>> [22.4.2013].

114 *Kinnock*, *The Future of Socialism*.

115 *Blair*, *The British Labour Party Today*, pp. 17ff.

116 Many historians have pointed out how the ›New‹ formulation of ›New Labour‹ flattened out a much more complex and many-layered Labour tradition into the homogeneous category ›old‹. The lack of focus on New Labour's revisionist roots led to Mandelson's call that they be recovered in the introduction to the updated edition of ›The Blair Revolution‹ in 2002: *Mandelson*, *The Blair Revolution Revisited*. The desire to distance ›New‹ Labour from ›old‹ was seen across all areas of New Labour policy; as the ›Guardian‹ journalist Jonathan Freedland put it: ›the connective tissue running through the whole New Labour project was that it was ›Un-Labour‹. The architects of New Labour believed that whatever had been done by Labour in the past was almost always wrong. Therefore, unthinkingly and instinctively, when confronted by a fork in the road, they would take the other direction‹: Tom Cordiner interview with Jonathan Freedland, 11 July 2012, in: *Tom Cordiner*, *Zionism and Aspects of British Political Culture*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge 2013, p. 192.

117 *Anthony F. Heath/Sarah-K. McDonald*, *Social Change and the Future of the Left*, in: *Political Quarterly* 58, 1987, pp. 364–377, here: p. 374.

having more ›middle-class‹ incomes, Heath and his co-authors argued for the continued salience of class.¹¹⁸ They also stressed that what politicians said and did was important in stimulating class sentiment – or allowing it to fade.¹¹⁹ What made the impact, however, despite the authors' best efforts, was the simple headline that Labour's ›natural‹ support base had declined in real terms. This was the only message of their 1985 book reported in a ›Times‹ article which touched on it¹²⁰, and when Giles Radice discussed their work in 1987, he, too, simply pointed out that Heath had worked out that the ››natural‹ level of support in 1987 [...] was about 39 per cent for the Tories and only 35 per cent for Labour.¹²¹ Heath was later told that this finding was discussed by the Shadow Cabinet at an important meeting in the late 1980s, and perhaps influenced Labour's shift away from working-class imagery.¹²² Though Heath and his co-authors made a nuanced and far from reductive argument, most of this subtlety was lost in the public debate.

Yet another alternative view of the continuing importance of ›class‹ in British politics came from Gordon Marshall, in a book first published in 1988 which aimed to demonstrate through statistical analysis that social class still explained voting behaviour.¹²³ Kinnock had access to this work well before it was published, in 1985 or 1986: a paper collected in his archive asserted the continued importance of ›the language of class‹ and suggested that ›Labour gains to the extent that it succeeds in constituting and mobilising class interests by presenting issues in class terms, and reinforcing the formation of collectivities with shared class identities‹.¹²⁴ But Kinnock largely shied away from this analysis.

This serves to highlight the fact that the modernisers' view of the ›decline of class‹ was not particularly ›postmodern‹: it did not posit that all identities were ›fluid‹ or ›liquid‹ now, floating free from the material base.¹²⁵ Instead it was based on a relatively reductionist account of the way politics had to respond to changes in the economic and social base of society. This is, perhaps, unsurprising: the reductionist account was particularly useful because it supplied an *imperative* for changing the party.¹²⁶ Through the Kinnock and Blair years modernisers used sociological accounts of the ›decline of class‹ selectively. It is, therefore, unsurprising to find that one of Tony Blair's favourite soundbites was his argument that Labour had lost four General Elections between 1979 and 1992 because ›society had changed and we did not change sufficiently with it‹.¹²⁷ This provided a powerful justification for the changes Blair wanted to make. The second part of this article

118 John H. Goldthorpe/David Lockwood/Frank Bechhofer et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1969.

119 Anthony F. Heath/Roger Jowell/John Curtice, *How Britain Votes*, Oxford 1985; Anthony F. Heath, *Understanding Political Change. The British Voter, 1964–1987*, Oxford 1991.

120 Labour Conference at Bournemouth. Scargill wins Strike Cash Battle, in: *The Sunday Times*, 3 October 1985.

121 Giles Radice, *Labour's Path to Power. The New Revisionism*, Basingstoke/New York 1989.

122 Anthony F. Heath/John Curtice/Gabriella Elgenius, Individualization and the Decline of Class Identity, in: Margaret Wetherell (ed.), *Identity in the 21st Century. New Trends in Changing Times*, Basingstoke/New York 2009, pp. 21–40, here: p. 38, n. 3; MORI pollster Bob Worcester also recommended to the Polling Committee in early 1986 that they study ›How Britain Votes‹, see Bob Worcester (MORI) to Polling Committee, Labour Party, C2s: the skilled working class, 21 January 1986, KNNK 2/1/92.

123 Gordon Marshall, *Social Class in Modern Britain*, London 1989.

124 Gordon Marshall/Carolyn Vogler/David Rose et al., *The Decline of Class Politics?*, KNNK 2/1/67.

125 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000.

126 See Hughes/Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt*, pp. 60–63.

127 Tony Blair in: *Renewal*, 4 October 1992; Tony Blair in: *New Statesman*, 15 July 1994; he also repeated these words in the opening sequence of ›The Wilderness Years‹, BBC, 1995.

examines responses under Kinnock and Blair to their analysis of the ›decline of class‹ in postwar Britain.

III. RESPONDING TO THE DECLINE OF THE ›TRADITIONAL‹ WORKING CLASS

In the mid-1980s, newspaper reports suggested that Labour might hope to win a General Election by consolidating its hold on the Celtic fringe and northern strongholds, and relying on the SDP-Liberal Alliance to split the Tory vote in the south. But Kinnock and key allies were determined that Labour should remain a national force.¹²⁸ Robin Cook, Kinnock's Shadow Cabinet election strategist, had argued as early as July 1983, in a paper to the left-wing Tribune Group, that Labour must ›find room for the electorate‹; in other words, move away from a strategy that only worked in Labour heartlands, ›identify[ing] and focus[ing] on the 125 target constituencies we need to win‹, places like Norwich rather than industrial heartlands like Glasgow.¹²⁹ To remain a national party, Kinnock needed southern seats above all. Bob Worcester had long stressed the need to win C2s, the skilled, prosperous working class, who he saw as ›the battleground of the electorate‹.¹³⁰ After 1983, C1s, that is, routine *white-collar* workers like office workers, policemen and shop assistants, were also increasingly the focus of Labour Party strategists; as a paper for Kinnock in June 1985 put it, he must be seen to ›identify with and to be seen to be taking an interest in the lives of those who live in the suburbs‹.¹³¹ Philip Gould emphasised in 1985 that Labour needed to appear to ›represent the majority‹ and ditch its ›cloth cap image‹.¹³² Thus many elements within Labour stressed the need to appeal to the south east, the suburban towns of ›middle England‹, and the quintessential residents of these places, C1s, or white collar workers. This was a constituency widely regarded as vital to Thatcher's victories, and she was thought to have a particular affinity for them, which made the challenge all the greater.¹³³

Kinnock needed the ›new working class‹ to win; however, he also needed and wanted to retain Labour's links to the ›traditional working class‹, because of the party's historic identity, his roots in the Welsh mining community of Tredegar, and because after the formation of the Social Democratic Party in 1981, Labour's links to the traditional working class set the party apart from the breakaway right wing. This strategy was not, however, easy. The miners' strike in 1984/85 epitomised Kinnock's difficulties in pursuing this balancing act: as he put it in his 1984 Conference speech, he *had to* ›take sides‹, because he ›couldn't do otherwise with my background‹.¹³⁴ However, he also wanted to distance

128 *George Brock*, Labour – How Real the Revival?, in: *The Times*, 9 April 1986.

129 *Robin Cook*, paper to Tribune Group, *The Tribune Group: Finding Room for the Electorate*, July 1983, KNNK 2/1/67.

130 Bob Worcester (MORI) to Polling Committee, Labour Party, C2s: the skilled working class, 21 January 1986, KNNK 2/1/92; see also Research Proposals for the 1987/8 General Election, prepared on behalf of the Labour Party by MORI, March 1985, KNNK 2/1/105.

131 *Chris Child*, The Presentation of Labour's Approach to Suburban England, 29 June 1985, KNNK 2/1/67.

132 [Philip Gould], Communications review commissioned by the Campaigns and Communications Director of the Labour Party, 22 December 1985; Labour Party Archive, People's Museum, Manchester, Philip Gould papers.

133 The creation of the stereotype of ›Essex man‹ demonstrates how far this group was seen to be Thatcher's natural constituency; see *Bruce Anderson*, The One Thing Wrong with Essex Man, in: *The Spectator*, 29 March 1997.

134 *Neil Kinnock*, Conference speech, Blackpool, 1984, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=190>> [22.4.2013].

himself from many aspects of the strike, particularly the violence on the picket lines and the miners' leader, Arthur Scargill; hence Kinnock was not seen on a picket line until ten months into the strike, when he went to one in his own constituency.¹³⁵ In the event, he got the worst of both worlds, criticised for not supporting the strikers strongly enough, but still associated in the media with the strike (something the right was clearly keen to encourage). Thus early on in Kinnock's leadership, the miners' strike derailed attempts to break with the ›cloth cap‹ image. But the strategy was already firmly on the agenda from the start of Kinnock's time as leader.

Kinnock wanted to bring together a new coalition of ›traditional‹ and ›new‹ working class, and so attempted to re-imagine the term ›working class‹ to include both groups. As he put it in his 1985 Conference speech, *all* those who »only have their labour to sell« must be counted among the working classes, »no doubt about their credentials«.¹³⁶ In 1986, Kinnock stressed that the »new working class« enjoyed their prosperity and »increased expectations« largely thanks to Labour's efforts in the past (a point he had also made during his campaign for the leadership).¹³⁷ Blair later stressed the same point, for it allowed the modernisers to insist that prosperity must be celebrated by Labour *not least* because it was the result of Labour's past triumphs.¹³⁸ In his 1987 Conference speech, Kinnock called for Labour to celebrate »ordinary people getting on« and enjoying prosperity, like the docker who »owns his house, a new car, a microwave and a video, as well as a small place near Marbella«. Kinnock argued that this was certainly not pandering to the »middle class« or to »yuppies«.¹³⁹ One commentator nevertheless suggested that Kinnock was »using all his authority to tell his party that it ought no longer to be a class party«, a telling slippage in the way Kinnock's reimagining of the ›working class‹ was interpreted in the press.¹⁴⁰

In order to project Labour's appeal beyond its ›cloth cap‹ heartlands, Mandelson undertook a much-studied re-vamp of the party's image, with glossy brochures, slick policy launches, and, of course, the red rose as Labour's new symbol.¹⁴¹ This was widely interpreted in the press as an attempt to make Labour more »middle-class«: »Vivaldi, Brahms, and *Chariots of Fire*. That's the middle-class, middle-brow image of Neil Kinnock's new model Labour party«, as a »Times« column put it in 1986.¹⁴² (Vivaldi and Brahms were played at the launch of »Investing in People«, a glossy brochure if ever there was one; »Chariots of Fire« director Hugh Hudson worked on party broadcasts for Kinnock.) By-elections in the late 1980s were followed closely in Westminster, with candidates with good, middle-class credentials chosen for key seats, such as Kate Hoey in Vauxhall. Barbara Follett (Labour MP for Stevenage 1997–2010) was brought in to undertake a process

135 See *Westlake*, Kinnock.

136 *Kinnock*, Conference speech, Bournemouth, 1985, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=191>> [22.4.2013].

137 *Kinnock*, *The Future of Socialism*, p. 173; see also *Neil Kinnock* in: *Labour's Choice*, ed. by Fabian Society, London 1983.

138 *Tony Blair*, *Diary*, in: *London Review of Books* 9, 29 October 1987, p. 21; *id.*, *The Courage of Our Convictions. Why Reform of the Public Services is the Route to Social Justice*, London 2002, p. 4; *id.*, *A Journey*, London 2010, p. 41; and see *Mo Mowlam*, *What's Wrong with Being Middle Class?*, in: *Fabian Review* 104, January/February 1993, pp. 4–6.

139 *Kinnock*, Conference speech, Brighton, 1987, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=193>> [22.4.2013].

140 *Geoffrey Smith*, *The Labour Party Conference*, in: *The Times*, 30 September 1987.

141 On the re-branding of Labour under Kinnock see *Hughes/Wintour*, *Labour Rebuilt*; *Wring*, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*; *Peter Mandelson*, *Marketing Labour*, in: *Contemporary Record* 1, 1987, pp. 11–13.

142 *Atticus*, in: *The Sunday Times*, 19 October 1986.

of ›Folletting‹, that is, giving old-style Labour MPs a wardrobe makeover. It was widely reported in the press; the »Guardian«, for example, called it »transforming left-wing politicians into designer packages«, and even got mentioned in Parliament.¹⁴³ Neil Stewart, who as Kinnock's Political Secretary had responsibility for by-elections in these years, argued that the point was not to alienate the working classes, however: quite the opposite, this modernisation of image was designed to appeal to the working classes, who appreciated and respected aspiration and achievement, rather than wanting MPs and parliamentary candidates to remain stuck in the past.¹⁴⁴ The rebranding in many ways focused more on the ›new‹ and ›modern‹, aiming to sidestep the working-class/middle-class dichotomy, to appeal to the »new« as well as the »traditional« working class. The aim was to put together a new majoritarian constituency, rather than to ditch the traditional working class.

Hence, in addition to trying to make him appear more sober and statesmanlike, Kinnock's team tried to present him as a man who could speak »across« class boundaries. A transcript for a possible broadcast in the run-up to the 1987 General Election showed Kinnock saying that »people of all ages and every social class feel they can approach me [...] that makes it very easy for me to be in touch«.¹⁴⁵ After the election, the statement of »Democratic Socialist Aims and Values« drawn up by Roy Hattersley in advance of Labour's policy review opened with the statement that Labour's »fundamental objective« was the »extension of individual liberty irrespective of class, sex, age, race, colour or creed«¹⁴⁶, presenting »class« as a fracture-line of inequality to be overcome, and counterposing it to »individual liberty«.

›The individual‹ was a theme which could be used to signal a shift away from ›class‹. In doing so, modernisers picked up on a long-standing theme in Labour discourse, but they also entered into direct competition with Thatcher, fighting on terrain she was widely perceived to have made distinctively her own. Labour had long been trying to counter clever Tory use of the rallying cries of ›the individual‹ and ›individual rights‹. Hence in 1964, Labour's manifesto aimed to counter the »Tory gibe that planning could involve a loss of individual liberty«, stressing Labour's commitment to the rights and participation of the individual in the democratic process¹⁴⁷; Labour manifestos continued to emphasise this aspect of Labour's policies, as well as focusing on Labour's anti-discrimination policies.¹⁴⁸ In the 1970s, Thatcher had put a good deal of effort into ditching her middle-class-bound image, to appeal to an ordinary middle mass of people.¹⁴⁹ Tory commentators

143 Gavin Evans, You've been Folletted, in: *The Guardian*, 25 February 1996; Phillip Oppenheim, Hansard, HC Debs., 13 June 1991, vol. 192, col. 1045.

144 Author's interview with Neil Stewart, 28 May 2013.

145 Philip Gould to Peter Mandelson, Neil Kinnock transcript, 20 May 1987, Gould papers.

146 Final version of »Democratic Socialist Aims and Values«, KNNK 2/2/5; the reference to class was, in fact, the suggestion of Larry Whitty, General Secretary of Labour Party: see Whitty to Kinnock, 17 March 1988, KNNK 2/2/5.

147 *The New Britain*, ed. by Labour Party, London 1964.

148 See, for example, *Let Us Work Together – Labour's Way Out of the Crisis*, ed. by Labour Party, London (February) 1974, which argued that »It is the duty of Socialists to protect the individual from discrimination on whatever grounds«; also *Britain Will Win With Labour*, ed. by Labour Party, London (October) 1974, which had a whole section on »Individual rights and the community«; and *The Labour Way is the Better Way*, ed. by Labour Party, London 1979, which declared Labour's intention to »tilt the balance of power back to the individual and the neighbourhood, and away from the bureaucrats of town hall, company board room, the health service and Whitehall«.

149 See *Jon Lawrence/Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics*, in: *Ben Jackson/Robert Saunders* (eds.), *Making Thatcher's Britain*, Cambridge/New York etc. 2012, pp. 132–148.

argued in the 1980s that she had been highly successful in this: one suggested in 1985 that many had thought Thatcher would be a »disaster [...] in the company of flat vowels and simple folk«; but instead »[s]he chatted up marketplace shoppers without embarrassment on either side and she bemused workers on the production line who expected a grand lady and met instead a switched-on dynamo«, with important implications for the 1979 election.¹⁵⁰ The implication was that, as Nigel Stanley and Peter Hain's 1983 memo urged Kinnock, socialism needed »pitching more at the level of individuals«.¹⁵¹

This was what Kinnock attempted. A memo from Kinnock's office in 1985 set out the priorities for the »caring community and individual freedom campaign« planned for that year: the »most important« aim was to »stress the need for collective provision, democratically organised and controlled, to enhance individual liberty«.¹⁵² The 1987–1989 policy review had a group dedicated to »democracy, the individual and the community«¹⁵³, and, in a draft speech to promote the group's report, David Clelland reworked the famous language of the October 1974 manifesto (»a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families«), arguing that Labour's proposals »are intended to bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power in favour of ordinary people in their localities«, shifting from a language resonant of a »working class« appeal to a language of the individual, neighbourhood and community.¹⁵⁴

In many respects, the approach of Blair and other modernisers to the »working class« in the 1990s was the same as Kinnock's, but Blair differed from his mentor in certain important ways. Blair thought that »working class« was a term which, as he wrote in his autobiography, »obscured as much as it illuminated«.¹⁵⁵ In 1996, Mandelson and Liddle wrote that where »the old left saw its job as to represent trade unions, pressure groups and the »working class« [...] New Labour stands for the ordinary families who work hard and play by the rules«.¹⁵⁶ »Working class« was placed in quotation marks, suggesting a scepticism about the usefulness of the term: it was associated with the declining »cloth cap« Labour heartlands, and hence excluded many people to whom New Labour wanted to appeal. Throughout postwar Britain, the terms »cloth cap« and »working class« called up a white, male image; and women and ethnic minorities were two groups Labour could not afford to exclude from its core constituency. Kinnock wanted to re-imagine the »working class« to include the »new working class«, making it a more capacious category. Blair and other modernisers in the 1990s, by contrast, were far more sceptical about the power of the term »working class« to denote a clear constituency.

As Mandelson's words above suggest, modernisers shifted their focus from the term »class«, with its gendered implications, to a focus on ordinariness, work, and »families«, a term which brought women as well as men firmly into the picture. Hence Blair argued for Labour's tax proposals in 1995 as fairer and better for »ordinary working families«, who he stressed had been hit by an average extra £800 a year tax bill since 1992.¹⁵⁷ (There were

150 *Michael Jones*, Inside Politics. On Moaning Minnies, in: *The Times*, 15 September 1985.

151 Nigel Stanley/Peter Hain to Neil Kinnock, Robin Cook & Charles Clarke, Labour leadership election, 24 June 1983, KNNK 2/1/20.

152 A caring community and personal freedom campaign, Memo from leader's office on the Campaign on Social policy, KNNK 2/1/67.

153 See Report of the Policy Review Group on Democracy for the Individual and Community, KNNK 2/2/5.

154 David Clelland, Draft Speech on the Democracy, the Individual and the Community report, KNNK 2/2/44; see *Britain Will Win With Labour*, ed. by Labour Party.

155 *Blair*, *A Journey*, pp. 47f.

156 *Mandelson/Liddle*, *The Blair Revolution*, p. 18.

157 *Jill Sherman*, Blair Hails Labour as Party of Fair Tax, in: *The Times*, 22 November 1995.

precedents for this language, of course; Labour's October 1974 manifesto had called for a shift of wealth to »working people and their families«; and sociologist Michael Mann advocated a Labour constituency he identified as »ordinary British families« in a Fabian pamphlet of 1985.)¹⁵⁸ Sociologist Fiona Devine's work, published in the modernisers' journal »Renewal«, suggested that this language would connect with the majority¹⁵⁹; she had returned to Luton in 1986/87 to update the »Affluent Worker« study, interviewing thirty-two working-class couples. She found that »[a]ll but two of the interviewees identified themselves as belonging to a mass of what they called ›ordinary working families‹, by which they meant a mass of people in the middle, who wanted to better themselves.¹⁶⁰ This language of ›ordinariness‹ thus chimed with another key New Labour value, aspiration.

In addition, the modernisers in the 1990s sometimes called their new imagined constituency the »new middle class«, rather than the »new working class«. In 1992 Thatcher dismissed moves to call newly affluent, home-owning individualists »new members of the middle class«, because »[c]lass is a Communist concept«, and »[t]he more you talk about class – or even about ›classlessness‹ – the more you fix the idea in people's minds.¹⁶¹ Blair and Gould, however, both argued that working-class people had been becoming members of the »middle class«, or »new middle class«, as Gould put it.¹⁶² In both cases, the argument was made more in private and in retrospect, suggesting that in the mid-1990s, Blair and Gould both preferred to steer clear publicly of ›class‹ language. In addition, in both cases, though rather differently in each, this belief in the growth of the middle class was drawn from personal experience, suggesting that historians would be foolish to focus on academic sources and written archival material to the exclusion of personal experience as formative on modernisers' political thought.

Gould, the son of a staunchly Labour teacher, failed to pass the exam for grammar school aged eleven and went to a secondary modern, where he developed a sympathy with the realism of the friends he made there, most of whom went on to manual jobs. He described in the opening of »The Unfinished Revolution« witnessing, growing up in Woking, Surrey, how over the course of the postwar years »the old working class was becoming a new middle class: aspiring, consuming, choosing what was best for themselves and their families. They had outgrown crude collectivism and left it behind in the supermarket car-park. I knew this, because they were my life.«¹⁶³ Later in the book he suggested that they

158 *Michael Mann*, *Socialism Can Survive. Social Change and the Labour Party*, London 1984.

159 On the origins of »Renewal«, see *Ben Jackson*, *Twenty Years of Renewal*, in: *Renewal* 20, 2012, pp. 6–10; Jackson points out that »Renewal« has often been seen as key to the development of the ›New Labour‹ project in its early years; it has been called »the modernisers' house journal« (*T. Happold*, *Critical Voices*, in: *The Guardian*, 14 March 2003), and some of its key figures have been described as »the shock troops of Blairism in 1994–5« (*Patrick Wintour*, *Devolving Public Services ›must be Labour aim‹*, in: *The Guardian*, 14 January 2003). Gould, Blair, Patricia Hewitt and others wrote for the journal in its early years: see the articles collected in: *Ben Jackson* (ed.), *Twenty Years of Renewal. Labour, New Labour, Social Democracy*, London 2013.

160 *Fiona Devine*, *Class Politics and the Labour Party*, in: *Renewal* 2, 1994, pp. 21–31, here: p. 25; see *ead.*, *Social Identities, Class Identity and Political Perspectives*, in: *The Sociological Review* 40, 1992, pp. 229–252; *ead.*, *Affluent Workers Revisited. Privatism and the Working Class*, Edinburgh 1992.

161 *Thatcher*, Article for »Newsweek«, 27 April 1992, MTF 111359, URL: <<http://www.margaret-thatcher.org/document/111359>> [22.4.2013].

162 *Gould*, *The Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 3ff.; *Blair*, *A Journey*, p. 8.

163 *Gould*, *The Unfinished Revolution*, pp. 3ff. In 2012, Andrew Cooper, Director of Strategy for David Cameron, who previously co-founded Populus and worked for the Conservative Party and the Social Market Foundation, called this »the foundational insight of New Labour«; *Andrew Cooper*, *How Philip Gould helped to save the Conservative Party*, in: *Kavanagh*, *Philip Gould*, pp. 132–151, here: p. 137.

formed a »new majority in Britain. Not disadvantaged, not privileged, not quite working-class, *not really middle-class* – they don't even have a name. I will call them the new middle class«. ¹⁶⁴ Gould developed his insights into this »new middle class« in the focus groups which were his forte. ¹⁶⁵ And he drew on ideas developed by American pollsters who he worked with on the 1992 Clinton campaign: in an article in that year, for example, he echoed Stanley Greenberg's language, talking of the need to win the British equivalent of »the working middle class«. ¹⁶⁶ By stressing the newness of this group, the fact that they were both the mainstream middle, comfortable but also working, and the fact that in some sense they were »not really middle-class«, Gould implied that class itself was changing; culturally this »new majority« was not the same as the older »middle class« of the professions, the intelligentsia, and the owners of businesses. ¹⁶⁷

Blair, by contrast, came from a Tory family: his father was going to stand as a Conservative candidate before he suffered a debilitating stroke. But his personal background was also key to Blair's celebration of the middle class: his father came to symbolise for him the way in which ordinary people's aspirations worked: »[h]e had been poor. He was working class. He aspired to be middle class. He worked hard, made it on his merits, and wanted his children to do even better than him« ¹⁶⁸; hence his decision to send his son to Fettes, the most prestigious public school in Scotland. Blair thought that most ordinary people had needed a helping hand (he might have used Kinnock's words, and said »a platform to stand on«), but once given that start they were »essentially meritocratic, not egalitarian«. ¹⁶⁹ Blair saw his mission as making Labour a party that a man like his father would vote for; to make it relevant to the quintessential aspirational, home-owning, self-employed electrician polishing his Ford Sierra, discussed in Blair's 1996 Conference speech. ¹⁷⁰ Thus Blair was prepared in his autobiography in 2010 to celebrate people's aspirations to join the »middle class«.

Aspiration could also, however, be a classless value, and could speak to those who no longer saw themselves in class terms. The modernisers' belief in the transformative power of aspiration was backed up by Giles Radice's »Southern Discomfort« Fabian pamphlet series, based on focus groups in the early 1990s in five swing towns with »southern« characteristics. Radice stressed that

»many no longer consider themselves to be »working class«. »In a way, we are not working class any more«. The main reason for this change is that they believe that »class« no longer has much relevance to their own lives. They believe that they have »got on« by their own efforts and not with the

¹⁶⁴ Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. 17 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, James Purnell's reflections on Gould's obsession with getting to know »ordinary people«; James Purnell, *The Land and the Sea*, in: *Kavanagh*, Philip Gould, pp. 92–107. And see Moran, *Mass Observation, Market Research, and the Birth of the Focus Group*.

¹⁶⁶ Philip Gould, *The Politics of Victory*, in: *The Guardian*, 6 November 1992, qu. in: Moran, *Mass Observation, Market Research, and the Birth of the Focus Group*, pp. 847ff. New Labour drew on the rhetoric and the market research techniques used by Clinton in 1992: this was another area where, as pointed out above, New Labour was happy to be different from »old« in every way possible; as Lawrence Black's work has shown, a key reason that many in the Labour movement were hostile to marketing techniques in the 1950s and early 1960s was because they were seen as »American« (*Black*, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*), but the modernisers actively celebrated such techniques (for example, see Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. xix).

¹⁶⁷ Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁸ Blair, *A Journey*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁰ Blair, Conference speech, Blackpool, 1996, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=202>> [22.4.2013].

aid of a group or class. Indeed, for many ›the working class‹ represents a past from which they have escaped.«¹⁷¹

They were suspicious of ›class‹ as it appeared to ›put you in a group‹.¹⁷² Hence Blair talked frequently of the individual, of aspiration and of opportunity; these words were intended to connect with this constituency of C1s and C2s; and with those hoping to join their ranks. To Blair and other modernisers in the 1990s, the desire to redefine the ›working class‹ to involve ›new‹ and ›traditional‹ workers, C1s as well as C2s, seemed fruitless; class as a concept seemed, as the work of Radice and Devine showed, to have backward-looking connotations. ›Aspiration‹ was more majoritarian: as Blair said in 1993, ›the aspirations that I know from my own constituency unite the majority of people [...] are infinitely more important than trying to divide people up into groups and saying Labour’s task is to take those who are on social security benefit and represent those people‹.¹⁷³

Speaking as Prime Minister in 1999, Blair asserted that the middle class was now over half the population. This was ›[a] middle class that will include millions of people *who see themselves as working class* but whose ambitions are far broader than those of their parents and their grandparents‹.¹⁷⁴ Defined in this way, by individual aspiration above all, the ›new middle class‹ could be almost endlessly capacious; people could have a cultural affinity with the working class while being middle-class in their standard of living and aspirations. Blair claimed that this did not mean abandoning Labour’s ›core vote‹; rather, tackling poverty meant giving the ›socially excluded‹ what he called ›ladders of opportunity‹ to move up into the expanded, heterogeneous middle class.¹⁷⁵ The ›new middle class‹ was thus supposed to be an inclusive category, though it should be noted that there were critics who felt that the relentless focus on the ›middle‹ meant that the poorest and most deprived did not receive the attention they needed¹⁷⁶, and the place of the unemployed and the most needy in Labour’s imagined ›middle‹, majoritarian constituency remains contentious.

Blair argued that in being positive about aspiration, tough on crime (though also on its causes) and strict on public spending, New Labour’s was a truly majoritarian project, representative of, as he put it in 1995, ›working-class Labour families up and down the country‹.¹⁷⁷ George Ferguson, Blair’s agent in Sedgefield, and his wife Hannah, came to represent for Blair ›the non-political world of most ordinary people‹: they ›got‹ aspiration; they were ›eye-wateringly‹ tough on law and order; they ›believed social conditions had to be changed, but they never accepted them as an excuse for criminal behaviour‹ thus combining some Tory instincts with Labour compassion and collectivism.¹⁷⁸ Blair put crime centre-stage in his appeal as Shadow Home Secretary, with the famous soundbite (suggested to him by Brown), ›tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime‹ forming the

171 *Giles Radice*, *Southern Discomfort*, London 1992, p. 7; see also *Giles Radice/Stephen Pollard*, *More Southern Discomfort: A Year On – Taxing and Spending*, London 1993; *Giles Radice/Stephen Pollard*, *Any Southern Comfort?*, London 1994.

172 *Radice*, *Southern Discomfort*, p. 9.

173 Untransmitted BBC TV discussion with Roy Hattersley, 26 May 1993, qu. in: *John Rentoul*, *Tony Blair. Prime Minister*, London 2001, p. 197.

174 *Jill Sherman*, *Blair Pins Labour’s Future on the New Working [sic!] Class*, in: *The Times*, 15 January 1999 (emphasis added).

175 *Ibid.*

176 For example, Ken Coates, a Labour Member of the European Parliament, described the new Labour leadership as ›bastards and shits who would walk past the unemployed‹; *Anne McElvoy*, *The Killing of Clause 4*, in: *The Times*, 22 April 1995.

177 *Tony Blair*, *Power for a Purpose*, in: *Renewal* 3, 1995, pp. 11–16, here: p. 12.

178 *Blair*, *A Journey*, pp. 47ff.

heart of his approach from early 1993 onwards.¹⁷⁹ David Blunkett had argued for toughness on crime and anti-social behaviour on the grounds that this was what working-class people wanted in 1992¹⁸⁰, and on his return from the Clinton Campaign of that year, Philip Gould wrote a glowing piece on Clinton's fusion of »economic interventionism [...] and social conservatism«. ¹⁸¹ As Martin Pugh has stressed, despite his upper-middle-class background and the fact that he was leader of the Labour Party, Blair had much in common with working-class Tory traditions – as, indeed, did Blunkett, and, Pugh argues, other figures throughout Labour's history, as far back at least as Jimmy Thomas, the cigar-smoking railwayman's union leader, making this strand of thinking a consistent, if usually marginal, one in the exceptionally varied tapestry of Labour's past ideology.¹⁸² Thus Blair put crime high on New Labour's list of priorities because it allowed him to connect with what he saw as traditional working-class interests.

But it is important that Blair promised to be tough on the »causes of crime« as well as on crime itself. There was still a progressive, collectivist side to his thinking. Blair saw crime as a perfect issue to demonstrate the argument for »socialism«, as crime could only be fought with collective, community action, not by individuals acting alone¹⁸³; or, as Brown put it in his anti-Thatcherite tract of 1989, »[p]eople know that individuals on their own cannot make the streets safe at night«. ¹⁸⁴ In this way Blair and other modernisers re-oriented the concept of »collectivism«, making it work for the New Labour project. »Socialism« was defined as the recognition of the interdependence of all members of the community, and the need for collective action to achieve what individuals could not acting on their own. Thus »socialism« was re-defined *not* in opposition to »capitalism« but to »individualism«, in particular to a variety of individualism associated with Thatcherism. Alongside the emphasis under Kinnock and Blair on the importance of the individual went a reevaluation of Thatcherite »individualism«, which was painted as an aberration. In September 1985, Labour's Campaigns Strategy Committee decided to launch a Social Policy Campaign, because of evidence that damage to the social services was damaging the social fabric of Britain, and polling showing that the public was aware of this. A memo on the proposed campaign stressed that »[t]he Tories have distorted and deformed values such as individualism and independence« making them »mere euphemisms for selfishness and greed«. ¹⁸⁵ And an early draft of the »Statement of Democratic Socialist Aims and Values« stated that:

»Socialism is the gospel of individual rights. But it is not the doctrine of callous individualism. A society based on ruthless social and economic competition entrenches the privileges of a minority whilst restricting the rights of the rest of society. Real freedom can only be extended by cooperative action, and by collective provision to gain and sustain individual liberty.«¹⁸⁶

The Labour modernisers under Kinnock and Blair argued that in fact socialism was about using the power of the community and collective action to bring about a fuller, richer and

179 See *Anthony Bevins*, Labour hits back on Crime, in: *The Independent*, 6 February 1993.

180 *David Blunkett*, Review of the General Election 1992, 16 June 1992, KNNK/180, qu. in: *Cronin*, *New Labour's Pasts*, pp. 338–339.

181 *Philip Gould/Patricia Hewitt*, Lessons from America – Learning from Success: Labour and Clinton's New Democrats, in: *Renewal* 1, 1993, pp. 45–51.

182 *Pugh*, *Speak for Britain*, p. 7 and passim.

183 *Tony Blair*, Why Crime is a Socialist Issue, in: *New Statesman*, 29 January 1993.

184 *Gordon Brown*, Where there Is Greed. Margaret Thatcher and the Betrayal of Britain's Future, Edinburgh 1989, p. 8.

185 Labour Party Campaign Strategy Committee, The proposed campaign on social policy, 22 November 1985, KNNK 2/1/67.

186 Draft Statement of Democratic Socialist Aims and Values, KNNK 2/2/5.

more real individual liberty. The selfish, short-sighted and greedy version of ›individualism‹ which the modernisers characterised as »Thatcherite« was condemned. And it was counterposed to socialism – or to collectivism, the two being essentially synonymous in much of the modernisers’ rhetoric.

In re-defining ›socialism‹ thus, Blair was following philosopher and historian of ideas David Selbourne, who hyphenated ›social-ism‹ in his 1994 book »The Principle of Duty«, as Blair did in the same year in his pamphlet »Socialism«. ¹⁸⁷ Selbourne suggested that »›social-ism‹ [...] was perceived by early nineteenth-century ›social-ists‹ to be the ethical antithesis to ›individual-ism‹«, thus finding alternative roots for socialism, not in Marxism or in the trade union movement but in (Christian) morals and ethics. ¹⁸⁸ This was a tactic Labour’s modernisers also followed, seeking to sideline the place of Marxism in Labour’s past in favour of morality and Christianity: Methodism not Marx, to paraphrase the famous dictum on the roots of the Labour movement. ¹⁸⁹ In »Socialism«, Blair argued that Marxist socialism was based on a »false view of class that became too rigid to explain or illuminate the nature of class division today«, in contrast with ethical socialism. ¹⁹⁰ Gordon Brown offered a similar critique in 1995 of »a crude form of Marxism«, which he suggested had gained some ground recently in the Labour Party and which suggested that socialism »belonged only to one class«. ¹⁹¹ And Mandelson also critiqued what he presented as the Marxist version of socialism, suggesting that »[i]ts narrow view of class offers no insights into today’s pluralist society«, and arguing that ethical socialism, based on values and on co-operation, not conflict, was Labour’s more important heritage. ¹⁹²

Blair was clear that in contemporary Britain, a party hoping to win had to »[speak] for the mainstream majority«, as he put it in a speech in New York in 1996. ¹⁹³ This was a lesson that appeared to be clearly delivered by the example of Clinton, as Mo Mowlam pointed out in 1993 in »Fabian Review«. ¹⁹⁴ It was also a lesson Blair drew from the Labour Party’s history, arguing that Labour won when it was a national party, as in 1945, when the party »put itself at the head of a movement for national renewal spanning classes, age groups and regions«, and in the 1960s when Wilson’s governments »carried forward the attack on class barriers and prejudice started in 1945«. ¹⁹⁵ Rhetoric about a »new majority« was designed not only to get away from the »cloth cap« image, but also to counter what Philip Gould identified as early as 1985 as an association of Labour with »minori-

187 *David Selbourne*, *The Principle of Duty. An Essay on the Foundations of the Civic Order*, London 1994; *Tony Blair*, *Socialism*, London 1994, p. 4.

188 *Selbourne*, *The Principle of Duty*, pp. 38ff.

189 Labour MP Robert Kilroy-Silk praised Kinnock’s return to Labour’s moral roots: *Robert Kilroy-Silk*, *Fifth Column Clique*, in: *The Times*, 29 April 1988; Catholic commentator Clifford Longley did the same: *Clifford Longley*, *The Moral in the Election Fight*, in: *The Times*, 1 June 1987.

190 *Blair*, *Socialism*, pp. 2ff.

191 *Brown/Wright*, *Values, Visions and Voices*, p. 14.

192 *Mandelson/Liddle*, *The Blair Revolution*, pp. 29ff.; for an important article arguing persuasively that New Labour had a conception of Labour history that was, though intensely political, nevertheless »based upon verifiable facts whose interpretation was, at the very least, plausible«, see *Steven Fielding*, *New Labour and the Past*, in: *Duncan Tanner/Pat Thane/Nick Tiratsoo* (eds.), *Labour’s First Century*, Cambridge/New York etc. 2000, pp. 367–392, here: p. 384.

193 *Patrick Wintour/Rebecca Smithers*, *Labour Leader stakes Claim for Centre Ground*, in: *The Guardian*, 12 April 1996.

194 *Mowlam*, *What’s wrong with Being Middle Class?*.

195 *Tony Blair*, *Let us face the Future. The 1945 Anniversary Lecture*, Fabian Society pamphlet, 1995, qu. in: *Richards*, *Tony Blair. In his Own Words*, pp. 104–108; see also *Mandelson*, *The Third Man*, pp. 64ff.

ties«, particularly ethnic minorities and the gay rights movement.¹⁹⁶ Ironically, it was mostly *middle class* activists from the 1968 student generation, the New Left and identity politics movements, entering the Labour Party from the late 1970s, who had created this image, with their desire for a ›rainbow coalition‹ constituency for Labour; though, of course, these diverse cohorts brought much more variety and energy to Labour than simply this.¹⁹⁷ Constructing a compelling vision of a new »mainstream majority« was very important to the modernisers.

Thus Blair said in his autobiography that he had always believed that »a coalition of the well off and the less well off could establish points of common interest«.¹⁹⁸ Individual aspiration was the glue that held this constituency together. In 1993, Blair denied that individual aspiration should be seen as *new*, claiming that the idea of a shift from collective-minded people to selfish individualists was a »myth«. People had voted for collective policies in 1945 *not* »for some abstract notion of the public good«, but because Labour's collectivism was going to be good for them. »People didn't change. Society changed«, Blair claimed; the key change, he suggested, was rising prosperity, which meant that more of the electorate were paying more in taxes, just as rising expectations meant that they wanted to consume more and more things which had previously been out-of-reach luxuries; this meant increasing numbers of people felt that tax rises were hurting their capacity to consume, rather than funding increased collective provision which would benefit them.¹⁹⁹ Blair's explanation of Clement Attlee's victory was not without a basis: the long-standing image of 1945 was, of course, of a collective and egalitarian spirit, a »war-warmed impulse of people for a more generous society« forged in the fires of the blitz²⁰⁰; but recent work, like that of David Kynaston, has suggested that the majority of people were probably still concerned first and foremost with their own families' interests.²⁰¹ Blair's tracing of individual aspiration back to the war years thus seems plausible.

Blair and other modernisers did not have the same horror that Thatcher did about the term ›class‹ as »a Communist concept«. But the language of class, and imagery associated with the traditional working class, did fade in importance in the Labour Party between 1983 and 1997. Kinnock wanted to talk about a »new working class«, to indicate that class boundaries had shifted and people's lives had changed. Blair preferred the language of »ordinary working families« and »aspiration« to describe this new majority. This was a language that focus groups conducted by Philip Gould, research for the »Southern Discomfort« series, and work by Fiona Devine, all suggested connected with people across traditional class boundaries. In essence, this was the same as the constituency Kinnock imagined; the difference lay in the terms used, rather than the group of people referred to. ›Middle England‹ is a slippery term, and frequently used with pejorative overtones, to conjure an image of provincial, socially conservative »Daily Mail« readers, for example. But as it was imagined in the early 1990s, it was a group of relatively prosperous, suburban C1s and C2s, neither particularly politically reactionary nor wildly progressive; as

196 Philip Gould, Communications review commissioned by the Campaigns and Communications Director of the Labour Party, 22 December 1985, Gould papers.

197 See, for example, *Sheila Rowbotham/Lynne Segal/Hilary Wainwright*, *Beyond the Fragments. Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, London 1980.

198 *Blair*, *A Journey*, p. 26.

199 *Tony Blair*, *Why Modernisation Matters*, in: *Renewal*, October 1993, in: *Richards*, *Tony Blair. In His Own Words*, p. 68.

200 *Richard Titmuss*, *War and Social Policy*, in: *id.*, *Essays on the Welfare State*, New Haven, CT 1950, p. 82.

201 *David Kynaston*, *Austerity Britain, 1945–51*, London 2007; see also *Steven Fielding/Peter Thompson/Nick Tiratsoo*, »England arise!«. *The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain*, Manchester 1995.

ITN's political analyst David Cowling put it, »no party claiming to represent the nation either geographically or socially can simply ignore these voters [...]. They are ›middle Britain‹.«²⁰² Thus, far from being a project focused solely on a narrow group of ›middle class‹ voters, as critics like Cruddas have claimed, New Labour envisaged a pluralist, majoritarian base.²⁰³

It should be stressed that Blairites preferred to talk about »middle Britain«, rather than »middle England«, because it allowed the inclusion of the Welsh and Scottish, two areas which were important Labour bases, and because it fitted with New Labour's vision of an inclusive civic nationalism. Long before Ed Miliband did, in his much-commented on Conference speech in 2012²⁰⁴, Blair had seized traditionally Tory ›One Nation‹ rhetoric as a clever move to sidestep class, stress his vision of an interconnected, interdependent citizenry, and associate Labour with patriotism (an association distinctly lacking in the early 1980s as Thatcher seized the patriotic mantle and tried to brand Labour as unpatriotic). When Chris Mullin toured Millbank, the party's headquarters (»My Millbank« as Mandelson called it) in the run-up to the 1997 election, »ONE NATION« topped the list of campaign slogans written up for all to see.²⁰⁵ Both the ›middle‹ and the ›Britain‹ in ›middle Britain‹ were thus significant.

Blair followed Kinnock in implying that ›class‹ was a dividing line in society which must be overcome, and which the Labour Party would appeal »across«.²⁰⁶ He suggested in 1994 that his brand of socialism, ethical socialism, »does not deny the existence of class divisions but its definition of them is not time bound«.²⁰⁷ Class divisions might still exist, but whether or not they did would have to be empirically determined, not assumed. This was what Blair and Brown referred to when they talked about the »crippling effects of the British class structure«²⁰⁸, and Britain's »class-ridden [...] society«.²⁰⁹ And Blair demonstrated a clear commitment to fighting those divisions where they were found: when he said in 1999 that »the class war is over«, he went on immediately to say that »the struggle for true equality has only just begun«, and that New Labour would »liberate Britain from the old class divisions, old structures, old prejudices«.²¹⁰ Old-fashioned class prejudice must be overcome, but New Labour would take a flexible approach to identifying and tackling social divisions.

John Prescott, often seen as the token representative of ›old‹ Labour at the heart of New Labour²¹¹, was thus completely ›on-message‹ when he said on the »Today« programme in 1996 that he was now middle class. It suggested a basic social egalitarianism if Prescott could tell the host, John Humphrys, that they were in the same class; and it celebrated working-class ambition, Prescott being well-known for his enjoyment of driving Jaguars

202 *Radice/Pollard*, *Any Southern Comfort?*, p. 4.

203 See *Cruddas*, *After New Labour*, pp. 25 and 27.

204 See, for example, *Patrick Wintour*, Ed Miliband Moves to Claim Disraeli's ›One Nation‹ Mantle, in: *The Guardian*, 2 October 2012.

205 *Mullin/Winstone*, *Diaries 1994–1999*, p. 153, entry for 19 March 1996; see *Seumus Milne*, *My Millbank*, in: *London Review of Books* 18, 18 April 1996, pp. 3–5.

206 *Blair*, Conference speech, Blackpool, 1994, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=200>> [22.4.2013].

207 *Blair*, *Socialism*, p. 2.

208 *Brown/Wright*, *Values, Visions and Voices*, pp. 24ff.

209 *Blair*, *My Vision for Britain*, p. 7.

210 *Blair*, Conference speech, Bournemouth, 1999, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=205>> [22.4.2013].

211 See, for example, *William Rodgers*, Blair's First Errors. The Roles of Prescott, Brown and Mandelson Contain the Seeds of Instability, in: *New Statesman*, 16 May 1997; *Riddell*, *The End of Clause IV*, p. 25.

and other expensive cars.²¹² As Mo Mowlam had said three years previously, until Labour could »mentally make the leap that says aspiring to be middle class is positive, the public will always have trouble believing that we want to represent them.«²¹³ Supposed paucity of aspiration and celebration of »pints and meat pies« in the Labour movement had been mocked in the Tory press in the 1980s.²¹⁴ Blair welcomed Prescott's statement with a jokey »I gather you are now a class act not a class warrior«: the focus on aspiration was designed to counter this aspect of the »cloth cap« image.²¹⁵

To understand the connotations which a term like »class warrior« carried for Blair, it is necessary to understand the prevalent view of the Labour left presented in the press in the 1980s and 1990s. As Tim Bale has pointed out, it is important that historians do not colude with the caricatured images of a Labour Party in the 1970s and 1980s dominated by the hard left, images which were promulgated by both Thatcherites and later by New Labour.²¹⁶ However, a faction around Tony Benn, Arthur Scargill and Ted Knight (who Beatrix Campbell called »the Colonel Blimps of the class war« in 1985)²¹⁷ continued to make vocal statements about »class struggle«, for example in 1990 when Scargill argued that Thatcher was defending her class, the capitalists, and demanded that Labour do the same and grant »special favours« to its class, the »working class«.²¹⁸ Such statements always garnered much press in right-wing publications²¹⁹, to the frustration of those who wanted to project a »new« image, for it was clear that many people found them off-putting: even an article in the left-wing Labour publication »Tribune« in 1983 highlighted the views of a man from an ordinary, working-class, Labour-voting background who had failed to vote Labour in 1983 because, he said, »[m]any statements which have been attributable to the party [...] have given people the feeling that they are not going to be a stable influence [...]. Quite often the statements have come over as being unrealistic and based on the class warfare which I don't think exists any longer.«²²⁰

Even in the early 1980s, many within the Labour Party, including on the left, were angry at the irrelevant posturing of the »class war« purists. Mandelson and other moderates on Lambeth council publicly condemned Ted Knight in 1981 for the »irrelevance« of his approach to »working-class people«.²²¹ No less a figure than the left-wing Labour activist Peter Hain recalled his frustration from the late 1970s onwards with activists who »talked only to themselves and believed the »class struggle« was advanced mainly by passing resolutions demanding (often impossible) positions of the leadership« (though it should be noted that Hain moved away from the left-wing, and served in the New Labour governments

212 See *John Prescott/Hunter Davies*, Prezza. My Story: Pulling No Punches, London 2008; *John Rentoul*, Prescott Declares for Middle Classes, in: *The Independent*, 13 April 1996.

213 *Mowlam*, What's Wrong with Being Middle Class?.

214 *Bernard Levin*, Who Now Is Grinding Down the Poor?, in: *The Sunday Times*, 19 June 1986.

215 *Gary Younge*, Class Act Prescott casts aside his Flat Cap Image, in: *The Guardian*, 13 April 1996.

216 *Bale*, The Logic of No Alternative?.

217 *Beatrix Campbell*, Kinnock's Crusaders, in: *Marxism Today*, October 1985, pp. 9–14, here: p. 10; reprinted as A Leading Role for the new New Left, in: *The Times*, 27 September 1985.

218 *Barrie Clement/Martin Whitfield*, The TUC in Blackpool – Kinnock Denounces Scargill before TUC, in: *The Independent*, 5 September 1990.

219 On the Tory bias in the press between 1979 and 1992 see *James Thomas*, Labour, the Tabloids, and the 1992 General Election, in: *Contemporary British History* 12, 1998, pp. 80–104; Thomas points out that between the 1970s and 1992 the popular press was more strongly biased in favour of Conservative Party than ever before, with 70% of the press explicitly in favour of Thatcher's brand of Conservatism (p. 87).

220 Until last June I'd always voted Labour, in: *Tribune*, 30 December 1983, p. 9.

221 *Mandelson*, The Third Man, pp. 64ff.

after 1997).²²² Talk about the »class struggle« was equated with fruitless navel-gazing and theoretical debate. It is, therefore, unsurprising that many within the Labour Party felt it was vital to get away from this approach, and from the rhetoric associated with it.

This was what he was referring to when Charles Clarke said that Blair was »contemptuous of class politics«.²²³ Peter Mandelson made the same point in his autobiography, discussing Blair's anger over Gordon Brown's accusation in 2000 that a northern state school pupil rejected by Oxford was the victim of class prejudice:²²⁴ Mandelson commented that Blair felt that this intervention »had been born of class-war Labour instinct«.²²⁵ To Blair, a »class war« approach to politics meant an instinctive tribalism, and distrust of institutions like Oxbridge (he was himself, of course, an alumnus of St John's College, Oxford). Blair noted in his autobiography that, »I had no patience with tribal party politics, with its exaggerated differences, rancorous disputes and irrational prejudices [...]. I didn't want class war«.²²⁶ Hence his proclamation in 1999 that »[t]he class war is over«.²²⁷ The repudiation of the language of class, and particularly of class war or class struggle, was born not of a desire to eradicate concern with inequality from the Labour Party, as Owen Jones has charged²²⁸; rather it was a strategic decision, and born of the intense frustration many modernisers had with the style of »class politics« of the hard left in the 1970s and 1980s. The abandonment of the language of »class struggle« was born of a desire to distance the Labour Party from the conflictual statements of the »Colonel Blimps of the class war«. Modernisers from Kinnock to Blair wanted to redefine Labour's »natural constituency« as a large middle mass in the centre of British society, including many people who were upwardly-mobile and relatively well-off.

IV. NEW LABOUR, EQUALITY AND POVERTY

Even to the extent that New Labour moved away from the »language of class« (and this was not a complete abandonment), this did not mean the end of concern with poverty and inequality, as has often been charged; quite the reverse, as the work of many historians and social and political scientists has shown. Stephen Meredith's work on New Labour and equality has demonstrated that New Labour figures had a conception of »equality of opportunity« which lay in a line of continuity with the understandings of equality held by Labour revisionists of the 1950s and 1960s.²²⁹ Meredith stressed that Tony Crosland had a nuanced appreciation of equality: he never wanted equality of outcome, but worked for equality of opportunity, which demanded a measure of redistribution so that children would start out with a reasonable set of opportunities. As David Lipsey, once Crosland's advisor, pointed out, »revisionists revise«, and New Labour thought that by the 1990s the economic and electoral environment, with the growth of globalisation and a populace desirous of low taxation, made the traditional Keynesian levers worthless, and demanded restrained government spending. In such circumstances, a reevaluation of the possibilities was necessary. However, as Meredith has argued, New Labour in power »utilised its eco-

222 *Hain*, *Outside in*, p. 131, see also pp. 119ff.

223 *Rawnsley*, *The End of the Party*, p. 230.

224 See *The War of Laura's Rejection*, in: *The Observer*, 28 May 2000.

225 *Mandelson*, *The Third Man*, p. 378.

226 *Blair*, *A Journey*, p. 26.

227 *Blair*, Conference speech, Bournemouth, 1999, URL: <<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=205>> [22.4.2013].

228 See *Jones*, *Chavs*, p. 98.

229 *Meredith*, *Mr Crosland's Nightmare*.

conomic prudence for an egalitarian purpose in a modern and inclusive conception and radical programme of equal opportunity, which attempts to address the root causes of inequality in unemployment and low skills«. ²³⁰ New Labour policies like the New Deals for the long-term unemployed, single parents, young people and disabled people, the minimum wage, tax credits, and the focus on education, particularly early years education, with the provision of Sure Start, all served the end of creating greater equality of opportunity and alleviating poverty. Blair's commitment to end child poverty, announced in his Beveridge lecture in 1999, but trailed by Alistair Darling in a Fabian pamphlet a year previously, was New Labour's most dramatic attempt to ensure real opportunity for all. ²³¹

And the results of this policy package were not negligible. Even during New Labour's first two years in power, when the government stuck to Tory spending plans (in a move widely seen as designed to woo the middle class) the Institute for Fiscal Studies calculated that Brown's first two budgets had effected the largest redistribution from rich to poor in decades. ²³² Even journalist Polly Toynbee, often sceptical of or hostile to New Labour, acknowledged that New Labour did not stop income inequality worsening, but it grew by less than it would have done without the changes to tax, National Insurance, benefit and tax credit policies. The bottom tenth of the income distribution were 12% better off in 2008/09 than they would have been had the Labour government done nothing after 1997. ²³³ Overall, the verdict of Kitty Stewart (of the London School of Economics' »Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion«) on Blair's legacy on poverty and inequality is positive, suggesting that a fruitful partnership born out of Brown's commitment to tackling poverty and Blair's focus on »opportunity for all« was vital in driving these outcomes, and concluding that »Britain [was] a fairer and more equal society in 2007 than it was in 1997, and it [was] almost certainly far more equal than it would have been after another ten years of Conservative government«. ²³⁴

Many of New Labour's measures to tackle poverty can be called »individualistic«; rather than attempting to channel resources to the unemployed *as a group*, via higher benefits, the New Deals tried to give individuals skills, along with a combination of carrots and sticks to make work worth their while. Where groups were targeted, it was more often on the basis of age than class, as with increases in universal or near-universal benefits for children or the elderly (such as Child Benefit and the Winter Fuel Allowance). But it is not accurate to suggest that this meant, as has been suggested by some critics, that New Labour abandoned any orientation to collectivism. As shown, Blair *defined* socialism (or »social-ism«) as the belief that collective provision was vital to provide many important goods, from health and welfare to law and order. ²³⁵ Brown defined »modern socialism« in the same way in 1994, arguing that one of its key features was the »belief in the importance of the community«, acting collectively, to help »individuals realise [their] potential«. ²³⁶

»Community« was, an article in 1994 suggested, »the modernisers' favourite word« ²³⁷, and there is much to be said about the place of »community« in their politics. »Communi-

230 Ibid., p. 252.

231 Pledge by PM to end Child Poverty, in: *The Independent*, 18 March 1999; *Alistair Darling, Rebuilding the Welfare State. The Moral Case for Reform*, in: *Gavin Kelly* (ed.), *Is New Labour Working?*, London 1998.

232 *Rawnsley*, *Servants of the People*, p. 157.

233 *Toynbee/Walker*, *The Verdict*, pp. 196–200.

234 *Kitty Stewart*, *Equality and Social Justice*, in: *Seldon*, *Blair's Britain*, pp. 408–435, here: pp. 434f.

235 *Blair*, *Socialism*, p. 4.

236 *Gordon Brown*, *The Politics of Potential. A New Agenda for Labour*, in: *David Miliband* (ed.), *Reinventing the Left*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 113–122.

237 *Sarah Baxter*, *Reading between the Battle Lines*, in: *The Sunday Times*, 12 June 1994.

ty‹ was put forward frequently as a ›big idea‹ around which Labour could build a distinctive vision of the world – for example, by David Blunkett in a paper for the Home Policy Committee as early as 1984.²³⁸ The concept was given academic credentials by the work of various communitarian theorists, particularly Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, and Israeli-American sociologist Amitai Etzioni. In brief, these (rather different) intellectuals called for a renewal of social bonds not on the basis of ›contract‹ or rights-based arguments but ›community‹. Etzioni argued that the market had undermined family and community relationships, which must be re-forged, based on mutual responsibilities which would balance rights: he called for governments to ›restore civic virtues‹ and ›shore up the moral foundations of society‹.²³⁹ Macmurray argued that society is based on transactional relationships, which individuals enter into because they see a personal, material interest; he thought that this was not enough for full human life, however, and argued for the importance of what he called »community« relationships, which were non-transactional, i.e. based on friendship and love.²⁴⁰ Blair often referenced these communitarian thinkers and others; as did Brown in a 1992 lecture.²⁴¹ But Sarah Hale has studied New Labour and communitarianism in detail, and concludes that in fact, communitarianism played little or no part in shaping New Labour's thinking: in substance neither Blair's rhetoric nor New Labour policy matched up with the thinking of Macmurray, Etzioni or other communitarians. She implies, thus, that community provided little more than mood music for New Labour, and other political scientists have concurred.²⁴²

But in fact, ›community‹ was more than merely a buzzword, because modernisers were aware that inequality was developing an ever-starker geographic dimension in Britain, and that people often talked about place as a substitute for talking about class. In 1988, focus groups in Glasgow Govan highlighted perfectly how ›class‹ was associated with place and culture. As Philip Gould noted in a private report for the party, Govan residents disliked the English; but he noted that »England = South East = Affluent yuppies = Thatcher → i.e. Empathy with Geordies/working class people«. In brackets afterwards, Gould noted »Sense of community?«²⁴³ One function ›community‹, in the sense of place and culture, could serve, therefore, was as a proxy for talking about class (in at least some of the senses of that word). New Labour did sometimes use ›community‹ to justify policies which had a class aspect to them. The »New Deal for Communities« (NDC) was the most prominent way in which New Labour used ›community‹ as a way to mobilise resources for particularly deprived areas and their inhabitants. Launched in 1998, over the next twelve years thirty-nine NDC partnerships were set up, each aiming to improve outcomes in a particular area in terms of crime, education, health, worklessness, and housing. Thus,

238 The challenge of ideology, Labour Party Home Policy Committee, Paper prepared for Campaign Strategy Committee, David Blunkett, 30 April 1984, KNNK 2/1/67.

239 Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community. Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda*, London 1995, p. xi.

240 John Macmurray/*Philip Conford*, *The Personal World. John Macmurray on Self and Society*, Edinburgh 1996; Blair wrote a foreword to this book.

241 See, for example, *Rentoul*, Tony Blair, pp. 42–45; *Richards*, Tony Blair in His Own Words, p. 140; *Gordon Brown*, *Constitutional Change and the Future of Britain*, Charter 88 Trust, 1992.

242 Sarah Hale, *Blair's Community. Communitarian Thought and New Labour*, Manchester 2006, p. 155; see also *ead.*, *The Communitarian »Philosophy« of New Labour*, in: *ead./Will Leggett/Luke Martell* (eds.), *The Third Way and Beyond. Criticisms, Futures and Alternatives*, Manchester 2004, pp. 87–108; *Stephen Driver/Luke Martell*, *Beyond Equality and Liberty. New Labour's Liberal-Conservatism*, in: *Renewal* 4, 1996, pp. 8–16.

243 Labour and the SNP. Qualitative research into Scottish voting behaviour looking specifically at implications for the Govan by-election, Gould Mattinson Associates, 14 October 1988, Gould Papers.

talking about ›community‹ provided a way of talking about and tackling ›class‹, in the sense of multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage, and hence inequality.²⁴⁴ The NDC has generally been fitted in solely with discussions of New Labour's conception of ›community‹, yet the programme was clearly about tackling inequality and class divisions.²⁴⁵

V. CONCLUSION

The widespread perception that New Labour abandoned class, and ditched its working class roots in favour of the middle class, is misconceived, but it is relatively easy to explain. Much of the modernisers' rhetoric, if not situated properly in its context, pointed towards this conclusion. Blair's personal image also played a role: Kinnock's working-class roots were obvious, but Blair was the paradigm of the metropolitan middle class, and parodied as such by his opponents in the Labour and Tory parties (in 1996 Michael Heseltine mocked Blair's supposed penchant for »chianti and pasta«, subtly suggesting that Blair was distant from ordinary people).²⁴⁶ Much of the maligning of modernisers like Mandelson and Hewitt from within the Labour Party used criticism of their supposed ›middle-classness‹ to criticise the direction in which they were taking the party, as in a »Tribune« article in 1992 calling for the dismissal of the »well-meaning, metropolitan, middle-class ministrations of the Shadow Communications Agency«.²⁴⁷ And, of course, many of the accusations that New Labour abandoned class continue to be politically motivated, designed to demand a return to supposedly ›traditional‹ Labour approaches to tackling class divisions and poverty. Such accusations are a good way to get leverage in intra-party debates, but should not be accorded too much weight by historians.

Particular aspects of New Labour policy assumed a huge symbolic significance to the project's detractors; for example, 1997 saw the »first [Labour manifesto] for a generation that does not promise across-the-board benefit increases the moment it comes to power«. But, as Roger Liddle argued in defence, this was necessary in order to achieve the promise set out in the 1996 tract, »New Labour, new life for Britain«, to reverse the trend established under Thatcher and Major of spending less as a percentage of the government's budget on education and more on welfare.²⁴⁸ Early battles, particularly the cut to benefits for single parents introduced in 1997, gave a misleading impression of New Labour's priorities. In fact, tackling poverty and achieving a real measure of opportunity for all remained on the agenda.

This paper has shown that it is far from accurate to charge that New Labour abandoned completely the language of class. There was a shift in the terms used to describe the constituency envisioned by the modernisers, from ›new working class‹ to ›new middle class‹

244 See *Paul Lawless*, *Locating and Explaining Area-based Urban Initiatives. New Deal for Communities in England*, in: *Environment and Planning C* 22, 2004, pp. 383–399.

245 For example: *Beech*, *New Labour*, p. 94; Ben Jones does comment on the way that class, or socio-economic inequality, was present in the New Deal for Communities, but he implies that this was in a subtle way a bad thing, that class was somehow being hidden from view; *Ben Jones*, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-century England. Community, Identity and Social Memory*, Manchester 2012.

246 *John Kampfner*, *The Tories have begun to assemble an Identikit Blair that they can rubbish*, in: *New Statesman*, 26 July 1996.

247 *Phil Kelly*, *Now how about some Politics?*, in: *Tribune*, 17 April 1992, pp. 6ff.; see also *Wring*, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*, p. 116; *Patricia Hewitt*, *The Start of Labour's Long March: 1985–1992*, in: *Kavanagh*, Philip Gould, pp. 42–61, here: p. 59.

248 *Roger Liddle*, *Memo to: Chris Smith*, in: *New Statesman*, 12 July 1996.

or ›ordinary working families‹, but this did not mark the end of a political project built around improving the lives of the majority; quite the opposite. This shift in language nevertheless had significance: as historians working within the framework of the ›New Political History‹ have stressed, language matters in political communication.²⁴⁹ The shift from ›new working class‹ to ›new middle class‹ and ›ordinary working families‹, and the focus on individuals and communities rather than classes, is thus significant; the interplay of political and popular languages is key to the formation of political identities, so that if politicians stop talking about class, that vocabulary may tend to fall out of use over time. The detailed work of Anthony Heath and colleagues on British Social Attitudes Survey data over time suggests that »the declining force of class identity« which was visible from the late 1990s onwards did not »simply [reflect] autonomous changes in the nature of society«; rather, they argued, »political developments« were the key to this change, particularly New Labour's shift away from class language and imagery.²⁵⁰

Finally, this paper has argued that the shift from ›democratic socialism‹ to ›social democracy‹ was part of a larger process of re-aligning Labour's ideology: it was an important part of the re-branding process, but had more significance than simply a superficial piece of marketing. The elements of Marxist heritage in Labour's past, which stressed class conflict and the eventual replacement of capitalism by socialism, were sidelined and downplayed by New Labour; the very meaning of ›socialism‹ was re-oriented, with the term used in opposition not to capitalism, but to callous individualism. It was possible, thus, to remain a socialist and yet retain faith in markets and capitalism in some areas. In addition, it was easier for New Labour to claim affinities with successful left-of-centre parties which had never called themselves socialist – in the early 1990s, it was particularly desirable to claim affinities with Clinton's successful Democratic Party. But as Morgan's analysis of ›socialism‹ and ›social democracy‹ in Labour's first 89 years pointed out, a revisionist, parliamentary approach, making peace with capitalism in many areas, had dominated for the vast majority of Labour's history.²⁵¹ This article has not set out to disprove the significant elements of continuity between New Labour and varied traditions in the tapestry of Labour history, as emphasised by historians like Morgan and Pugh; quite the opposite. It has aimed to demonstrate, however, that significant battles were fought *over* and *using* terms such as ›socialism‹, ›social democracy‹, ›working class‹, and ›ordinary‹.

249 See Raphael Samuel/Gareth Stedman Jones, *The Labour Party and Social Democracy*, in: *eid.* (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Politics. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, London 1982, pp. 320–329; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982*, Cambridge/New York etc. 1983; Jon Lawrence/Miles Taylor, Introduction. Electoral Sociology and the Historians, in: *eid.* (eds.), *Party, State and Society. Electoral Behaviour in Britain Since 1820*, Aldershot 1996, pp. 1–26; Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People. Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914*, Cambridge/New York etc. 2002; Dror Wahrman, *The New Political History. A Review Essay*, in: *Social History* 21, 1996, pp. 343–354; Steven Fielding, *Looking for the ›New Political History‹*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, 2007, pp. 515–524.

250 Heath/Curtice/Elgenius, *Individualization and the Decline of Class Identity*, p. 38.

251 Morgan, *Socialism and Social Democracy*.

