Abstract

Post-war affluence for a time appeared to threaten Labour's future as a party of government in Britain. After the Party's third consecutive election defeat in 1959 commentators suggested that the twinned growth of affluence and consumerism had begun to erode Labour's traditional base of support. It was argued that workers aspired to middle class values and lifestyles as they became more prosperous and as a consequence abandoned the Labour Party. Wilson's victory in 1964 showed that predictions about the Party's long-term demise had been wide of the mark. But historians have continued to search for an explanation for Labour's apparent electoral weakness in the 1950s.

This thesis will argue that the descriptions of weakness and failure which have been applied to the Labour Party in the affluent post-war years have been overstated. It will aim to show that the underlying strength and vitality of the Party in the 1950s and early 1960s have been too often overlooked.

After the aims of the thesis have been explained in more detail in the introduction, chapter two examines the internal politics of the Labour Party between the elections of 1951 and 1955. Policy-making during this period is also discussed. Chapter three focuses on Hugh Gaitskell's leadership of the Party between December 1955 and October 1959. Labour's three year review of policy is discussed in chapter four and it will be shown that this review provided the basis for the manifestos of 1959 and 1964. Chapter five will examine the Party's response to the 1959 election defeat. Chapter six is a discussion of policy-making between 1959 and 1964. Chapter seven assesses the internal opposition to the Labour leadership after 1955 and chapter eight is a discussion of local Labour politics during the thirteen years of opposition.
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1. Introduction

Within a decade of the Attlee Government's departure from office in 1951, commentators began to argue that post-war prosperity threatened Labour's future as a party of government in Britain.\(^{(1)}\) After a third consecutive election defeat in 1959 it was suggested that the twinned growth of affluence and consumerism had begun to erode Labour's traditional base of support. The spread of home ownership, the growth of home-centred leisure activities, and increased consumer spending on luxury items and durables were all identified as factors which had altered the priorities of traditional Labour supporters.\(^{(2)}\)

Rather than identify with the interests of a social class or the trades unions, individuals seemed to be more concerned with their own particular needs and aspirations. As a result, many either lost interest in politics or alternatively supported Conservative Governments which delivered economic growth and which emphasised their positive attitude towards individual ambition. In short, it was argued that a significant proportion of traditional Labour voters abandoned the Party as their standard of living reached new heights in the 1950s.

Initially, this analysis appeared to offer a credible explanation for Labour's sequence of election defeats in 1951, 1955 and 1959 (see appendix). In a study of factory workers in 1960, Ferdinand Zweig concluded that full employment, universal welfare provision and the increased availability of consumer durables had combined to produce a change in working-class attitudes: 'The whole working class finds itself on the move, moving towards new middle-class values and middle-class existence.'\(^{(3)}\) The process by which workers adopted this middle-class outlook was known as embourgeoisement. Zweig found that his sample of workers enjoyed security of employment, comfortable housing, and wages which gave them access to items such as televisions, record players, refrigerators, washing machines and motor cars. The result of this security and relative prosperity, he believed, was a decline in the collectivist values which lay at the heart of Labour's appeal;
'The worker wants little things instead of big things. He wants them for himself, rather than for society at large. He wants better and wider opportunities for getting along. Old calls, old slogans, old loyalties often leave him cold. The class struggle interests him less and less. The idea of the working class as an oppressed or an exploited class or the romanticized idea of the working class as foremost in the struggle for progress and social justice is fading from his mind, and is more and more replaced by the idea of the working class as a class well established and well-to-do in its own right.'

Mark Abrams drew a similar conclusion from his survey of political attitudes in 50 parliamentary constituencies chosen at random in 1960. The Labour Party, he argued, could still hope to persuade voters of the merits of its policies for economic and social reform, but the task was likely to become increasingly difficult as post-war affluence continued into the 1960s;

'A new epoch has been entered, in which the policies Labour has stood for are losing support. Its old appeal as the Party of the working class is waning; class allegiances are weakening in our modern more fluid society...The radical mood seems to be lacking today. People appear concerned chiefly with their own ambitions. They have no great interest in politics; they are satisfied with their jobs; they set high store on possessing a house of their own - and, once possessed, they shift noticeably into the Conservative camp.'

This analysis appeared to signal disaster for a Party with a traditional reliance on working class support and a continued faith in collectivist policies. Fortunately for Labour, though, the analysis proved to be flawed. The depressing prognosis of the Party's political future was discredited by Labour's return to power in 1964 and by its comfortable election victory in 1966. Subsequent research also exposed the inadequacy of the embourgeoisement thesis as an explanation for the decline in the
In the light of these developments, historians and political commentators have sought instead to explain the contrast between Labour's electoral success in the 1940s and 1960s and its failure in the 1950s. Writers have disagreed about the causes of this failure in the 1950s, but there is at least a general agreement among historians and commentators that Labour had fundamental problems at this time which require explanation. The images of weakness, decline and failure are familiar features of the literature on the Party in the years of opposition between 1951 and 1964.

Vernon Bogdanor described the thirteen years of opposition as 'years of disaster' for the Party: 'The Labour Party was rent by dissension after 1951, because it had completed the classical programme of British Socialism and was compelled to search for another.' Samuel Beer has also portrayed the 1950s as a period of conflict and division for Labour. In his view, unity was restored temporarily only when a general election approached: 'Looking at the Labour Party during this decade, little seems to change. With almost compulsive iteration, the same battles are fruitlessly fought out again and again through the same cycle of renewed confrontation, bitter strife, and temporary and indecisive compromise.' In tandem with this internal division, Beer believed that the Party's 'working-class image' and its association with public ownership made it increasingly unpopular with the electorate - it was this unpopularity which in his view produced the 'routs' of 1955 and 1959.

James Hinton was equally critical of the Party in the period under discussion. He agreed with Beer that at the root of Labour's difficulties was internal division and conflict: 'In the 1950s the Labour Party's problem was...that it seemed incapable of presenting a sufficiently coherent face to the electorate to recapture power at all.' Kenneth Morgan's assessment of Labour in the 1950s was essentially no different. He described the decade as 'a highly damaging and divisive time' for the Party: 'The unity, the structural coherence, the certainty of priorities of the 1945 period abruptly disappeared.' Kevin Jefferys also focused on the problem of internal division as an explanation for 'Labour's weakness in
the 1950s', although he is at least prepared to concede that economic growth helped the Conservatives to retain power in the elections of 1955 and 1959. (12)

Ralph Miliband, from a left-wing perspective, complained that the Party betrayed its principles and alienated its natural supporters during the period by abandoning 'radical' socialist policies. The result, in his view, was a blurring of the distinction between the two main parties in Britain. Miliband argued that the Party leadership in the 1950s contributed to a wider decline in the vitality of national politics by adopting a moderate programme which aimed to attract support from the 'floating voter': 'If politics in the fifties have seemed a decreasingly meaningful activity, void of substance, heedless of principle, and rich in election auctioneering, the responsibility is not only that of the hidden or overt persuaders: it is also, and to a major degree, that of Labour's leaders.' (13)

The burden of this analysis was shared by David Howell. He argued that the Party lost its way after 1951, particularly in terms of the development of policy. The 1964 election victory, according to Howell, was tarnished by the preceding years of division within the Party and by Labour's failure to construct a radical programme: 'Compared with 1945, its [1964] programme was a flimsy blend of optimism, rhetoric and sparse proposals. The party evoked the image of "Thirteen Wasted Years" - it might have applied this a little nearer home.' (14) Nick Tiratsoo has also criticised Labour's selection of policy in the 1950s, but from a different perspective. In his view, one of the main causes of Labour's problems after 1951 was its failure to win support from groups which were at the centre of post-war social change - in particular, women and youths. Tiratsoo has argued that while the Conservatives welcomed social change and the spread of affluence, Labour was more ambiguous and often displayed a rather high-minded attitude towards the development of consumerism, advertising, mass entertainment and youth culture. (15) In other words, the Party misunderstood the needs and values of the electorate.
The debate about Labour politics in the affluent society between 1951 and 1964, therefore, has been concerned largely with the causes of the Party's relative political weakness. The aim of this thesis is to show that the premise of this debate is flawed. The following chapters will challenge the assumption that the period under discussion was a time of weakness and decline for Labour. It will be argued here that the underlying strength and vitality of the Party in the 1950s and early 1960s have been too often overlooked by historians and commentators. Labour, it will be shown, staged a steady political recovery after the 1951 defeat and laid the basis for the 1964 election victory in the second half of the 1950s. It will also be shown that the Party's performance in elections was conditional upon domestic issues rather than foreign affairs. As a result, this thesis will not attempt to assess the foreign policy of the Labour Party in this period.

The initial stages of Labour's political recovery after 1951 will be covered in chapter two. This will examine the Party's search for a new programme after the return to opposition and it will be argued here that the familiar portrait of a party which had run out of ideas and energy is inaccurate. It will show that the period between 1951 and 1955 saw the first attempts by Labour policy makers to adapt the Party's appeal to the changed conditions of post-war Britain. The nature of this adaptation provoked a fierce debate within the Party, but this did not prevent Labour from producing a manifesto in 1955 which attracted the fourth highest vote in the Party's history.

Chapters three and four will examine Labour politics between 1955 and 1959. The burden of the analysis here is that the Party was in a relatively strong position by 1959. The Parliamentary Labour Party rediscovered the benefits of unity under a new leader; organisation in the constituencies was improved; modern techniques of presentation in an election campaign were introduced; and the leadership carried some important revisions of domestic policy during a three year review of the Party's programme. The examination of this policy review in Chapter four offers a more detailed study of the project than has hitherto been available. The central proposition here is that the policy
makers in the 1950s provided most of the programme on which Labour returned to power in 1964.

The resumption of conflict within the Party after the 1959 defeat is covered in chapter five. The aim of this chapter is to show that sections of the Party were overtaken by a mood of defeatism for a time after the Conservatives' third consecutive election victory. Radical changes were proposed for Labour's constitution, organisation and image - the result was a fracturing of Party unity and a series of unnecessary controversies. It will also be argued, though, that the Party was able to recover by 1964 primarily because of developments which had taken place before 1960. Labour was able to rely on an organisational base, improvements in presentation and an agreed policy programme which had been worked out largely in the second half of the 1950s. The development of policy between 1959 and 1964 will be examined separately in chapter six. As will be shown, Labour's policy makers decided not to embark on a further detailed review of the Party's programme after the 1959 election. Only four main policy documents were produced and Labour's programme continued to consist of proposals which had been agreed between 1956 and 1958. Changes were made to the Party's economic policy, but it will be argued that the importance of these changes in electoral terms has been overstated by historians and political commentators.

Opposition to the Party leadership between 1955 and 1964 provides the focus for chapter seven. Although a vocal minority within the Labour movement consistently opposed the leadership over policy and strategy, it will be shown here that this minority was successfully marginalised for much of the period under discussion. The Left enjoyed a victory over the campaign to change Labour's constitution in 1960, and they were at least pleased to see a renewed emphasis on the language of planning in Party policy after 1959. But the leadership's control of the policy-making process remained secure and even the election of a new Party leader in 1963 with apparent roots in the Left failed to produce decisive changes in Labour's programme. The marginalisation of opposition within Labour's ranks was a significant victory for the leadership, particularly after 1955.
The final chapter examines one of the most important manifestations of Labour's underlying strength in the period: the commitment of the Party membership. No previous study has attempted to assess in any depth the effect of post-war affluence or the disappointment of consecutive election defeats on Labour's core supporters - the members and activists in the constituencies. Using records from wards, constituency parties and divisional parties, as well as interviews conducted with activists from the period, it will be shown that the Party retained an unprecedented degree of enthusiasm and support among the membership in the 1950s and early 1960s. The significance of this commitment in the local parties is that it should be seen as part of a wider picture of Labour renewal and strength after 1951.

The main archival sources for this study have been provided by the Labour Party's own records. Briefing papers and minutes of the meetings of the National Executive Committee, the Home Policy Sub-Committee and the Organisation Sub-Committee have been examined in detail for the whole period. Where appropriate, minutes of the meetings of the National Council of Labour, the Financial and Economic Policy Sub-Committee, the Chairmen's Sub-Committee, the Publicity and Political Education Sub-Committee, and Home Policy study groups and working parties have also been used. A comparative study of manifestos, drafts and policy documents forms the basis of chapters four and six. The Labour Party Annual Conference Reports for the period were also a valuable source of information. The minutes of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee were consulted but were found to be of limited value in the context of this thesis.

The most useful collections of private papers were those of Richard Crossman, Tony Crosland, Patrick Gordon Walker, Hugh Dalton, Philip Noel-Baker and George Brown. The General Secretary's papers at the Labour Party's archives are also a rich source for the period. The papers of Clement Attlee, Maurice Edelman, Michael Foot, Tony Greenwood and Herbert Morrison were consulted, but little of this material appears in
the following chapters. Unfortunately, the papers of Hugh Gaitskell remain closed to researchers. His diary has been published for the period between 1945 and 1956, but more comprehensive material is available in the diaries of Richard Crossman and Hugh Dalton. Tony Benn kindly agreed to lend the present writer a copy of his diary for the period between 1951 and 1960 before it was published. The unpublished diary of Patrick Gordon Walker was of particular value for the period between 1951 and 1955 and for the post-1959 election controversies.

The interviews with current and former Labour parliamentarians were of enormous value. Lord Jay, Lord Rodgers, Peter Shore MP and Dick Taverne offered a detailed insight into several important areas. Requests for interviews were made to eleven other current or former Labour parliamentarians, but unfortunately these requests were always declined. The interviews with constituency activists provided valuable background information, but clearly it was not possible to draw specific conclusions from such a small sample. These activists were contacted by writing to the secretaries of 120 Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) in southern England.

The documentary evidence for the chapter on local politics was largely provided by records from the following Constituency and Divisional Labour Parties: Abingdon, Bermondsey, Greenwich, Hornchurch, London, Newcastle West, Romford, Ruislip Northwood, Stockport Central, Sheffield Hallam, Southall and Hanwell, West Ham South, West Salford, Woolwich and York. The composition of this sample was governed by the availability of material in local archives and ease of access, both of which vary widely across the country. Local party records also concentrate frequently on organisation rather than policy; as a result, the records were often of limited value in the context of this thesis. There is a clear need for a history of the Constituency Labour Parties to be written, based on the records of a much larger sample of local material. However, this chapter was not an attempt to begin the task.

A wide selection of newspapers and periodicals was consulted during the research and was used in the following chapters. A
list of these titles appears in the bibliography alongside a full list of the published works which were consulted for this thesis. The results of the general elections of 1951, 1955, 1959 and 1964 are set out in tables in the appendix.

References

4. Ibid., p.402.

2. The return to opposition, 1951-1955

The Labour Party lost the 1951 election, but the result can be presented as one of the least disappointing defeats in the Party's history. No British party had ever secured as many votes in an election, the Tory Government's majority of 17 appeared vulnerable to by-election defeats and back-bench revolts, and the size of Labour's individual membership was climbing to its peak total in 1952. Labour politicians in 1951 could look back on the recent past with some satisfaction. They had served in government for 11 years, helped to steer the country through the Second World War, won their first ever majority at Westminster and honoured commitments that had been part of Labour's programme for decades. At worst, defeat was seen as a minor and temporary setback on the Party's route to electoral dominance; at best, defeat offered the Party an opportunity for calm reflection, a chance to decide how it should build on the reforms of the Attlee Governments. Hugh Dalton, who served in Cabinet for most of Attlee's premiership, believed that Labour had left office at exactly the right time and with acceptable losses. In his view, the result was 'wonderful'.

The circumstances of defeat may have provided some comfort for the Party, therefore, but they also disguised some profound difficulties. Returning to opposition in 1951 was a more complicated transition than it had been in 1924 or 1931. The first two minority Labour governments had been unable to transform their core commitments into legislation. As a result, these commitments were simply carried forward for inclusion in each new manifesto before 1945 - the list included public ownership of the coal industry and the railways, increased provision of public sector housing, improved social services and full employment. By 1951, though, a Labour Government had achieved these objectives and most of the rest of its manifesto commitments. This success meant that the Party could no longer rely on a programme which in part had served Labour since the 1900 election. Policy had been exhausted and it was not clear immediately how Labour would respond. In opposition, its task
was to draw up a new programme which defined Labour's purpose in a society which offered universal welfare provision, low levels of unemployment and improved relations between trade unions and government. This was always likely to prove difficult, but the process of policy-making in opposition was complicated still further by disunity within the Party. As will be shown, conflict and division was a particular problem for Labour between 1951 and 1955.

This chapter will examine the Party's attempt to recover from the 1951 election defeat. It will be acknowledged in the following paragraphs that the return to opposition was a difficult time for Labour, but it will also be argued that in two important respects the Party was in a stronger position by 1955 than it had been in 1951. First, unity was restored within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) during the period. The leadership marginalised its critics in the PLP and helped to ensure that Labour was able to concentrate its attention on issues such as policy, presentation and organisation after 1955. Secondly, an initial attempt was made to construct a new policy programme after the exhaustion of traditional proposals by the Attlee Governments. The familiar description of Labour as a party which had run out of ideas in the early 1950s will be challenged in this chapter. Instead, it will be argued that the 1951 election was followed by Labour's first attempts to respond to economic and social change in post-war Britain. It was of particular importance here that the policy makers rejected attempts to position increased public ownership at the centre of Labour's new mission. Although most of the new thinking on Labour policy occurred after 1955, the policy makers in the early 1950s produced a useful first draft of the Party's new programme. The result was a manifesto in 1955 which attracted the fourth highest vote in Labour's history before 1993 - both in terms of the aggregate vote and the percentage of votes cast. It will be argued throughout this thesis that the political recovery of the Labour Party after 1951 occurred in the main in the second half of the 1950s, but this chapter will show that recovery was helped by developments which took place between 1951 and 1955. In order to begin this task, an
assessment must first be made of the condition of the Party in
1951.

The defeat of the Labour Government in the general election of
1951 was not unexpected. Attlee's administration had lost more
than 95 per cent of its majority in the 1950 election, and the
Conservatives' clear lead in the opinion polls throughout 1951
showed that they were likely to achieve the small swing that
they required to form a government. Political problems had
continued to weaken the position of the Labour Government during
1951. The resignations of Bevan, Wilson and Freeman in April
over the twin issues of health service charges and the defence
budget graphically illustrated the disunity within the Party;
the devaluation of sterling in September 1949 continued to push
up the price of imports and the cost of living; Gaitskell's
pre-election budget increased overall levels of taxation, and
in September 1951 further cuts were made in the rations of basic
foodstuffs. These difficulties were compounded by the success of
the Conservative Party's efforts to revive its political
fortunes after its defeat in 1945: the organisation of the Party
was revitalised and policy was modified to take account of
changes which had been made by the Attlee Government - public
ownership of the Bank of England, the coal mines and the
railways was accepted, and similar acceptance was made of the
principle of increased public spending to finance the welfare
state. The Tories also had a simple message for the electorate:
Conservative government would end the austerity and shortages
caused by socialist bureaucracy and inefficiency.

Apart from attempts by the opposition parties to portray
Aneurin Bevan as an extremist who would become Prime Minister if
Labour won, and a row over the Government's handling of the
Iranian oil crisis, the 1951 campaign proper was relatively
restrained. Labour's appeal was built around a defence of its
achievements since 1945 and the prediction that a Conservative
government would return large areas of Britain to the poverty
and mass unemployment of the 1930s. The manifesto led the way
in this 'safety first' approach. At best, its descriptions of
policies were cautious; at worst, they were ambiguous. The
document contained very few positive or new proposals to fire the imagination of the electorate, but it also presented opponents with little opportunity to attack either the cost or the content of the Party's programme.

The most positive aspects of the manifesto included a commitment to build at least 200,000 houses each year, a pledge to reduce taxation on 'moderate' incomes at the first opportunity, a policy of statutory dividend limitation, and a commitment to establish equal pay between men and women in the public services. The policy makers, though, were less specific about industrial democracy, public ownership and education. On industrial democracy the manifesto outlined the Party's intention 'to associate the workers more closely with the administration of public industries and services'; but the precise role that workers would play in the management of these industries and the mechanisms that would enable them to participate in administration were left unclear. The section on public ownership said that a future Labour government would 'take over concerns which fail the nation and start new public enterprises wherever this will serve the national interest'. But the criteria by which an industry would be condemned as having failed the nation were left unstated, and it was equally unclear whether the 'national interest' would be defined primarily in terms of profits, export orders, a commitment to research and development or full employment. Finally, on education there was a simple commitment to 'extend our policy of giving all young people equal opportunities in education'. But no specific reference was made to the comprehensive principle, the role of the local authorities or the position of the private sector. (14)

Despite its internal problems and its lack of substantive policy proposals, Labour achieved its highest ever vote in 1951. This owed much to the reduced number of candidates fielded by the Liberal Party. But it also confirmed the popularity of the Attlee Governments' reforms and the strength of the Party's core support. In Wales, the North East of England, the Potteries and East London Labour polled more than 60 per cent of the votes cast. In the North East Midlands, the West Riding, Coventry, the Black Country, South London and parts of Forth it polled more
than 55 per cent of the vote. (15) The Party's strength in these areas, though, was overshadowed by its failure in Southern England. Labour won in only 24 southern constituencies outside of London, leaving the remaining 120 seats to the Tories. (16) In Kent, Sussex, Surrey and the South West the electorate voted overwhelmingly for the Conservative promise of less bureaucracy and more prosperity. In terms of seats, the Tories' hold on the South far outweighed Labour's advantage in Wales, the North and the Midlands. As will be shown, the Party's weakness in the south was a recurring problem in contests against the Tories.

The first analysis of the 1951 election for the NEC was provided by Morgan Phillips, the Party's General Secretary. The closest he came to an explanation of the defeat was a vague statement about 'irrationally fostered fears of the consequences of a Labour victory'. Overall, the report was marked by a sense of optimism: Attlee's personal success was highlighted as 'one of the outstanding features of the campaign' and the Party was said to be in 'good fettle', with its support increasing throughout the country. There was no indication in the report that the Party faced any specific political problems or that its return to office might be delayed past the next election. Instead, the immediate tasks outlined for the Party were a recruitment drive to increase the individual membership, the improvement of Labour's financial position and the appointment of more full-time agents. (17)

Tribune, a left-wing publication whose editorial board and contributors included Labour MPs, shared the optimism of Phillips in 1951 and claimed that the Party's period in office had been merely 'interrupted'. (18) To a large extent, this optimism was based on the belief that Labour would be returned to power to restore full employment and adequate welfare provision after a brief period of Tory rule during which many of the social and economic reforms made after 1945 were expected to be reversed. An NEC discussion paper acknowledged that in policy terms Labour was 'temporarily sterile' and uncertain about the future. (19) But this was not considered to be a problem so long as the belief remained that the Tories would destroy their own
electoral fortunes with cuts in public expenditure and the return of high unemployment.

This sense of optimism was to prove unfounded and it also took no account of the extent of Labour's internal problems in 1951. For a time after the election defeat the Party was torn by a division between the leadership and a group which was known as the Bevanites. The origins of this division were in foreign affairs. The Bevanites developed from the Keep Left group which had criticised Ernest Bevin's foreign policy in November 1946, and they were formed officially after Gaitskell introduced a budget in 1951 which aimed to finance a massive rearmament programme. Their first public show of defiance came when they led a revolt by 57 Labour MPs over an official amendment to the defence estimates in March 1952. But the split within the Party was also concerned with much wider issues than defence. The Bevanites should be seen as part of a radical tradition in British socialism which includes the ILP in the nineteenth century, Victory For Socialism in the late 1950s and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy in the 1970s and 1980s. The Bevanites presented themselves in the first half of the 1950s as the guardians of the socialist soul of the Labour movement. They were effective self-publicists who liked to contrast their dynamism and irreverence with the apparent caution and dullness of the Party hierarchy. As Ben Pimlott has argued;

'The essence of Bevanism was outrage: the Bevanites were determined to shock. They were the enemies of blimps, snobs and stuffed shirts of whatever political persuasion. They enjoyed the anger of right-wing union barons as much as the bluster of Morrisonian MPs or, for that matter, the indignation of Tory colonels. They were anti-upper class, anti-public school, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-American.'

The group took its name from the most prominent critic of the leadership within the Party, Aneurin Bevan. By 1951, Bevan had become established as the senior left-wing member of the PLP: in domestic policy terms this meant that he believed in an enlarged
public sector within the mixed economy, increased state planning and greater industrial democracy. (23) But Bevan was much more than a rebel and a critic; he was recognised also as a potential leader of the Party and this was the root of the difficulty with the Labour hierarchy. The Party at the time lacked experienced former ministers who were younger than sixty and who could be expected to lead the Party through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Attlee was sixty-eight in 1951 and his retirement was expected within the next few years. His Cabinet had been an old Cabinet, so the number of possible successors was limited. Morrison was one option, but he was already sixty-three in 1951. Gaitskell was a rising star, but he had only been an MP since 1945 and was more likely to be seen as Labour's next leader but one. Bevan, though, had been in Parliament since 1929, he had made his reputation as Minister of Health and Housing between 1945 and 1950 and he was only fifty-four in 1951. Securing the leadership for Bevan was seen by some in the Party as the prime motivation of the Bevanites. (24)

Ironically, Bevan was an infrequent attender of Bevanite meetings. Instead, the most prominent members of the group were Barbara Castle, Richard Crossman, Michael Foot, Jennie Lee, Ian Mikardo, Tom Driberg and Harold Wilson. (25) The group was based in the PLP and its aggregate membership was 49 - at its peak in 1952 it was likely to attract about 30 members to its weekly meetings. (26) The Bevanites have featured prominently in the historiography of the Party in the 1950s because the significance of the divisions within Labour's ranks at this time has been emphasised. (27) The important point about the Bevanites in the context of this thesis, though, is that they were marginalised by the Party leadership between 1951 and 1955. Divisions in the Party had not healed necessarily by the middle of the decade, but at least action had been taken to ensure that Labour could concentrate on its political and electoral recovery after 1955, rather than focus again on internal conflict and renewed challenges from the Left. Arguably, one of the main achievements of the Labour leadership after 1951 was that it won the civil war in the Party and thereby established a relative peace in the movement for most of the remainder of the decade.
To understand the success of the leadership in neutralising the Bevanite challenge, an assessment must be made of the scale of this challenge.

Close colleagues of Attlee were in no doubt that the Bevanites represented a considerable threat to his leadership. During the spring and summer of 1952 senior members of the PLP held a series of meetings to discuss the divisions in the Party and the position of the Labour leader. Those present at these meetings included: Herbert Morrison, the deputy leader; Hugh Gaitskell; Patrick Gordon Walker, the former Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations; Alf Robens, the former Minister of Labour; Sir Hartley Shawcross, the former Attorney-General; Sir Frank Soskice, the former Solicitor-General; Richard Stokes, the former Lord Privy Seal; and William Whiteley, the Party's Chief Whip. (28) Members of this group first invited Attlee and Jim Griffiths, the former Colonial Secretary and Minister of National Insurance, to discuss the problems presented by Bevan and his followers in the Spring of 1952. They offered to help Attlee in any way possible, but found that he was 'rather casual' about the threat from Bevan, which he believed would 'fade out'. (29) Paradoxically, Attlee also told the meeting that he was too old to be a Prime Minister again and that he would have made up his mind to resign earlier if it had not been for the divisions within the Party. (30) Whiteley later told the group that Attlee had already spoken of resignation before the 1951 election. (31) Convinced that the retirement of Attlee was imminent, members of the group met throughout the summer of 1952 to consider the possible consequences of his departure. At these meetings it was agreed that Morrison was the natural successor to Attlee. Although Morrison was old and his political reputation had suffered during his time as Foreign Secretary in 1951, the alternatives were limited. The only other candidate who was discussed as a serious contender was Griffiths, but his position was weakened by the knowledge that Morrison would refuse to serve under him as deputy leader. (32) This meant that if Griffiths was successful he would be left isolated against a potential challenge by Bevan - and a Bevan succession had to be avoided at all costs. The group, however, disagreed about the
best way to ensure the election of Morrison. Some felt strongly that Attlee should resign at once - the Chief Whip was convinced that in a contest at that time the PLP would have chosen Morrison. Others, notably Griffiths and Gaitskell, felt that Attlee should remain as leader until after the next election and then retire. They put this suggestion to Attlee and received 'a non-committal but not altogether unfavourable reply. He would think it over'.

Gaitskell and Griffiths appear to have been successful because in July 1952 Attlee announced that he would lead the Party into the next election. Gordon Walker and his colleagues at least welcomed this new commitment and urged Attlee to take the lead in the fight against Bevan and his supporters. Attlee, however, rejected this request because 'he had been advised by "people close to the rank and file" not to attack. Bevan would hang himself in time'. Gaitskell was particularly depressed by the Labour leader's caution. He believed that support for Bevan had increased in the PLP and that his following might have been as high as seventy.

These discussions about the future of the leadership are significant because they provide an insight into the thinking of the Party hierarchy at the time. In particular, they confirm that the Bevanites were perceived as a serious threat to the leadership and that Gaitskell was much more concerned about this threat than Attlee. But was this perception of the Bevanite threat accurate? It is difficult to quantify the precise strength of the Bevanites in the period, but it is certainly true that Bevan and his followers were popular among constituency party activists in the period. This was important because the local parties controlled seven of the twenty-seven places on the National Executive Committee - the governing body and policy-making forum of the Party. Critics of the Bevanites accused them of organising support among the CLPs and of creating in effect a 'party within the Party'. Bevan himself had invited this charge when he spoke in November 1951 of the need to 'capture the constituency parties and so put a squeeze on the Parliamentary Party'.

The mobilisation of Bevanite support in the constituencies
was usually attributed to Ian Mikardo, who at the time was the MP for Reading. Mikardo, however, denied that the Bevanites organised support among the local parties. He stated in his autobiography that he had never had a Bevanite agent, organiser or contact in any CLP: 'The very idea was so impractical - fanciful, that only a paranoiac could have entertained it'.(41) Instead, a more straightforward explanation can be offered for the group's popularity in the constituencies. The Bevanites presented themselves as fearless, imaginative and committed socialists. Rather than organise directly in the constituencies, members of the group used their talent for self-promotion to reinforce this image through high profile rows with the Party hierarchy, articles in Tribune, and appearances on the 'Brain s Trusts' - where a panel of Bevanites answered questions from an audience of constituency activists. Members of the local parties confirmed that the image of Bevanite vigour and irreverance was the group's main strength. An activists from Brentwood CLP recalled:

'To us it was imperative that we had a strong Bevanite commitment on the National Executive representing the constituency parties. That's what fired us and kept us going. I thought that the Bevanites were prepared to challenge old Labour beliefs and old Labour positions...they were offering revitalisation of the Party generally and speaking the language of the 1950s rather than that of the 20s and 30s.'(42)

Similarly, activists from Surbiton CLP supported the Bevanites because of a shared belief in public ownership, a shared hostility to the trade union block vote and a shared image of themselves as 'radicals'.(43)

Perhaps the best demonstration of local party support for the Bevanites occurred during the noisy and often bad-tempered Party Conference at Morecambe in 1952. Douglas Jay remembered this Conference for the 'groups of screaming fanatics in the gallery'.(44) Hugh Dalton described it to a colleague as a 'bloody bore'(45) and shortly after the Conference wrote in his
diary: 'I am very gloomy about the Party. We haven't had so strong hatreds since 1931'. (46) Morecambe provided another forum in which the Bevanites and the leadership could play out their differences and this was reflected in the atmosphere of the Conference. Dalton himself was a victim of the escalating battle in the Party. Despite reaffirming his socialist credentials at a Labour rally before the Morecambe Conference - when he spoke about the need to take action against large estates, accumulations of capital and the City of London - Dalton was removed from the constituency section of the NEC after more than 25 years of service on the Executive. (47) Herbert Morrison joined him in defeat. They were replaced by Crossman and Wilson, which left Griffiths as the only representative of the constituencies who was not a member of the Bevanite clique. (48)

The elections for the constituency section of the Executive at Morecambe appeared to represent a victory for the Left against the caution of the Party leadership. Hugh Gaitskell, however, was determined that this victory would be reversed and his counter-attack began at Stalybridge on the weekend after Conference. Gaitskell alleged that some of the constituency party delegates at Conference had been Communists or Communist-inspired. And in a thinly disguised attack on the Bevanite hierarchy, many of whom wrote for Tribune, the New Statesman & Nation, Reynolds' News and other publications, he declared that the time had come to 'end the attempt at mob rule by a group of frustrated journalists and restore the authority and leadership of the solid, sound, sensible majority of the Movement'. (49)

Gaitskell's outburst at Stalybridge was an unfair attack on his opponents in the Party. Allegations of Communist infiltration in the constituency parties caused unnecessary offence in the movement and risked damaging Labour's image in the country. The charge should not have been made because there was nothing to support it beyond the hearsay evidence of some 'well-informed correspondents'. (50) All of the activists interviewed for this project who were present in the Party in 1952 deny any knowledge of a Communist presence in their local ward or constituency. Douglas Jay, who first suggested to Gaitskell that Morecambe was an example of 'mob rule' in
practice, believed that the attack at Stalybridge had been too violent. (51) The NEC made it clear that they did not wish to pursue the issue of infiltration when they rejected Wilson's proposal to investigate the allegations. (52) In other respects, though, the speech was a necessary and timely assault, both for the Party as a whole and for Gaitskell personally. The split within the Party could not be allowed to continue indefinitely - Labour needed to have a clear identity, and if the leadership did not want Bevanite ideas and policies to be part of that identity they had to make this apparent as soon as possible.

Gaitskell disagreed with the Bevanite approach to domestic and foreign politics and he believed that his views were shared by the majority of the Party. Attlee and Morrison had failed to take a stand against the Bevanites, so Gaitskell seized the initiative at Stalybridge and in the process alerted many of his colleagues to his own leadership credentials. He even found support for his attack among the local parties. London News, the monthly publication of the London Labour Party, used similar language to Gaitskell in its criticism of the NEC election results at Morecambe:

'It looks as if some constituency parties have lost their sense of proportion in the face of the oratorical gifts of Mr Bevan and the industrious labours of his associates. Others appear to have given Mr Bevan their enthusiastic support for reasons which, to do him justice, he would never approve. Among these are the near-Communists, the pacifists, the temperamental anarchists, the "clear-out-of-everywhere" school.' (53)

The Party leadership took up the attack within weeks of Gaitskell's offensive at Stalybridge. Attlee made his move against the Bevanites at the start of the new session at Westminster. A resolution was drawn up by Labour's Parliamentary Committee - the Shadow Cabinet - which called for the 'immediate abandonment of all Group organisations within the Party'. (54) Attlee agreed to submit this to a meeting of the PLP and to resist any attempts to amend the wording of the resolution. When
the PLP accepted Attlee's resolution on 23 October by 188 votes to 51, the Bevanite group in Parliament was forced to discontinue its regular meetings. This action against the group weakened its standing at Westminster still further. In November, Bevan challenged Morrison for the deputy leadership and was defeated by 194 votes to 82. In the annual elections of the PLP in the same month, Bevan was returned to the Shadow Cabinet in twelfth and final place, but no other Bevanite was successful. In contrast, Gaitskell repeated his performance from the previous year when he was elected to the Shadow Cabinet in third place. The Times noted the strength of Gaitskell's position within the Party after he had 'risked his political life' at Stalybridge. 

After the drama of Morecambe and Stalybridge and the disciplinary measures of October 1952, an 'armed truce' was maintained between the Bevanites and the Party leadership until April 1954. Once again, when this truce was breached the immediate cause of the renewed conflict was a defence issue. Bevan interrupted Attlee in the Commons and challenged the Labour leader's cautious support for a united front against Communist aggression in South East Asia. When Attlee criticised his conduct at a PLP meeting the following day, Bevan repeated his performance of April 1951 and resigned from the Parliamentary Committee 'in a sulk', according to one observer. This episode further weakened the Bevanite group within the Party. Despite the clear disapproval of most his colleagues in the group, Wilson stepped into Bevan's place in the Shadow Cabinet and thereby confirmed his removal from the Bevanites. More importantly, Bevan's conduct - his regular tantrums at Party meetings, his criticisms of the leadership and his second resignation - finally seemed to confirm that he was not suitable to become Party leader. When Bevan contested the post of Party treasurer against Gaitskell at the Scarborough Conference in 1954, his defeat by 4.3 million votes to 2 million votes showed that Gaitskell was the favoured candidate of the trade unions and of almost half of the constituency parties. The result meant that Bevan no longer had a base in either the Shadow Cabinet or the National Executive. Gaitskell, who had
previously been co-opted to work for the NEC, now had a secure position on both. The leadership prospects of Bevan receded still further in 1955 when he narrowly escaped expulsion from the Party. In April he challenged Attlee in the Commons during a debate on the hydrogen bomb and led 62 Labour members in an abstention on the opposition amendment. The PLP voted to withdraw the whip from Bevan, but he survived the vote on expulsion in the NEC by 14 votes to 13. (60)

In contrast to Bevan's declining fortunes, Gaitskell had emerged as the young standard bearer of the Right less than ten years after he had entered parliament for South Leeds in 1945. He had risen quickly to become Chancellor by 1950 and in the opposition years he showed a willingness and an ability to challenge the Left - he led the counter attack at Stalybridge in 1952 and he beat Bevan for the treasurership at Scarborough in 1954. By the time of the 1955 election the battle against the Bevanites had been won and Gaitskell had firmly established himself as a potential leader of the Party. As will be shown in the following chapter, the result of these developments was the election of Gaitskell to succeed Attlee in December 1955. It will be argued throughout this thesis that Gaitskell led Labour's recovery after 1955 and laid the basis for the Party's return to power in 1964. In particular, he controlled a long-term review of policy which eventually fed into the manifestos of 1959 and 1964. The significance of the marginalisation of the Bevanites in the early 1950s in this context is that it helped to make Labour's long-term recovery possible. Before discussing these issues further, though, the Party's initial attempt to rewrite policy after the 1951 defeat will be assessed.

Work on domestic policy was the responsibility of the Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee of the NEC - a group that was known more simply as the Home Policy Committee. Initially in 1951 this set up four sub-committees to examine policy on nationalised industries, private industry, the social services and agriculture and rural life. (61) In May 1952 a Financial and Economic Policy Sub-Committee was formed to consider the broad
economic implications of domestic policy proposals. It is worth noting, though, that detailed costings of policies were not always made at this time. (62) Arrangements were made to consult the trade unions during the formation of policy, but the links were to be kept 'flexible and informal'. (63) It was also agreed at the outset that constituency members should participate in the work of policy-making, despite the fact that Herbert Morrison, the Chairman of the Home Policy Committee, had accused them of 'clumsy thinking or no thinking' and of ignoring the facts of life when they submitted motions to Conference. (64) It was suggested that consultation could take two forms: members of the Home Policy Committee could visit constituency parties and listen to their views direct, or local parties could discuss pamphlets produced by the Committee and send their views to the Executive at Transport House. (65) With the machinery in place, the initial aim was to produce an interim policy statement for the 1952 Conference at Morecambe.

Facing the Facts, the interim statement, left the NEC maximum room for manoeuvre at Conference because its authors carefully avoided the inclusion of detailed commitments. As the title of the document implied, the NEC preferred to outline their assessment of the main problems and challenges which faced the country in the early 1950s, rather than offer a detailed set of policies for discussion. The problems which the statement diagnosed were instantly familiar. Facing the Facts identified the need to improve Britain's balance of payments as the most important challenge for the nation. (66) This was no surprise, because the post-war Labour Governments had consistently battled to improve Britain's export performance - particularly when Cripps was Chancellor. (67) The document recalled the spirit of the Cripps austerity programme when it outlined the need to divert resources to industry at the expense of other goods and services. The aim was to increase output and productivity, but the methods by which this would be pursued were not set out in detail. The expansion of the coal and steel industries was identified as a priority, but there was no firm commitment to renationalise steel if the Tories acted on their promise to return it to the private sector. Instead, the 'public interest'
The sub-committee on socially owned industries offered the Party a way out of the debate about more or less state ownership of whole industries by outlining some new forms of public ownership: for example, the extension of the Co-operative movement, state building of factories which could be let to private firms, and the establishment of state firms within an industry to compete with the private sector. (69) The sub-committee on private industry agreed with this final proposal and added some ideas of its own. These included the abolition of resale price maintenance and the use of statutory powers to impose price controls. (70) The group on agriculture suggested increased public ownership of farming land, while the sub-committee on social services offered the creation of a
Ministry of Social Security and a feasibility study of a national superannuation scheme to replace flat-rate pensions. (71)

It is possible to suggest a number of explanations for the absence of these policy ideas from Facing the Facts. Some of the ideas were at an early stage of development and might not have stood up to a full Conference debate and public scrutiny in the press. The 1952 Conference was perhaps a little too soon after an election defeat for the presentation of new policies - possibly the NEC wished to test the mood of the Party at Conference before pressing ahead with the detailed work of constructing a programme. Labour's gains in the local elections of May 1952 also appeared to confirm that there was no need for the Party to offer anything new in order to win power - voters, it seemed, had already begun to reject the Tories. Finally, the Bevanite controversy was likely to make the Party leadership over-cautious about policy: the less that was said about policy, the less opportunity there was for an argument. If the intention was to avoid controversy, however, the leadership was soon disappointed.

The bad-tempered Morecambe Conference provided the first opportunity for the Party to discuss collectively its future after the 1951 election. On the second day of the Conference, Attlee opened the debate on Labour's new programme by summarising the main points contained in Facing the Facts. The delegates showed their disappointment with this document by supporting a composite resolution moved by Islington North CLP which called on the Executive to produce a much more clearly defined set of policies for a future Labour government. Arguably the most significant part of the composite instructed the NEC to draw up a list of industries which would be taken into public ownership during the lifetime of the next Labour administration. This was a commitment which the leadership had been reluctant to make since at least 1950. The resolution also called for a 'speedy' redistribution of wealth in favour of workers, greater democracy in the workplace, 'radical' educational reforms to ensure full opportunities for all, and proposals which would restore, co-ordinate and extend the value and scope of the
social services. (72) Morrison accepted this resolution on behalf of the NEC, but he reaffirmed his opposition to the idea of a target list of industries for public ownership. (73) He also suggested that amendments to the resolution should be remitted to the Executive for further consideration: these included a proposal for the nationalisation of land, a call for a 'vast expansion of the school-building programme' and a demand for the abolition of the House of Lords. (74)

Morecambe, therefore, left the NEC with a set of instructions for policy-making. Crossman believed that the Conference had opened the way for 'a more militant Socialist policy'. (75) When the Executive met for a weekend in December to consider a 'broad framework' for a policy statement for the 1953 Conference, Crossman's judgement appeared to be confirmed. (76) The dominant issue at the meetings was public ownership and the need to draw up a list of industries which would be taken over in the lifetime of the next Labour administration. The Bevanite members of the Committee took the initiative in this area, particularly Bevan and Mikardo who suggested a number of possible candidates. Attlee was cautious throughout the meetings and told the Executive that he wished to hear a detailed, prima facie case made before any industry became a candidate for public ownership. (77) During the meetings it was agreed that an appropriate case had been made for the nationalisation of the chemical industry, home minerals, water, air-frame assembly and aero-engines. It was also agreed that further consideration should be given to ship-building, ship-repairing, marine engineering, textile machinery and boot-making machinery.

Although it was stressed that the meeting had reached only 'tentative conclusions', Labour's industrial policy by the end of 1952 appeared to be much more clearly defined than it had been during the 1951 election. If Labour's manifesto for the 1955 election had been based closely on the resolutions passed at Morecambe and the preliminary conclusions of the NEC in December 1952, it would have promised a substantial restructuring of the British economy and a clear growth in the size of the public sector. However, as passions cooled after Morecambe, as the Conference faded in the memory and as the Home
Policy Committee began its detailed work, the retreat on public ownership began. The Committee kept in place the existing sub-committees on agriculture, social services and economic policy and set up four working parties on possible candidates for public ownership: engineering and aircraft, textile machinery, chemicals and shipbuilding. The TUC leadership viewed this enquiry into candidates for state ownership with hostility. At a joint meeting of the TUC General Council and the NEC in January 1953 the trade union leaders refused to co-operate formally with the working parties: they did not want to become involved directly in policy-making, they claimed that they did not have the time to attend the meetings, and Lincoln Evans of the Steelworkers expressed serious doubts about the value of nationalisation. Rather than have a formal input into policy formation, the TUC agreed to place its appropriate committees at the disposal of the NEC for whatever consultation or advice was thought necessary.

The discussions of the working parties about public ownership appear to have been conducted in practical rather than in ideological terms; efficiency and productivity were the key considerations rather than principle. It soon became clear that while it was comparatively easy to draft resolutions which demanded new measures of nationalisation, it was much more difficult to produce workable proposals which could be justified on economic grounds. The result was that the working parties rejected full scale nationalisation for all the industries which they examined. Although it was chaired by Ian Mikardo, the working party on engineering and aircraft rejected the outright nationalisation of the aircraft industry. It also rejected the idea of taking over whole firms within the industry. Instead, it proposed that Labour would acquire an interest in certain firms in an effort to stimulate competition in the sector. Only in 'very special circumstances' and if a firm was acting contrary to 'national interests' would it be acquired fully by the state.

The working party on shipbuilding was equally unenthusiastic about public ownership. The discussions here were based on a document which the Research Department had prepared in 1948 and
the conclusion was soon reached that the contraction of the industry could not be reversed or managed significantly better under state ownership. It was suggested that some form of Development Council which included representatives of government and all sides of the industry would be more appropriate than nationalisation. (82) The working party on chemicals agreed that they would base their deliberations on two considerations: the efficiency of the industry and the adequacy of its investment programme. (83) It was eventually proposed that the state should acquire a controlling interest in some of the major chemical manufacturing companies, but a firm decision was postponed until the TUC and the Home Policy Committee had been able to examine the full implications of a form of public control in this industry. (84) The working party on textile machinery failed to submit any proposals at all to the 1953 Conference. Its members decided that they needed to investigate the prospects of the whole textile industry before they could make any sensible decisions about the future of textile machinery - but it was not possible to conduct this investigation within the constraints of the original timetable. (85)

Although these four sub-committees had produced nothing to satisfy the spirit of the Morecambe resolution on public ownership, the Home Policy Committee clearly felt no pressure to offer other candidates for nationalisation instead. In effect, the Islington North composite was ignored. On the mining of home minerals, the Committee agreed that a Labour government would reserve powers to take over rights or workings 'in the light of the overall national interest' - it was also made clear that the 'national interest' would be defined in terms of economic efficiency. (86) The enquiry into mining machinery was guided by similarly practical considerations. It was proposed that the state should acquire a 'controlling interest' in a few key firms in order to stimulate investment in research and development. The report also stressed that a policy statement in this area should make specific reference to the way in which improvements in mining machinery would improve coal output in Britain. (87) A broadly similar policy was applied to the machine tool industry. It was suggested that the state should acquire a 'controlling
interest' in a small number of the larger machine tool manufacturers in an effort to promote rationalisation and efficiency. Finally, public ownership of the boot and shoe machinery industry was rejected outright.

The rejection of full public ownership for the eight industries discussed so far created little controversy within the Home Policy Committee. The Executive could at least argue that it had investigated the main potential candidates for nationalisation and found them to be unsuitable. Public ownership of agricultural land, however, was a more contentious issue for the Committee. During its deliberations in the spring of 1953, Bevan, Mikardo and Wilson all advocated state ownership of rented agricultural land. Others dismissed the idea as administratively unworkable and electorally damaging. Morgan Phillips and Peggy Herbison, the MP for North Lanarkshire, argued that the scheme would encounter widespread opposition among the farming community. George Brown, the MP for Belper and a future deputy leader of the Party, agreed with this view and argued that a change of ownership would be a huge administrative task and would do nothing to increase productivity in the short-term. Brown suggested that existing powers for supervision and the dispossession of inefficient farmers remained the most effective instruments of control. In March, the Home Policy Committee accepted this proposal by eight votes to none; the Bevanite proposal was rejected by eight votes to three.

The Bevanites' failure in the debate on agricultural land confirmed the extent to which they were marginalised within the policy-making forum of the NEC. At a meeting of the full Executive in April 1953 they failed once again to secure a commitment to the public ownership of either farm land or rented farm land. When a draft version of Challenge to Britain, Labour's first general statement of policy since 1951, was discussed by the NEC in May 1953, Bevan, Crossman, Castle and Mikardo put forward ten amendments in an attempt to bring the document more in line with Bevanite thinking. Nine of the amendments were defeated comfortably and one was ruled out of order. As a result, Challenge to Britain was in most respects
a cautious and moderate document. After Morecambe, the Executive chose to ignore the call for increased nationalisation in both industry and agriculture because they judged that it would be impractical and unpopular with voters. In its place they offered limited state intervention - for example, the use of state funds to compete with the private sector as a way of improving investment, efficiency and productivity. This was an idea which had the strong support of Hugh Gaitskell, who warned that Labour should avoid becoming identified as a party which supported public ownership as an end in itself. Shortly before the publication of Challenge to Britain he wrote;

'Politically one of our dangers at the moment is that we tend to be regarded as a party opposed to the energetic enterprising small man who wants to get on'. (96)

Gaitskell believed that Labour had to deflect the charge that it would stifle individual initiative with bureaucratic restrictions and a large extension of the public sector of the economy. To be sure, surveys conducted in the late 1950s and early 1960s confirmed the extent to which public ownership was unpopular with the electorate. (97) Increasingly, Gaitskell and his colleagues within the Party became convinced that economic growth and efficiency, full employment and social equality could be achieved largely within the existing balance of the mixed economy. The lesson of the 1940s appeared to be that Keynesian budgetary techniques and the management of the welfare state could be used to secure many of the social and economic objectives of the Labour Party. Further progress was required on the redistribution of income and wealth, but it was believed that this could be achieved without the reform of existing institutions in Britain and without further measures of large-scale public ownership. In short, the transformation of the economy through an extension of the state sector was no longer seen by some in the Party as a finite socialist goal. This analysis of the economy gained wider credence in 1952 with the publication of New Fabian Essays. (98) As will be shown, however, the most complete elaboration of the analysis arrived
in 1956 when Anthony Crosland published *The Future of Socialism*. (99)

The economic priorities identified in *Challenge to Britain* were drawn from the papers which Gaitskell and Crosland had produced for the Financial and Economic Policy Sub-Committee. (100) In their view, Britain had to increase its foreign currency reserves if it was to survive without aid from other nations. The need to increase the dollar reserves was of particular significance because the United States was the world's leading supplier of raw materials - Dalton, Cripps and Gaitskell had all struggled with this problem as Chancellors in Attlee's post-war administration. It was now suggested that a Labour government could defend the reserves by combining direct controls with a planned distribution of resources. Imports would be regulated, currency exchange would be controlled, capital investment would be channelled into the production of food and raw materials both at home and in the Commonwealth, and productivity increases would be targeted in industries which had 'big export prospects'. *Challenge to Britain* identified those industries which relied on sophisticated research and high levels of manufacturing skill as the ones which had the best export prospects: oil refining, chemicals, industrial plastics, aeronautical engineering and electronics. As we have seen, though, the extent to which a future Labour government would intervene in these industries to increase productivity was not clear. Full public ownership of these industries had been ruled out by the Executive, but there was a strong suggestion that individual firms in these sectors would be taken over. The only candidates offered for full nationalisation in the document were road haulage and steel.

The theme of state planning ran consistently through *Challenge to Britain*. Management of interest rates, regulation of investment, control of capital movement abroad, allocation of raw materials, control over the location of industry, dividend limitation and price controls were offered as measures which would secure full employment and growth without inflation. Labour also offered to 'review the detailed working of the tax system in order to ensure that it is efficient and just'. This
proposal was open to wide interpretation, but anything more detailed was probably inappropriate when a general election was not expected for almost two years.

More specific policies for the pursuit of social equality were contained in the document. There was a call for an immediate increase in the level of social security benefits and a pledge to conduct an annual review which would link benefits with inflation. Labour repeated its pledge from the 1951 manifesto to abolish health charges and it promised to improve health care for all by building more hospitals and by recruiting extra staff in the service. The Party's belief in the principle of equal pay between the sexes was reaffirmed - there was a commitment that a Labour government would introduce this principle immediately into the public sector. On housing it was promised that a Labour government would instruct local authorities to submit schemes for the take-over and modernisation of rent-controlled private properties - the aim was to transfer almost all rented property eventually to the local authorities. Although Labour was concerned primarily with public sector housing, there was also a pledge to reduce interest rates to help those who wished to buy their homes. The Party reaffirmed its commitment to comprehensive secondary education, although the rate at which the transition towards this system would take place was not mentioned. There was also a pledge to raise the statutory school-leaving age to sixteen as soon as it was 'practicable'. A commitment was made to ensure that students who were accepted for higher education would be entitled to a state scholarship. Finally, it was recognised that there was a need to promote science and technology in education - the document promised that funds would be made available for this and that Labour would establish a College of Technology. (101)

By 1953, therefore, the Party had a full domestic policy programme which combined measures for economic planning and efficiency with proposals for social reform. As with most documents of its kind, Challenge to Britain received a mixed response. Tribune's verdict on the policy statement was 'Good! But it can be a whole lot better'. (102) Predictably, the paper
called on the NEC to accept the Bevanite amendments to the document which had been rejected in May. The national press as a whole was equally unsure about its verdict. The Daily Mail described it as a victory for the 'right-wing'. The Daily Express offered an alternative view and declared it a 'victory for Mr Aneurin Bevan. At point after point his desires have prevailed'. The Financial Times believed that the nationalisation proposals and the philosophy of central control in the statement represented a 'strategic victory for the left-wing of the Labour Party'. The Times meanwhile criticised the Executive for producing a statement which they felt was 'extremely bare of specific proposals or ideas'.

John Freeman, one of the three Ministers who resigned from the Labour Government in 1951, described the document in the New Statesman & Nation as 'so unsatisfactory and yet so nearly good'.

Despite these reactions, Challenge to Britain was accepted at the Margate Conference of 1953 with few amendments. A delegate from Coventry North complained that the NEC had ignored the resolution on public ownership from the previous year and called for nationalised industry to be made more accountable to Parliament. Sir William Lawther, President of the National Union of Mineworkers, told him that he should 'go back to Coventry', the NEC opposed the resolution and the amendment was defeated. Five other attempts were made by delegates from Hendon, Sheffield, Solihull, West Renfrewshire and the Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers to commit the Party to further public ownership, but these were also rejected. The difference between the Conferences of 1952 and 1953 in this respect was that the NEC could support their rejection of full nationalisation for industries in 1953 with the detailed evidence of the sub-committees. Most delegates accepted this point and supported the platform's policy on public ownership at Margate. It may also have been true that the Party wished to present a public display of unity at the 1953 Conference after the rancour of Morecambe. This could partly explain why further amendments on industrial democracy in the nationalised industries, public ownership of land and the abolition of
fee-paying schools were also defeated. The Economist offered this interpretation of Margate;

'The counter attack by the party's right wing has succeeded; the policy on domestic affairs that last year seemed to be veering far to the left has been pushed a good way back to moderation.'

Labour's policy after the 1953 Conference was essentially the policy on which it fought the 1955 election. The NEC decided after Margate that work was required on some of the details, but the main components of the programme remained unchanged. Although the Party was broadly united behind the programme, the Left was unhappy about the cautious proposals on nationalisation and the absence of a specific pledge to introduce a capital gains tax. From a different perspective, Noel-Baker expressed reservations about the policy of comprehensive secondary education. Gordon Walker shared this view and argued that the Party should aim to provide a 'Grammar school education for all'. He was also concerned about a housing policy which emphasised the need to provide rented accommodation. He argued that local authorities should aim to provide houses for sale because the country did not want 'a population of council tenants'.

Hugh Gaitskell expressed a different concern about Challenge to Britain. In July 1954 he presented a paper to the NEC which argued that Labour would be unable to finance the commitments which it had made in its programme, despite press criticism that Challenge to Britain was cautious and that it lacked specific proposals. Even on the 'most favourable' assumption that a Labour government could deliver an annual growth rate of 3 per cent, Gaitskell believed that the programme was 'still too ambitious'. In order to fund the promised increased investment in industry and to finance the commitments on education, state benefits, health care, housing and equal pay without risking inflation, Labour would have to impose 'major increases in taxation'. As the paper concluded;
'The political consequences as well as the economic difficulties must be realised... A re-examination of the commitments entered into in Challenge to Britain is desirable if a future Labour Government is not to face an impossible situation'. (115)

As election year approached, however, it seemed increasingly unlikely that Labour would be asked to implement its programme in government - in that respect the cost of its programme was irrelevant. A series of articles published in the Manchester Guardian between December 1954 and January 1955 contained an important truism about electoral politics during the period: 'The need for a change has never been less obvious'. (116) Despite Labour's slim lead in the opinion polls for most of the period from 1952 to 1954, there were simply no compelling reason for the country to vote for a change of government when an election was called for May 1955. Labour's dire predictions in 1951 about the consequences of a Tory victory had been disproved by events. The Conservative Government was certainly helped by external economic factors - particularly an improvement in the terms of trade - but its record overall was marked by a number of significant achievements. By 1955 unemployment was barely 1 per cent; cordial relations were maintained with the trade unions; pensions and national assistance benefits were raised; income tax was reduced in 1953 and 1955; the housing programme, which aimed to build 300,000 houses a year, was achieved in 1953; food rationing was stopped in 1954 and sales of consumer durables rose rapidly, especially after 1952. The Conservatives showed that they were committed to the maintenance of the welfare state, they held all their seats at by-elections after 1951 and the Chancellor offered the prospect in 1954 of living standards which would double in twenty-five years.

By 1955 Labour's policy makers recognised the difficulties they faced in the forthcoming election. A paper for the Home Policy Committee in February admitted that the economy was 'running fairly smoothly' and acknowledged that the references in Challenge to Britain to the restoration of full employment were 'out of date'. (117) It argued that the best economic issue
on which Labour could attack the Tories was the looming balance of payments problem. This was a valid argument, but its impact on the electorate was likely to be minimal. Another paper in March, entitled 'Plans for an Election Manifesto', reinforced the scale of the difficulties which Labour faced. It conceded that the economic situation would favour the Government during the campaign, but it suggested optimistically that Labour could claim the credit for prosperity as they had laid the foundation for recovery after 1945. It was further suggested that Labour should attack the Tories for their failure to achieve a higher rate of growth, for their failure to distribute wealth fairly and for their failure to guard against inflation. The paper also put forward the argument that in an age of technological change, only a government committed to economic planning could prevent the return of heavy unemployment. (118)

These were valid arguments for Labour to use, but their potential impact against a Government which had presided over economic growth and prosperity was always likely to be limited. When Anthony Eden succeeded Winston Churchill as Prime Minister in April 1955 and announced a general election for the following month, Labour's prospects appeared to be bleak - despite the progress that it had made since 1951. The civil war was largely over by the time of the election, but the ending of hostilities came too late for the Party to convince voters that it was a unified force. The image of division and in-fighting which the Party had often presented to the public during its time in opposition was also summoned up again by the attempt to expel Bevan in March 1955. Valuable work was completed on policy after 1951, but constructive policies were of limited electoral value while the Government remained popular. The Conservatives entered the campaign with a lead of 4 per cent in the opinion polls. (119) And according to the Nuffield study of the 1955 election the 'general expectation' of a Tory victory was present from the outset. (120)

The belief that the Government would be returned to office made for a dull campaign. Election stories rarely made the headlines in the national press in 1955, the average audience for election broadcasts was one-third of the size of the average
audience in 1951, and neither of the main parties made particularly effective use of television. Labour focused its attack on rising prices under the Conservatives, but it failed to overcome the apathy of the electorate. This was reflected in the fall in the turn-out of voters from the previous election: whereas 82.5 per cent of the electorate had voted in 1951, 76.7 per cent of the electorate voted in 1955. As a result, both of the main parties suffered a reduction in their aggregate vote from 1951: the Conservative vote fell by approximately 430,000 and Labour's vote fell by more than 1,500,000. In terms of parliamentary seats this meant that the Government increased its effective majority from 17 to 59. However, Labour could at least take some comfort from the defeat. In difficult circumstances they had won 46.4 per cent of the popular vote, while the average swing towards the Government had been just 1.8 per cent. Tony Benn, who held his seat for Labour in Bristol, explained in his diary that the national defeat could be attributed to the Government's good economic fortune rather than any serious and irreversible decline in Labour's support:

'Now we are defeated again. The right will blame Bevan. The Bevanites will interpret it as the price paid for the right-wing policies and leaders. But since 1951 the Tories have had good luck with the economic climate, people are generally better off and the end of most shortages has enabled rationing to be ended on everything but coal. There has been no unemployment. A family in a council house with a TV set and a car or motorcycle-combination on hire purchase had few reasons for a change of government.'

The Party was more united than at any time since 1951 in the aftermath of the 1955 defeat. The task for the leadership as the Party entered another period in opposition was to ensure that this unity was consolidated. This would enable the attention of the PLP to be focused on the fight against the Government. A start had been made on the search for a new policy programme before 1955, but more work was needed to refine and to modernise policy as the next Labour administration was unlikely to take
power during the remainder of the 1950s. Labour could look to the future with some confidence in 1955, but it was also aware that a further period of economic prosperity could again damage its electoral fortunes. The following chapter will show how Labour responded to its second successive electoral failure.

References


3. See *Labour's Appeal to the Nation*, (1923); *Labour's Appeal to the People*, (1924); *Labour's Appeal to the Nation*, (1929); *Labour's Call to Action: The Nation's Opportunity*, (1931); *The Labour Party's Call to Power*, (1935) and *Let Us Face the Future*, (1945).

4. Labour's untitled manifesto of 1900 included a call for pensions, improved housing, work for the unemployed and public ownership of the railways. Legislation was passed by the Attlee Governments in all of these areas.


7. Excluding the Speaker, the Labour Government's majority after the 1945 election was 146 seats; this majority was reduced to 5 seats after the 1950 election, *ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
8. The Conservative lead in the Gallup Poll between January 1951 and the election in October never fell below 6 per cent, *ibid.*, p.102.

9. Aneurin Bevan resigned as Minister of Labour, Harold Wilson resigned as President of the Board of Trade, and John Freeman resigned as an Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Supply.

10. Hugh Gaitskell was Chancellor of the Exchequer from October 1950 to October 1951. Previously he had been Minister of Fuel and Power and Minister of Economic Affairs.


17. 'General Election Campaign 1951; General Secretary's Report', NEC Minutes, 7 November 1951.


2/116.

25. M. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.153. At the time Barbara Castle was MP for Blackburn, Richard Crossman was MP for Coventry East, Michael Foot was MP for Devonport, Jennie Lee was MP for Cannock, Ian Mikardo was MP for Reading, Tom Driberg was MP for Maldon and Harold Wilson was MP for Huyton.


30. *Ibid*.

31. *Ibid*.


33. *Ibid.*, 22 June 1952. Whiteley had said that with the present PLP there was 'no doubt that Morrison would be elected'. But the result of a leadership contest after a general election would be much more difficult to predict because the composition of the PLP would have changed.

34. *Ibid*.

35. *Ibid*. The entry for 3 July 1952 contains an account of Whiteley's meeting with Attlee when he denied that he had spoken of imminent retirement. The entry for 30 July 1952 describes the reaction of Gordon Walker and his colleagues to Attlee's announcement that he would continue to lead the Party.


37. *Ibid*.

38. Seven members of the NEC were elected only by the CLPs, twelve were elected only by the trade unions and one was elected by the socialist societies. Five women members and a treasurer were elected by Conference as a whole and the leader of the PLP was an *ex-officio* member.

39. See, for example, Parliamentary Committee Minutes, Labour
44. Interview with Lord Jay, July 1991.
46. Dalton diary, 1 October 1952, p. 599.
47. For an account of this speech see the News Chronicle, 21 June 1952.
48. See M. Jenkins, op. cit., for a list of NEC (Constituency Party Section) Members from 1947 to 1957, p. 128.
49. Leeds Weekly Citizen, 10 October 1952.
50. Ibid.
51. Interview with Lord Jay.
52. NEC Minutes, 28 October 1952. After 'considerable discussion' on the advisability of investigating Gaitskell's claims, Wilson's suggestion that the Organisation sub-committee should compile a report on the issue was rejected by sixteen votes to seven.
55. The Times, 12 November 1952.
56. Ibid., 28 November 1952.
57. K. Jefferys, op. cit., p. 41.
60. NEC Minutes, 23 March 1955.
61. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 3 December 1951, and NEC Minutes, 12 December 1951.

63. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 4 February 1952.

64. Memo by Morrison, 'Considerations arising out of the General Election, 1951', NEC Minutes, 12 December 1951. An advance copy of the memo was sent to Morgan Phillips, Labour's General Secretary from 1944 to 1963, General Secretary's papers, Labour Party archives, GS/HM/12.

65. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 January 1952 and 18 February 1952.


67. Ibid. The document pointed out that Britain's current account on trade balanced for the first time since 1935 under the Attlee Governments.

68. The Times, 12 August 1952.

69. Memo R.135/June 1952, 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-Committee on Socially Owned Industries', Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 23 June 1952.

70. Memo R.134/June 1952, 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-Committee on Privately Owned Industry', Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 23 June 1952.

71. Memo R.132/June 1952, 'Report to the Policy Committee by the Sub-Committee on Agriculture, Food and Rural Life', and Memo R.133/June 1952, 'Report by the Sub-Committee on Social Services to the Policy Committee', Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 23 June 1952.


73. Ibid., pp.109-11.

74. Ibid., pp.95-102.


76. NEC Minutes, 13 and 14 December 1952. See also General Secretary's papers, GS/NEC/173-176, for verbatim reports of the meetings.

77. General Secretary's papers, GS/NEC/174 xliv.
78. Minutes of a joint meeting of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the NEC, 8 January 1953.

79. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 19 January 1953.


82. Working Party on Shipbuilding Minutes, 2 and 27 February 1953; see also Memo R.231/February 1953 (revised), 'The Outlook for the Shipbuilding Industry'


84. Home Policy Committee Minutes, 20 April 1953.


86. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 16 February 1953.

87. Ibid., 16 March 1953; see also Memo R.229/February 1953 (revised), 'Mining Machinery Industry'.

88. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 16 March 1953.

89. Ibid., 16 February 1953.

90. Ibid., 30 March 1953. See also Memo R.243/March 1953, 'Nationalisation of Agricultural Land'; Memo R.245/March 1953, 'The Public Ownership of Agricultural Land'; and Memo R.258/March 1953, 'Land Nationalisation'.

91. Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 20 April 1953.

92. Ibid., 30 March 1953.

93. Ibid.

94. NEC Minutes, 25 April 1953.

95. Ibid., 21 May 1953. The Bevanites sought a commitment to take over firms which were involved in machine tools, mining machinery and chemicals manufacture. They also made a renewed attempt to win the vote on the nationalisation of
rented farm land.


98. R.H.S. Crossman (ed.), *New Fabian Essays*, (London, 1952). A. Albu in 'The Organisation of Industry', pp. 121-142, put forward the view of the Socialist International that socialist planning was compatible with the existence of private ownership in industry. He argued that socialist economic objectives had been achieved after 1945 with only 20 per cent of industry in the public sector: full employment had been maintained and inequality had been tackled with the taxation of company profits, limitation of dividends, price-fixing, increased trade union power and the welfare state.


101. See Memo R. 240/March 1953, 'Report on Education Policy to the Social Services Sub-Committee'. This document criticised the Party for its failure to offer 'any challenging policy for education' in 1945, 1950 and 1951. It spoke of 'grave deficiencies' in the 1944 Act and argued that the priorities in education were to build more schools and to train more teachers. It called for comprehensive schooling up to the age of 15 and for special sixth-form schools thereafter. It also recommended a shift in the curriculum away from the humanities and towards science-based subjects. The document ruled out the abolition of private schools but recommended that independent day-schools should be forced to accept at least 60 per cent of their pupils from LEA nominees - see Social Services Sub-Committee Minutes, 26 February and 11 March 1953.
102. Tribune, 19 June 1953.
103. Ibid.
104. The Times, 17 June 1953.
107. Ibid., pp.108-114.
108. Ibid., pp.129, 139 and 166.
109. The Economist, 3 October 1953.
110. See Memo R.311/November 1953, 'Programme of Work', Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 16 November 1953.
111. Tribune, 19 June 1953.
112. See correspondence between G.B. Swaine and Noel-Baker, 11 and 21 September 1953, Philip Noel-Baker papers, NBKR 1/144.
115. Ibid.
119. F.W.S. Craig, op. cit., p.102.
121. Ibid., pp.59 and 96.
122. Ibid., pp.171-184 and 198-209.
123. Tony Benn diary, entry marked 'June 1955'. 
Labour's record in elections to Parliament between May 1955 and October 1959 appears to be that of a party in decline. At Westminster, the Conservatives increased their majority from 59 seats to 100 seats. Labour's share of the poll fell from 46.4 per cent to 43.8 per cent and its aggregate vote dropped by almost 200,000.\(^{(1)}\) By-elections provided the Party with some welcome victories, but its record overall in these contests was one of only modest success. Labour increased its share of the vote in 31 of the 49 by-elections during the period, but all four of its gains were the result of small swings in marginal constituencies. Lewisham North, Rochdale and Glasgow Kelvingrove were taken from the Tories, while Carmarthen was won from the Liberals; in none of these four contests, though, did Labour increase its share of the vote by more than 5 per cent.\(^{(2)}\)

The 1959 election was the fourth successive national contest in which Labour lost seats overall. At the time, commentators believed that this record of failure raised questions about the Party's ability to form another government.\(^{(3)}\) Historians, aware of course that these questions were answered in 1964, have focused instead on the contrast between Labour's apparent weakness in the 1950s and its strength in elections in the 1940s and 1960s. Various arguments have been used to explain this contrast, but there is at least agreement among historians that Labour was a Party with serious problems in the 1950s, particularly in the second half of the decade when it lost two elections.\(^{(4)}\) These problems have been attributed to factors such as poor leadership, failures in policy-making and failure to respond to social changes in an increasingly affluent society.\(^{(5)}\)

This chapter will offer a different interpretation of Labour's performance between 1955 and 1959. Here it will be argued that Labour was in a relatively strong position at the end of this period. The PLP rediscovered the benefits of unity, individual membership of the Party remained stable at about 850,000\(^{(6)}\) and the leadership carried some important revisions of
policy which enabled the Party to offer a workable programme in the 1959 election. To be sure, mistakes were made at the time which undermined the Party's strategy for recovery after the 1955 defeat. But in an era of economic growth and rising living standards, the remarkable feature of Labour's support in the late 1950s is not its decline, but its consistency.

Labour's first task after the 1955 election was to analyse the reasons for its failure. Morgan Phillips' report on the contest for the NEC offered a number of explanations for the Party's defeat. The most important factor he identified was continued prosperity in the country. Phillips conceded that many workers were 'happy about the present position and had no inclination to secure a change of Government at this time'. The superior organisation of the Tories, based largely on their employment of more professional staff than their rivals, was another advantage identified by Phillips. The redrawing of constituency borders by the Boundary Commission helped to make the contest even more favourable for the Conservatives; the report calculated that the Boundary Commission's changes had produced a net gain of 23 seats for the Tories and a net loss of 17 seats for Labour. Phillips also acknowledged, though, that in some respects at least the Party's electoral failure was self-inflicted. Divisions within the Party were blamed both for a loss of votes and for a loss of morale among Party workers. The report also argued that policy differences between the parties in some areas were 'of a technical nature rather than clear cut'. As a result, many Labour candidates had conducted negative campaigns in which they attacked the Government's record, but failed to offer clear, positive alternatives to the voters.

In the aftermath of the Party's second successive defeat, the NEC highlighted two areas for urgent attention; organisation and policy. In June, the NEC set up a sub-committee on Party organisation with the aim of improving Labour's electoral machinery. In July, the Policy Committee agreed to begin a long-term review of domestic policy. Most Labour supporters and activists, though, were more concerned with the issue of the Party leadership. The Tories did not have to request a
dissolution before 1960, by which time Attlee, who had led the Party since 1935, would be seventy-seven. As we have seen, Attlee had apparently considered retirement before the 1951 election, and he had told his colleagues in 1952 that a Prime Minister should be younger than seventy. After his Party had lost seats at three consecutive contests, it was obvious that Attlee was not the man to lead Labour into the next election. Within days of the Conservative's victory, the Daily Mirror led the call for a leadership change. Under the headline 'Attlee Must Go!' it described the Labour leader as the 'chief architect of defeat'. The paper believed that Attlee and his senior colleagues were too old, too tired and too weak to lead the Party; its message to the old men in the Shadow Cabinet was simple - 'Move over, Dad. Make room for Youth'.

This view of the Party leadership was not confined to the press. In a private account of his election campaign, Crossman blamed 'the obvious disarray of the Labour leadership' for the 'indifference and apathy' which he had encountered around the country. He looked forward to the prospect of the Party 'getting rid of an ageing leadership, which, in the course of the campaign gave no lead whatsoever and left each candidate with a feeling that he was fighting an isolated battle in his own constituency'. According to Arthur Moyle, Attlee's parliamentary private secretary, the Labour leader had anticipated this type of criticism and wanted to retire immediately after the 1955 defeat. At the time, however, there was no obvious successor. The main candidate on the right of the Party was Morrison; but at sixty-seven he was already probably too old to take charge. Bevan was the clear left-wing favourite; but his resignation from the Shadow Cabinet in 1954 and his narrow escape from expulsion in 1955 perhaps confirmed that he was too much of a rebel to be a team captain. An early contest between the two also offered the prospect of an immediate return to the civil war which had scarred the Party between 1951 and 1955. Therefore, although a change of leader was necessary, there was no compelling reason for Labour to rush into a decision. Instead, it made sense for the Party to enjoy a period of quiet reflection after its electoral setback. As a
result, when Attlee suggested that he should step down as leader at the first PLP meeting of the new session, his colleagues made it clear that they wanted him to stay. Douglas Jay, a member of the PLP who worked closely with Attlee, believes that the Labour leader fully expected to be asked to delay his retirement at this meeting. (15)

Attlee's decision to stay in his post has been portrayed as a deliberate attempt to deprive Morrison of the leadership. Exponents of this view argue that Attlee refused to stand down until he was satisfied that Morrison would not be chosen as his successor. (16) However, Attlee already knew that Morrison's chances of leading the Party had probably disappeared before the PLP meeting in June. Morrison would have been favourite to win a leadership contest before the 1955 election, but he was unlikely to be chosen to lead the Party after this because of his age. He was from the same generation as Attlee; a generation which had rescued the Party in the 1930s and dominated British politics in the 1940s, but whose work was now complete. In 1955, Labour had to find a leader from a younger generation to guide the Party into a new decade. Until a credible candidate emerged, Attlee knew that the Party was not ready for a leadership contest. This judgement, rather than antipathy towards Morrison, best explains why Attlee stayed on as leader until December 1955.

Attlee's decision to delay his resignation was arguably the greatest service he performed for the Party after 1951. It allowed Hugh Gaitskell to convince both himself and his colleagues that he should become the next Labour leader. As a result, the contest to find Attlee's successor in 1955 settled the leadership issue for the foreseeable future and enabled the Party to declare a truce in its civil war. As shown, Gaitskell's record after ten years in Parliament had marked him out as a future leader of the Party: he had been promoted rapidly in the 1945-1951 administrations; he had been elected to one of the top three places in the Shadow Cabinet throughout the 1951 Parliament; and his successful bid for the treasurership in 1954 showed that he had the support of the major trade unions. Throughout most of 1955, though, Gaitskell believed that he would become leader only after Morrison had served a short term
as Attlee's successor. In October, at a meeting with Patrick Gordon Walker, he agreed that he could best serve the Party as Morrison's deputy 'for a few years'. But he also made it clear that he would enter the leadership contest if he believed that Bevan was likely to beat Morrison.

At the Margate Conference in October, Gordon Walker - who had been canvassing hard for Morrison - noted a 'strong trend' among the PLP in favour of a Gaitskell succession. There were two main reasons for this. First, Gaitskell offered the prospect of a long period of settled leadership. Second, by outlining his thoughts about the future of the Party in post-war society, Gaitskell had begun to prove that he could match his administrative talent with political vision, imagination and passion. In his debut speech from the platform at Conference he emphasised that his socialism was rooted in a hatred of social injustice, poverty and squalor. But he also recognised that these issues had lost much of their resonance with the electorate since 1945 as affluence increased in Britain. In an article published shortly after the 1955 election, he outlined the way in which the values of voters had become more individualistic:

'I fancy that in the last year or two more and more people are beginning to turn to their own personal affairs and to concentrate more on their own material advancement. No doubt it has been stimulated by the end of post-war austerity, TV, new gadgets like refrigerators and washing machines, the glossy magazines with their special appeal to women, and even the flood of new cars on the home market. Call it if you like a growing Americanisation of outlook. I believe it's there, and it's no good moaning about it.'

Gaitskell saw that rising living standards and the changing attitudes of voters presented a challenge to Labour. The Party had to adapt its appeal to win votes in these new circumstances; the traditional pledges to tackle poverty and unemployment were no longer adequate in an era of full employment and universal welfare benefits. This analysis signalled to the PLP that
Gaitskell was willing to engage in the new thinking that was required after successive election defeats. His leadership prospects were improved still further by his combative performance in the debate on Butler's supplementary budget in October 1955. This performance contrasted sharply with Morrison's laboured efforts in the House which eventually led Gordon Walker to comment:

'Morrison is undoubtedly failing both mentally and physically. He still has deep knowledge of the movement which Gaitskell still lacks. But he cannot think afresh - nor can he any longer speak in Parliament. His performances of late have been horrible.' (21)

When Attlee retired in December 1955 Bevan, Gaitskell and Morrison entered a contest for the succession. (22) In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that the result was ever in doubt. Bevan was a rebel; Gaitskell was a loyalist. Morrison was in decline; Gaitskell had yet to reach his peak. The outcome was a landslide: 157 Labour MPs voted for Gaitskell, 70 for Bevan, 40 for Morrison and 8 abstained. (23) Almost 60 per cent of the PLP voted for the new Labour leader - at the time it was the most convincing victory in the Party's history and it made Gaitskell the youngest leader of any main British party since Rosebery had led the Liberals at the end of the last Century. With a simple change of leadership, the Party had drawn a line under the years of Jarrow, Dunkirk and post-war austerity. Labour could now face the future with a leader who was young, competent and self-assured. The Daily Mirror caught the mood of optimism which followed the PLP's decisive vote when it declared: 'Last night the Labour Party was reborn. It demonstrated that it is no longer satisfied with the cautious advice of old men, or with the ideas of the last half-century.' (24)

Despite Gaitskell's past battles with the Bevanites, his election by the PLP was a new beginning which gave the Party an opportunity to repair the damaging splits within its own ranks. Bevan simplified the process by signalling that he was at least prepared to work with his old rival. The day after his defeat in
the leadership contest, Bevan made it clear that he would stand for the position of Gaitskell's deputy after Morrison retired.\(^{(25)}\) This represented a further step towards peace in the Party, but it would be a mistake to assume that former Bevanites completely buried their differences with Gaitskell at this time. At an NEC meeting in January, Mikardo argued that Gaitskell should not be permitted to retain the treasurership after he had become Party leader.\(^{(26)}\) This move was an attempt to secure the treasurership for Bevan as the second placed candidate in the contest for the post at the 1955 Conference. Gaitskell's majority on the NEC enabled him to defeat Mikardo's proposal, but the episode was an early warning that the Left had no intention of supporting the new leader on every issue.

The priority for Gaitskell was to set Labour on a route back to power. He outlined the three main components of his strategy for electoral recovery at a meeting of the National Council of Labour at the start of 1956. The Party had to improve its organisation to ensure that it mobilised maximum support in the constituencies; the PLP had to show that it was an 'alternative Government' by conducting vigorous opposition in Parliament in a 'responsible manner'; and the three year policy review had to produce an 'up-to-date version of Labour's Socialist faith'.\(^{(27)}\) This programme made obvious sense as a broad strategy for the Party, but the objectives it set were only met in part between 1955 and 1959. As will be shown, the Party made substantial progress in only one of the three areas highlighted by Gaitskell. The important point, however, is that this progress was made in the most significant area of all: the rewriting of policy. Party organisation improved only marginally before the 1959 election, the PLP enjoyed mixed fortunes opposing the Tories at Westminster, but the policy review was a clear success. It will be argued here that weaknesses in organisation and occasional failures by the PLP at Westminster were understandable and were not decisive factors in Labour's defeat in 1959. Although progress in these two areas would have been welcomed by the Party, the important feature of Labour politics after 1955 was the direction in which Gaitskell led the Party over policy. It was this new direction and a rediscovered sense
of purpose under Gaitskell which laid the foundations of Labour's election victory in 1964.

When Gaitskell became leader, an internal study of the Party's organisation was already in progress. A sub-committee had been set up to examine the subject following the General Secretary's report on the 1955 election. Wilson chaired this sub-committee and turned its investigation into the most extensive and methodical study of organisation in the Party's history. Between July and September 1955 the sub-committee visited each regional centre of the Party and a small number of marginal constituencies; they received oral and written evidence from the National Union of Labour Organisers and the Co-operative Party; they asked every Election Agent in the country to answer a questionnaire and received 527 completed forms; they took evidence from 140 Labour MPs and 164 unsuccessful Labour candidates; and they interviewed officers from Transport House. When Wilson sifted through this mass of evidence and wrote the sub-committee's report, his conclusions were highly critical of the existing standard of organisation in the Party.

Although the report acknowledged that poor organisation was not the sole cause of Labour's defeat in 1955, Wilson emphasised that it was an important factor which operated in favour of the Tories. The sub-committee was 'deeply shocked' by the evidence they had found during their study:

'After what we have seen of Party organisation throughout the country our surprise is not that the General Election was lost, but that we won as many seats as we did.'

The sub-committee claimed that the Party's army of voluntary workers was smaller and less enthusiastic than at any previous time. According to Len Williams, Labour's National Agent, 35 marginal seats across Britain were lost to the Tories 'primarily through poor organisation'. An example was given of a large city - which the report did not identify - with three marginal divisions where no house was canvassed during the campaign. This example of neglect highlighted the importance of the
constituency parties. Wilson stressed that the primary function of CLPs during elections was to identify Labour supporters and to ensure that they cast their votes, particularly in marginal constituencies. Time should not be wasted on attempts to make converts. In order to create a machine that would mobilise fully the potential Labour vote, the report argued that the Party's voluntary workers had to be supported with 'staff, finance, inspiration and advice'. It would have made sense for the Party to follow the Conservatives' practice of employing professional party workers in the constituencies, but the sub-committee believed that Labour should retain its traditional reliance on voluntary workers. (30)

Wilson's report covered 80 pages and made 41 recommendations. Many of these dealt with detailed aspects of finance and organisation within constituencies, but several important recommendations threw into sharp relief the Party's failure to adopt even the most obvious methods of effective organisation in the country before 1955. It was suggested, for example, that a standing committee should be established to supervise the organisational work of the Party - the eventual creation of the Organisation Sub-committee of the NEC was arguably the most important achievement of the report. One of the priorities envisaged for this new sub-committee was to prepare a scheme to recruit, train and deploy agents who would be used solely for organisational work in the constituencies. Alongside the recruitment of more agents, the report urged the Party to ensure that resources were transferred from safe seats to marginals during an election campaign. In fact, one of the main aims of Wilson's report was to focus the efforts of the Party on marginal constituencies. It was suggested that prospective Parliamentary candidates should be appointed in every marginal seat at the earliest possible date; this would enable candidates to build a base of support in their constituency by working alongside local councillors. Wilson also argued that the NEC should assume responsibility for providing adequate financial assistance to local parties in marginals. In the 1955 election, 37 seats had been won on minority votes and 42 seats were held with majorities of less than 1000. (31) The report called for a
full canvass in every marginal division as part of an effort to capture as many of these seats as possible at the next election. Success in this area, however, eluded the Party; in the 1959 election, Labour gained only 5 seats overall and sustained 28 losses. (32)

Although Wilson's report offered solutions to Labour's organisational problems, its critique was too powerful ever to be accepted in full at Transport House. Morgan Phillips and Len Williams, the two members of staff in charge of Party organisation, resented the criticism of their working methods implied in the document and launched a counter-attack against its conclusions. Each complained that the report contained a number of inaccuracies at a meeting of the NEC. (33) This rearguard action was rewarded when the Executive decided against adopting the report officially; instead, the document was to be given 'detailed consideration' after Conference had discussed a revised version of the material. (34) A favourable reception from delegates at Margate, though, failed to persuade the NEC or Transport House to accept the logic of the sub-committee's findings. The Party's methods of organisation required thorough reform, but the only significant change that occurred before 1959 was increased financial assistance for marginals. (35) Crossman, a member of the NEC, pointed to the lack of progress in this area when he complained shortly before the 1959 election; 'Transport House is a machine which is gummed up and the whole structure of constituency parties is barely alive'. (36) Overall, mainly because of resistance from Party officials and a shortage of funds, Wilson's report continued to be a critique rather than a programme of action.

In contrast, the PLP at Westminster was relatively well organised. This at least gave the Party an opportunity to tackle the second requirement of Gaitskell's strategy for recovery - effective opposition in parliament. When the new Parliamentary Committee met for the first time after the 1955 election, Gaitskell suggested that front bench members should be allocated clear areas of responsibility in the Commons; the appointments would be made by Party officers. (37) The idea that Labour
spokesmen should 'shadow' Ministers made obvious sense and was a clear improvement on previous arrangements. Members of the PLP front bench would be able to develop expertise in specific areas; it would help to ensure that a senior PLP member was ready to attack the government on each area of policy; and it would help the PLP in opposition to present itself as an alternative government. Attlee led the Party when this practice was adopted. As a former Prime Minister, he understood the advantages of allocating specific responsibilities to individuals, but he emphasised that the procedure should not be allowed to interfere with his authority over strategy in the House, nor with the right of the Chairman or Deputy-Chairman of the PLP to intervene at any time when particular issues were raised.\(^{(38)}\)

Appointments to shadow posts were regularly changed, but the first allocation of major roles contained few surprises. With the PLP determined to present itself as a government in waiting, the obvious arrangement was for former Ministers to shadow their old departments. So, for example, Gaitskell was appointed to cover the Treasury, Bevan shadowed Labour and National Service, and Wilson shadowed the Board of Trade.\(^{(39)}\) It was later agreed that front bench members of the PLP would not be permitted to speak from the back benches on issues which were not their direct responsibility; instead, they would concentrate on their front bench duties.\(^{(40)}\) In theory, by deciding upon a clear division of responsibility at Westminster, the PLP had established a structure which enabled them to act as a more effective opposition than ever before. In practice of course, the quality of Labour's opposition was governed by two variables: the performance of PLP members and the performance of the Conservative Government.

One of the main problems which faced the NEC after May 1955 was a potential loss of morale caused by the disappointment of defeat. It is difficult to assess the morale of the Party in the Commons at this time with any degree of accuracy, but there is evidence which suggests that some members of the PLP did not relish the battle with the Tories at Westminster. Herbert Bowden, the Chief Whip, often drew attention to the problem of
poor attendance in the House, poor attendance at Party meetings and the fact that the front bench was often left unattended. (41) Gaitskell was asked to impress upon his senior colleagues the 'desirability' of attending debates on the front bench, even if the issue under discussion was not an area of direct responsibility. (42)

Crossman implied that the greatest threat to the morale of the PLP was the poor quality of Labour's senior parliamentarians. He was optimistic about the performance of Gaitskell and Bevan towards the end of 1957, but he described the rest of Labour's front bench team as 'small and unimpressive'. (43) Crossman criticised his colleagues in highly personal terms and argued that the real opposition in the country was anti-political and could be found outside Parliament among writers like John Osborne, John Wain and Colin Wilson - this trio and others attacked what they saw as the apathy and complacency of the post-war affluent society and earned themselves the generic title of 'angry young men'. (44) Crossman echoed some of their concerns when he complained that Labour was too cautious, paid too much attention to opinion polls and was too anxious to avoid debates on contentious issues in case commitments were made which might cost the Party votes at the next election. (45) Whether these criticisms were fully deserved is debatable. Crossman constantly complained in his diaries, correspondence and articles about colleagues he considered to be less able and less intelligent than himself; occasionally he would bestow praise, but criticism was more frequent. His description of Labour's 'unimpressive' front bench team and their cautious approach to politics should be seen in this context. In place of Crossman's verdict, it is more reasonable to argue that the Parliamentary Committee struggled to make an impression against the Government in the second half of the 1950s. The Conservatives at the time had a talented parliamentary team which included Harold Macmillan, R.A. Butler, Iain Macleod and Enoch Powell. (46) These were often more than a match for their Labour opponents in the House. Perhaps more importantly, the Government was able to take advantage of largely favourable economic circumstances; average annual total
output grew at almost 3 per cent, unemployment remained low at around 2 per cent and real wages continued to rise.\(^{(47)}\) Provided that this prosperity in the country continued, Labour's front bench had few opportunities to challenge the Tories' ascendancy in Parliament. This dilemma was recognised by the Party hierarchy. A 'propaganda directive' for the NEC in 1956 identified full employment, full shops and high wages as particularly strong factors which worked in favour of the Tories at that time.\(^{(48)}\)

This tranquility helped to produce the unfavourable political climate in which the new Labour leader had to operate before the 1959 election. Gaitskell had the misfortune to face a Government which presided over a growing economy - any assessment of his performance in opposition at Westminster should begin with an acknowledgement of this fact. As Party leader, though, it was his duty to make the best of adverse conditions. Gaitskell had called for effective opposition at Westminster; he, above all, had to rise to this challenge. Although much of his time as leader was spent on internal Party business, Gaitskell realised the importance of presenting himself as an alternative Prime Minister to Anthony Eden and later Harold Macmillan.\(^{(49)}\) In fact, by 1958 Gaitskell was complaining that his Party had failed to pay enough attention to this task:

'We've got to win the next Election. And one thing, surely, for purely technical reasons, the Party should be ready to build me up in the way that Macmillan is built up by his people. After all, I am their Leader, at least till after the next Election.'\(^{(50)}\)

This is a revealing statement which outlines one of Gaitskell's main concerns in his early years as opposition leader. In part, it was an admission that he had failed to establish himself sufficiently in the public mind as a suitable alternative to Tory Prime Ministers. To be sure, Gaitskell had a mixed record against Eden, but he failed completely to disturb Macmillan's carefully crafted presentation of calm authority. For some time, Gaitskell found it difficult to adjust to his new
role in Parliament; the transition from Labour's chief economic
spokesman to leader of the opposition was a difficult journey.
Gaitskell's main strength in parliamentary debate was his
mastery of economic and financial affairs. As shown, his
training and his authority on economic issues had led to rapid
promotion after 1945, and an impressive reply to Butler's
supplementary budget in October 1955 helped to establish him as
a favourite to succeed Attlee. As leader, though, Gaitskell
enjoyed fewer opportunities to attack the Tories on his favoured
ground. The responsibility for leading the Party's critique of
Government economic management passed to Wilson, the new Shadow
Chancellor. While Wilson was able to concentrate on this
specific area and enhance his reputation in Parliament with some
impressive performances, the Labour leader's brief at
Westminster was largely governed by events. He could attempt to
influence the political agenda by focussing his Party's attacks
on specific aspects of Government policy, but his main task was
to exploit Tory mistakes and difficulties as they occurred.
Unfortunately for Gaitskell, opportunities to embarrass the
Government were rare before 1959. To make matters worse, he
failed to exploit Tory difficulties fully when they arose.

The first main test of Gaitskell's potential as a national
rather than a party leader came during the Suez crisis. Although
the details of the Suez episode fall outside the boundaries of
this study, it is useful to examine the Labour leader's handling
of the affair and the effect which the crisis had on his
standing as an alternative Prime Minister. According to the
opinion polls he handled the crisis badly: in the aftermath of
Suez, Eden's popularity rating climbed by 12 per cent;
Gaitskell's fell by 9 per cent. (51) Eden reaped the short-term
benefit that could be expected by a Prime Minister when the
country's forces were engaged in military action; in contrast,
Gaitskell left himself open to the charge that he had trimmed
his opinions on an issue of national importance for party
political reasons. Gaitskell was accused of initially supporting
military action to protect Britain's interests in the Suez
Canal, but then changing his mind when the troops were sent in
because of pressure from his backbenchers and the condemnation
of the action by the United Nations.

In fact, Gaitskell clearly informed Eden that Labour would not support Britain's use of force in the Canal Zone unless it was in self-defence. But in a Commons debate on 2 August 1956, he had compared the tactics of the Egyptian President Nasser to those used by Hitler and Mussolini in the 1930s; in retrospect, this was an unwise and emotive comparison because it conveyed the impression that Gaitskell was prepared to sanction the use of force against Nasser unless the Egyptian President backed down in the face of international pressure. When Gaitskell protested against Britain's military intervention in Egypt in October 1956, he was accused by some of inconsistency. More importantly, he was accused of disloyalty at a time when British troops were preparing to go into action. Also, in a televised broadcast to the nation, Gaitskell followed a reasoned denunciation of the Government's breach of international law with a call for the Prime Minister's resignation. As a result, the Labour leader was accused of exploiting an international crisis for party political purposes and some Tories took a long time to forget this charge. Gaitskell's biographer concedes that the Suez crisis damaged his subject's reputation in the country: surveys found that the number of voters who considered Gaitskell a bad leader nearly doubled and Gaitskell himself wondered whether his effectiveness as an opposition leader had been permanently undermined.

Despite provoking passionate debate in Parliament, in the press and to a lesser extent in the country, the influence of the Suez crisis on the electorate was limited. At the Lewisham by-election of February 1957, Crossman noted a tendency to deny that the episode had ever occurred. Suez also had very little impact on voters during the 1959 election. Politically, the most important immediate consequence of the affair was the resignation of Eden whose health had been ruined by the crisis. Unfortunately for Gaitskell, the new Prime Minister was Macmillan, a polished parliamentary performer who soon established an ascendancy in the Commons. Gaitskell's confidence at Westminster had been undermined by the criticism he had endured after Suez, and in the period before the 1959 election
he struggled to match the success and authority of the new Tory leader. Macmillan was certainly determined to stamp his authority on Parliament as a prelude to electoral success. Looking back on this period in 1971, he explained:

'I didn't even mind losing a by-election or bother too much with the outside world, if you can once impress upon the House of Commons that the Government is in control...then gradually...it begins to go out into the country as the Members go back to their constituencies.' (56)

Macmillan was confident that he could dominate the Commons as long as Gaitskell led the opposition. His contempt for his rival was established long before the two became party leaders. When Gaitskell delivered his first and only Budget in April 1951, Macmillan noted in his diary the 'pedantic style, tedious expositions of the obvious, weak gestures, and irritating style' employed by the Labour Chancellor. (57) He saw Gaitskell as high-minded, but self-righteous; worthy, but stuffy and weak. In a telling entry in his diary he once ridiculed Gaitskell's style of correspondence as 'governessy'. (58) Gaitskell, he believed, regularly displayed acute political incompetence; he failed to take full advantage of Eden's difficult position over Suez, and he never learned how to an exploit an opportunity to embarrass the Prime Minister in the Commons. (59)

Macmillan's view of Gaitskell was formed by something deeper than the natural rivalry which can be expected between political opponents. His contempt was genuine. Other observers were less dismissive of the Labour leader, but many agreed that Macmillan was a clear victor in his contest against Gaitskell. For example, six months before the Government announced the date of the 1959 election, Crossman's initial optimism about the Labour leader had given way to depression;

'I don't think there has been a single occasion on which Gaitskell has got the better of Macmillan and it has been depressing to to watch how in debate after debate, our Front Bench has been out-maneouvred or alternatively has blundered
The *Sunday Express* claimed in 1958 that Macmillan 'outshines Mr Gaitskell as a lighthouse does a glow-worm'. Gaitskell's biographer was more generous, but he acknowledged the weakness of his subject's position during this period by choosing the title 'Macmillan Ascendant' for his chapter on the years from 1957 to 1959. Anthony Sampson, one of Macmillan's earliest biographers, wrote that the contrast between the two main party leaders was the main factor behind the Tories' lead in the opinion polls in the middle of 1958;

'The opposition was certainly weak, and Hugh Gaitskell could not present a united front or a bold personal image. But most Conservatives thought that the chief factor was the prime minister himself.'

Overall, Gaitskell and his party were unable to provide the 'effective opposition' which had been envisaged as one of the three components of the 1956 strategy for recovery. When this failure is set alongside the limited progress made in improving the Party's organisation, it would appear that Labour's attempt to revive its fortunes after the 1955 defeat was largely unsuccessful. However, although Gaitskell had chosen to identify improved organisation and a strong performance by the PLP at Westminster as priorities, the importance of these two objectives and the implications of the Party's failure to succeed in these areas should not be overdrawn.

The first point to make in mitigation concerns the difficulties which the Party had to overcome to achieve its objectives. Improving Labour's organisational efficiency across the country was a complex and expensive task. Even if the hierarchy at Transport House had pursued the drive for efficiency with enthusiasm, the Party did not have the large reserve of money required to make real progress in this area - despite increased financial assistance from the trade unions after 1955. Without the financial drain of large-scale spending on organisation, Labour still did not match even a quarter of
the Tories' expenditure on political advertising at the 1959 election. (64) Alongside the substantial financial requirement, improving Labour's machinery in the constituencies also relied heavily on the efforts of an army of voluntary Party workers whose enthusiasm and competence varied across regions and over time.

Equally plausible excuses can be offered to explain the PLP's lack of success in Parliament. Labour was always unlikely to make headway against a government which presided over economic growth; the Party's energies between 1955 and 1959 were largely devoted to the internal policy review; Eden's resignation and Macmillan's succession enabled the Tories to draw a line under the difficult Suez episode; and the Tories under Macmillan allowed the opposition parties few opportunities to exploit government mistakes.

The second important point to make about these two objectives concerns their political significance. It is difficult to make a definitive assessment here, but it is reasonable to argue that Labour was unlikely to win the 1959 election, regardless of the Party's performance at Westminster or the quality of its organisation. As prosperity in the country grew after 1955, there was simply no compelling reason for the electorate to replace the Conservative Government with a Labour alternative. While it is true that Labour is by no means guaranteed to win elections during times of economic depression, it is equally true that the Party has never replaced the Tories in government at the top of the economic cycle. To describe the Conservatives as the natural party of government would be an overstatement; nevertheless, the fact remains that they have won two-thirds of the general elections fought in Britain since the reform of the franchise in 1918. In 1955, their position appeared to be even more secure; the Conservative and Unionist Party had emerged as the largest group in the Commons in 8 of the 11 general elections contested between 1918 and 1955: their average share of the vote in all 11 contests was 43.1 per cent; Labour's average share of the vote was 37.1 per cent, excluding those members of the Party who followed MacDonald into the National Government in 1931 and 1935. The average Conservative lead over
the Labour Party in these general elections was 6 per cent.\(^{(65)}\)

Taking into account this record of Conservative dominance and the relatively healthy condition of the British economy, there was very little that Labour could do after the 1955 defeat to secure a victory at the following election. More organisational improvements would have been an advantage in 1959, but clearly this would not have enabled Labour to deprive the Conservatives of the whole of their 100 seat majority. A more combative performance by the PLP would have been welcomed by Labour supporters, but ultimately the electorate was probably more concerned about job security, prosperity and taxation than it was with the contest between the parties in the Commons. In any case, even if the PLP had performed consistently well, the public's perception of the contest at Westminster at this time was largely determined by press comment; and as Douglas Jay pointed out, approximately 80 per cent of national newspapers in the 1950s supported the Tories.\(^{(66)}\)

Labour in the second half of the 1950s, therefore, should not be judged primarily on its electoral record against the Conservatives. Instead, it should be recognised that the Party made changes during the period which helped to prepare the way for a return to power in 1964. After the experience of 1951 and 1955, the Party learned to abandon its attachment to factionalism in the period before an election; it learned to improve the presentation of its message; it designed new policies for a society with universal welfare provision and a mixed economy; and it modernised the way it conducted election campaigns. Although the Party was little more than fifty years old at this time, Gaitskell began a necessary process of modernisation which enabled Labour to face the future with growing confidence.

Gaitskell's first success as leader was to reimpose unity on the PLP. This was a significant achievement, particularly as Gaitskell had been arguably the Left's main enemy within the Party since 1951. Gaitskell's early years as leader were largely free of the Bevanite controversies, disciplinary hearings, withdrawals of the whip and threatened expulsions which had
preoccupied the Party on so many occasions after 1951. As will be shown in another chapter, Gaitskell's style of leadership and policy preferences continued to draw criticism from the Left, but at least there was less talk about a 'party within the party'. The old divisions in the Party resurfaced for a time after the 1959 election, but there were no sustained and damaging splits in Labour's ranks until the 1970s and 1980s.

This reimposition of unity on the PLP was helped by several factors. The scale of Gaitskell's victory in the leadership contest confirmed to the Left that Bevan was unlikely to lead the Party in the foreseeable future; no amount of meetings, alternative policy documents or rebellions could resurrect Bevan's leadership prospects or force such a secure leader as Gaitskell to cede ground to the Left. Indeed, Bevan was among the first to recognise the logic of the PLP vote. In February 1956 he signalled his acceptance of the new leader when he stood for the post of Gaitskell's deputy and was narrowly defeated by Jim Griffiths. Gaitskell in turn signalled his cautious acceptance of the rapprochement with his former rival by offering Bevan the job of colonial affairs spokesman. Full co-operation between the two, though, was not achieved immediately. Significantly, the new leader remained suspicious of Bevan's attempt to become treasurer, a position which carried a place on the NEC and powerful responsibility within the movement. In April 1956, Gaitskell had a 'very private dinner' with 'almost all the key people in the TUC' at which they planned to support George Brown for the treasurership against Bevan. This attempt to block the election of Bevan as treasurer was unsuccessful - which illustrates the difficulty the Party leader could face in controlling the trade unions' votes at Conference - but it provides a useful illustration of the lingering doubts which Gaitskell harboured about Bevan.

By the end of 1956, though, these doubts had gradually given way to an appreciation of Bevan's abilities and an understanding of the advantages which a senior appointment for the spokesman of the Left would bring to the Labour leadership. After a series of impressive performances during the Suez crisis, Bevan was appointed Shadow Foreign Secretary at the end of 1956. This
appointment helped to sustain the Party's renewed unity in two ways. First, it showed that Gaitskell was prepared to balance the allocation of senior front bench responsibilities between former supporters and adversaries. Second, it helped to appease the Left's leading spokesman while detaching him from his rebellious acolytes: Bevan in 1956 had almost no prospect of becoming Party leader; in order to secure a senior position in a future Labour government, he had to perform as a loyal member of the front bench team as Gaitskell's Shadow Foreign Secretary. At the Brighton Conference in October 1957, Bevan finally confirmed that he was willing to fulfil this role. By speaking against a unilateralist motion in the defence debate, Bevan helped to take the developing alliance with his old rival a stage further. His breach with the Left helped to ensure that there were no major divisions within the Party hierarchy in the period before the 1959 election. As will be shown, this at least helped the Party to fight an effective and united campaign in 1959.

This renewed sense of unity in the Party was maintained in potentially difficult circumstances. Labour spent much of its time after 1955 in an introspective mood; the three year policy review forced the Party to answer some fundamental questions about its future direction. The balance of the mixed economy, the relationship between the state and the individual, the future of education in Britain and the nationalisation of land were the most sensitive issues which the policy review had to address, offering the prospect of renewed disagreements and divisions within the Party. A detailed examination of the policy review will be made in a separate chapter, but a brief assessment will be made here of the broad implications of Labour's domestic policy programme between 1955 and 1959. The purpose of this brief assessment is to acknowledge that significant and beneficial policy changes were made at this time which had long-term implications for the Party.

Labour's policy makers responded to post-war affluence and successive election defeats by formulating what became known as a 'revisionist' programme. The term 'revisionism' can be traced back to the work of Eduard Bernstein, a German Social Democrat who helped to persuade his party to reject Marxism and its
revolutionary implications in the late-nineteenth century. Labour's revisionists did not need to rewrite Marxist policies, instead they aimed to show that the corporate socialism of the Attlee generation should be superseded by a programme whose central goal was the achievement of greater social equality. Arguably, therefore, although the term will be used throughout this study as an accepted definition of the Party's new programme, the use of the term 'revisionist' to describe Labour policy at this time is in some respects misleading. There was no rejection or revision of the policies of the post-war Governments, instead there was an acknowledgement that the Attlee generation had completed its mission and that the Party had to build on this achievement in a new era. In simple terms, the policy makers had two main objectives; to define the second stage of British socialism after the reforms of the post-war Labour Governments and to abandon policies which were electorally unpopular.

Public ownership was the unpopular policy which the revisionists had in their sights. They were largely satisfied with the balance of the mixed economy and they saw no justification for any major expansion of the public sector. The argument that a future Labour government should place the pursuit of greater social equality above the expansion of public ownership was rehearsed in a number of publications after 1951; for example, the Fabian Society's *New Fabian Essays* in 1952, Bill Rodgers' *About Equality* in 1954, and John Strachey's *Contemporary Capitalism* in 1956. By far the most important revisionist work, though, was Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*, published in 1956.

Crosland's analysis was produced at the perfect time. It came shortly after the election of a new Labour leader, it coincided with the policy review and it provided the new ideas required by the Party as it sought to define its mission in the second half of the 1950s. Perhaps more importantly, Crosland provided a comprehensive rationale for the abandonment of the Morrisonian brand of corporate nationalisation. The central premiss of *The Future of Socialism* was that no correlation existed between state ownership and the achievement of socialist objectives;
full employment, economic growth and social equality could all be achieved within a mixed economy with a predominant private sector. This was the point at which Crosland departed from traditional socialist theory with its assumptions about the evils of capitalism. According to Crosland's thesis, Keynesian demand management, the welfare state and a progressive taxation system had changed the nature of capitalism in Britain. A Labour government could achieve its objectives with a mixture of economic management, taxation policy and spending on public services; in other words, the ownership of capital was largely irrelevant because the state had so much power over the direction of the economy. Instead of expending time and resources on a programme of nationalisation, Crosland believed that a Labour administration should concentrate on providing a redistribution of wealth, improved public services, comprehensive education, and a liberalisation of legislation on abortion, divorce, homosexuality and censorship. Redistribution was at the heart of Crosland's socialism, and economic growth would enable a Labour government to win public consent for this transferral of resources. Redistribution within a growing economy would allow rising living standards for all to continue; redistribution within a stagnant economy implied a return for some to the joyless austerity of the Cripps era. For Crosland, the ultimate aim was to produce a liberal society in which there was economic growth, social justice and social mobility. (70)

Crosland based his vision of socialism on the mistaken assumption that governments could deliver the economic growth required to make redistribution acceptable. However, in the boom conditions of the 1950s the flaw in this assumption was not so apparent. The Future of Socialism appeared to provide Labour with a blueprint for policy in an affluent society, and its influence was clear in the documents produced during the policy review. Of the nine major policy statements published by the NEC between 1956 and 1958, seven owed a large debt to Crosland's thesis. (71) For example, the policy makers emphasised the need to achieve greater social equality through taxation reforms and a comprehensive education system. (72) They outlined a redistributive national pensions scheme which was linked both to
contributions and inflation. (73) Full scale nationalisation was
dowgraded in favour of the state acquisition of shares and new
forms of competitive public enterprise. (74) The review recognised
the need to safeguard individual liberties as the power of the
state increased. (75) Finally, the policy review argued that a
Labour government could achieve the economic growth needed to
pay for its programme without creating inflation or a balance of
payments deficit. (76)

Although Crosland provided the theoretical framework for
Labour's policy makers after 1955, the policy review itself was
dominated by Gaitskell. The Labour leader's authority at
Westminster may not have been established fully before 1959, but
his hold on the Party was secure. He supervised closely the
production of the home policy statements which eventually formed
Labour's programme for the 1959 election. Gaitskell was an
ex-officio member of the NEC, he served on the Home Policy
Committee, he chaired the study group which produced the
document on equality, he served on the study group which covered
public ownership and he rewrote sections of the statement on
housing. After the document on public ownership was endorsed by
the Brighton Conference in 1957, the Sunday Times acknowledged
the control which Gaitskell had maintained on policy formation.
It said that he had;

'transformed Labour's policy in all essentials to
Gaitskellism, a great personal achievement...Brighton has
left him with his personal authority at its peak.' (77)

Gaitskell was fortunate to become Labour leader when the
Party was committed to a long term policy review. It offered him
an ideal opportunity to re-shape Labour's programme after the
1955 defeat; he was able to examine all aspects of the Party's
domestic programme, relatively unencumbered by previous policy
statements or Conference decisions. Labour's manifesto in 1959,
therefore, largely represented Gaitskell's personal vision of a
socialist programme for the 1960s; indeed, he made a number of
amendments to the final draft of the document, particularly in
the section on economic and industrial policy. (78) The result was
a manifesto which combined revisionist faith in the existing balance of the mixed economy with Labour's traditional commitment to social reform.

Britain Belongs to You emphasised the social policies which had been formulated during the three year review. It concentrated on traditional Labour themes such as tackling poverty, narrowing the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and criticising the Tories for their refusal to use economic controls. The document began with a discussion of Labour's plans to help pensioners. Perhaps this sense of priority was unlikely to capture the imagination of those voters who were more concerned with their own rising living standards, but at least it demonstrated the Party's belief that economic growth should be used to create a more humane society. This belief was reinforced by pledges to abolish health service charges, to spend at least £50 million each year on hospital development and to raise unemployment pay and other welfare benefits. Labour's housing policy was similarly motivated but more bold. Its main objectives were the repeal of the 1957 Rent Act - which had decontrolled rents in the private sector - and the eventual municipalisation of most rented property. Redistribution through improved public services and benefits would also be helped by the implementation of a 'fair' taxation system. The details of Labour's taxation plans were drawn only faintly, but specific references were made to the abuse of business expense accounts, the avoidance of death duties and the need to tax capital gains more heavily.

As will be shown in the next chapter, Labour formulated specific economic policies during the three year review. But election manifestos in this period were relatively brief documents which rarely discussed policies in depth. As a result, the Party concentrated on identifying its main economic objectives in Britain Belongs to You. Expansion of output, full employment, stable prices, high investment, rising productivity, a favourable balance of payments and a strong pound were all cited as targets. Perhaps not surprisingly there was little attempt to establish priorities in this part of the document, and the policies that would be used to pursue the targets
mentioned were described with a minimal degree of precision. The manifesto implied that tax concessions would be used to encourage investment in private industry; it stated that industrial 'giants' would be made to plan their operations in line with the Party's national objectives; and it predicted confidently that the 'full co-operation' of the trade unions would be secured by a Labour government. On the final point, although there was no mention of an agreed incomes policy, it was apparent that Labour aimed to win the co-operation of the unions by improved welfare policies and the implementation of a Workers' Charter which guaranteed employees' rights.

Other parts of the manifesto helped to reinforce Labour's commitment to planning. The section on transport argued that planning was required to bring about necessary improvements in the nation's infrastructure. In particular, it promoted the idea of an integrated transport policy which included a national plan for road building. On public ownership, specific pledges were made about the re-nationalisation of steel and commercial long-distance road haulage, both of which had been promised in the 1955 manifesto. The rest of the section on public ownership, though, reflected revisionist concerns about the irrelevance and unpopularity of full-scale nationalisation. The formula which had been used since 1951 was employed once more - a Labour administration would nationalise all or part of an industry only if it was convinced that such action would benefit the national interest. Finally, using a phrase which foreshadowed one of the main themes of Labour's 1964 election campaign, the manifesto outlined the need for the 'application of science in all phases of our economic life'.

Although the programme contained in Britain Belongs to You was the product of more than three years hard work and a mountain of drafts and papers, the national press was unenthusiastic about Labour's 1959 manifesto. The Times was sceptical about the Party's promise to increase public spending without raising basic rate taxes. It was not convinced that Labour could achieve the increased output and economic expansion it promised to finance its spending commitments.
'What assurance have we that Labour could bring about this happy state of affairs without running into trade deficits, depletion of gold reserves and domestic inflation?...The general impression the manifesto gives is of a party with serious misgivings about the few doctrinaire experiments to which it is committed and with a coherent programme of minor social reform well grounded on Labour's traditional preoccupation with equality'. (79)

The _Guardian_, which supported Labour in the 1959 campaign, also had reservations about the manifesto. Its leader writer was impressed by the section on foreign affairs, but was less enthusiastic about the commitments on domestic policy.

'The image of an up-to-date Labour Party fails to come over. The truth is that the majority even of working class voters are more prosperous and better cared for today than ever before...But the general impression that remains is of a Labour Party still unwilling to come to grips with our post austerity revolution'. (80)

Similarly, _Tribune_ gave only qualified support to the manifesto, partly because of genuine disagreements with Gaitskell over policy, partly because of the legacy of the Left's battles with the Labour leader which had not been forgotten.

'Britain Belongs to You advances many of the ideas which the Labour Party has agreed upon after debate. There are many points which will still be the subject of hot argument after the election. But it has done a masterful job of exposing the sham policies of the Conservatives'. (81)

The faint praise and criticism which the Party's programme drew from the press was largely undeserved. Certainly it would be a mistake to hold the manifesto responsible for Labour's defeat in 1959. In terms of policy proposals, there was very little difference between _Britain Belongs to You_ and the programme on which Labour eventually came to power under Wilson.
in 1964. The three year policy review provided the basis for Labour's manifestos in 1959 and 1964. The only major commitments from the 1959 programme which did not reappear in 1964 were the nationalisation of road haulage, the large-scale municipalisation of rented housing and a 'plan for cotton'. As will be shown, the only significant new policy proposals which appeared in the 1964 programme were on the integration of the public schools into the state system and the details of welfare provision - the other innovations under Wilson largely concerned the machinery of government. In other words, almost all of the policies which took Labour into government in 1964 were in place before 1959. It was Wilson's good fortune in 1964 to fight against a Government that was discredited and unpopular; it was Gaitskell's misfortune in 1959 to fight against a Government that was successful, confident and popular.

Labour was always unlikely to win the 1959 election, despite the findings of fluctuating opinion polls which occasionally gave the Party a lead during the campaign. Labour had to convince the electorate that a change of government was necessary in 1959, even though the economy had grown steadily and living standards had risen since 1955. The scale of this task should not be underestimated. Although the two main arguments which the Party used to support its case were the best available in the circumstances, both were vulnerable to an easy counter-attack. The first part of Labour's strategy focused on the idea that social reform was required to redistribute the product of economic growth more equitably. The Conservatives countered this with the claim that reforms would be expensive and would lead to tax increases. They also argued that the Party's concern with social reform and the fight against poverty was increasingly inappropriate in the post-war affluent society. The second and twin part of Labour's strategy involved the promise that it could achieve a higher rate of economic growth than the Tories. The Conservatives simply responded to this by welcoming Labour's recognition of the fact that the Government had presided over growth and prosperity - whenever Labour focused on the economy, the electorate was reminded of the affluence that was associated with the Tories in the 1950s. In
short, Labour was in no position to win in 1959; it was a party of change and social reform in a country that was largely satisfied with the status quo. Its programme could be portrayed as fiscally irresponsible, and its promise of economic growth was merely words on paper against a Government whose record of achievement in this area could be seen in homes, shops and workplaces around the country.

In these circumstances, the fact that Labour managed to conduct a relatively successful election campaign was a considerable achievement. Particular credit for this was earned by the team which produced the Party's televised broadcasts. Previously, the Conservatives had been more effective than their rivals at using television for political purposes, but in 1959 it was widely accepted that Labour had won the battle on the small screen. According to the authors of the Nuffield study of the 1959 campaign, the televised broadcasts provided Labour with 'one of its most unexpected tactical successes during the election'.

By this time, of course, television had become an increasingly important medium of political communication - more than 70 per cent of the electorate had access to a set, while opinion polls found that television had become the prime source of information on news and politics for the public.

Labour's advantage over the Tories in the use of television during the campaign owed much to forward planning. As early as November 1956, Tony Benn, who led the committee which was in charge of Labour's televised output, met colleagues to discuss the Party's election broadcasts. Although the urgency was caused by predictions that the Suez crisis would be followed by a general election, discussions about Labour's broadcasting strategy continued even after it was clear that a dissolution would not take place. In December 1956 the Party's Senior Broadcasting Committee met in full to discuss election plans for the first time, and in the same month Benn supervised the production of a televised film on Labour's housing policy. Although he was not satisfied fully with the film, the project at least gave Benn and his broadcasting team the opportunity to perfect their technique well in advance of a national contest.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the
Independent Television Authority (ITA) offered to help the main parties with their broadcasts and Labour was happy to accept their advice. Members of the Broadcasting Committee met a producer from Associated Rediffusion early in 1957 to discuss new approaches to political broadcasts. (86) This was followed in December 1958 by detailed talks with producers from the BBC who offered to help Labour with its televised election programmes. (87) Although the Party retained full control over the content of its broadcasts, BBC personnel worked on the structure of Labour's programmes and eventually helped with production. BBC staff also helped to train the Labour team that was involved in filming - a task that was preceded by the Broadcasting Committee's own efforts which had begun in February 1958 in a rehearsal studio at Transport House. (88)

The result of these preparations was five effective televised broadcasts during the campaign - four of 20 minutes and one of 15 minutes. Because convention at the time decreed that neither Macmillan nor Gaitskell was interviewed on television during the election, the party broadcasts were particularly important in 1959. Benn and his team used a magazine format for Labour's programmes. Each broadcast covered a range of issues and used interviews, speeches, short pieces of film, music and cartoons for variety and pace. The films were presented by Benn from an 'operations room' in order to convey an impression of purpose, efficiency and hard-edged professionalism. The content was planned carefully and parts of the films were prepared months in advance. (89) The Nuffield study described this as a 'brilliantly flexible formula' and it was far superior to the straight talks to camera which the Party had used in 1955. (90)

The magazine format was also more effective than the recordings of staged 'discussions' between Ministers which the Conservatives favoured. Their first broadcast featured the Cabinet discussing the Government's various achievements; it had been filmed weeks in advance, but Edward Heath, the Government Chief Whip, described the broadcast as 'absolutely catastrophic - awful...And the next programme was just as bad.' (91) The penultimate Conservative broadcast, which had also been recorded in advance, was withdrawn and hurriedly replaced by an
alternative because it looked so bad in the preview.\(^{(92)}\) In contrast, Labour maintained confidence in their programmes and concentrated on building up Gaitskell's image as a Prime Minister who was waiting to take office. The Labour leader had his own special set for the broadcasts in order to underline his authority and standing. In July 1958 Benn had written a briefing paper on communications in which he insisted that the image of the leader had to be amplified for the electorate.

'The Party must realise that the projection of its Leadership is quite as important as the projection of its policy... We must face the fact that by tradition, the Labour Party is inhibited against the idea of building up its own Leader. These inhibitions must now be overcome as a matter of deliberate policy.'\(^{(93)}\)

The Party and Gaitskell responded to the challenge. His performances on television were described as 'formidable' in The Times and for a while at least they added to his reputation in the Party.\(^{(94)}\) The value of Gaitskell's success was recognised by Harold Wilson, who copied and extended the strategy of dominating Labour's campaign on television when he was Party leader in 1964.

Other aspects of Labour's campaign were less effective than the televised broadcasts but no less professional. Crossman led the Party's Campaign Committee and directed the Transport House staff in the organisation of public meetings and daily press conferences. In the early part of the election these press conferences helped to ensure that the contest was dominated by issues of Labour's own choosing - primarily, the charge that the Government had failed to achieve a sufficiently high rate of economic growth. On the penultimate Monday of the campaign The Times acknowledged that Labour had so far fought more effectively than either of its main rivals.\(^{(95)}\) Tony Benn at the same time wrote in his diary, 'We have definitely got the Tories on the run'.\(^{(96)}\) But this Monday has also been seen as a turning point in the election for two reasons. First, the Government announced that unemployment had fallen by 22,000 in August to
stand at 1.9 per cent. Secondly, Gaitskell pledged that a Labour Government would not increase income tax rates in order to finance its spending commitments. The Conservatives seized on this pledge and accused Labour of attempting to bribe the electorate by promising extra public spending without any rise in taxation, a charge that was summarised by the headline in the Daily Sketch: 'This is spiv stuff. What Next - Free Fags?'(97) Butler, the Home Secretary, made the same charge using different language in a speech at Newcastle;

'Never have we seen before a party leader so cynically pre-judge the conditions with which he will be faced, and at once promise vast extra expenditure and deny that he is going to raise extra taxation to pay for it'.(98)

To make matters worse, Morgan Phillips followed Gaitskell's pledge by confirming that Labour would abolish purchase tax on certain essentials. Peter Shore, from Labour's Research Department, believed that the statements on taxation were significant;

'you can never be certain about what wins or loses elections, but you do know in the course of a campaign some particular event that changes the feel of the campaign, or puts a check on your impetus and gives a boost to the other side. And it was undoubtedly that pledge that we wouldn't raise income tax that really hit the Labour Party very hard, hit its credibility.'(99)

Tony Benn in his diary reached a similar conclusion. The confidence which he had felt just days before had begun to give way to anxiety. 'The income tax pledge that Hugh gave in his speech, coupled with the purchase tax pledge released by Morgan, has upset us all. We feel that the Tories have now got us on the defensive.'(100)

Although the Conservatives undoubtedly welcomed the chance to accuse Labour of conducting an auction for votes, it would be a mistake to attach too much significance to the controversy over
taxation. As already stated, the economic situation made a Labour victory unlikely in 1959, regardless of specific episodes during the campaign. The Conservatives were able to take advantage of the fact that the economy had grown steadily under their stewardship. On the advice of a public relations firm, the Tories emphasised that most people in the country were enjoying a higher standard of living than ever before. The slogan which captured the essence of their appeal was simple but effective; 'Life's Better with the Conservatives. Don't Let Labour Ruin It!'. This message had been forced home by an expensive and unprecedented national advertising campaign which had begun two years before the election. It was reinforced by the release of two sets of statistics which complemented the announcement of a fall in unemployment. On 30 September it was announced that production was rising and that output in August was 8 per cent higher than it had been in the same month in 1958. This was followed on 2 October by the news that gold and dollar reserves had risen by £13 million in September to stand at their highest level since 1951. (101)

Despite the advantage which prosperity gave the Tories, Gaitskell refused to concede that his party was on the way to another defeat - he even wrote out his proposed Cabinet list on the final Sunday of the campaign. His view of Labour's prospects was based on opinion polls which showed the two main parties neck and neck as they entered the final week of the election, but his confidence was both misplaced and eventually damaging. The expectation of a Labour victory, or at the very least a close result, increased the sense of shock and disappointment which accompanied the Conservatives' clear victory. This in turn affected the way in which the Labour leadership interpreted the 1959 result. As will be shown in the next chapter, Gaitskell and his colleagues failed to appreciate that the Party had performed relatively well in difficult circumstances in 1959; instead, they saw defeat as the product of a long-term decline which had to be halted by drastic action. The consequence of their proposals for such action was renewed conflict in the Party. However, a more considered analysis of the polling figures would have revealed that Labour was in a strong political position at
the end of the 1950s and was well placed to win an election which was fought in less favourable circumstances for the Conservatives.

Despite the problems which they faced in the 1959 campaign, Labour still received 43.8 per cent of the votes cast, compared with 49.4 per cent for the Conservatives and 5.9 per cent for the Liberals. Labour's aggregate vote fell by almost 200,000, but many of these votes were lost because the Liberals doubled the number of candidates they fielded from 1955. Although the Tories increased their majority at Westminster to 100 seats, the scale of this increase was partly the product of a bias in the electoral system which allowed the Tories to win a given number of seats with 400,000 fewer votes than Labour - in order for the parties to have won an equal number of seats in 1959, Labour would have required 47.3 per cent and the Conservatives 45.9 per cent of the votes cast. (102) In other words, the size of the Government's majority at Westminster exaggerated the true level of support for the Conservatives in the country. Labour could also take heart from the fact that they had at least slowed down the swing towards the Conservatives, despite the comfortable prosperity of the late 1950s; in 1959 the swing towards the Government was 1.1 per cent, in 1955 it had been 1.8 per cent.

Although prosperity was the key to Conservative success, it was apparent too that the Government probably stood to lose votes heavily if confidence in the economy faltered. Conservative support was strongest both in regions which had prospered most in the 1950s and among social groups which had benefitted most from post war affluence. The largest swings to the Conservatives had taken place in the West Midlands, which provided 10 of their 28 gains, and the London area, which provided an additional nine. As prosperous industrial towns such as Luton and Leicester voted Conservative, it appeared that skilled, affluent manual workers had abandoned the Labour Party. According to opinion polls, support for the Conservatives also increased among voters aged between 21 and 29 who were too young to remember the depression of the 1930s or the post war reforms of the Attlee Government. In contrast, Labour's support had remained firm in areas where unemployment and poverty were high.
- particularly Clydeside and South-East Lancashire. Pensioners formed perhaps the main social group which failed to benefit appreciably in the 'affluent society', so it was no surprise that a majority of over-65s voted for Labour - in fact, the Party had a lead of about 7 per cent over the Tories among pensioners. One final interesting aspect of the voting figures which should be mentioned is that Labour increased its share of the vote among women for the first time since 1945. Although much of this support was lost in 1964, it seems that many women voters transferred their allegiance to the Liberals. It appears, therefore, that the 1959 election marked the beginning of a drift of female support away from the Conservatives. (103)

Labour politicians should not have been too depressed by the 1959 result. Advanced economies had always been marked by periods of boom and slump and it was idle to expect that Britain's economy would always work in favour of a Conservative election campaign. Instead, the Party should have recognised the gains it made between 1955 and 1959. The leadership issue had been settled, divisions in the PLP had been healed, organisation had improved and the Party had learned how to conduct a modern and effective election campaign. As a result of these achievements, Labour managed to retain almost 44 per cent of the vote in difficult circumstances in 1959. More importantly, though, the Party launched a policy review after 1955 which provided the basis of Labour's programme in 1959 and again in 1964. Arguably, more than any other factor, this policy review illustrates the way in which the groundwork for the Party's victory in 1964 was completed in the 1950s.

References

2. P. Norris, British By-Elections: The Volatile Electorate, (Oxford, 1990). Results are listed in the appendix in this publication.
3. See, for example, M. Abrams and R. Rose, op. cit.

5. Failures of leadership and policy have been identified by R. Miliband, \textit{op. cit.}; failure to respond to social change has been highlighted by N. Tiratsoo, \textit{op. cit.}.


8. \textit{Ibid.}

9. NEC Minutes, 22 June 1955. The members of this sub-committee were: Jack Cooper, of the General and Municipal Workers; Peggy Hebison, an MP from the Women's Section of the NEC; Arthur Skeffington, an MP who represented the Socialist Societies on the NEC; and Harold Wilson, who chaired the sub-committee.


12. \textit{Ibid.}


15. \textit{Ibid.}


18. \textit{Ibid.}


22. Attlee announced his retirement at a special meeting of the Parliamentary Committee. See Parliamentary Committee Minutes, 7 December 1955.

23. Ibid., 14 December 1955. According to his biographer, Gaitskell won support from Labour's northern MPs, over two-thirds of the Scots and some from London. Most trade union MPs supported him. P. Williams, *op. cit.*, p.236.


26. NEC Minutes, 25 January 1956. Gaitskell remained treasurer until a successor was chosen at the 1956 Blackpool Conference.

27. National Council of Labour Minutes, 18 January 1956. This Council contained representatives from the PLP, the TUC, the Co-operative Union, Labour Peers and Labour Party officers.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.


32. 'General Election 1959, Report by the Secretary, NEC Minutes 28 October 1959. The 5 gains were Central Ayrshire, Craigton, Lanark, Oldham East and Scotstown. The 28 losses were distributed across the country.

33. NEC Minutes, 28 September 1955.

34. Ibid.


38. Ibid., 13 July 1955.

39. Ibid. Other notable appointments to shadow positions on home policy included: Dr Edith Summerskill at Health; George Brown at Supply; Philip Noel-Baker at Atomic Energy and Anthony Greenwood at Works. It was later agreed that Jim Griffiths would take responsibility for covering Welsh issues: see Parliamentary Committee Minutes, 18 April 1956.
40. Ibid., 8 February 1956.
42. Ibid., 20 November 1957.
43. Crossman diary, 6 November 1957, p.624.
46. Harold Macmillan served as Minister of Defence, 1954-55; Foreign Secretary, 1955; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1955-57; Prime Minister, 1957-63. R.A. Butler was Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1951-55; Leader of the House of Commons, 1955-61; Home Secretary 1957-62; Foreign Secretary, 1963-64. Iain Macleod served as Minister of Health, Minister of Labour and Colonial Secretary and was Leader of the House of Commons, 1961-63. Enoch Powell resigned as Financial Secretary to the Treasury in 1958, but was brought back to the Cabinet as Minister of Health, 1960-63.
49. Anthony Eden was Conservative Prime Minister from April 1955 to January 1957. He was succeeded by Harold Macmillan who remained Prime Minister until October 1963 when he was succeeded by Sir Alec Douglas-Home.
53. Ibid., p.291.
60. Crossman diary, 19 March 1959, p.742.
61. Sunday Express, 10 August 1958.
64. The Conservatives spent £468,000 while Labour spent £103,000. D. Butler and R. Rose, op. cit., pp.21 and 28.
65. These figures were calculated on the basis of statistics cited in F.W.S. Craig, op. cit., pp.89-90.
67. Griffiths polled 141 votes to 111 for Bevan. There were 22 abstentions and one ballot paper was spoiled. Parliamentary Committee Minutes, 2 February 1956.
68. Gaitskell diary, 14 February 1956, pp.442-443.
69. Ibid., 5 April 1956.
71. The seven statements were: Personal Freedom, Towards Equality, (1956); National Superannuation, Public Enterprise, Industry and Society, (1957); Learning to Live and Plan for Progress, (1958). The two documents which did not draw significantly on Crosland's thesis were Homes of the Future, (1956) and Prosper the Plough, (1958).
73. National Superannuation.
74. Industry and Society and Public Enterprise.
91

75. **Personal Freedom.**
76. **Plan for Progress.**
82. D. Butler and R. Rose, *op. cit.*, p.84.
84. Tony Benn diary, 26 November 1956.
89. See, for example, Tony Benn diary, 25 March 1959.
96. Tony Benn diary, 28 September 1959.
99. Interview with Peter Shore.
100. Tony Benn diary, 1 October 1959.
Defeat in a general election invariably acts as a force for change within political parties. The most important change which Labour made after the 1955 contest was the election of Gaitskell as leader; the second most important change was the reshaping of the Party's domestic programme. To an extent these two events were related. As we have seen, Gaitskell's ideas about future policy helped to establish him as a credible candidate for the leadership in 1955; after he took charge of the Party, Gaitskell used his authority in the NEC to dominate the long-term review of policy which Labour initiated after its second successive defeat. Gaitskell's victory against Bevan in the contest to succeed Attlee ensured that there would be no shift to the left in policy in the second half of the 1950s. This had been made clear during an exchange between the two rivals for the leadership in the columns of Tribune shortly after polling day. In reply to Bevan's claim that Labour had failed in 1955 because its policies were insufficiently distinguishable from those of the Conservatives, Gaitskell had asked: 'Do we really believe that the marginal voters who failed to go to the polls were skulking at home because the Labour Party is not revolutionary enough?' (1) This rejection of Bevan's analysis of the election defeat signalled that Gaitskell as leader would attempt to reshape Labour's programme in a way that would appeal to marginal voters in the centre ground of politics. He was fortunate in this respect that the Party was already committed to a thorough review of policy by the time he became leader.

This chapter will examine in detail the three year review of policy which was initiated in 1955. It will explore the policy-making process within the Party at this time and it will show how the leadership controlled this process to ensure that a programme was produced which reflected the revisionist ideas of Crosland, Gaitskell and others. The main aim of the following paragraphs, though, is to show that the review of policy formed the basis of Labour's manifestos of 1959 and 1964.
Work on policy began within weeks of the election defeat. In July 1955 the Home Policy Committee, which included Gaitskell, Morrison, Wilson and Mikardo, met to discuss a Research Department paper which advised the Party to initiate a research programme on selected topics: the suggested themes were equality, the state and industry, security and old age, education, housing, agriculture, bureaucracy and liberty, and the atomic and automotive age.\(^2\) The 'Report on Future Policy' called on the Policy Committee to formulate statements which 'while drawing on the Party's wealth of past experience, will be designed to take account of changes and developments in our way of life'.\(^3\) These were to form the basis of a new party programme for 1960 when the next election was expected to take place. The research paper emphasised the need for Labour to modernise its policies in a way which recognised changed social conditions in Britain. It argued that the 1953 policy document, *Challenge to Britain*, had relied too heavily on the expectation of economic difficulties as a vehicle which would bring Labour back into power. The paper conceded that five years of Conservative rule had to be expected - years which economic growth was likely to make more straightforward for the Government than its previous term. As the Research Department predicted correctly in 1955, 'the real incomes of all sections of the community are likely to increase...and some improvements are to be expected in the social services.'\(^4\) A revised version of the Department's paper in September argued that the task of preparing a policy statement for an election in 1959 or 1960 was potentially more difficult than ever before, because the Government was likely to be able to preserve full employment and would 'probably move into calmer economic waters well before the next election'.\(^5\)

The mechanics of policy-making outlined in the papers for the Home Policy Committee were relatively straightforward. A particular field of study was allocated to a member of the Party's Research Department who would then compile a report. The research team at this time usually comprised about twelve staff.\(^6\) Small study groups made up of members of the Policy Committee were established for each policy theme to supervise
the work of the research staff. The study groups for the respective statements met initially to discuss the aims of the research and would meet again only after a draft statement had been prepared by the research worker. Outside experts were not co-opted on a formal basis, instead the research team was instructed to maintain close contacts with 'reliable and sympathetic experts' in the appropriate fields. (7) Policy-making was, therefore, highly centralised. In practice, only three or four members of the Policy Committee and one member of the Research Department were involved in the drafting of each statement. After a statement had been discussed, amended if necessary and approved by the Home Policy Committee it was submitted to a full meeting of the National Executive. After it was approved in an agreed form by the NEC the statement was published and presented to Conference. The nine major documents which were produced during the review were submitted to Conference at the rate of three each year between 1956 and 1958. As will be shown, all nine were endorsed by delegates with comfortable majorities.

The first three policy statements produced by the review in 1956 were Towards Equality, Personal Freedom and Homes of the Future. The influence of Croslandite revisionism was apparent from the outset; the first two of these documents were concerned with key themes covered in The Future of Socialism - social equality and the relationship between state authority and individual liberty. (8) Of course, greater social equality was a traditional Labour objective - the Labour Representation Committee's manifesto for the 1900 election had placed 'the Establishment of Social and Economic Equality between the Sexes' at the heart of the new Party's mission - but in 1956 revisionists argued that the means by which equality had been pursued in the past were no longer appropriate. (9) Gaitskell himself chaired the study group on equality and presented the draft of Towards Equality to the Policy Committee in June. (10) After minor amendments the document was passed to a full meeting of the National Executive where it was approved for publication with little apparent controversy. (11)

The greater part of Towards Equality consisted of an analysis
of the main causes of social and economic inequality in Britain. It was essentially a philosophical statement which set out the values and principles which underpinned the Party's programme. As seen, the belief in social justice and equality was a key component of Labour's 1959 election campaign. But only a brief section at the end of the document on this theme outlined the policies which Labour would employ in pursuit of equality. The introduction set out the scale of the problem which inequality presented and acknowledged that post-war welfare reform had failed to narrow the gap between rich and poor in Britain. There was at least a clear indication, though, that a Labour administration would use the power of the state to create a more equal society:

'We must admit that opportunities are far from equal; privilege in many forms remains strongly entrenched; the division of the nation's wealth is still arbitrary and unjust; and in its essentials ours is - and is felt to be - a class society...there exists in a capitalist system a strong, persistent trend towards economic and social inequality which can only be contained by deliberate and continuous State intervention.' (12)

The document identified the educational system as the most significant cause of inequality in the country. Post-war reform in secondary education, it argued, had failed to produce parity of esteem within the tripartite structure of state schools: secondary modern, technical and grammar. Division within education was even more pronounced between state schools and the fee-paying sector and the effect of this was to heighten social barriers and to stimulate class consciousness. In short, the school system both reflected and helped to perpetuate the class structure. It fostered social division among children and it influenced an individual's prospects of entering higher education, the professions and other forms of skilled, managerial or technical employment. The explanation of the policies which Labour would use to reduce inequality in this area, though, was reserved for the separate statement on
Towards Equality argued that some progress had been made towards a more equitable distribution of income and wealth since 1945. Full employment, extensions in the social services, progressive taxation and equal pay between the sexes in certain areas of employment had achieved a 'considerable redistribution' of income through the community. However, serious problems still remained. The most affluent one per cent of Britons owned approximately half the nation's private wealth. Meanwhile, over 2 million Britons were supported by payments from the National Assistance Board which had been established in 1948 as a safety net against abject poverty. In order to close the gap between these two extremes the Party committed itself in the document to a reform of Britain's taxation system. No major changes were envisaged to the existing rates of taxation - Gaitskell's income tax pledge during the 1959 election campaign, therefore, had been Party policy for three years - instead reform would focus on the superstructure of the taxation system. If gaps in the system could be closed, it was argued, the taxation system could become 'a very powerful instrument for redistributing income'. The main aim was to concentrate on hitherto untaxed or inadequately taxed sources of income. The abuse of business expenses and the payment of tax free capital to top executives on retirement were identified as common tax avoidance techniques. Death duties also had to be collected more rigorously - although Towards Equality made it clear that Labour did not wish to discourage workers from making reasonable provision for their families. Finally, capital gains made on the Stock Exchange were cited as a 'powerful and virtually unchecked force working for inequality'. Labour's commitment to address these faults in the taxation system was apparent in the 1959 manifesto. The principles were clear even if the details still required some further explanation;

'We shall deal with the business man's expense account racket and the tax-free compensation paid to directors on loss of office; We shall tax the huge capital gains made on the Stock Exchange and elsewhere; We shall block other loopholes in the
tax law including those which lead to the avoidance of death duties and surtax.' (14)

The 1964 manifesto adopted a similar line on taxation policy but the detail was even less clear;

'Taxation must be fair and must be seen to be fair. The present situation where the largest gains are made, not through hard work but through the untaxed rewards of passive ownership of Stock Exchange speculation, must be ended. In particular we shall tax capital gains; and block up the notorious avoidance and evasion devices that have made a mockery of so much of our tax system'. (15)

Towards Equality was accepted with an overwhelming majority and without amendment at the 1956 Blackpool Conference. Gaitskell reinforced his commitment to the values contained in the document by speaking on behalf of the NEC during the debate on the statement. (16) The Labour leader was also closely involved in the production of Homes of the Future, the 1956 policy statement on housing. Although improved housing had been promised in every Labour manifesto since 1900, the new policy statement attempted to explain in detail how the Party would provide decent, affordable housing as a nationwide public service. The draft of Homes of the Future was presented to the Policy Committee in May. (17) The main principle contained in the document was simple and familiar. The Party believed in the municipalisation of rented property - the principle that most accommodation in the rented sector should be owned and controlled by local authorities. The first appearance of this policy in a Labour manifesto came in 1955. The manifesto had said that a Labour government would request local authorities to submit schemes for gradually taking over and modernising rent-controlled private property. (18) By 1956, however, the commitment to the policy had been strengthened. Instead of making requests to local authorities the document stated flatly that 'houses and flats that were rent controlled on the 1st January 1956 and remain tenant occupied should be taken into
public ownership'. In the 1959 manifesto the commitment was stronger still: with allowance made for reasonable exceptions, a pledge was made that 'local authorities shall take over houses which were rent-controlled before 1 January 1956'. (19)

The replacement of 'should' with 'shall' in the wording of the policy had far-reaching implications. Labour had committed itself to a policy which would have affected almost half the families in Britain if it had been implemented. (20) In view of the scale of the operation envisaged, it was no surprise that the issue of municipalisation caused some disagreement within the study group on housing. Whereas certain members of the group favoured a commitment to an early vesting day on which property would be acquired, others believed that the transfer of ownership to local authorities should be linked more specifically to the need to repair and to improve properties. (21) Two drafts of the chapter which dealt with the issue were therefore submitted to the Research Department with a request that they be merged in such a way as to leave a future Labour Minister of Housing a degree of flexibility over the issue. The final version of the document stated that local authorities would plan and operate the transfer of ownership, but it was also made clear that the Minister concerned would have the power to make alternative arrangements to speed up the process if a local authority was seen to be 'falling down on the job'. Gaitskell offered his own suggestions on the redraft of this section, arguing that the document had to be more precise about its justification for the municipal ownership of tenanted property and not just concentrate on the details of Labour's plans. (22) A revised draft of the statement was discussed during two meetings of the NEC in June where it generated 'considerable discussion'. (23) After a number of amendments were suggested and approved the statement was accepted for submission to Conference.

Although Homes of the Future was concerned primarily with the issue of municipalisation, other aspects of Labour's housing programme were also addressed in the document. Despite the fact that improved housing had been a national priority in 1945, serious deficiencies in the housing stock continued to exist a
decade later. Post-war affluence had not solved the country's housing problems. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government's own figures at the time showed that almost 1 million houses in Britain were unfit for human habitation. The 1951 Census revealed that from a total of 14.5 million households, almost 7 million had no fixed bath, over 3 million either shared or were without a water closet and over 1 million either shared or were without a cooking stove.\(^{(24)}\) Homes of the Future offered a list of policies which would attack these problems. Increased slum clearance, lower interest rates for housing purposes, the right of leaseholders to purchase the freehold on the expiration of the lease, the provision of 100 per cent mortgages by local authorities and the establishment of a National Housing Association to help with a building programme were all mentioned in the statement.

With the exception of the material on local authority mortgages and a National Housing Association, the policies contained in Homes of the Future reappeared in Labour's 1959 election manifesto. Most of them were present also in the 1964 programme. In fact there were just two main differences between the housing policies in the 1956 document and the 1964 manifesto. The first was the abandonment of plans for a National Housing Association in favour of a proposal for a Crown Land Commission which would acquire land for building purposes. The second was the replacement of the plan for large-scale municipalisation with a policy which involved local authorities acquiring old properties from landlords who failed to meet Labour's new standards of modernisation.\(^{(25)}\) The abandonment of municipalisation was an important change of policy which will be explained in a further chapter. When Homes of the Future was submitted to the Blackpool Conference, however, most delegates had no reservations about the proposed extension of public ownership in housing. Introducing Homes of the Future on behalf of the NEC at Conference, Anthony Greenwood emphasised the scale of the project which was envisaged in the document;

'it is a full blooded Socialist policy statement which will involve what is probably the biggest socialisation project
that has yet been attempted in the democratic world." (26)

The third policy statement produced in 1956 dealt in part with the implications of such collectivist policies for the rights of individuals. Personal Freedom was a thematic document written by David Ginsberg, the head of the Research Department, which dealt with the issues of civil liberties and individual freedom in an increasingly collectivist society. The draft of the document was presented to a meeting of the Policy Committee in May where it was accepted with a number of amendments. (27) After the conclusion had been rewritten the document passed to a meeting of the NEC in June where it was approved for submission to Conference. (28) Although there was very little discussion of policy proposals in Personal Freedom, the statement at least showed that the Party had thought seriously about the rights of the individual in society. The burden of the analysis was that socialists were committed to two forms of freedom: civil liberties and 'those freedoms that can only exist in a classless society'.

The policy makers appeared to be relatively satisfied about existing safeguards on civil liberties. They argued that Labour would protect the independence of the judiciary, implement fully the Legal Aid and Advice Act of 1949 and ensure that the country retained 'the most efficient, incorruptible and "non-political" Civil Service in the world'. The main complaints in this area concerned the powers of the Home Secretary over the entry of aliens into Britain, the secrecy which surrounded security checks for certain forms of public employment and the failure to publish reports of inquiries held under the Town and Country Planning Acts. The issue of freedom within the framework of a 'classless society' was rather more problematic than the issue of civil liberties. As a result, the discussion of the former issue was understandably vague and largely free from specific recommendations. For example the document stated that concentrations of economic, military or political power 'should serve, and be seen to serve, the whole community, and not dominate it'. It also said that 'the right to property always carries with it the responsibility to use and develop it in the
interests of the community'. These rather general assertions, though, were neither developed with further analysis nor supported by policy proposals. Indeed, there was an implicit assumption in *Personal Freedom* that individual rights in a classless society would be protected automatically after a Labour government had regained control of the state. The document was as much an appeal for trust in a future Labour government as a statement of policy. It did advocate both a more diverse ownership of the press and the public control of radio and television broadcasting, but other recommendations are difficult to find.

*Personal Freedom* caused some controversy at Conference, largely because it was seen to lack enough specific proposals. A number of delegates at Blackpool supported demands for more stringent controls on the security services and for a more open system of appeal for individuals who were denied employment as a result of information supplied by the security services. A resolution along these lines attracted significant support but was eventually defeated by 3,478,000 votes to 2,625,000. (29) Although the statement was therefore approved by Conference, its analysis did not feature in the manifesto of 1959. Instead, Labour's programme for the election dealt with the issue of individual liberty in a way that was largely designed to avoid controversy. The manifesto stated that Labour aimed to remove 'out-of-date restrictions on personal liberty'. Reform in this area had been advocated previously by Crosland in *The Future of Socialism* when he argued that in the blood of a socialist 'there should always run a trace of the anarchist and the libertarian, and not too much of the prig and the prude'. (30) The programme for 1959 included proposals to remove anomalies in the betting laws, to hold an enquiry into the Sunday observance laws and to set up a Royal Commission to review and recommend changes in the licensing laws. (31) As these proposals involved matters of conscience, the manifesto confirmed that Labour members would be entitled to a free vote when the issues came before Parliament. In the 1964 manifesto the discussion of individual liberty was even more brief: it was simply stated in the conclusion that a new office of Parliamentary Commissioner would be established.
'with the right to investigate the grievances of the citizen and report to a Select Committee of the House'. (32)

The first three statements produced during the policy review generated enthusiasm in some quarters of the Party. In July 1956 Crossman acknowledged that the policy documents which had been published by the NEC;

'are having an effect on the public. They are making people think that the Labour Party is a party to be taken seriously, that it is thinking, that it is beginning to get a policy and that there can be such a thing as a second stage of Socialism.

Moreover, there is no doubt that in the formulation of this second stage Gaitskell and his friends are playing the major role, since no one else has anything positive to propose. Such ex-Bevanites as Mikardo and Barbara Castle have contributed nothing whatsoever on the Executive and the Tribune is milk and water'. (33)

As a member of the Home Policy Committee, Crossman was involved closely in the review of Labour's domestic programme. His main contribution to policy-making came in 1957 when he helped to produce National Superannuation, the new statement on Labour's proposals for the state pension scheme. A call for improved pensions had been another familiar feature of Labour manifestos since 1900, but the proposals put forward by Crossman and three academics from the London School of Economics were a radical departure from previous Party policy. (34) The draft statement was presented by Crossman to a meeting of the Policy Committee in April where it was accepted after minor amendment. (35) It was then passed to the Executive who approved the document for submission to Conference. (36)

National Superannuation contained two main proposals: an immediate rise in national insurance pension payments and the establishment of a new state system of wage-related benefits for wage-related contributions. The new system of superannuation outlined in the document was based on similar schemes from
Sweden and Germany and its long-term aim was to provide a pension that was equivalent to half pay on retirement for the average wage-earner. The proposed reform of the flat-rate pensions scheme was a significant step and Gaitskell was anxious that the project might appear too extreme. Crossman and the Shadow Chancellor Wilson, however, reassured the leader and the Executive that the rationale for reform was sound and that the logistics of the new scheme were workable. The principle of an income-related state pension plan was justified on several grounds. It was argued that a flat-rate contribution was a poll tax which affected disproportionately the lowest paid workers; the need to ensure that low earners could afford the flat-rate contribution restricted pension payments and resulted in a deficit in the system which the Exchequer had to cover; private superannuation schemes were becoming more common and this was creating a new form of social division - individuals with a private pension plan enjoyed a considerable advantage over those who relied on the state scheme; most private superannuation schemes were not transferable, whereas a national system would offer all wage earners the security of a safeguarded income-related pension plan wherever they worked; flat-rate payments meant that the average wage earner with no private pension allowance suffered a 75 per cent reduction in spending power on retirement; finally, a superannuation scheme would provide savings which would help the state to carry out large-scale capital investment.

After setting out the case for a state superannuation scheme the document explained how the new system would function. The details are complex but the broad principles are clear. The state pension scheme would be divided into two elements: a flat-rate element and a graded element. Workers who were covered by private superannuation arrangements could contract out of the proposed new system but all other workers would join the state superannuation scheme. Every insured worker would be entitled to the continued flat-rate element, whereas those covered by national superannuation would be entitled to the graded element. Married women who did not earn a wage would retain their old pension rights unchanged. In place of a flat-rate contribution
employees in the new state scheme would pay a set percentage of their wage in national insurance. Employers would pay a similar percentage and the Exchequer would also provide a contribution. In order to limit wide differentials between high earners and low earners in the new scheme a ceiling would be imposed on contributions and payments. A minimum level would also be set below which no state pension would be allowed to fall. In order to ensure that final pension payments matched the real value of a worker's contributions throughout their working life, contribution rights in any earning year would be multiplied by a factor which represented the increase in average national earnings between the year in question and the date of retirement. Adjustments to payments based on a periodic review of the cost of living would also be used to safeguard pensioners from inflation. In the transition period between the old and the new state schemes, the payment of graded benefits would be calculated according to the number of years a worker had contributed to national superannuation.

The authors of Labour's new pensions plan did not lack confidence in their scheme. They believed that their work stood comparison with the Beveridge Report, the great symbol of social reconstruction in post-war Britain: 'Just as the Beveridge Report was attuned to the conditions of the 1940s, so National Superannuation is attuned to the new and changed conditions of the 1950s'. (39) Crossman congratulated himself on 'cooking this wonderful vote-winner'. (40) He also argued at the 1957 Brighton Conference that the document tackled the most pressing social issue in Britain at the time: 'Just as unemployment was the great social challenge and the great disgrace of the 1930s, poverty in old age is the great social disgrace and the great challenge of the 1950s'. (41) Most delegates at Brighton appeared to share Crossman's views and his faith in the policy document. Only four speakers from a total of eighteen in the debate on National Superannuation criticised aspects of the policy and the statement was easily approved by Conference. (42)

Reform of the state pensions scheme was an important element of Labour's programme in 1959. Indeed, the increase in the basic pension and the establishment of a new system of superannuation
were the first policy proposals in the manifesto. (43) Labour's poster campaign and its televised broadcasts also featured prominently the pledge to end poverty in old age. The priority attached to this issue reinforced the importance of social equality as a theme in Labour's election campaign under Gaitskell. When Wilson took over the proposed superannuation scheme was given a lower profile in the Party's programme, but the significant point is that the policy on pensions in 1964 remained virtually unchanged from 1957 - the only difference was the promise that private pension schemes would be made transferrable. (44)

The two remaining policy statements for the 1957 Conference dealt with the most contentious issue in Labour's domestic programme: public ownership. Public Enterprise reviewed the performance of nationalised industries; Industry and Society outlined the Party's future policy on public ownership. Potentially, these two statements were the most sensitive and divisive elements of the whole policy review. As far as Gaitskell and his revisionist colleagues were concerned, proposed extensions of public ownership were usually unpopular with the electorate and were increasingly unnecessary as a means of achieving the Party's main goals of social equality and economic growth. However, they also knew that there existed within the Labour movement a sizeable body of opinion which regarded nationalisation as the centrepiece of Labour's economic policy and which was anxious to see more industries brought into public ownership. Gaitskell's objective therefore was to oversee the production of a policy which was flexible enough to unite the Party and to reassure voters at the same time that Labour did not intend to nationalise a long list of industries.

The Labour leader chaired the study group which produced Public Enterprise and he introduced a draft of the document to a meeting of the Executive in June. (45) Although the document was not a policy statement its review of nationalised industries helped to prepare the way for the Policy Committee's proposals on future public ownership. The nationalisation programme of the Attlee Governments was defended and the document acknowledged that a number of gains had been made by industries after they
had been taken into the public sector. But the criticisms levelled at nationalised industries recalled the charges made by Crosland in *The Future of Socialism*. The Boards of nationalised companies had frequently proven no more accountable to Parliament or to the public than the Boards of private companies; Ministers had often been unwilling or unable to guide the investment decisions of nationalised industries; and concerns were expressed about the implications of public monopolies for efficiency and competitiveness. (46)

Different conclusions could be drawn from the analysis in *Public Enterprise*. Some argued that the anticipated benefits of nationalisation had failed to materialise and that the Party should be cautious about further extensions of public ownership. Others believed that with appropriate reform public ownership could be made to operate more effectively. A composite resolution at the Brighton Conference identified the management of nationalised industries as the main cause of the problems outlined in the document. The delegate from Batley and Morley CLP argued that the solution to poor management in the state sector was increased participation by the workforce in the administration of nationalised industries. (47) The trade unions, however, were opposed to the establishment of formal structures for recruiting workers into management, so *Public Enterprise* was accepted by Conference without the amendment. (48)

The criticisms expressed in the review of nationalised industries strengthened the revisionist case against new measures of large-scale public ownership. *Industry and Society*, the statement on industrial policy, reflected the revisionist position on nationalisation and ensured that Labour's programme contained only a limited commitment to the state acquisition of whole industries. The document was produced by a study group whose personnel had previously disagreed about the aims and value of public ownership: it included Gaitskell, Wilson, Bevan and Mikardo. (49) In order to give the trade unions a voice in the formation of industrial policy a research officer from the TUC attended all the meetings of the study group, a full meeting was held with the Economic Committee of the TUC and contact was maintained with the Chairman of the Co-operative...
Union. (50) Despite the apparently collaborative nature of the project, though, *Industry and Society* was written largely by Peter Shore. He was not given a detailed brief by the study group and had 'almost total freedom' in the initial drafting of the statement. (51) A revised draft was discussed by the Executive in June and approved for submission to Conference without apparent controversy. (52)

*Industry and Society* was produced with two different audiences in mind. The Party faithful had to believe that the document reinforced Labour's commitment to a socialist economic programme in which private ownership of capital would be replaced with public ownership. At the same time the wider electorate had to be persuaded that the document signalled Labour's broad acceptance of the existing balance of the mixed economy. As a result the policy statement combined innovation and caution, radical thinking and conservatism. It began with a powerful critique of capitalism which described how private industry in Britain had become dominated by some five hundred large companies. Within these companies shareholders had ceased to perform any worthwhile function. They were not needed to provide risk capital and they had no influence over the management of the company; they simply collected dividends without contributing to the national economy. Following from this analysis it might have been expected that *Industry and Society* would advocate a widespread extension of public ownership to replace the role of the functionless shareholder. Instead, the conclusion was largely free of specific proposals for nationalisation. Peter Shore, who wrote the critique of capitalism in the analytical section of the document, recalls how the revisionists ensured that the conclusion of the policy statement was relatively cautious;

'I was interested in the whole changing structure of post-war capitalism. *Industry and Society* was really very much leaning toward that kind of research I had been doing. It became sharply political rather than being to some extent rather research based and slightly academic when the point was reached in the discussion - what conclusions do you draw from
this? And initially the conclusions were actually very radical conclusions. It was questioning whether we actually needed a private sector in the large firm area of companies, questioning whether we really needed the private shareholder at all, he'd become irrelevant. And of course that in turn could lead to very radical or perhaps not very radical conclusions. And at the end of that particular policy statement I know Hugh Gaitskell was very disturbed indeed and he got Tony Crosland to come in and help shape the concluding chapter.' (53)

The revisionists' redrafting of the conclusion of Industry and Society was crucial because it was this section of the document which determined Labour's policy on public ownership. The proposals offered in the statement had been rehearsed previously in The Future of Socialism. In place of a 'shopping list' of industries which a Labour government would nationalise, two alternative forms of public ownership were envisaged. Individual companies rather than whole industries would be brought into the public sector, and the state would acquire shares in large companies so that the community would enjoy some of the profits of industry. The nationalisation of single companies had already been proposed by Labour in 1953 - Challenge to Britain had advocated the state acquisition of key firms in the machine-tool industry. Industry and Society implied that competitive public enterprise would be introduced across a wider range of industries than just machine-tools, but there was no precise definition of the criteria that would be used to select companies for take over by the state. The formula that eventually appeared in the 1959 manifesto recalled the rather vague formula that had been used in the 1951 manifesto: companies would be taken into public ownership if 'thorough enquiry' revealed that they were 'failing the nation'. This form of words was attacked with some force in The Economist:

'What Labour has done this week is to flaunt a programme that is deliberately designed to have the minimum of eventual real effect, while instilling the maximum of interim uncertainty
in every board room in the country.'(54)

The proposals for the state acquisition of shares in the policy statement were defined with a little more clarity, but there was still enough ambiguity in the drafting to cause confusion. The document at least explained how a Labour government would acquire shares on behalf of the community. First, a National Superannuation Fund would be established under the control of independent trustees; these trustees would be given part of the surplus remaining from state pension payments to finance the purchase of the shares of their choice. Second, death duties where appropriate would be collected in the form of shares rather than cash. However, although the mechanics of the share buying scheme were clear, the amount of shares that would be acquired by these methods was not specified, nor was it explained how the dividends from the shares would be distributed. There was even a disagreement between those who had helped to produce the document about the central purpose of state share buying. Wilson argued that the policy should be used by a Labour government to gain control of industrial firms whose performance was unsatisfactory - he did not believe that the state should become a functionless shareholder. (55) Mikardo argued in a similar vein that the state purchase of shares could be used to increase public ownership dramatically. In his view, the policy enabled the state to acquire majority shareholdings in large groups of companies and thereafter to appoint new directors and ensure that these companies operated in line with the national interest. (56) The revisionists, though, disagreed with the interpretations of the policy offered by Wilson and Mikardo. Crosland argued that the state acquisition of shares was simply a mechanism for redistributing income from the owners of capital to the wider community - the aim was not to gain control over the management of companies, it was for the state to act as a functionless shareholder which left private industry alone to maximise the profits on which dividends were paid. (57) Gaitskell reinforced this point at Conference when he explained that the policy would give the state a share of the capital gains made by private industry - there was no mention of
the policy being used to gain control over the management of companies. (58)

Delegates at the Brighton Conference also applied a variety of interpretations to the proposals in Industry and Society. In a debate which lasted for more than four hours the General Secretary of the railwaymen's union complained that the statement was ambiguous and called on the Executive to inject into the Party's industrial policy 'the rich red blood of Socialist objective'. (59) Herbert Morrison also criticised the statement, some of which he believed was satisfactory, some of which was unsatisfactory and some of which was 'exceedingly difficult' to understand; overall, he concluded, the policy was 'too clever by half' because it attempted to appease all shades of opinion within the Party. (60) In contrast, the President of the engineers' union expressed his support for a policy which he believed was 'honest' and which recognised the practical difficulties involved in taking whole industries into public ownership. (61) Bessie Braddock, the MP for Liverpool Exchange, also defended the document on the grounds that an 'elastic' policy was required to meet the needs of a constantly changing economic situation. (62)

Despite criticism from some delegates at Brighton, Industry and Society was approved by Conference with a majority of more than four million votes. (63) For Gaitskell and the revisionists this represented a considerable achievement. Surveys of public opinion confirmed that public ownership was unpopular with most of the electorate. (64) The leadership's main fear during the review of the Party's industrial policy was that the Executive would be forced to adopt a long and electorally damaging list of industries for nationalisation by a future Labour government. It was with some relief, therefore, that Gaitskell and his colleagues on the NEC managed to secure broad support in the Party for a statement which contained just two specific proposals for public ownership - road haulage and the iron and steel industry. The ambiguities in the rest of the document enabled the Party leadership to present Labour's industrial policy in different ways to different audiences.

This flexibility was particularly useful during general
election campaigns. The section on industrial policy in Labour's 1959 manifesto was taken directly from the recommendations in *Industry and Society*. Although the Tories continued to claim in 1959 that Labour remained the Party of public ownership, their argument was based on the commitment to nationalisation in Labour's constitution rather than on the substance of the Party's industrial policy. As a result, Gaitskell attempted to rewrite Labour's constitution after the 1959 defeat, but the Party's industrial policy remained largely unchanged for the 1964 election. Despite a renewed emphasis on the language of planning in 1964, the manifesto still offered just two candidates for public ownership - the water industry and steel. A new form of words replaced 'failing the nation' as the criterion for taking a firm or industry into public ownership, but the new formula was no more precise: 'If production falls short of the (national) plan in key sections of industry...then it is up to the Government and the industry to take whatever measures are required.' The manifesto also stated that in order to take advantage of scientific discoveries in industry, a Labour government would develop and establish new industries 'either by public enterprise or in partnership with private industry'. (65) In other words, the ambiguities of *Industry and Society* found their way into the manifestos of 1959 and 1964, both of which contained only limited commitments to public ownership, and both of which aimed to leave an incoming Labour administration with the maximum room for manoeuvre over industrial policy.

With the most potentially divisive part of the policy review complete, and with the prospect of an early general election fading as the Government recovered steadily from the Suez crisis, the Executive embarked on the final phase of policy-making in an atmosphere of relative calm. The documents prepared for the 1958 Conference dealt with education, agriculture and the Party's plan for economic expansion. All three were readily accepted by Conference, the only minor controversy concerned part the statement on education, *Learning to Live*, a draft of which was presented to the Policy Committee in April. (66)
Most of the document on education was uncontroversial and agreement was soon reached on its main proposals. This was a crucial policy statement for a Party which believed that the education system had a profound and adverse effect on the levels of inequality in society. As already seen, both Towards Equality and The Future of Socialism in 1956 had identified the education system as the most important cause of social inequality in the country. Learning to Live reinforced this argument and began with a review of the problems which many pupils faced in Britain's schools. One-third of the children in primary schools were taught in classes of more than 40 pupils; two-thirds of the children in secondary schools were taught in classes of more than 30. Expenditure on education as a proportion of the national income was approximately the same in 1958 as it had been in 1938; as a result, money was not available to replace schools which in some cases had been built as early as 1870. New teachers were recruited at a rate of approximately 5000 each year, whereas Labour's policy makers believed that at least 16,000 new teachers were required to make an increase in the school leaving age feasible. The segregation of pupils at the age of 11 was criticised for being arbitrary and counter-productive, provision for part-time education was attacked as inadequate, and it was argued that insufficient numbers of students were entering higher education.

Learning to Live acknowledged that a future Labour government could not solve all of the country's educational problems in one term. It could not even predict with any certainty how much extra time would be needed beyond a five year term to carry through all of Labour's proposed changes. But at the very least it highlighted education reform as a priority for the Party. The broad objectives established in the document were clear and ambitious. Spending on education was to be increased, class sizes were to be reduced to a maximum of 30, slum schools were to be replaced, all-age schools were to be abolished, spending was to be increased on scientific and technical training and the school leaving age was to be raised to 16. In order to counter the shortage of teachers, more training places would be made available, maintenance grants for trainees would be increased
and a recruitment drive would be launched in tandem with the local authorities. In addition to these objectives, Learning to Live also outlined plans for the restructuring of Britain's education system. Most importantly, the document reaffirmed the Party's commitment to abolish the testing and selection of children at 11; local authorities would be asked to submit plans for the adoption of the comprehensive principle 'with all reasonable speed'. The provision of higher education was to be improved by building new universities, expanding old ones and increasing both the availability and scale of maintenance grants for university students: in order to finalise the details of higher education policy, the document confirmed that a Labour government would establish a Royal Commission on the universities. For those school leavers who did not enter university, facilities for part-time vocational or recreational education in colleges and works' schools would be improved. (68)

After minor drafting Amendments were agreed the statement on education was approved by the Executive in May. (69) Controversy, however, still surrounded the policy on schools in the private sector. Michael Stewart, the MP for Fulham, had been asked by the Home Policy Committee in April to prepare a paper on the possibility of making 75 per cent of places in the 'major public schools' available to non-fee-paying pupils. (70) Stewart's paper recognised that opinion in the Party was strongly in favour of ending the educational privileges enjoyed by the wealthy. It suggested that a new Board, Commission or special Department at the Ministry of Education could control the allocation of free places at the public schools. However, difficult decisions would have to be taken about which schools should be included in the scheme and about which pupils would be given places. Stewart agreed with Crosland that places could not be allocated on the grounds of intellectual ability because this would merely replace one elite system of education with another. (71) There was also a strong suggestion that a Labour government might concentrate its attention on improving the maintained schools rather than spend time reforming an elite group of schools which would affect only a small minority of the nation's pupils. This was a powerful argument and the final version of Learning to
Live conceded that it was simply too difficult and potentially time consuming to alter the nature of the existing public schools. At Conference, the omission of proposals to reform the public schools caused widespread concern among delegates. A resolution which called for the abolition of fee paying in schools was defeated by 3,544,000 votes to 3,067,000 - the closest the Executive had come to defeat in the course of the three year policy review. Once this controversy had been resolved, though, Learning to Live was accepted at Scarborough with a large majority. (73)

Labour's 1959 manifesto commitments on education were taken directly from Learning to Live - the only main difference was that there was no mention of a Royal Commission on the universities. The Times criticised this part of the manifesto on two grounds: first, because there was no timetable for reducing class sizes to 30; second, because the section on comprehensive schooling was 'unintelligible'. (74) The Party's confidence in its own proposals, though, was confirmed by the fact that education was the second area of policy discussed in the manifesto after pensions. Social equality was a dominant theme in Labour's campaign at this time and education policy had a vital role to play in this context. By 1964 economic regeneration had replaced social equality as the first priority in the Party's programme, but education remained the first area of policy discussed in the 1964 manifesto under the heading 'Modern Social Services'. Again, the content of the policy was taken from Learning to Live - the only main difference this time was the proposal to establish an educational trust which would recommend a way of integrating the public schools into the state system. As seen, a similar idea had been considered in 1958; there had been some support in principle for the policy but it was rejected as unworkable and omitted from the 1959 manifesto. The proposal was taken up again in Signposts for the Sixties but the Wilson Government eventually had to concede that the scheme was indeed impractical: a report on integration was published by the Public Schools Commission under Sir John Newsom in 1968, but it was soon shelved and quickly forgotten. (75) In effect, therefore, Labour's education policy in 1964 was largely unchanged from
1959. Even the 'unintelligible' section on comprehensive schools remained: the 1964 manifesto read, 'secondary education will be reorganised on comprehensive lines. Within the new system, grammar school education will be extended'.

*Prosper the Plough*, Labour's statement on agriculture, was never likely to capture the interest of the wider electorate. Britain had long ceased to be self-sufficient in the production of food and in 1958 approximately half of its total food requirement was met by imports. The main purpose of the document was to reassure Britain's farming community that Labour would continue to abide by the terms of the Agriculture Act of 1947. This Act guaranteed both prices and markets for approximately 80 per cent of home produce, but its provisions were dismantled steadily by the Conservatives after 1951. Before the details of a return to guaranteed prices were finalised, the document made it clear that farmers' representatives would be consulted by the government in accordance with the procedure set down in the 1947 legislation. The central aim of the policy was a 'moderate' increase in home production which would not have an adverse affect on other trading considerations. It was particularly important that any increase in production did not disturb the balance between imports and exports: many countries bought British manufactured goods with the currency they had earned from selling foodstuffs to Britain. To assist the moderate expansion envisaged, credit facilities from the Agricultural Mortgage Corporation would be improved so that farmers could invest more easily in new machinery. To help with long-term planning there was also a pledge that a Labour government would restore security of tenure to farmers in line with the provisions of the 1948 Agricultural Holdings Act. It was made clear, though, that unprofitable farmers would not be permitted to shelter behind subsidies and security of tenure. Some farms were too small to be profitable, so voluntary schemes of amalgamation would be encouraged. If exhortation failed, *Prosper the Plough* reassured readers that the 1947 Act offered a Labour government sufficient control over agricultural land to dispossess inefficient farmers - if it was discovered that these powers needed to be strengthened, there was a pledge that the
next Labour administration would take immediate action to amend the legislation.

This proposal disappointed those in the Party who favoured the public ownership of agricultural land. Several delegates at the Scarborough Conference called on the NEC to follow the lead provided by the National Union of Agricultural Workers and to adopt nationalisation as Party policy. Crossman, who spoke on behalf of the NEC, explained that a Labour government would not have the administrative resources required to take over tens of thousands of farms; in any case, he argued, a commitment to the public ownership of agricultural land would be 'absolutely catastrophic' in electoral terms. As a result, the resolution on public ownership was defeated and Prosper the Plough was accepted with a large majority. The main proposals in the document were included in the 1959 manifesto, along with a commitment to the reorganisation of water supplies under public ownership. Curiously, agricultural policy was not mentioned in the 1964 manifesto - in essence, therefore, the policy remained unchanged from 1959.

Plan for Progress, the Party's policy statement on economic expansion, was described by its authors as the 'key' document produced during the three year review. As shown in the previous chapter, Gaitskell and Crosland both believed that the delivery of Labour's domestic programme was dependent upon the achievement of economic growth. They were determined to establish the principle that a Labour administration would finance its programme only from the resources generated within an expanding economy. The idea that existing national income could be redistributed on a scale that would be sufficient to meet the cost of Labour's domestic programme was regarded by the Party leadership as impractical and electorally undesirable: indeed, one of Gaitskell's most memorable statements as Party leader was his denial in 1959 that a Labour government would need to increase income tax in order to pay for its spending commitments. The aim of Plan for Progress, therefore, was to convince the electorate that the Party was capable of producing the economic growth required to meet the domestic policy objectives which had been set out in the statements published
since the 1955 election defeat.

The study group on the control of industry produced a draft of the document on economic expansion for the Home Policy Committee in June. After amendment it was presented to a meeting of the NEC where it was approved for publication. Wilson, who chaired the study group, explained that representatives from the TUC had been involved in the production of the statement from the beginning and had been consulted regularly throughout its development. The priority for the TUC during the production of the statement was to ensure that Labour's economic policy did not contain any commitment to an incomes policy. As a result Plan for Progress confirmed that 'no kind of wages freeze' was envisaged by the Party as a safeguard against inflation. It also reassured the unions that 'incomes should not be exclusively related to productivity in any particular industry'. Although an incomes policy was effectively ruled out, though, the document made it clear that planning would be applied to many other areas of the national economy. According to the policy makers, planning did not mean a return to the detailed controls which had been used during the 1940s, it meant instead the pursuit of broader objectives - matching savings with investment, imports with exports, spending with production and jobs with workers.

The first objective of Labour's economic policy was to emulate the high rates of investment of Britain's European competitors. Only 15 per cent of Britain's national income had been spent on all forms of investment in 1956 - a rate which compared unfavourably with figures of 23 per cent in Germany, 25 per cent in the Netherlands and 20 per cent in Italy. In order to encourage investment Labour planned to reduce the Bank Rate and to relax the credit squeeze which the Tories had operated since 1955. Labour was also prepared to use the taxation system to encourage investment - company profits which were distributed as dividend payments to shareholders would be taxed at a higher rate than profits which were saved and invested. The document contained the rather vague threat that a Labour administration would 'require the larger firms to draw up and report their investment plans in greater detail and on a
longer-term basis so that measures can be taken to retard or accelerate them according to economic needs'. It was not clear which methods would be used to produce either an acceleration or retardation of investment: the only clue was the proposed establishment of a National Investment Board whose powers were undefined. But the passage and the creation of the Board at least reassured the Party faithful that a Labour government would exercise a degree of control over the private sector. In a similar vein there was confirmation in the document that building licensing would be used to steer investment and industrial units into regions which suffered from a high rate of unemployment. The policy makers also believed that the public sector had an important role to play in stimulating investment in a depressed economy: in their view, expenditure on capital equipment by the nationalised industries would send 'powerful currents of demand' through those firms in the private sector with whom orders for equipment were placed.

Accompanying the drive for increased investment were the two main objectives of Labour's external economic policy: the defence of the value of sterling and the achievement of a balance of payments surplus. The first step in pursuit of these objectives was an increase in the volume of Britain's exports. As part of the plan, Labour aimed to expand Britain's engineering and ancillary industries so that capital equipment could be supplied to countries which were in the early stages of industrial development. The document also pledged that firms which could contribute to the export market would be assisted in their search for working capital. It was clear that Britain's export performance had declined in relative terms since 1951 - only Portugal had a lower rate of growth in exports in Western Europe. An improvement in Britain's trade abroad was vital if the value of sterling was to be maintained and the economy was to be protected from what the document described as 'the variable winds of currency speculation'. In order to support sterling further, Labour planned to re-employ policies which had been used by the Attlee Governments: exchange controls would be strengthened and trade would be encouraged with countries in the sterling area in an effort to save foreign currency. As part of
the drive to economise on non-sterling imports, Labour also planned to return to the practice of establishing long-term orders with Commonwealth producers who could then plan for higher output with a market for their products already assured.

In a document that was concerned primarily with plans for economic growth it was perhaps no surprise that the weakest section of Plan for Progress dealt with measures for controlling inflation. With their eyes fixed firmly on the target of growth, the policy makers rejected the idea of reducing demand in the economy as a way of restraining price increases. As shown, the document had committed the next Labour government to a reduction of interest rates and had dismissed the idea of an incomes policy. Two years earlier, an increase in income tax as a way of holding down consumption had been ruled out in Towards Equality. In the course of the three year review the Party had endorsed some ambitious proposals for social reform, so a promise to reduce public spending was clearly not an option. In short, although Labour had been sharply critical of the deflationary measures used by the Tories to control rising prices, their own proposals for tackling inflation consisted of little more than an optimistic forecast of improvements in productivity. The policy makers argued that improved productivity would absorb the effect of wage increases on labour costs and would not damage the competitiveness of British industry; the aim of government, managers and workers, therefore, was to co-operate in pursuit of productivity gains. The only practical suggestion on this theme, though, was that extra resources would be made available for industrial research and training: Labour pledged to expand the facilities of existing research associations, and to continue and possibly to extend investment allowances to firms engaged in research and development.

The absence of any serious discussion about the potential problem of inflation at least helped to ensure that there was a clear tone of optimism in Plan for Progress. Most delegates at Conference were enthusiastic about such a confident presentation of Labour's economic plans and the statement was accepted with a minimum of dissent: one speaker complained that Labour had proposed to operate capitalism more efficiently than the
capitalists, but his argument attracted little support. After it had been approved by Conference, the document became Labour's main statement on economic policy for the 1959 election. As seen in the previous chapter, the 1959 manifesto was rather more concerned with economic objectives than with policy: Plan for Progress provided the detail and outlined the methods with which these objectives would be pursued. Although economic policy was refined after the defeat of 1959, the main commitments from the 1958 document remained. As will be shown, the 1964 manifesto contained new proposals for an incomes policy, regional planning and the creation of a Ministry of Economic Affairs and a Ministry of Technology. There was also a much greater emphasis on the need to modernise Britain's industry and economy. However, these new proposals aimed essentially to achieve the objectives which had been set out in Plan for Progress - planned expansion, full employment, a balance of payments surplus, better productivity, stable prices and a more modern and efficient industrial effort. The only main objective from 1958 which did not reappear in the 1964 manifesto was the commitment to a strong pound.

Labour's policy review was completed at the Scarborough Conference of 1958. The Home Policy Committee continued to fine tune parts of the programme after Scarborough, but most of the domestic policies which the Party offered to the electorate in 1959 were finalised between 1956 and 1958. The only additions to the ten main statements were three documents on steel nationalisation, racial prejudice and the health services. A glossy compendium of the main proposals which had been agreed during the period was also published at the end of 1958. For the leadership, the review of policy had been a considerable success. Conference had endorsed every aspect of the Executive's domestic programme and arguably the only disappointment was the failure to agree some form of incomes policy with the unions. As will be shown in a subsequent chapter, although Labour was defeated in the election of 1959, few within the Party held the domestic policy programme responsible for the defeat. Indeed, the prospect of undertaking a further review of policy after the
The election was specifically ruled out. Instead, Labour's programme in 1964 was drawn extensively from the statements produced by the policy makers in the three year review. Civil war resumed over a number of issues within the Party after the 1959 defeat, but broad agreement was at least maintained about the domestic policy programme.

References

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Memo R.532, 'The New Research Programme', Policy and Publicity Sub-Committee Minutes, 22 September 1955. The main difference in policy terms between Memo R.522 and Memo R.532 was that the latter suggested examining industrial policy under three headings - ownership of industry, control of industry and public industries.
6. Interview with Peter Shore.
9. Labour Representation Committee, manifesto for the 1900 General Election.
10. Re.78/June 1956, 'Draft Policy Statement - Study Group on Equality', Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 18 June 1956. The draft was written by David Ginsberg, the head of the Research Department.
11. NEC Minutes, 27 June 1956.
17. Re.67/May 1956, 'Homes of the Future' (Revised draft), Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 May 1956. See also, Re.10, 'Housing Policy in the Light of the Tory Government's actions', Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 5 December 1955.
20. Joint Sub-Committee on Housing and Rents Minutes, 17 November 1955. Rent control had been introduced in 1915 as a temporary measure to stop wartime profiteering. The Rent and Mortgage Interest Restrictions Act in 1939 had imposed rent control on most tenant-occupied houses and flats.
22. Re.74/June 1956, 'Note from Mr Hugh Gaitskell', and Re.73/June 1956 for the suggested redraft of the chapter, 'Plans for The Future. The Local Authorities', Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 May 1956.
23. NEC Minutes, 6 and 11 June 1956. See also, Re.95/September 1956 for further recommendations on leasehold reform and town and country planning, Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 17 September 1956. And Re.106/November 1956 and Re.108/November 1956 on proposals for leasehold reform, Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 19 November 1956.
25. Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain.
27. Re.60/May 1956, 'Personal Freedom' (Draft), Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 May 1956.
28. Re.70/June 1956, 'Personal Freedom: Labour's Policy for the Individual and Society', NEC Minutes, 6 June 1956. See also, Re.72/June 1956 for the redraft of the conclusion to the statement, Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 May 1956.
29. Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1956, p.96. After the NEC rejected this resolution, Tom Driberg refused to

31. Britain Belongs to You.
32. Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain.
34. The three academics were Brian Abel-Smith, Richard Titmuss and Peter Townsend.
35. Re.152/April 1957, 'Draft Policy Statement on National Superannuation' (Revised), Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 8 April 1957. See also Minutes of 29 January 1957.
36. NEC Minutes, 17 April 1957.
37. Crossman diary, 1 May 1957, p.582.
38. National Superannuation.
39. Ibid.
42. Ibid., pp.106-124.
43. Britain Belongs to You.
44. Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain.
48. Ibid., p.94.
50. NEC Minutes, 25 June 1957.
51. Interview with Peter Shore.
Interview with Peter Shore.


According to Wilson, firms which failed to play an adequate part in the export drive, abused monopoly power, failed to expand sufficiently, suffered from poor industrial relations or failed to co-operate with the industrial policies of a Labour government would be deemed to have failed the nation.

Tribune, 19 July 1957.


Ibid., pp.131-132.

Ibid., pp.135-136.

Ibid., p.137.

Ibid., p.150.

Ibid., p.161.

See, for example, Colin Hurry and Associates, A Survey of Public Opinion on Nationalisation, (1959). This rather controversial survey was sponsored by companies who were opposed to public ownership. From a total of almost two million interviews it found that 63.5 per cent of the sample wanted no more nationalisation while just 18.6 per cent supported more nationalisation.

Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain.

Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 April 1958.

Towards Equality and A. Crosland op. cit., p.188.

Learning to Live.

NEC Minutes, 14 May 1958.

Re.375/April 1958, 'The Stewart Memorandum', Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 14 April 1958.

Ibid., and A. Crosland, op. cit., p.206.


Ibid.

The Times, 19 September 1959. The section on comprehensive schooling in the manifesto read: '...we shall get rid of the 11-plus examination. The Tories say that this means abolishing the grammar schools. On the contrary, it means
that grammar-school education will be open to all who can benefit by it. In our system of comprehensive education we do not intend to impose one uniform pattern of school. Local authorities will have the right to decide how best to apply the comprehensive principle.'


76. *Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain*.


78. Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1958, p.121.


81. *Plan for Progress*, (1958). Sam Watson, the National Union of Mineworkers' representative on the NEC, asked Wilson to emphasise the importance of increased production in the draft. The need for a statement on economic expansion had been referred to previously in Re.219, 'Programme of Work', Home Policy Committee Minutes, 18 November 1957.

82. Re.398/June 1958, (Third Revision), 'Draft Policy Statement On The Control Of Industry, Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 16 June 1958. This was revised and published eventually as *Plan for Progress*.


84. *Plan for Progress*.


86. Re.505/February 1959, 'Steel and the Nation - Labour's Plan', Home Policy Committee, 9 February 1959 and NEC Minutes, 25 February 1959; Com/1957-8/22, 'Final Draft Statement on Racial Prejudice', NEC Minutes, 26 September 1958; Re.529/April 1959, 'Members One of Another - Labour's Policy for the Health Services, NEC Minutes, 3 June 1959.

5. The road to 1964

Labour has often failed to respond rationally to defeat in a general election, despite the fact that it has lost almost two-thirds of the contests it has fought since 1918. After the 1951 election, Labour launched itself into a damaging and time-consuming civil war which left a legacy of mistrust in the Party. After the 1959 defeat, sections of the Party were overtaken by a mood of defeatism as they desperately sought solutions for a crisis which existed only in their imaginations. Senior members of the Party over-reacted to the disappointment of defeat in 1959, perhaps because they had expected victory, perhaps because the result was Labour's worst defeat since 1935. Gaitskell and some of his closest colleagues argued with some force that the Party would return to power only if radical changes were made to its constitution, its organisation, its image and perhaps even its name. The result of this campaign for change was a resumption of hostilities within the Party. For a while at least, the good work which had taken place after the 1955 defeat was forgotten.

The aim of this chapter is to argue that the initiative taken by Gaitskell and his followers in the wake of the 1959 defeat plunged the Party into a series of unnecessary crises. It fractured Party unity, it led to a leadership contest between Gaitskell and Wilson, and it demonstrated in the clearest possible terms that Labour was uncertain about its future direction. It will also be argued, though, that the Party was able to recover from these crises by 1964 primarily because of developments which had taken place before 1959. Ben Pimlott has argued that 'it is difficult not to regard the outcome of the 1964 election as Wilson's victory'. (1) This chapter will offer a different interpretation of Labour's return to power: Labour survived the crises of the early 1960s because of a residual strength which had been built up in the 1950s. When the heat was taken out of the internal Party battles, Labour was able to rely on an agreed policy programme, an organisational base and improvements in presentation which had been worked out before
1959.

The Party's internal inquiry into the 1959 election defeat identified one main factor which had helped the Tories. 'We were defeated by prosperity' argued the Election Sub-Committee of the NEC. (2) They claimed in their report on the election that rising prosperity had hardened middle class opinion against Labour and had cut into the Party's traditional base of working class support:

'To such an extent had we failed to present ourselves as the party of prosperity that there is some evidence of Labour voters who voted Labour but who did not want a Labour victory.'(3)

Gaitskell's pledge on income tax was also singled out as an important contributory factor in the defeat: in the opinion of the Sub-Committee, it had provided the Tories with an opportunity to challenge not only the financial policy of the Party but the integrity of the leadership. Morgan Phillips, who wrote a separate report on the 1959 campaign as the Party's General Secretary, did not criticise the tax pledge explicitly, but he acknowledged that the Tories had exploited the impression that Labour was uncertain about the cost of its own programme. The Tories had used this to support their claim that Labour's policy proposals were impractical, inflationary and a danger to the national economy. (4) The other Tory claim which was seen to have made an impact during the campaign was the idea that Labour was committed to the nationalisation of hundreds of British companies. Both reports on the 1959 defeat argued that the portrayal of Labour as a party of large-scale nationalisation had led to a significant loss of support.

The NEC's inquiry into Labour's defeat concentrated on the immediate failings in the 1959 campaign. Neither report diagnosed fundamental problems in the Party or expressed particular concern about Labour's long-term future. The burden of their analysis was that the Party was unlikely to win an election while the Tories enjoyed favourable economic
circumstances; in the meantime, the lessons of the 1959 campaign had to be learned and the Tories' misrepresentation of Labour's policy on public ownership had to be challenged. This calm assessment of the Party's electoral performance, though, could not halt the torrent of rash proposals for Labour's immediate future which swept over the Party within days of the election defeat.

The first important discussion on the Party's future took place at Gaitskell's Hampstead home on the Sunday after polling day. The Labour leader held court and discussed the election with several of his closest colleagues - Crosland, Jay, Gordon Walker, Dalton and Roy Jenkins were among those present.\(^5\) This meeting has featured heavily in the historiography of the Party in the period, but its significance has perhaps been misinterpreted. Michael Foot has argued that 'a bold initiative was set in motion by the Right wing of the Party' on this Sunday in Hampstead;\(^6\) Ben Pimlott has described the meeting as the 'starting-point' of Gaitskell's campaign to change the Labour Party;\(^7\) Anthony Howard has referred to the gathering as a 'council of war'.\(^8\) However, there was nothing conspiratorial about this post-election meeting. Sunday evening discussions between the group which became known as the 'Hampstead Set' had taken place regularly since Gaitskell had become leader. As Roy Jenkins pointed out, it was natural that the group should meet in the aftermath of a painful defeat; 'we just came together because Gaitskell thought we were people with whom he could lick his wounds at ease'.\(^9\) The meeting did not mark the start of a right wing plot to change the Party, it represented instead the first significant gathering at which the despair, defeatism and panic that had taken hold in the PLP was demonstrated.

Douglas Jay confirmed that the discussions in Gaitskell's home bore none of the hallmarks of organisation or planning; the talks were informal, minutes were not taken and there was no set agenda;

'A whole lot of things were said by all sorts of people. But the idea that we were sort of taking decisions, or reaching agreement or laying plans was all nonsense.'\(^{10}\)
The main suggestions put forward at the meeting showed that Gaitskell's colleagues had drawn the wrong conclusions from the 1959 defeat. Instead of recognising the underlying strength of a party that could win almost 44 per cent of the vote in unfavourable circumstances, they diagnosed a disease which they believed would prove fatal for Labour without surgery. Despite having won a large share of the vote, they concluded that the Party was too reliant on a core of working class support that was steadily shrinking. For Douglas Jay, the problem was clear; Labour was simply too old fashioned. (11) With no unanimity and with varying degrees of conviction the participants in the discussion proposed that Labour should abandon its policy of nationalisation, loosen its links with the trade unions and change its name to show that it no longer represented the working class alone. Gordon Walker caught the pessimistic tone of the meeting in his diary;

'The broad feeling was that unless we changed our policies in order to appeal to the people we would be out permanently, but for an economic depression...Perhaps we must change the constitution first. This would help us to change the image of our association with the trade unions. They must appear in a new and more modern light - and less the masters of the Party - if we are to win.'(12)

Gaitskell did not take a leading role in the discussion, he decided that a special post-election Conference was the proper place to outline his future strategy for the Party. Nevertheless, he was initially sympathetic to the ideas which had been put forward by his colleagues. When Tony Benn met him a few hours after the Sunday meeting had broken up, the Labour leader expressed support for the suggestions of the Hampstead Set;

'He [Gaitskell] said several times, "I'm not prepared to lose another Election for the sake of nationalisation." He also laid great stress on the disadvantages of the name Labour, particularly on new housing estates, and said, "Of course
Douglas Jay is going to urge us to have a new one. "...Hugh also thought we must review our relations with the trade unions". (13)

Gaitskell's supporters would have best served the Party by keeping their pessimistic views about Labour's future to themselves. Instead, two members of the group offered their ideas to a wider audience. On the Monday after the Hampstead meeting, Roy Jenkins trailed the anti-nationalisation line on the BBC programme Panorama and suggested that Labour should consider the possibility of an association with the Liberals. (14) The following Friday, Douglas Jay set out more fully the options for change which had been discussed by the Hampstead Set in an article in Forward. This included the suggestion that the Party should change its name to 'Labour and Radical' or 'Labour and Reform'. (15) Although Jenkins and Jay had taken purely personal decisions to publicise their analysis of the election defeat, the suspicions of those who were not part of Gaitskell's inner circle were immediately aroused. It appeared that a clique of largely middle class intellectuals had decided on a plan of action for the Party less than a week after polling day. The result was widespread resentment and a diminution of Gaitskell's authority as leader. After winning high praise for his performance during the election campaign, Gaitskell alienated many in the Party by his association with colleagues who seemed to have lost faith in the Labour movement. Jay's article in Forward was received mistakenly by the press as a manifesto that had been approved by the Labour leader. The Times described the piece as: 'The first authoritative statement which may fairly be taken as representing Mr Gaitskell's views on the reshaping of the Labour Party's policy...the stage is set for a bitter struggle for supremacy between the opposing factions within the party'. (16) The Daily Mail asked the question which troubled many members of the Party; 'Is it conceivable that Mr Jay could have been so forthright without consulting his leader?.. Once again the party is split wide open'. (17) Jay in fact took the decision to write an article on the causes of Labour's defeat before the Sunday meeting in Hampstead. His
initial intention was to publish an anonymous piece which would synthesise the views of his constituency workers in Battersea and his own interpretation of the campaign. He was eventually persuaded to sign the article by the editor of Forward, Francis Williams, but he never intended his piece to be seen as a guide to the Labour leader's thinking. Because of the way in which the article associated the Party leadership with his own views, Jay continues to regret the use of his byline in this instance. (18)

The confusion that was caused by Jay's piece in Forward illustrates the way in which Gaitskell's supporters misplayed their hand after the election. Roy Jenkins has rightly conceded that the Hampstead Set were guilty of 'grave tactical errors'. (19) In fact, they made at least three major mistakes. First, they acted too quickly. The Conservatives had a secure majority of 100 at Westminster, so it was likely that a general election would not take place for several years. There was no need to rush any decisions about the future of the Party, but by publicising their proposals for radical change within days of the 1959 defeat, Jay and Jenkins contributed to an atmosphere of panic and defeatism which built up in the movement in the months after the election. Second, they failed to appreciate the danger of ignoring Labour's tradition of inner-party democracy. The Party's constitution was no model of democracy, but the wider membership at least had a role to play in decision making through Conference and they guarded this arrangement with some care. Gaitskell's circle appeared to have decided upon a course of action for the Party without consulting the PLP, the NEC, the trade unions, the socialist societies or the local parties. Of course the Hampstead Set were entitled to form their own views on issues without consulting anybody, but their close relationship with the Labour leader meant that they should have exercised a certain amount of discretion on matters which affected the Party. Third, the publicity which Gaitskell's colleagues generated for their post-election analysis recreated an atmosphere of mistrust in the Party and made it more difficult for a sensible discussion to take place about Labour's future. The old battle lines between right and left were redrawn and Crossman even suggested reviving the Bevanite group. (20)
This poisoned atmosphere placed Gaitskell in a difficult position. He was due to make a speech on the lessons of the election at a rearranged Party Conference in November. If he agreed too closely with the views put forward by Jay and Jenkins, he could be accused of leading a right-wing campaign for reform which threatened to split the Party; he would have faced the same charge of disloyalty which he had directed with such force in the past against the Bevanites. If, however, he made a conciliatory speech to reassure the movement, he would forfeit what he believed was his best opportunity to suggest some necessary changes to the Party. As Gaitskell made up his mind about the line he would take at Conference, bitterness and suspicion in Labour's ranks increased. The unity which the movement had enjoyed before the election had been shattered. Different sections of the Party warned Gaitskell that they would resist any attempt to alter the Party's policy, principles or constitution; indeed, the signs of an impending crisis could not have been more clear.

At the first meeting of the PLP after the election, Bill Blighton, the former Durham miner and Member for Houghton-le-Spring, led a strong attack on Jay's proposals. The attack was continued at a meeting of the PLP Trade Union group on 3 November. This group's annual report emphasised that Labour's link with the unions was the basis of the Party's traditional strength and should not be altered. Another meeting of the PLP on 11 November made it clear that a majority of Labour MPs would oppose any radical alterations to the policy on public ownership. Wilson, who knew about the Labour leader's thoughts on the future from Crossman, issued a warning to Gaitskell in a speech at Cambridge University;

'I would not be able to feel - and I am sure the electorate would not be able to feel - any confidence in a party which decides a few days after the election, or indeed at any other time, that policies it had believed to be right and appropriate should be thrown over because they were believed to be electorally unpopular. There is a lot of talk about the image of the Labour Party. I cannot think it would be
improved if we were to win, and indeed deserve, a reputation for cynicism and opportunism, by throwing over essential and fundamental parts of our creed for electoral purposes.\footnote{24}

Jay's \textit{Forward} article produced a swift rearguard action in defence of public ownership in the PLP; understandably, Gaitskell was annoyed that his colleague had helped to create a climate in which it became difficult to discuss any proposals for change on this issue without adding to the developing controversy.\footnote{25} As the \textit{Observer} pointed out in the middle of November, some members of the Party had lost little time in warning the Labour leader that an attack on nationalisation in his Conference speech would provoke 'a quarrel that would soon make the Bevanite rebellion seem like a polite difference at a vestry meeting'.\footnote{26} Gaitskell, however, was still prepared to face a confrontation over public ownership for two reasons. First, he was determined to dispel completely the Conservative myth that Labour was committed to widespread nationalisation. If this myth was not challenged, he believed, Labour faced the prospect of a disastrous fourth consecutive defeat which would be followed by a split in the Party and a resurgence of the Liberals.\footnote{27} Secondly, Gaitskell's approach to politics was marked by an instinctive dislike of compromise. After he had made up his mind on an issue he found it difficult to accommodate opposing views or to be dissuaded from a particular course of action. Gaitskell's supporters believed that this approach displayed courage, integrity and clarity of purpose. His critics believed that it displayed arrogance, stubbornness and poor political judgement. Whichever view was most accurate, once Gaitskell had decided that a modification of the Party's position on public ownership was necessary, no amount of warnings from within the PLP could prevent him from tackling the issue. When Crossman suggested that the Labour leader should listen to the views of Conference before deciding on the precise content and tone of his speech, Gaitskell replied that he had largely made up his mind about 'what has to be said'.\footnote{28}

Gaitskell's speech on the first day of the special weekend Conference at Blackpool lasted over an hour and much of it was
uncontroversial. He began by praising Labour's efforts in the 1959 election. He believed that Party organisation and the campaign itself were both very good. Particular praise was reserved for the policy programme on which Labour had based its appeal; he described this programme as 'excellent - well thought out, moderate, practical and yet fully in tune with our Socialist convictions.'[29] The obvious problem for the Party, though, was that improved organisation, an impressive campaign and a good programme had not prevented the Conservatives from increasing their majority in Parliament. In an effort to explain this, Gaitskell worked through the familiar argument that welfare reforms, low unemployment, the relative decline of heavy manual work and a general rise in living standards had all eroded Labour's traditional base of support. Labour had been guilty of assuming that millions of workers would instinctively support the Party; as a result, Labour had failed to make a 'special conscious effort' to win over younger, newer and more affluent social groups. Gaitskell believed that the Party had to change the nature of its appeal if it was to avoid defeat at the next election, but the necessary changes largely involved presentation rather than policy. He rejected the 'desperate' proposals which had surfaced after the election that the Party should change its name, abandon the link with the trade unions or forge an alliance with the Liberals. Instead, he emphasised that after winning the battles of the first half of the twentieth century against mass unemployment, widespread poverty and inadequate state welfare provision, Labour had to address the new challenges of the second half of the century;

'We have to show...that we are a modern mid-twentieth century party, looking to the future, not to the past...Above all our object must be to broaden our base, to be in touch always with ordinary people, to avoid becoming small cliques of isolated doctrine-ridden fanatics, out of touch with the main stream of social life in our time. We should be missionaries, not monks, a mass party not a conspiratorial group.'[30]

Gaitskell's plea that the Party should address itself to the
concerns of ordinary voters and be less concerned with doctrinal purity prepared the way for the most important passage in his speech. The burden of this passage was simple; 'doctrine-ridden fanatics' supported a wide extension of public ownership, 'ordinary people' did not. Gaitskell began his discussion of public ownership by repeating the findings of the NEC's reports on the election campaign, both of which argued that nationalisation was unpopular with voters. The main problem, in his view, was one of emphasis and presentation rather than policy or principle. He supported the extension of public ownership in certain circumstances, but he was concerned that nationalisation was seen by many as a finite socialist goal — the main economic objective of the Labour Party. This misunderstanding was largely caused by Clause Four of the Party constitution, the only clause which attempted to define the political aims of the Party. (31) Gaitskell told the Conference;

'Standing on its own [Clause Four] cannot be regarded as adequate. It lays us open to continual misrepresentation...It implies that the only precise object we have is nationalisation, whereas in fact we have many other Socialist objectives. It implies that we propose to nationalise everything, but do we? Everything? - the whole of light industry, the whole of agriculture, all the shops - every little pub and garage? Of course not.(32)

Gaitskell's belief that Clause Four was due for revision was based on sound logic but poor political judgement. In practice, Labour aimed to manage a mixed economy in which most capital was owned and controlled by private individuals and private companies; therefore, the constitutional commitment to the 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' was illogical. In the 1959 election campaign, Macmillan had cited Clause Four to support his claim that widespread nationalisation was the ultimate aim of Labour's economic policy. (33) Gaitskell was therefore correct when he argued that the commitment to common ownership left Party policy open to 'misrepresentation'. The damage caused by this
misrepresentation was illustrated by a survey conducted shortly after the election. When the informants were asked to say what would have pleased them least about a Labour victory in 1959, 33 per cent mentioned further nationalisation; the second most frequently mentioned single topic was higher taxation, but this was put forward by only 2 per cent of the sample. (34) Arguably, a peaceful and agreed revision of Clause Four would have been beneficial for Labour; it would have made it easier for the Party to convince the electorate that it did not support large-scale nationalisation, but was committed instead to the management of a mixed economy which embraced various forms of public ownership.

However, the point which Gaitskell failed to appreciate in the wake of the election defeat was that a peaceful and agreed revision of Clause Four was highly improbable. His mistake was to embark on a struggle which he was unlikely to win. The commitment to common ownership had a deep, symbolic significance for many in the Party. It was as much a question of ethics as economics. Clause Four symbolised the Party's acceptance of communal values above individualism; it showed that Labour believed in the sharing of profit across the community rather than in the maximisation of profit for those with capital to invest. For a party that was considerably younger than its two main rivals, Clause Four provided Labour with a link back to its founding fathers and a distinct sense of identity in mainstream British politics. It became apparent immediately during the Blackpool Conference that an attack on this part of the constitution would be met with strong resistance. The Labour leader's speech was accompanied by hostile interruptions from the floor, Michael Foot responded with a stinging rebuke for Gaitskell, (35) and Frank Cousins warned that the trade unions would never support an attempt to revise Clause Four. (36) Tony Benn, described by the Daily Mail at this time as 'pro-Gaitskell', (37) criticised sharply the Party leader's performance at the Conference;

'I agreed with most of [the speech]...But it was a ghastly failure because it was constructed in quite the wrong way and
without regard to the needs of the Party. In effect he asked himself, "How much of what we once believed will the electorate now stomach?" The answer he produced was not surprisingly, "Very little." But that is not the question you should ask. If he had said, "Here is the modern world full of causes for us to take up. Here is what we must do. Here are the changes we must make in ourselves to do them" the Party would have risen to him to a man. But he is quite incapable of inspiring people.'(38)

Gaitskell's authority as Party leader was badly damaged by his initiative on Clause Four. After Blackpool, the Daily Mail claimed that Wilson was leading a plot to fight Gaitskell on future policy. (39) The Shadow Chancellor denied the report, but he also predicted in private that the Labour leader would not last another two years in the post. (40) Tribune called for Gaitskell's resignation in January 1960, (41) and 15 Labour parliamentary candidates decided that their leader required a public declaration of support the following February. (42) In May, Tony Crosland told Gaitskell that 'your own position is weaker, and you yourself more criticised, than at any time since you assumed the leadership'. (43) Morgan Phillips, who eventually helped to resolve the crisis over Clause Four, forecast in August 1960 that 'the Party won't get out of its difficulties as long as Gaitskell's there'. (44)

By this time, the public perception of a Party that was once again embroiled in internal conflict was well established. The controversy itself was played out in a series of speeches and at a meeting of the NEC in March. Gaitskell was forced to retreat on his original objective of replacing Clause Four with a new statement of aims for the Party. Instead he was prepared to have both Clause Four and his new statement of aims included in the constitution. Gaitskell's new mission statement contained twelve points which included the rejection of racial discrimination, the right of all people to freedom and self-government, a pledge to work for world disarmament, a commitment to social justice and equality of opportunity, and the rejection of the acquisitive values of capitalism. (45) These aims were accepted by
the NEC with a number of amendments, including a more forceful expression of support for public ownership from Jennie Lee. Where Gaitskell had preferred to commit the Party to 'a substantial measure of common ownership in varying forms', Lee substituted the alternative objective of 'an expansion of common ownership substantial enough to give the community power over the commanding heights of the economy'. Although it appeared that the issue had been settled by the compromise on the Executive, the trade union delegates on the NEC had voted to accept the amendment to the constitution without consulting their rank and file. Four of the largest unions - the miners, engineers, railwaymen and transport workers - voted against the amendment at their spring conferences. The result was a further retreat by Gaitskell. The new statement of objectives was eventually accepted by the 1960 Scarborough Conference as a 'valuable expression of the aims of the Labour Party in the second half of the 20th Century' and not as an addition to the constitution.

Roy Jenkins described the result of the Clause Four controversy as an 'unsatisfactory draw'. In fact, it was a defeat for the Party leader. Clause Four remained in place and the attempt to amend it led to months of unwelcome publicity for the symbolic commitment to large-scale public ownership. Perhaps in a reaction against Gaitskell's initiative, the Scarborough Conference reaffirmed its socialist credentials by supporting a resolution from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers which confirmed the Party's belief in a socialist commonwealth founded on common ownership. The resolution also offered the Executive a long list of industries which would 'benefit' from nationalisation. In addition to provoking a high-profile defence of public ownership, Gaitskell also ensured that the Party was riven by mistrust and hostility. He admitted that he would not have raised the issue if he had foreseen the reaction it would cause. To be sure, this reaction was not just a problem for the Party, it was also a serious problem for Gaitskell as leader. When the 1960 Conference supported a unilateralist defence motion against the wishes of the Executive, Gaitskell vowed that he would fight to overturn the
decision. His critics in the Party who had just fought off his attempt to amend the constitution were exasperated by this refusal to accept the will of Conference. The resentment against the leadership which had built up in the preceding months spilled over in the weeks after Scarborough. The Party reverted to the state of civil war which had characterised the early 1950s and Harold Wilson launched the first formal challenge to Gaitskell's leadership.

The leadership contest between Gaitskell and Wilson in 1960 confirmed the depth of the crisis which the Party had created for itself since its election defeat the previous year. It was an unnecessary and damaging event which lent credence to Dalton's occasional description of the Party as a 'suicide club'. (51) In his memoirs, Wilson argued that his challenge was motivated by a desire to restore Party unity. In his view, the Clause Four episode showed that the Party was being administered by a 'coterie' in Hampstead. 'It was that fact more than any pressure from parliamentary colleagues which persuaded me that I had to stand against Hugh in the next convenient annual PLP election for the Party Leader.' (52) However, Ben Pimlott has shown in some detail that Wilson was pushed reluctantly into a contest by his former Bevanite colleagues once it was clear that Gaitskell was likely to be defeated in the defence debate at the 1960 Conference. (53) Indeed, it was only after Anthony Greenwood had announced his own candidacy for the leadership, following Gaitskell's pledge to overturn the Scarborough defence vote, that Wilson decided to commit himself. He recognised that a refusal to stand could have led to a charge of cowardice against him - a charge which would have threatened his chances in a future contest either for the deputy leadership or for the senior post if Gaitskell was forced out.

Wilson had expected a 'mucky' contest against Gaitskell, but in public at least their battle was conducted with a degree of restraint. (54) In private, however, there was no disguising the strength of feeling in either camp. Gaitskell's allies believed that Wilson had acted dishonourably by challenging the Party leader at a time when he was most vulnerable, particularly when
they knew that only minor differences separated the two candidates on defence policy. Bill Rodgers, who at the time was closely involved in the campaign to support Gaitskell, recalled that his colleagues shared his view that Wilson's challenge was the product of political calculation rather than principle: 'We never really trusted Harold Wilson. On policy fundamentally Wilson didn't seem to be that much different from Hugh Gaitskell, but he was always getting himself into a position where he seemed to be an opponent. And so we thought he was opportunistic.' On the other side, though, some of Wilson's supporters had genuine doubts about Gaitskell's ability to lead Labour effectively. Tony Benn agonised over his decision to back Wilson, but he eventually decided that Gaitskell's performance since the election had damaged Labour's future prospects. Benn believed that Gaitskell and his supporters were seeking to exploit a test of strength against their critics in order to justify planned expulsions from the Party. In a letter to Crosland, Benn argued that the long-term future of the Labour leader was in serious doubt, even though he could expect to win comfortably in the fight against Wilson;

'I know you believe in the necessity for a paroxysmic crisis in the Party, out of which you hope a new political grouping will come. Certainly, you are in a position to precipitate such a crisis, but, in the process of doing so, you will be destroying the electoral prospects of the Party and making modernisation totally impossible...It's no good winning the argument. You've got to win the hearts of the Party - whatever sort of party you have. And if you really dislike and distrust a very large part of your party, you can never lead it...I know a lot of MPs who are voting for Gaitskell who have told me quite frankly that they don't believe it is possible for him to last.'

On the day of the contest, the emotion felt by members of the PLP spilled over into the Chamber of the House of Commons. Tony Benn recorded in his diary; 'At 2.30 the House met and for an hour the Labour Party was in public shambles: Members denounced
each other... We cannot survive as a united Party if this goes on for more than a week or two.' (57) Both candidates could draw some satisfaction from the ballot of the PLP. Gaitskell won a decisive victory by 166 votes to 81, but Wilson had persuaded almost one-third of his parliamentary colleagues to support his challenge. The result confirmed Gaitskell's authority in the PLP and it established Wilson as his main rival, but the Party as a whole gained little from the contest. Gaitskell's leadership style remained unchanged and the campaign against the Scarborough defence vote continued - it was eventually overturned at the 1961 Blackpool Conference. After a public row over Clause Four, the Party had walked into another high-profile controversy over defence and the conduct of the leadership. It was no surprise, therefore, that Labour's share of the vote decreased in all 11 by-elections that were fought in 1960, a run of poor performances which included the loss of the marginal Brighouse and Spenborough seat. (58)

Labour supporters were entitled to question why the Party created such difficulties for itself. The answer lay in the tribal divisions between left and right and the fears which they shared about Labour's future. Most of the protagonists in the disputes of 1960 were veterans of the battles which had taken place in the Party since 1951. Former Bevanites did not forget that Gaitskell had been their most forceful opponent in the early 1950s and they never fully trusted him as leader. After the 1959 election they believed that Gaitskell was leading the Party in the wrong direction - away from its doctrinal inheritance and towards another defeat by the Conservatives. In their view, his clumsy attempt to amend Clause Four and his pledge to fight a Conference decision on defence confirmed their doubts about his ability to lead a united Party. As a result, he had to be removed from his post to safeguard Labour's future. Crossman was convinced that Gaitskell was responsible for the turmoil in the Party at the end of 1960;

'the issue in the Labour Party is not basically a defence issue at all but a crisis of confidence in the leadership created by Gaitskell's and Crosland's Revisionism. It was
only when he failed to push his Revisionism through that he chose to pick a quarrel on defence...the Party loyalists spend their time telling one how terrible Hugh is, and there can be little doubt that George Brown, his new Deputy Leader, is mainly concerned to dig his grave even faster than Hugh is digging it for himself. It is an odious atmosphere, which of course stinks not only to high heaven but down into the electorate, and it is astounding to me that we are still retaining, as we are, the main structure of the Party intact.' (59)

Gaitskell shared his opponents' fears about Labour's future, but he differed from them in his analysis of the Party's main weakness. He believed that Labour appeared to be committed to untenable positions on major issues of policy - full-scale nationalisation as set out in Clause Four, and unilateral nuclear disarmament after Scarborough. In his view, the first was a misrepresentation of specific policy, the second was wrong in principle and both were unpopular with the electorate. Gaitskell had argued that if Labour's position on public ownership was not clarified, a disastrous fourth consecutive defeat beckoned. He was even more forthright on unilateralism, defining his pledge to challenge the defence vote as a mission to rescue the Party. His speech at Scarborough contained perhaps the most memorable peroration of his career; 'There are some of us, Mr. Chairman, who will fight and fight and fight again to save the Party we love.' (60)

The crises of 1960, therefore, should be set against the background of uncertainty about Labour's future which built up after the 1959 election. They were the most visible symptom of the pessimism which infected the Party at this time and which clouded the judgement of the leadership in particular. The Conservatives' return to power in 1959 produced speculation about Labour's future as a party of government in Britain. Serious doubts were expressed about its ability to win a future election without first undertaking a process of fundamental self-reform. This pessimistic appraisal of Labour's political fortunes had a strong influence on the nature of the disputes in
1960. Arguments about policy or about the constitution assumed a much wider significance at this time because the participants saw them as part of a battle for Labour's survival.

The mood was set by a series of articles in Socialist Commentary which analysed the causes of the Party's successive election defeats. The articles were written by Mark Abrams and were based on a detailed survey of over 700 informants who were questioned about their political views. Abrams used his findings to argue that the Party relied too heavily on supporters who considered themselves to be working class. The danger of this reliance was that Labour's traditional working class base was shrinking as a result of rising living standards and structural changes in the economy;

'The image of the Labour Party, held both by its supporters and its non-supporters, is one which is increasingly obsolete in terms of contemporary Britain. Both groups see Labour as identified with the working class - especially the poor and the labouring working class; and at the same time, many workers, irrespective of their politics, no longer regard themselves as working class. Conversely, the electorate sees the Conservative Party as the Party of middle class people and young people, the party that attracts men and women with realistic ideals, and which offers prosperity to all and opportunities to the ambitious.' (61)

An editorial which drew conclusions from the survey was equally pessimistic. 'A new epoch has been entered, in which the policies Labour has stood for are losing support... People appear concerned chiefly with their own ambitions... they set high store on possessing a house of their own - and, once possessed, they shift noticeably into the Conservative camp'. (62) Subsequent research discredited the 'embourgeoisement' thesis - the idea that working class Labour voters aspired to middle class values as they became more prosperous and consequently abandoned the Labour Party. (63) But in the aftermath of the 1959 election, the argument that Labour's traditional base of support was being eroded was largely accepted by Gaitskell and his allies and this
strengthened their belief that the Party required urgent reform. Peter Shore, the head of Labour's Research Department, recalled the impact which the survey for Socialist Commentary had on the leadership: 'We had Mark Abrams producing all kinds of depressing analyses. This greatly infected Hugh Gaitskell's thinking in that period. Generally, the right-wing intellectuals in the Party really were rather defeatist'. (64)

This defeatism contributed to the formation of a right-wing pressure group within the Party - the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS). The formation of this group was the product of a number of different factors, but ultimately it was based on a flawed analysis of Labour's future. CDS was formed to rescue the life of a party that was in no danger. It was arguably the clearest symbol of the panic which gripped the Party temporarily after 1959. Bill Rodgers, the chief organiser of CDS, confirmed that the overall objective of CDS was to rescue the Labour Party; 'we believed that the Party could be saved from itself and Hugh Gaitskell offered the best prospect of saving it'. (65) As a result of this mission, CDS became associated closely with the maintenance of Gaitskell's authority in the Party. In order to achieve this and to counter what they believed was a resurgence of the Left after 1959, CDS was prepared to risk the accusation that they were a 'party within the Party' - the same charge that had been used successfully against the Bevanites a decade before.

The origins of CDS can be found in the public declaration of support for Gaitskell by 15 Labour parliamentary candidates in February 1960. Several of the signatories to this declaration went on to support CDS - including Merlyn Rees, Dick Taverne and Shirley Williams. (66) More importantly, the declaration was organised by Bill Rodgers, who, together with Denis Howell and Frank Pickstock, launched CDS with the 'Victory for Sanity' manifesto in October 1960. (67) The launch was timed to coincide with the success of the unilateralist resolution at Scarborough, the reversal of which was the first short-term objective of CDS - in their view, unless the resolution was overturned within a year, Gaitskell could not have remained as leader. (68) With the counter attack on unilateralism ready to begin, the 'Victory for
Sanity' manifesto set out the three long-term objectives of CDS: the marginalisation of the Left, the reassertion of the authority of the PLP leadership and the acceptance of Croslandite revisionism. The content of the manifesto contained few surprises - after all, Crosland was one of its main authors - but the tone was perhaps more strident than might have been expected. CDS fought a hard campaign, but arguably they fought without recognising that a war against members of their own Party might damage the Labour movement as a whole. Their manifesto stated:

'This is the culmination of a long period in which the voice of moderate opinion in the Labour Party has been drowned by the clamour of an active and articulate minority. As socialists who are loyal to its central tradition yet aware of the changed conditions of the 1960s, we seek to reassert the views of the great mass of Labour supporters against those of doctrinaire pressure-groups...the party must be seen to represent all sections of society, and it must be made absolutely clear that no one has the power to instruct, control or dictate to the Parliamentary Labour Party.' (69)

Rodgers believed that this crusade was justified by the Party's need to reform itself in order to survive. The model for reform which he and others referred to at this time was the German Social Democratic Party, which had formally renounced its Marxist inheritance in favour of social democracy at its Godesberg congress in 1958. He recalled: 'I and my friends at that time felt strongly that the Labour Party had to go through a cathartic experience. It had to demonstrate to the world that it was a democratic socialist party if it was really to go forward...The failure to do what the SPD did in Germany, to have its Godesberg, was an albatross round its neck, even though Labour won in 1964 and won again in 1974.' (70) Dick Taverne, who became CDS Treasurer, recalled a similar motivation behind his commitment to the organisation: 'There was a group of us who were very worried about the direction in which the Labour Party was going, because it appeared to be moving into a mood where it
was to become a sort of Marxist Party. It seemed to me at the time that the direction in which we should go was much the same as the German Social Democrats... We weren't motivated primarily by loyalty to a leader, it was the future of the Party that mattered.' (71) Taverne and others were dismayed by Gaitskell's compromise over Clause Four because it represented a failure to break the symbolic association of Labour with state ownership. (72) However, they were prepared to continue with CDS because they believed that other important battles had to be fought.

Planning and fighting battles was the central purpose of CDS. Tony Crosland recognised this when he described his colleagues in the group as 'apparatchiks'. (73) They did not aim to generate ideas or initiatives on policy, instead their speciality was organisation against their opponents within the Party. At its height, CDS had 260 'whips' who co-ordinated support in local parties and trade unions. It also had a permanent central office in London, considerable funds and a regular publication, Campaign, to counter the influence of Tribune. (74) Initially, the group took up Gaitskell's challenge to fight the Conference endorsement of unilateralism. This meant persuading the trade union executives who controlled the block vote to support the Party leadership's defence policy at the 1961 Blackpool Conference. CDS workers wrote speeches for delegates at union conferences, they approached senior union officials individually and they produced briefing material which supported Gaitskell's position. (75) After the defence issue was resolved to their satisfaction in 1961, CDS turned their attention to candidate selection in local parties. Contacts were made with regional organisers and lists were compiled where possible of CDS supporters in constituency parties. Bernard Donoughue, a CDS organiser, explained how the battle over candidate selection was fought;

'In the summer of 1964, the MP for Finsbury died and I was telephoned by a friend, a left-wing journalist, and told that I must watch out, that there had been a meeting of key left-wing people and they had decided to capture Finsbury...
I contacted one or two friends and the list of CDS people in Finsbury including the Post Office and Telegraph Union people and they organised very actively. It emerged that the Left, despite its incompetence, had their candidate and had 27 potential votes. CDS campaigned in the constituency and we won by 31 to 27.\(^{(76)}\)

The activities of CDS caught the attention of Morgan Phillips and Sara Barker, the National Agent - the Party officials who monitored possible infringements of Labour's internal rules. Despite their interest, CDS was neither outlawed nor declared a 'party within the Party' as the Bevanites had been in the early 1950s. Bill Rodgers maintained that in contrast to the Bevanites, CDS was a legitimate organisation because it worked in the open and not in secret. When Phillips indicated that the NEC might investigate CDS, Rodgers told him that the Executive could have access to all of the group's papers; 'We were far too clever. Everything we did, I was prepared to see the light of day. Even the things which were most confidential were written in such a way that there was never any question about our loyalty to the Party as a whole...it was all above board.'\(^{(77)}\) Obviously, CDS was helped by its association with the Party leader, who gave the group his 'distant blessing'.\(^{(78)}\) According to Dick Taverne, Sara Barker also eventually became a 'staunch supporter' of CDS.\(^{(79)}\) In addition, the group attracted the support of elder statesmen in the Party like Attlee and Dalton, and the March 1961 edition of the monthly CDS broadsheet, *Campaign*, carried a pledge of support from 45 members of the PLP.\(^{(80)}\) It was probably these connections with the Party hierarchy which safeguarded CDS from thorough investigation or disciplinary action by the NEC.

Although CDS was well organised, with support in the PLP, the trade unions and local Parties, the degree of success it enjoyed was minimal. Patrick Seyd, who wrote an early study of the group, argued that the Scarborough defence vote would have been reversed even without the work of CDS, because trade union leaders were concerned about the long-term implications for the Party if it continued to endorse a policy of unilateralism.\(^{(81)}\)
The group's influence over the selection of parliamentary candidates was also unremarkable, not least because of the slow rate at which vacancies occurred in seats where Labour stood a chance of victory. Finally, although CDS was inspired by John Kennedy's commitment to efficiency and drive as President of the United States after 1960, it failed to contribute significantly to the modernisation of Labour's organisation before 1964. On balance, therefore, it seems that a good deal of effort and money was wasted on CDS between its formation in 1960 and its disbandment after the 1964 election. Its main significance in the context of this study is the way in which it heightened mistrust in Labour's ranks after Scarborough. It also illustrated graphically the fear which some felt about the future of the Party.

Ironically, the civil war which CDS helped to sustain in the Party coincided with an improvement in Labour's political fortunes from 1961 onwards. Labour was fortunate that its inept performance in the country at this time was at least better than that of the Government. Macmillan's administration, which had once seemed so assured, stumbled from one crisis to another in the early 1960s. The root of its difficulties was the economy. In a mirror image of the way in which confidence in the economy had helped to produce the Conservative victories of 1955 and 1959, anxiety about the economy helped to produce the Conservative defeat of 1964. In the early 1960s, the Government struggled to cope with four related economic problems: sluggish growth, rising prices, a balance of payments deficit and pressure on sterling. High levels of consumer spending in the late 1950s had left an awkward legacy for Britain. Consumers had often used easily available credit to buy imported manufactured goods - this pushed Britain's current account further into the red and caused a loss of gold and dollar reserves. Although this problem was evident in 1960, Macmillan believed that immediate remedial action would bring into disrepute the tax cuts and optimistic forecasts which his Government had made before the 1959 election. As a result, the first serious attempt to reduce demand in the economy was delayed until July 1961, when an emergency budget increased the Bank Rate and introduced a
'pay pause' for public sector workers. Teachers, nurses and other state employees were unhappy about the policy on wage increases, while borrowers stood to lose as a result of higher interest rates. In the month after this budget, Labour overtook the Conservatives in the Gallup Poll for the first time since March 1959 - the Conservatives did not regain a stable lead in the Gallup poll until February 1965. (83)

Britain's economy continued to grow after 1960, but the growth rates of its main competitors were markedly more impressive. As Britain's relative decline became more apparent, Macmillan tried and failed to find a cure for the country's economic weakness. In August 1961, the Government formally applied for membership of the European Economic Community (EEC). There were a number of factors which influenced the decision to apply, but among the most important was the impressive economic growth of the six founder members. In the same month as the application, the Government also appeared to abandon its long-held suspicion of state planning. The Chancellor met leading employers and trade union officials to discuss the creation of a tripartite body to oversee economic planning - the result was the formation of the National Economic Development Council (NEDC) in February 1962. Neither of these measures, though, helped to revive the Conservative Party's flagging political fortunes. The application to join the EEC caused a split in Tory ranks and ended in the humiliation of de Gaulle's veto at the start of 1963. Meanwhile, the NEDC, which was not designed to produce an immediate improvement in Britain's economic performance, failed to capture the imagination of the public. The scale of the Conservatives' unpopularity at this time was signalled by a sequence of poor performances in by-elections. A week after the inaugural meeting of the NEDC in March 1962, the Conservatives lost one of their safest seats to the Liberals in the Orpington by-election. At the time it was the largest by-election swing in British political history: compared with the 1959 general election, the Liberals more than doubled their share of the vote from 21 per cent to 53 per cent while the Conservative share dropped from 57 per cent to 35 per cent. (84) This was followed in June by Labour's first by-election
gain since the 1959 election at Middlesbrough West. (85) After the Liberals pushed the Tories into third place in the Leicester North East by-election in July, Macmillan decided that drastic action was required. (86)

The Cabinet reshuffle of July 1962 was a political manoeuvre on the grand scale. Seven Cabinet Ministers were dismissed in a move which The Times saw as an indication of the electoral crisis in which the Government found itself. (87) Macmillan had hoped to revitalise his Cabinet with new talent, but his reshuffle looked dangerously like a panic decision. The Prime Minister's image of calm authority, which Gaitskell had been unable to disturb before 1959, was lost forever. Meanwhile, the Government's electoral disappointments continued. In November 1962 Labour gained Dorset South and Glasgow Woodside from the Conservatives. Labour also came very close to gaining Norfolk Central, where the Conservative share of the poll fell by 12.6 per cent. (88) By the end of the year, Labour's lead in the Gallup poll had climbed to 7.5 per cent. (89) Without having undertaken any of the internal reforms which had been proposed in the Party since 1959, Labour appeared to be back on the road to power.

Although Labour's recovery from the crises of 1960 and 1961 was largely a product of Conservative failure, the Party also helped itself by gradually re-establishing unity from the 1961 Blackpool Conference onwards. A new domestic policy statement, Signposts for the Sixties, assisted this process. The document was broadly acceptable to both wings of the Party because it combined the language of social equality with the language of state planning - the actual policies, though, were largely unchanged from the 1959 programme. (90) The leader of the transport workers' union protested about the lack of specific commitments to public ownership, but Conference accepted the policy statement by a large majority. Crossman, in his closing remarks as chairman at Blackpool, made his contribution to Party unity by declaring that the leadership issue had now been settled 'once for all'. (91)

Relations in the Party continued to improve throughout 1962 as Labour built on its lead in the opinion polls. Gaitskell rallied support for his leadership with a principled and
sustained attack on the Government's Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, a measure which aimed to restrict the entry of Indians and West Indians into Britain. The leader's rehabilitation in the eyes of his former critics was carried a stage further at the Brighton Conference in 1962, when he dismayed many of his closest allies by opposing Britain's entry into the EEC on the grounds that the terms which the Government had negotiated were unacceptable. Gaitskell's stance on the European issue was a severe disappointment to the leading members of CDS, most of whom believed that Britain should join the Community. Crosland, Jenkins and Rodgers went to see Gaitskell on the night before his Conference speech in an attempt to persuade him of the European case. Rodgers recalled: 'We were led to believe that although [Gaitskell's speech] would not be comfortable for us, it would not be as extreme as it turned out to be. It was a sad experience for all of us who had launched the [Victory for Sanity] manifesto.' (92) Dick Taverne reacted similarly to the speech: 'It was a bitter disappointment. When he died there was a certain amount of bad blood between several people in CDS and Hugh Gaitskell.' (93) The Left, in contrast, took heart from Gaitskell's opposition to Britain's entry into the EEC. Tribune described the events at Brighton as 'A great week for democracy and socialism'. (94) A bulletin produced by writers on the New Left Review for the Conference was similarly optimistic. 'So far as an election is concerned, the party is now, as never in recent years, a united and confident party. It is united because the Party Leader has at last discharged his function in speaking for its vast majority. As a matter of practical politics, there is not now a question of the Leadership.' (95) Although the European issue was a potential source of division in the Party, de Gaulle's veto at least ruled out the immediate prospect of a split to rival the controversies over Clause Four and unilateralism. By the end of 1962, Labour was more united than at any time since the Hampstead Set had mishandled their attempt to reform the Party in 1959.

When Hugh Gaitskell died from a rare immunological disease in January 1963, Labour appeared to be well placed to win the
general election which was expected in 1964. The Party had a strong lead in the opinion polls, morale was high after by-election success, and Government misfortune and mismanagement combined to make the Conservatives increasingly unpopular. After winning his battle on defence policy and largely uniting the Party over Europe, Gaitskell was seen as a Prime Minister in-waiting. The loss which many in the Party and the country felt at his death was heightened by a sense of frustration that a national leader had been denied his rightful inheritance. Labour made great progress during the seven years in which Gaitskell led the Party, even though his judgement faltered temporarily after the 1959 election. Organisation, policy and the presentation of policy all improved under Gaitskell - his legacy was a Party that was fully equipped to take advantage of Conservative misfortune in a General Election. Although it was natural for the press to be generous in its assessment of a political career that was cut short in its prime, the tributes that were paid to Gaitskell were sincere in their view that Labour had lost an extraordinary statesman. The Observer argued that Gaitskell's death represented a disaster for the Party, because his role in Labour's political recovery had been so crucial;

'in writing the epitaph of Hugh Gaitskell it is difficult to avoid writing, also, the epitaph of the Labour Party he loved - so commanding a figure had he become. The immediate effect of his death is bound to be to reduce the Labour Party's political effectiveness and electoral appeal...Gaitskell's death has not only robbed Labour of the chance of victory but probably means the end of the party in its present form.'(96)

The Times was less pessimistic about Labour's future, but it believed strongly that Gaitskell would prove a difficult leader to replace. Its leader writer's assessment of the potential successors was downbeat: 'There is no active Labour politician whose present standing in the country approaches that acquired by Mr Gaitskell.'(97)
It was no surprise that this view was shared by Gaitskell's disciples in CDS, for whom the pain of bereavement was particularly acute. All of the group had lost an inspirational leader, some had lost a close friend, too. The main candidates for the vacant leadership were George Brown, deputy leader since November 1960, and Harold Wilson, Shadow Foreign Secretary since November 1961. Many in CDS were uninspired by this choice. In their view, the prospect of a contest between Brown and Wilson simply reinforced the scale of the tragedy which Gaitskell's death represented. Wilson, according to Rodgers, was seen by CDS as 'a bit shifty and shabby'.\(^{(98)}\) They saw him as opportunistic and untrustworthy and they had not forgiven his challenge to Gaitskell in 1960. Brown, to use Taverne's phrase, had 'certain weaknesses'.\(^{(99)}\) He was a politician who failed to exploit his natural gifts to the full. He was passionate but dangerously volatile; he had a fine intellect, but his judgement was sometimes clouded by alcohol. Christopher Mayhew, who discussed ways of defeating Wilson at a CDS meeting, described the two main candidates for the leadership as a 'crook and a drunk'.\(^{(100)}\) As a result, members of CDS persuaded James Callaghan to enter the contest as an alternative to Brown and Wilson.

Wilson and his supporters were 'overjoyed' at Callaghan's decision to stand because they knew that he was likely to take votes away from Brown.\(^{(101)}\) Both Callaghan and Brown appealed to the broad right wing of the Party, whereas Wilson knew from his previous challenges for the leadership and deputy leadership that he could rely on exclusive support from Labour's broad left wing. According to Ben Pimlott, Wilson's campaign in 1963 was conducted with a 'scientific precision' which had never been seen before in such a contest.\(^{(102)}\) Wilson and his lieutenants compiled lists of potential supporters who were then categorised according to ideology, social group or region. This enabled members of Wilson's team to identify waverers and to reassure them about their candidate's credentials for the leadership. The result of this detailed work, combined with a clumsy campaign by Brown and the intervention of Callaghan, was a lead for Wilson on the first ballot of the PLP on 7 February. He polled 115
votes, compared with 88 for Brown and 41 for Callaghan. (103)

After Callaghan withdrew from the contest, Wilson defeated Brown comfortably on the second ballot by 144 votes to 103. (104)

Wilson's victory was due in part to his exceptional political talents. He was arguably the Party's most effective debater in the House of Commons, he had demonstrated his administrative abilities in Attlee's Cabinet and his intellect was as sharp as any in the PLP. Perhaps his main asset in February 1963, though, was George Brown's volatile temperament, which a majority in the PLP believed disqualified him from the leadership. Wilson often faced charges that he was cold, calculating and devious, but at least his colleagues knew that he would not embarrass the Party with the type of public outburst to which Brown was prone. With the Tories trailing in the opinion polls, Labour could not afford to risk the selection of a leader whose lack of self-discipline might distract attention from the Government's difficulties. Wilson, therefore, succeeded Gaitskell partly by default. His second piece of good fortune was to take over as leader at a time when Labour appeared to be back on the road to power. As The Times pointed out on the day after the second ballot; 'Mr Wilson embarks under favourable omens. He inherits a party which is in good shape, having been laboriously rescued from irrelevance and schism by his predecessor, and with excellent prospects of winning power at the next general election'. (105)

Labour's new leader took his Party towards victory by building on the foundations which had been laid during Gaitskell's years in charge. The most important of these foundations was Labour's domestic policy programme. Shortly after his victory on the second ballot Wilson told the editor of the Daily Herald that there would be no major changes to this programme before the next election. He was content to use the policies which had been set out in Signposts for the Sixties. As the Daily Herald told its readers, on policy 'Harold Wilson will hold the Gaitskell line'. (106) A year later this theme was restated when Wilson told radio listeners that he had differed with his predecessor mainly over Party management rather than policy. (107) To be sure, Wilson needed to highlight the common
ground he shared with Gaitskell to reassure voters that his left-wing reputation was largely undeserved, but his claim that there was continuity in policy after his succession had real substance: it was not simply a statement for public consumption, it was a statement of fact. After all, Wilson had made a major contribution to the formation of the domestic programme during his years of service on the NEC and the Home Policy Committee. As leader, there was little reason for him to abandon policies which he had helped to shape in the first instance. And as Crossman recognised in March 1963, the programme did not require alteration because, 'the Labour Party had quite radical policies on every topic under the sun'.

In his first period as opposition leader, therefore, Wilson altered the presentation and interpretation of Labour's programme rather than its content. Whereas Gaitskell had placed equality and social justice at the top of the Party's agenda, Wilson preferred to emphasise the commitment to economic growth, modernisation and efficiency which had appeared both in the 1959 manifesto and in Signposts for the Sixties. This reordering of priorities was politically astute. First, it enabled Wilson to steer a middle course between the revisionist commitment to social equality and the left-wing commitment to more public ownership, thereby maintaining Party unity. Secondly, it enabled Labour to present itself as an up-to-date, dynamic party in an era of automation, atomic power and space exploration. The new Labour leader offered a combination of the Soviet Union's economic planning - which appeared to produce impressive results - and the political talents and vigour of Kennedy's team in the United States of America. The skill with which Wilson identified his Party with scientific and technological advance is a familiar feature of the historiography of British politics in this period. Similarly, his vision of a social revolution in which talent and merit would be recognised above social background is well known. The issue which needs to be considered in the context of this study, though, is whether Wilson's reinterpretation of policy made a significant impact on the electorate in the approach to the 1964 General Election.

This is a difficult issue to resolve with any degree of
certainty, but the Gallup Polls and the 1964 election results provide some useful clues. There is no doubt that Labour's lead in the opinion polls increased temporarily under Wilson, but arguably this owed much to the 'honeymoon period' which new political leaders usually enjoy. When Gaitskell died, Labour's lead in the Gallup Poll had been 11.5 per cent, under Wilson the gap widened to 15.5 per cent. By July 1963, though, the Party's lead over the Conservatives began to slip back to the levels which had been recorded at the end of 1962. (110) Significantly, Labour's advantage in the Gallup Poll continued to fall after the 1963 Conference, during which Wilson set out his vision of a new Britain forged in the 'white heat' of the scientific revolution. (111) According to Gallup, therefore, Wilson's emphasis on growth and his association of socialism with the planning of science did not increase support for the Party in the country. If his vision was to make an impact, it was most likely to occur in the months after the 1963 Conference or in the weeks before the 1964 election - at both times, though, the Conservatives closed the gap on Labour. Wilson's speech on the new Britain was warmly received by delegates, it helped to increase morale in the Party and it drew praise from the national press, but its electoral impact was not significant. The results of the 1964 election support this conclusion: as will be shown, Labour's share of the vote in this contest increased only slightly from 1959 while its aggregate vote showed a small decline.

As well as inheriting an opinion poll lead over the Tories when he succeeded Gaitskell, Wilson also enjoyed the advantage of operating in the most favourable political climate for his Party since 1947. First, the economic news helped Labour. During the month in which Wilson won the Party leadership unemployment reached its highest level since the 1940s. Second, the Conservative Party continued to create problems for itself. Stories which combined sex, Tory politicians and national security dominated the headlines and were exploited to the full by a new generation of political satirists. The effect was to make the Government appear incompetent, accident prone and faintly ridiculous. Shortly after the Conservatives had begun to
recover from the Vassall affair in 1962 - when Ministers were falsely accused of protecting a homosexual Admiralty clerk who had been blackmailed into spying - the Profumo scandal broke, providing further ammunition for the Government's critics. In retrospect, the Profumo episode was a sad affair which involved no breach of national security. But at the time it was seen as a symbol of the degeneracy and decline which some believed had taken hold in the country under the Tories. In June 1963 John Profumo resigned as Secretary of State for War because he had lied to the House Of Commons about his relationship with Christine Keeler - a model who had been involved in a close relationship with a Soviet diplomat at the same time as she was seeing Profumo. The cast list in this drama also included Stephen Ward, an London osteopath whose interest in Anglo-Soviet relations had already attracted the attentions of MI5.

Macmillan, who had been aware of rumours about this case for months, was criticised for failing to act before the episode became a public scandal. Wilson, in contrast, handled the affair with delicate but devastating skill. His tactic was to concentrate on the security issues raised by the affair and to avoid being seen to exploit the allegations against Profumo for party political purposes.

By adopting a position of cool but concerned detachment, Wilson ensured that his Party came out of the Profumo affair with its hands clean and with maximum political advantage. Meanwhile, Macmillan looked like a Prime Minister who was old and tired and who had lost his political judgement. His carefully refined portrayal of an Edwardian, gentleman politician seemed almost embarrassingly out of date against Wilson's equally refined portrayal of a professional, classless, down-to-earth meritocrat from Huddersfield who was excited by the potential of the scientific revolution. As ridicule was heaped upon the Prime Minister - led by the satirical television programme That Was The Week That Was and the magazine Private Eye - speculation intensified that he would resign in the wake of the Profumo affair.
But if Macmillan's Conservative critics had hoped to replace him with a more dynamic leader who could match the political skills of Wilson, they were soon disappointed. When it was announced in October 1963 that the Prime Minister had retired because of ill health, the aristocratic Lord Home emerged as his successor - not because of any outstanding ability, but because he was the candidate with the fewest enemies in the senior ranks of the Conservative Party. (112) His elevation to the Premiership without an open contest reinforced the impression that the Tories were trapped in a bygone age. Wilson poured scorn on a Prime Minister who used matchsticks to help solve economic problems. Home, who soon renounced his peerage to become Sir Alec Douglas-Home, was also an easy target for the satirists. David Frost, the presenter of *That Was The Week That Was*, dismissed the new Tory leader with contempt as he joked; 'And so there is the choice for the electorate - on the one hand Lord Home and on the other Mr Harold Wilson: Dull Alec versus Smart-Alec'. (113)

Labour's preparations for a general election - which was due before the end of 1964 - were already in progress when Douglas-Home succeeded Macmillan. In October 1961 the NEC had formed a nine-member campaign committee to oversee pre-election strategy: the committee rallied morale in the constituency parties, channelled funds to marginals and organised a 'Festival of Labour' in June 1962 which attracted a crowd of more than 100,000 to Battersea Park in London. (114) Drawing on a technique which the Tories had used in 1959, the committee also recruited a team of advertising artists and copywriters to help with public relations in 1962. This team used data from social surveys to select the most appropriate issues for posters and advertising and to monitor public reaction to the Party's propaganda. By January 1963 the team had agreed on the 'thumbs-up' sign and the slogan 'Let's Go with Labour'. The idea was to rid the Party finally of its puritanical image and to persuade the public of Labour's dynamism and enthusiasm for progress. In May 1963 advertisements which featured the sign, the slogan, some text and a picture of Wilson began to appear in the national newspapers. (115) Labour had learned the value of continuous campaigning and its election budget for the 1964
contest was trebled compared with 1959. (116)

The work of the NEC's campaign committee and the publicity department meant that the broad shape of the Party's pre-election strategy had been decided long before Wilson became leader. Although lessons had been learned and refinements had been made since Labour's previous defeat, there were some important similarities between the campaigns of 1959 and 1964. Labour was determined to fight a forward-looking campaign in 1964 but the focus remained on a limited and familiar range of domestic issues - housing, education, prices and economic management. In an attempt to repeat the success of the Party's campaign on television in 1959, Tony Benn was reappointed in charge of Labour's broadcasts by Wilson in one of his earliest actions as leader. When the two first held formal discussions about broadcasting in March 1963 it soon became clear that Wilson intended to dominate Labour's forthcoming election campaign to an even greater extent than his predecessor had done in 1959. (117) Benn, who had insisted that Gaitskell's image as Party leader had to be amplified for the election in 1959, was understandably pleased that the new leader was ready to repeat and extend this strategy. (118) Echoes of 1959 were to be found also in the use of daily press conferences throughout the election - Wilson, rather than the Party's General Secretary, took charge of these meetings with the press in 1964.

The main difference between the campaigns of 1959 and 1964 concerned the tone of Labour's appeal to the electorate. Although economic growth through efficient management had been an important theme during the 1959 campaign, there had been an equal emphasis too on concepts such as equality and social justice. By 1964, however, there was an almost exclusive concentration on planned expansion, economic efficiency and modernisation as the heart of Labour's message. The old crusade against poverty had been marginalised; in contrast to 1959, for example, there were no posters which promised that Labour would remember the pensioners in 1964. Instead, Wilson drove home his claim that Labour was modern and forward-looking while the Conservatives were out of date and out of touch. Adapting a formula which Kennedy had used in 1960, Wilson committed an
incoming Labour administration to 100 days of vigorous action as part of a drive to create a 'New Britain'. (119) In this 'New Britain' individuals of outstanding ability - irrespective of social background - would work in partnership with the government to regenerate the nation's economy, industry and public services. This attempt to recreate Kennedy's 'New Frontier' campaign was short on detail, but in reality its main objective was simply to reinforce the idea that Labour was a team of classless professionals in a contest with well-heeled Tory amateurs - technocrats against aristocrats. The other lesson which Wilson had learned from Kennedy was the way in which youthful appeal could be used as a political weapon. Wilson even ran up the stairs at Labour's pre-election rally at Wembley in September 1964 to emphasise the contrast between his relatively youthful leadership and a Prime Minister who was in his sixties.

Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain, the manifesto for the 1964 election, was infused with the energy and commitment to modernisation which dominated the Party's campaign. The language used in the document left the reader in no doubt about the zeal with which a Labour administration would approach the task of regenerating Britain. It stated that the Party was, 'Impatient to apply the New Thinking that will end the chaos and sterility' and 'restless with positive remedies for the problems the Tories have criminally neglected'. The preface outlined the basis of Labour's forward-looking appeal. It promised;

'A New Britain - mobilising the resources of technology under a national plan; harnessing our national wealth in brains, our genius for scientific invention and medical discovery; reversing the decline of thirteen wasted years; affording a new opportunity to equal, and if possible surpass, the roaring progress of other western powers while Tory Britain has moved sideways, backwards but seldom forward. The country needs fresh and virile leadership'. (120)

In short, the manifesto was a vigorous attack on Conservative complacency. But if the tone and the rhetoric of the document
are set aside, strong similarities in terms of policy between the manifestos of 1959 and 1964 become apparent. As already stated, only three domestic policies from 1959 did not reappear in the 1964 document - the nationalisation of road haulage, the large-scale municipalisation of rented housing and a 'plan for cotton'. The only significant new policy proposals which appeared in the 1964 programme concerned the public schools and the details of welfare provision. The other new proposals in 1964 were essentially concerned with the machinery of government and planning - the Party was committed to the creation of a Ministry of Economic Affairs, a Ministry of Technology, regional planning boards, a Land Commission and an office of Parliamentary Commissioner. The details of how these new bodies would operate were left unclear. And as The Guardian pointed out, administrative changes on this scale had no precedent in peace-time. 'The amount of work, planning and adjustment, cajollement and negotiation involved in the establishment of regional planning alone would be tremendous.' (121)

Fortunately for Wilson and his colleagues, the awkward questions which were raised by Labour's new proposals for the machinery of government were largely ignored during the campaign itself - a contest which The Times described as 'this most formless and aimless of election campaigns'. (122) Wilson kept a firm control over Labour's campaign in an effort to ensure that the Party was not drawn on contentious issues - he was anxious to avoid the kind of controversy which Gaitskell had caused by his comments on income tax in 1959. (123) The result was that the two main parties frequently failed to engage in a debate with each other: Wilson continually emphasised the issue of modernisation, while Douglas-Home drew on his experience as a former Foreign Secretary and made the security of Britain his predominant theme - a sense of priority which was reflected in the structure of the Conservative manifesto. (124) Labour made little attempt to exploit previous Government difficulties such as the Cabinet purge of 1962, unemployment in 1962 and 1963 or the security scandals during Macmillan's final years in office. The main skirmishes in the campaign were over trivial issues: the moral standards of either front bench; industrial stoppages...
during the election which Wilson believed were politically motivated; and organised heckling which disrupted the public appearances of the Prime Minister. A fortnight before polling day Tony Benn complained that there was a 'certain flatness about the campaign'.(125) But as the end of the contest approached, tension increased as opinion polls predicted the closest result in a general election for decades.

Despite the best efforts of Wilson, Labour's lead over the Tories in the opinion polls narrowed sharply from the summer of 1964 onwards. During the election campaign proper this lead at times disappeared completely - the three main polling organisations all found that the Conservatives were ahead at some stage of the campaign. The final result confirmed the pollsters' eventual belief that Labour would emerge with a narrow victory. Wilson led the Party back into government with an effective majority of just five seats. On a slightly reduced turnout, Labour's aggregate vote fell by almost 10,000 compared with 1959. Its share of the vote at 44.1 per cent was an improvement of just 0.3 per cent from the previous election - which meant that Labour took office with the lowest share of the popular vote of any majority government since 1922. But the collapse in the Conservative vote and the resurgence of the Liberals meant that Labour could return to office without improving substantially on its performance from 1959. Support for the Conservatives haemorrhaged. Their aggregate vote fell by almost 1.75 million and their share of the vote dropped by 6 per cent - the heaviest loss of any major party since the Conservative disaster of 1945. The Liberals meanwhile increased their aggregate vote by almost 1.5 million and won nine victories in three-cornered contests for the first time since 1929. The rise in the Liberal vote can be explained largely by the increase in the number of candidates fielded by the Party in 1964, but the figures also suggest that the Liberals picked up support from a number of disaffected Conservatives.

The average swing to Labour in 1964 was 3.5 per cent. The Party's best gains were made in Liverpool and there were greater than average swings to Labour in the North West, Clydeside and Greater London. Traditional areas of strength such as Wales and
Scotland continued to return Labour MPs in large numbers — in other words, therefore, it was the Party's core support combined with the drop in the Tory vote which carried Labour back into office. Although surveys found a slight increase in Labour support among the middle and lower middle classes, the bulk of the Party's votes continued to come from male, skilled or unskilled manual workers who belonged to a trade union. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the tone of its campaign, Labour apparently won support from less than 40 per cent of voters who were aged 65 or above in 1964. In contrast, the Party appeared to attract support from a majority of voters aged between 21 and 44. (126)

Labour enjoyed several advantages in 1964. Without doubt, Wilson was a vibrant and accomplished leader who shone against Douglas-Home in all arenas — at Westminster, on television, on public platforms and at press conferences. And as Ben Pimlott has shown, Wilson made few errors in his first election campaign as leader. (127) But the failure to increase Labour's vote in 1964 — despite more favourable circumstances than Gaitskell had enjoyed in 1959 — calls into question the extent to which the Party's return to power can justly be described as 'Wilson's victory'. Labour's triumph in 1964 was essentially the product of a retention of support from the 1950s. Arguably, this retention of support owed much to long-term factors rather than the inspiration provided by a new leader. As already shown, Labour had begun to plan for an election in 1961 and had overtaken the Tories in the opinion polls in 1962. More importantly, though, the fundamentals in the Party were right long before Wilson took charge: Labour had a carefully agreed policy programme; Party unity was patiently restored after the controversies of the early 1960s; and constituency party activists continued to work for a Labour victory on the ground. The following chapters will examine these three areas in turn in an attempt to show that the origins of Labour's victory in 1964 are to be found in the 1950s.
References

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10. Interview with Lord Jay.
18. Interview with Lord Jay
20. Tony Benn diary, 21 October 1959.
Clause Four committed the Party to the following objectives; 'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service'.


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58. P. Norris, *op. cit.*, see the appendix in this publication.
63. J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechofer, and J. Platt, *op. cit.*
64. Interview with Peter Shore.
65. Interview with Lord Rodgers.
70. Interview with Lord Rodgers.
71. Interview with Dick Taverne, August 1991.
72. Ibid.
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91. P. Williams, op. cit., p.383.
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100. Cited in, Contemporary Record, op. cit., p.382.
102. B. Pimlott, op. cit., p.259.
103. The Times, 8 February 1963.
104. Ibid., 15 February 1963
105. Ibid.

6. Policy-making, 1959-1964

Much of the period between the defeat of 1959 and the victory of 1964 was marked by controversy and division within the Labour Party. As shown, though, the three main issues at the centre of this conflict were Gaitskell's leadership, Clause Four and the retention of Britain's nuclear deterrent. Despite a reopening of hostilities in Labour's ranks after the 1959 defeat, the domestic policy programme which had been agreed during the three year review continued to enjoy broad support within the Party. It has been argued already that most of the domestic proposals which had appeared in the 1959 programme reappeared in the 1964 manifesto. The aim of this chapter is to examine the policy-making process after the 1959 election and to show that the development of Labour's programme before the victory of 1964 was relatively limited. Only four major domestic policy statements were published by the Party during this period, so the work of the Policy Committee did not begin to approach the scale of the project which had been undertaken after 1955. Although some notable changes were made to Labour's economic policy after 1959, it will be argued in the following paragraphs that the significance of these changes was relatively minor. Labour's victory in 1964 owed more to policies which had been developed before 1959 than it did to Wilson's vision of a 'New Britain'. In policy terms, Labour's return to power was a belated triumph for the architects of the three year review.

Policy-making in the months after the 1959 defeat took place against a background of recrimination and mistrust in the Party - caused in the main by the ill-conceived initiatives of the Hampstead Set. Partly as a result of these fractured relations, the Policy Committee decided not to embark on a critical analysis of Labour's programme after the election. They were well aware that a detailed examination of policy could open up issues which were likely to exacerbate tension in the Party; for example, after Gaitskell had proposed to amend Clause Four of the constitution, it would have been difficult for the Party to
have engaged in a calm discussion about Labour’s plans for public ownership. At a meeting in January 1960, the Policy Committee discussed and approved a research paper from Peter Shore which argued that the detailed phase of policy-making was complete and that 'it would be unwise to embark on a new policy marathon - at least at this stage.' Rather than review the content of Labour’s programme, the paper continued, the Committee should focus instead on the trends and problems which were likely to shape British society in the first half of the 1960s. In order to help with this process, the Research Department had begun to construct a picture of the likely needs and problems of Britain in 1964 - the year in which the Tories were expected to call an election. The burden of the analysis in the paper was that detailed policy-making should be replaced by an attempt to think in wider, strategic terms: the aim was to identify the themes and issues which the Party could exploit to most effect in the next general election.

The development of a future vision of Britain was taken a stage further in March when the Policy Committee discussed a research paper entitled 'Britain in 1964'. This suggested that a series of papers should be produced on the challenges that were likely to be encountered in specific areas of policy in 1964. The first paper in the series was on education: the other proposed topics were pensions, housing, health, the standard of living, changes in industry and employment, and town planning. It was emphasised, though, that the purpose of the exercise was not to produce policy proposals but simply to 'think about the future'. In other words, there was no plan at this stage to amend the specific policy recommendations of the 1959 programme. This position was reinforced in July when the NEC discussed a document from Morgan Phillips and Peter Shore entitled 'The State of the Party'. Primarily, Phillips aimed to use this document as part of his campaign to restore unity in the Party. As Labour's Chairman, he was deeply concerned about the controversy which was likely to accompany the debates on Clause Four and unilateralism at the 1960 Conference: in order to off-set the effect of these debates, Phillips aimed to provide an opportunity for the Party to focus on a less immediate and
less divisive issue - Labour's strategy for victory in 1964. Again it was emphasised that the intention was not to examine the detail of Labour's policy. Indeed, it was even argued that the Party had spent too much time on the discussion and refinement of its programme after 1955;

"In recent years we have obviously failed to put across our policies. This is partly because we have had far too much policy for the electorate to absorb - a mistake that we must not repeat." (6)

The document argued that the Party should 'rigorously limit the number of policy statements that are produced'. Instead it was suggested that the NEC should write 'a small number of broad statements, showing what is wrong with Britain, and pointing the new direction which the Labour Party wishes to give to our affairs'. (7)

The analytical sections of 'The State of the Party' examined the trends and challenges which were emerging in British society in 1960. Peter Shore, who wrote these sections, aimed to show that the justification for economic planning in Britain in the 1960s was as powerful as ever. In fact, Shore was convinced that Crosland had failed to emphasise fully the case for planning in The Future Of Socialism;

'I think the influence of Tony Crosland on Party thinking was really at its peak before the 1959 election. Although he'd done in my view a very brilliant analysis of how things had developed in the post-war period, Crosland was terribly passive in his prescriptions: the market was going to be alright, the great contradictions had been eliminated in contemporary capitalism and therefore we could take a kind of relaxed view, you don't have to intervene very much, you don't plan very much, you leave it to the market. And on the social side, on the ownership side, you deal with it with taxation rather than with public ownership. But that was not the mood after 1959. It might have been Gaitskell's mood for
Shore at this time was influenced heavily by the analysis of contemporary capitalism which the economist J.K. Galbraith had outlined in *The Affluent Society*.

Galbraith argued that in capitalist countries there was an imbalance between the proportion of national resources which was spent on private consumption and the proportion of resources which the state devoted to public services: the result of this imbalance was an increasing contrast between private wealth and inadequate public services. In 'The State of the Party' Shore complained that Britain suffered from this maldistribution of resources and argued in addition that the main centres of private capitalist power were not subject to adequate democratic control:

'These adverse features of our society tie in, of course, with defects in our national system of values. We must emphasise that we cannot have a sane society when the values of private acquisitiveness and private advancement, so strongly excited by the techniques of modern mass persuasion, dominate the values of public service and mutual aid. We must show too, that we cannot have a genuinely democratic society when so many of the key decisions are made without reference to democratic control. Perhaps the most important question for us to answer in the next few years is how democracy can be made effective in a society where private power has become so powerfully concentrated.

We need not, indeed should not, take a sour attitude to the growth of general prosperity. But we must make it quite clear that in the more prosperous '60s as in the poverty-stricken '30s, the struggle for the primacy of the community interest over private selfishness goes on; and that in the struggle we know where we stand.'
that economic growth and rising living standards had created problems which only the state could address: controls over the location of industry had to be strengthened in order to stem the drift of population to the prosperous Midlands and South; public transport and urban planning had to be developed in order to deal with the crisis in the transport system as the number of vehicles on Britain's roads increased. Perhaps more importantly, it had become apparent that British investment in industrial research and development was inadequate - even the Conservative Government had recognised that it was necessary for the state to make public money available for this purpose. In an attempt to encourage the Party to lift its eyes from the conflicts over defence policy and Clause Four, 'The State of the Party' offered a vision of some of the challenges which Britain was likely to face in the 1960s. The significant point here, though, is that its proposed solutions to these challenges had all been outlined previously in the three year policy review. The idea that state intervention was required in the areas mentioned in the document had been accepted already in the Party's 1959 programme. The manifesto - which remained the official policy of the Party until the 1964 election - had committed Labour to the full use of the 1945 Distribution of Industry Act in order to control the location of industry; it committed Labour to a 'national plan which [covered] all the transport needs of an expanding economy'; it also promised 'an energetic application of science in all phases of our national life' - Plan for Progress in 1958 had stated that a Labour administration would use investment allowances to encourage industrial research and development.

The Executive endorsed 'The State of the Party' after amendment and agreed that it should be commended to Conference under a new title of 'Labour in the Sixties'. At an otherwise divisive meeting of delegates at Scarborough, the document's theme of scientific progress as a justification for economic planning was an idea on which the Party could unite. Wilson, who replied to the debate on the document on behalf of the Executive, delivered at Conference a message which was to become familiar in the years which followed: 'The world into which we are moving...is a world characterised by a scientific
revolution. That is why we say today that socialism must be harnessed to science and science to socialism'. (12) The document was approved by delegates on a show of hands and the Executive was instructed to prepare a statement on home policy in line with the recommendations made in 'Labour in the Sixties'. This had suggested that five domestic issues required particular attention: regional and urban development, transport, the crisis in education and the youth services, the decay of the welfare state, and capital investment in industry.

Work on the new policy statement began in November 1960 with the creation of a small sub-committee under the Chairmanship of Wilson. (13) It was agreed that the aim was to produce a statement which avoided 'unnecessary detail' on policy but which identified as sharply as possible Labour's main criticisms of the affluent society. (14) By April 1961 a draft version of the statement was ready for submission to the Policy Committee. At a meeting on 10 April the Committee accepted the broad framework of this draft but called for it to be shortened. (15) The revised draft was discussed at a further meeting on 20 April and particular attention was paid to the sections on building land, public ownership and education - the latter topic was especially significant as the Policy Committee had already agreed to review the Party's position on the public schools. (16) When the draft was presented to the NEC in May there were further complaints about the length of the statement. It was felt that the document should be written more like a short propaganda pamphlet and less like a long election manifesto. There was particular concern about the section on public ownership - mainly that it was too long and that there were too many commitments about the machinery that would be created for extending the public sector. On education it was suggested that the priorities should be taken from the 1958 statement, Learning to Live, and that 'while accepting the principle of integration, the section on public schools should be shorter and less definite on their future role'. (17) It was agreed finally that the statement should be rewritten by the Party's officers and research staff - Gaitskell, Brown, Crossman, Wilson and the team led by Shore. (18) Their draft was discussed, amended and approved at a
special meeting of the Executive on 27 June: the agreed title for the statement was **Signposts for the Sixties**. (19)

The document agreed by the Executive in June 1961 was the final general statement on domestic policy which Labour produced before the publication of the 1964 election manifesto - the other statements published after 1961 were on housing, social security and science. The principal theme of **Signposts for the Sixties** was taken from **Labour in the Sixties**: it argued that state planning was required to modernise Britain's economy at a time when the potential offered by scientific and technological progress was remarkable. There was also a reaffirmation of Labour's commitment to redress the imbalance between private wealth and public squalor which had been highlighted by Galbraith. As Peter Shore recalled;

'**Signposts for the Sixties** was very strongly influenced by the Galbraithian critique of the affluent society which we'd absorbed and found to be both helpful and relevant. So the mood from 1961 onwards was very much in favour of expansion of the public sector in general to make up for these great gaps between the development of people's private standard of living and their social and community services. We were in favour of increased public expenditure and indeed said so and had no doubts about it. And we were also - very much with the Harold Wilson input - in favour of using the public sector in the modernisation and rejuvenation of industry. So all the inhibitions about stopping nationalisation ended by saying - well no it's not nationalisation, it's an extension of the public sector generally to take on tasks which the private sector was failing to perform.' (20)

The statement began with a review of Britain's economic performance which would have been familiar to readers of **Plan for Progress**. The main charge was that Conservative mismanagement of the economy had enabled competitors in Europe to outstrip Britain's rate of economic growth; in the words of the document, the nation had fallen into 'comfortable complacency'. Production increases were constantly followed by
balance of payments problems and credit restrictions which reduced output and consumption - this sequence was known as the 'stop-go' economic cycle. The prime cause of the problem was the Conservative's 'refusal to plan' and their 'obstinate determination to use only the bluntest monetary controls'. Labour's proposed solution to economic failure was to realise the potential of the scientific revolution as a means of achieving economic growth. According to Signposts for the Sixties, efficient planning and supervision of the economy would ensure that the 'forces released by science' were directed to the service of the community: growth would be achieved and there would be a fair distribution of the product of expansion. The authors of the statement calculated that if Britain's rate of industrial growth had matched the average rate of growth in Western Europe, Government revenue would have increased by some £1,500 millions per annum without any rise in taxation. It was also claimed that Britain had suffered from increased inequality and a rapid concentration of economic power since 1951: again, this was a charge that had been made during the three year review - indeed, even the figures which were used to support the claim were taken from the 1956 document Towards Equality. (21)

The 1961 policy statement established increased investment in industry as the first objective of Labour's economic planning. To achieve 'speedy and purposive industrial investment' the Party proposed to create a National Industrial Planning Board. The origins of this policy for Labour can be traced back to 1931 when the Party's manifesto contained a commitment to establish a National Investment Board. (22) As we have seen, the same proposal also featured in Plan for Progress. However, whereas the rationale for increased investment in 1931 had been the reduction of unemployment, by 1961 the policy was designed primarily to improve Britain's rate of economic growth. In pursuit of the same objective, Signposts for the Sixties also stated that a Labour government would enlarge the National Research Development Corporation. The aim here was for the state to place research and development contracts with teams of scientists, to stimulate technical advance in civil industry, and to modernise industries which had fallen into decline. An
enlarged National Research Development Corporation with enhanced powers was envisaged as the agency through which the public sector of industry would be expanded;

'Once this Corporation was firmly established, the public sector would be able to advance where it is most needed - at the growing points of the British economy and in the new industries based on science.' (23)

This section of the policy statement can be contrasted with Crosland's thesis on the relationship between the state and industry. Crosland had argued that state involvement in industry should be confined in the main to the acquisition of equity shares - the idea was to provide the state with a stake in industrial profits, not to gain management control of companies or industries. (24) In contrast, the 1961 statement emphasised that the state should intervene in the management of industry to ensure that the potential offered by scientific and technical advance was exploited fully by companies. However, this justification for state intervention should be seen as a development of policy from the 1959 programme rather than as an innovation. As shown, the 1959 manifesto had promised 'an energetic application of science in all phases of our economic life', and had also pledged that a Labour government would ensure that industrial giants 'plan their operations in accordance with our national objectives of full employment and maximum efficiency'. (25) This at least implied that Labour was prepared to use the authority and resources of the state to achieve a modernisation of British industry. The difference in Signposts for the Sixties was that the mechanics of intervention were explained in rather more detail and that the policy itself was given a higher priority in the Party's programme. As Tudor Jones has argued recently, though, this renewed emphasis on public ownership and public control in Labour's programme can be seen in part as a strategy for healing the division in the Party which had been caused by Gaitskell's attempt to amend Clause Four: in practice, the apparent rehabilitation of public ownership as an instrument of economic planning was not followed
by an extensive commitment to an expansion of the public sector in the 1964 manifesto. (26)

Much of the remainder of Signposts for the Sixties was based on policies which had been agreed before 1959. The section on social security contained a renewed commitment to the National Superannuation scheme of 1957: the addition to this policy was a proposal for wage-related sickness and unemployment insurance benefits. The proposals for education were taken directly from the 1958 statement Learning to Live: the new development in this area was the plan to establish an Educational Trust which would decide on a scheme for the integration of the public schools into the state sector. As argued in a previous chapter, however, this proposal should not be interpreted as a major change of policy or principle for the Party. Labour's policy makers had supported the principle of integration in 1958, but they did not believe that a viable method could be found to implement the plan; by 1961, they were apparently more optimistic about the feasibility of integration and so a commitment on the public schools was added to Labour's programme. In essence, though, the new commitment was little more than a pledge to re-examine the feasibility of integration after the election of a Labour government - as shown, the outcome of this re-examination was the maintenance of the separate status of the public schools after 1964.

Labour's taxation plans were not set out in detail in the 1961 statement. Instead, the simple commitment to fair taxation which had appeared in Towards Equality and earlier policy statements was repeated. More specific proposals were outlined in the section which dealt with the ownership and the use of land. The most significant addition to Party policy in this area was the proposal for a Land Commission which would be empowered to purchase the freehold of land on which building or rebuilding was to take place. This policy was largely the work of Hugh Gaitskell, who described the idea as 'a hobby of mine for a number of years'. (27) The rationale for the proposal was that it would halt the uncontrolled rise of land values and at the same time facilitate effective town and country planning. One of the consequences of Labour's increased commitment to town and
country planning at this time was the abandonment of municipalisation as a component of the Party's housing policy. A Research Department paper in June 1960 had argued that the problem of housing and the issue of the ownership of tenanted accommodation had been superseded by problems such as rising land values and uncontrolled urban sprawl. (28) The principal task of the state, therefore, was to exercise a wide control over construction in urban and rural areas rather than to transfer the control of tenanted accommodation to local authorities. The omission of municipalisation from Signposts for the Sixties was criticised at the 1961 Blackpool Conference, but the document was accepted by delegates and it went on to form the basis of Labour's 1964 manifesto.

The Party's declared strategy in 1960 had been to avoid the production of a long series of policy statements: accordingly, Signposts for the Sixties remained Labour's main statement of domestic policy until September 1964. Three additional statements appeared in 1963, but none of them contained any new proposals of significance. The first of the three, Labour's Plan For Old Houses, set out the Party's plans for slum clearance and for the repair of properties which failed to meet a new minimum standard of quality. (29) New Frontiers For Social Security offered a more detailed account of Labour's proposals for wage-related welfare benefits and for an 'Income Guarantee', which would ensure that all retirement pensions were supplemented where necessary to meet a national minimum. (30) The final document in 1963, Labour and the Scientific Revolution, reinforced one of the main themes of Signposts for the Sixties: the commitment to science as the agent of social and economic change. (31)

As we have seen, this theme was at the heart of Wilson's speech at the 1963 Party Conference. (32) It also dominated the first half of Labour's 1964 manifesto, in which it was claimed:
'This is an age of unparalleled advance in human knowledge - and of unrivalled opportunity for good or ill. In ever-widening areas of the world the scientific revolution is now making it physically possible for the first time in human history to provide the whole people with the high living standards, the economic security, and the cultural values which in previous generations have been enjoyed by only a small wealthy minority'. (33)

In order to realise the potential that was offered by the scientific revolution, Labour's manifesto promised to create a 'New Britain' by 'mobilising the resources of technology under a national plan'. (34) In addition to the 'national plan', the manifesto also outlined a 'plan for industry', a 'plan for the regions', a 'plan for transport', a 'plan for stable prices' and a 'plan for tax reform'. The degree of emphasis which Labour assigned to planning in 1964 is therefore clear. However, in assessing the significance of this strategy a degree of caution is necessary. The first point to re-emphasise is that similar policies on planning had appeared in the 1959 programme. New proposals for economic planning in 1964 were limited in the main to the creation of a Ministry of Economic Affairs and a Ministry of Technology. The first of these new bodies was to be responsible for drawing up the national plan, the second aimed to bring new technology and new processes into industry. The only other new development in terms of planning in 1964 was the commitment to the creation of Regional Planning Boards. It should be noted, however, that this proposal represented an innovation in the structure of government rather than a new approach to the function of government at a regional level. Essentially, regional planning continued to mean the operation of the Distribution of Industry Act, the clearance of slums and the fight against overcrowding. Alongside these familiar tasks, the only new functions that were envisaged for the Regional Planning Boards were the implementation of programmes for new town and overspill development, and the rather vague aim of 'the co-ordination of higher education, further education and
industrial training required to maintain economic expansion'. (35)

The second point to make about the emphasis on planning in the 1964 manifesto concerns its impact on the electorate. In the General Secretary's analysis of Labour's 1964 victory no mention was made of the national plan, the New Britain campaign or the scientific and technological revolution. According to the 260 Labour candidates who completed questionnaires for this analysis, the most important issues in the election campaign were pensions, housing and education. (36) As we have seen, the Party's policies on these issues were based on proposals which had been agreed during the three year review. Education policy was taken from Learning to Live, with the additional proposal for the integration of the public schools. The policy on pensions was taken from National Superannuation, with the additional proposal for an income guarantee. To be sure, Labour's housing policy was altered in two important ways between 1959 and 1964 - municipalisation was abandoned and there was a new proposal for a Crown Land Commission - but the rest of the proposals were taken from Labour's 1959 manifesto. This continuity of policy was present in the remainder of the section on social services in the 1964 manifesto. The proposals for health care were taken from a policy statement which had been produced in June 1959 outside of the main three year review. (37) Social security policy also remained largely unchanged from 1959; the only new proposals were for wage-related sickness and unemployment benefits and for a new National Severance Pay scheme which would be applied to the whole work force.

Two conclusions should be drawn from this assessment of policy-making between 1959 and 1964. First, the 1964 manifesto differed from its predecessor mainly in tone rather than content; there was a continual emphasis on the language of planning, but the substantive policies remained largely unchanged from 1959. Secondly, this change of tone does not appear to have made a significant impact upon the electorate. Labour's own candidates found that many voters believed in 'the need for a change' of government in 1964. (38) But they also found
that the Party's promise of a 'New Britain' with a national plan was not mentioned frequently as they canvassed during the election. Instead, voters focused on the social issues which had been at the centre of Labour's campaign in 1959. The three year policy review which the revisionists had dominated, therefore, provided most of the programme which helped to bring Labour back into government in 1964.

References

2. Ibid.
4. Ibid. The paper on education was RD.34/March 1960, 'Education: Looking Ahead'.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Interview with Peter Shore.
15. Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 10 April 1961.
16. Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 20 April 1961. See also Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 5 December 1960 for the suggestion that the position of the public schools should be reviewed.
17. NEC Minutes, 16 May 1961.
18. Ibid.
20. Interview with Peter Shore.
21. It was noted, for example, that 1 per cent of the population owned approximately 50 per cent of the country's wealth.
25. Britain Belongs to You.
27. P. Williams, *op. cit.*, p.381.
29. Labour's Plan For Old Houses was based on the requirements of a Twelve Point Standard for building - this standard was already applied to houses which were modernised with the aid of discretionary improvement grants. A national survey would be used to establish whether old houses were worth preserving. If old houses could be made to meet the Twelve Point Standard at reasonable expense they would be modernised: if not, they would be demolished. Private landlords would carry out the modernisation with the help of improvement grants, or they could sell their property to the local authority so that the council could do the work. If a landlord refused to co-operate, the local authority would compulsorily purchase the property. Compulsory Purchase Orders would also be used to acquire properties for demolition. Large industrial cities where housing conditions were particularly poor would be classified as special Housing Areas and would be given priority in the allocation of resources. National government would help to provide the finance for this large-scale housing project. See RD.382/January 1963, Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 7 January 1963 and NEC Minutes, 23 January 1963.
30. This document claimed to present 'the most comprehensive and radical proposals for the reform of our social security, since the main principles of the Beveridge Report were incorporated in the National Insurance Act of 1946'. The aim of the policy was to provide subsistence benefits as of right and without recourse to the National Assistance Board. On this foundation, Labour aimed to build a new structure of graded contributions and graded benefits - the retirement pension would be wage-related for life, but wage-related sickness and unemployment benefits would be replaced by flat-rate benefits after the first year's absence from work. See RD.428/March 1963, (Revised), Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 11 March 1963 and NEC Minutes, 27 March 1963.

31. This statement identified the 'major expansion' of the universities as a priority. It suggested that at least 150,000 additional university places should be created by 1975. It was also argued that an expansion of adult training facilities was required to retrain workers who lost their jobs as a result of technological change. See RD.518/August 1963, (Revised), Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 17 September 1963 and NEC Minutes, 27 September 1963.


33. Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. 'General Election 1964, Final Report by the General Secretary', NEC Minutes, 28 October 1964.

37. Re.529/April 1959, 'Members One Of Another - Labour's Policy for the Health Services', Home Policy Sub-Committee Minutes, 11 May 1959 and NEC Minutes, 3 June 1959.

38. 'General Election 1964, Final Report by the General Secretary', NEC Minutes, 28 October 1964.
7. The Labour Left, 1955-1964

Hugh Gaitskell and his supporters dominated policy-making in the Party between 1955 and 1964. It will be argued here that the weakness of the Left opposition within the Party during the period made this domination of policy possible. In part, the continued marginalisation of the Labour Left was the result of disciplinary action on behalf of the leadership - this use of managerial authority has been discussed in detail by Eric Shaw and Lewis Minkin. (1) But marginalisation also reflected the failure of the Left to formulate a coherent, alternative programme to the revisionists. As will be shown, the domestic politics of the Left at this time continued to focus almost exclusively on the demand for increased public ownership. A 'New Left' outside Parliament produced some interesting ideas after 1957, but these ideas were often concerned with cultural analysis rather than with specific issues of policy. To be sure, the Left enjoyed some limited success after 1955 - they helped to defeat Gaitskell over his plan to amend Clause Four, and they forced him to make some tactical concessions on the issue of public ownership after this defeat - but their failure to influence policy overall was clear. The revisionists dominated policy-making because they won the battle of ideas within the Party after 1955 - there was no equivalent of the Future of Socialism produced by the Left. Although Wilson's election as Labour leader was seen by the Left as a victory, the previous chapter showed the extent to which Party policy remained unchanged after February 1963.

This thesis has argued that the preparation for the 1964 election victory began in the main in 1955. The aim of this chapter is to show that the weakness of the internal opposition to the Labour leadership at this time helped to make the recovery possible. In the absence of a Left opposition with new ideas, new strategies or a new analysis, the revisionists were able to dominate the PLP and the NEC with relative ease. The only real challenge which the leadership faced from the Left occurred after the 1959 election: as we have seen, though, the
development of this crisis owed more to the tactical mistakes of the leadership than it did to the vitality of the Left. Before discussing these issues further, it is perhaps useful to begin with a clarification of the meaning of the term 'the Left'.

The difficulties involved in defining and identifying the Left in the Party between 1955 and 1964 have been recognised in previous studies. Patrick Seyd referred to the ideological argument within Labour's ranks as 'Left/Right factionalism', but he conceded that there were divisions within either camp and acknowledged that politicians and activists could not always be classified in such simple terms. Seyd explained that the most persistent critics of the leadership often portrayed themselves as the guardians of the Party's socialist conscience. (2) Alan Warde also used the term 'the Left', but he qualified this usage with a description of the Left's political philosophy, which he referred to as 'fundamentalism'. Warde claimed that fundamentalists retained an understanding of socialism which had been developed during the inter-war years; and they still held to the central socialist assumption that social justice was impossible without common ownership of the means of production. (3)

Throughout this study the term 'Left' will be used to describe those individuals within the Labour movement who were opposed to the Gaitskell leadership and who shared an alternative, if at times ill-defined, vision of economic, social and industrial policy. The 'Left' was never a homogenous unit, but it existed as a group which consistently adopted a similar position on a wide range of policy issues: the points on which they agreed outnumbered the points over which they disagreed. The forms which the Left opposition assumed are rather more easy to define. Left activity within the apparatus of the Party took place inside the PLP, in the NEC and at Conference. Left opposition outside the Party apparatus took the form of extra-parliamentary groups such as 'Victory For Socialism' and the 'New Left' which emerged towards the end of the 1950s.
The Left shared a common understanding of most domestic and foreign issues, but their challenge was to persuade the Party as a whole to adopt this analysis. The first opportunity to begin this task was provided by the 1955 election defeat. It was no surprise that the Left blamed the Party leadership for the result of the election. Tribune's interpretation of the defeat was predictable enough, despite that fact that the paper had endorsed the Party's manifesto and campaigned for the implementation of its proposals. Labour, it now claimed, had lost because its policies were too cautious and too moderate to encourage enough of its potential supporters to turn out and vote. According to Tribune, the Party would have been served better by a campaign which had been based on genuine 'socialist' policies. (4) A careful selection of readers' letters reinforced the point. One socialist from Chelmsford wrote:

'I never voted in this election, not because of anything Bevan has said or done, but simply because the Labour leadership just did not give a fighting Opposition policy. I am a Socialist, and have been for many years. When Labour gets back to a real socialist policy (symbolised by Nye Bevan or anyone else) I shall go to the poll again.' (5)

It was of course simple for the columnists and readers of newspapers to call for 'real socialist' policies. It was much more difficult to construct these policies in detail and to persuade the Party leadership that they would win support from the electorate. As Crossman acknowledged in June 1955, the task of the Left in the second respect had been made more difficult by social and economic change in post-war Britain. He correctly perceived that in a prosperous society, the larger proportion of the electorate preferred to maintain the status quo and not to engage in radical change;

'people in Britain are more prosperous and more contented...We suddenly feel that our mission to save people from cataclysm and disaster has come unstuck. We are
missionaries without a mission, or missionaries more and more dubious about the mission.\(^{(6)}\)

This was the dilemma that a party of change faced in an era of widespread affluence. The Left, however, largely ignored the political implications of increased prosperity and full employment and continued to demand the transformation of the economy. According to their analysis, economic objectives such as full employment, redistribution of income and wealth, and increased investment in training and technology could only follow from increased public ownership. In fundamentalist terms, a dominant public sector was the prerequisite of the economic and social transformation of society which lay at the heart of the Left's mission. According to Benn Levy, a signatory to the 'Keep Left' manifesto in 1947, a belief in the widespread extension of nationalisation was the defining characteristic of the socialist. In an article in *Tribune*, Levy argued that while there was a consensus among the main political parties on the need for a degree of public enterprise - for the Post Office, the roads and the railways - the true socialist believed that public ownership should be the rule rather than the exception, even if the industries concerned produced profits and were managed competently in the private sector.\(^{(7)}\) Levy criticised Gaitskell for seeking to reform capitalism while leaving the basic structure of the economy untouched. Although he accepted the need to campaign for better schools, better medical facilities, better roads and more civil liberty, he also believed that Labour needed to offer much more if it was to continue as a socialist party;

"The essential thing to remember is that socialism is an economic system. It advocates the complete transformation of the basic economic structure of society... In short... it is a doctrine of replacement."\(^{(8)}\)

Jennie Lee reinforced this analysis during a parliamentary debate on government expenditure in July 1956;
'Economic situations have to be dealt with months, indeed years, ahead of events...we must be prepared to go forward with more controls, planning of our own resources, and more nationalisation. We cannot have some industries nationalised, with the price of their goods controlled, and other great industries allowed to go free with the sky as the ceiling so far as profits are concerned.' (9)

With these arguments the Left rejected the revisionist view of nationalisation and reaffirmed their commitment to an idea that had been a central strand in British socialist thought since the 1880s. It was no surprise that the Left attacked Crosland's analysis of post-war socialist economics. The review of The Future Of Socialism in Tribune was entitled, 'Socialism? How Dare He Use The Word!', but it offered nothing more constructive than a defence of nationalisation as a principle. (10) As the publication of the NEC's new policy document on public ownership in 1957 approached, the Left put forward a list of industries which they believed should be taken into the state sector. This included the motor-car industry - in the aftermath of major strikes at car plants in Coventry, Oxford and Birmingham - road transport, shipping, motor insurance, aircraft manufacturing, and the chemical and petroleum industries. (11) There were also calls to nationalise land, private schools, credit finance houses and the football pools. (12) As a result, the delegates' approval of Industry and Society at the 1957 Conference was a serious defeat for the Left. Thirty-two Labour MPs had already described the document in Reynolds News as a 'betrayal of socialism'. (13) Tribune also distanced itself from the policy, with a response to the Conference endorsement of Industry and Society that was headlined, 'We'll Keep The Red Flag Flying Here!'. (14) Barbara Castle made clear her reservations about the policy and rejected the claim that leading left-wingers in the trade unions and on the Executive had been satisfied with the document as it had been prepared for submission to Conference. She explained that Frank Cousins - the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union - Bevan and herself had criticised the
document at a joint meeting of the TUC Economic Committee and the Home Policy Sub-Committee of the National Executive. (15)

To be sure, Cousins expressed his reservations about Industry and Society at the Brighton Conference, but he cast his union's votes in favour of the document and helped to ensure that it was accepted with a large majority. (16) The exercise of block votes at Conference by Cousins and other trade union leaders was a matter of particular concern to the Left. In addition to their demands for more public ownership, the Left at this time was preoccupied with the distribution of power within the Party. They were aware that they needed to change the way in which the Party was managed and controlled if they were to end their marginalisation. The conclusion which they drew from the Bevanites' failure to amend Challenge to Britain in 1953 was that the constitution of the Party required alteration before the Left could exercise its influence over policy-making. In their view, the rules and procedures which were applied both to the PLP and to the NEC were in need of reform. Bevan opened the campaign for reform at a Tribune meeting in Manchester on 4 February 1956 - two days after he failed to defeat Jim Griffiths for the Deputy Leadership of the Party. (17) He complained that the revisionists' transformation of policy had been achieved at the expense of democracy within the PLP. Labour MPs, he explained, were expected to vote in Parliament in accordance with the strategy that was agreed in secret at PLP meetings. Constituency party members and Labour voters were unable to find out how their elected representatives had voted on policy issues at these meetings, and if a Labour Member decided to ignore the decision of a Party meeting and to exercise their own judgement in a parliamentary division the possible consequence was expulsion from the PLP. In this way, control of the movement at Westminster was kept firmly in the hands of the parliamentary leadership, minority points of view were stifled and the principle of democratic accountability was undermined. (18)

In March Bevan switched the focus of his criticism to the voting arrangements at Conference. His complaint this time was that a small number of trade union leaders elected a majority of the National Executive and then decisively influenced voting on
the policy documents which the NEC produced for Conference. In short, trade union leaders elected the policy makers and controlled the process by which policy was endorsed. As Bevan pointed out, this arrangement excluded the rank and file membership of the Party from decision making.\(^{(19)}\) Throughout the remainder of 1956, though, Bevan's commitment to the reform of Labour's constitution became less vocal. As we have seen, in February 1956 he accepted Gaitskell's invitation to become Shadow Colonial Secretary. And as the working relationship between the two old rivals improved in the months that followed, Bevan became less inclined to create problems for the Party leader. As Bevan quietly retreated on the issue of internal Party democracy, the lead in the campaign was taken over by a new group which called itself Victory for Socialism (VFS).

VFS was a left-wing ginger group whose main concerns were the organisation of the Party and the promotion of two policies: public ownership and unilateralism. The name had been used originally by a Labour group in London in 1944 and this enabled the organisers of VFS to claim that they had simply revived an organisation which the NEC had tolerated in the past.\(^{(20)}\) The aims of the new group were outlined in a pamphlet entitled Tho'Cowards Flinch, which was produced jointly by VFS and Future, the socialist monthly publication, in 1956.\(^{(21)}\) The overall theme of this pamphlet was democracy within the Labour Party - in particular, the distorting influence of the block vote. Labour, it was argued, would never adopt the policies required to carry through the 'democratic socialist revolution' until it transferred power away from the trade unions and parliamentary leadership and towards the individual membership.\(^{(22)}\) A study of voting figures from Party Conferences was used to show the extent to which the constituency parties had been marginalised: only on the rare occasions when the trade unions were evenly divided on an issue could the local parties hold the balance of power and exercise an influence over policy. Usually, however, the major trade union executives supported the wishes of the PLP leadership at Conference and ensured that the Party hierarchy could rely on a majority on most issues. This relationship, according to the pamphlet, resulted in the
constant adoption of cautious, reformist policies and an unhealthy divergence of opinion between the leadership and the rank and file;

'The evidence suggests that the Constituency Parties will not succeed in committing the Labour Party to the more radical policies they advocate unless and until they are able to secure a majority for such policies at the Trade Union Congress or in the Parliamentary Party.' (23)

No detailed attempt was made to outline any 'radical policies' as the authors were concerned primarily with the internal machinery of the Party. (24) Three main suggestions for reform of this machinery were put forward which the authors believed would end the leadership's domination of policy and enable the Party to adopt a 'radical' programme. First, it was proposed that meetings of the PLP should be opened to the public, except on occasions when parliamentary tactics were discussed. (25) The rationale for this was that constituency party members and Labour voters should have the right to know how each Labour MP voted at Party meetings - it was also argued that constituency parties should have the right to replace Labour members whose views on policy differed consistently from their local activists. Secondly, it was suggested that standing orders in the PLP should be abolished. (26) This would allow the Left to have their views represented in the parliamentary party without the fear of disciplinary action. Finally, it was argued that the block vote should be 'decentralised'. Under this arrangement, trade unions would lose their right to vote as a national block on political matters at Conference. They would continue to be represented nationally at the TUC on industrial matters, but on political matters individual trade union branches would be represented by the constituency party to which they were affiliated. (27) The authors conceded that this change would take time to organise, but they insisted that it was the best way to ensure that the Party accurately reflected the views of its membership. (28)
Victory For Socialism aimed to gather support for its proposals in the spring of 1956 by inviting delegates from the various strands of the Party to a conference on internal Party democracy in London. Predictably, the NEC was concerned by this development. Morgan Phillips informed the organisers that the NEC 'strongly opposed Conferences of this kind, whose only purpose can be to try and secure organised unofficial groups within the Party.' When VFS refused to cancel the meeting, Phillips wrote to the Secretaries of all the CLPs in London and the Southern Region and warned them not to participate in action that was 'calculated to impair the unity of the Party'. The warning was deliberately vague because it was far from clear whether VFS had infringed any Party rules. Also, the NEC was understandably reluctant to threaten specific disciplinary action against more than 50 local parties. Instead, the NEC chose to monitor the group. Len Williams, the Party's National Agent, drew up a list of the 13 leading parliamentarians in VFS, together with their election majorities for 1951 and 1955 and their local party membership figures for the period between 1952 and 1954. The aim was to build up a 'general picture of the state of the organisation [of VFS] in the constituencies'.

According to the organisers, the effect of the NEC warning was to increase the attendance at the VFS meeting. Delegates from 53 constituency parties, together with representatives of other affiliated groups, took part in the conference on 'Democracy within the Labour Party' in April 1956. The report of the meeting in The Times stated that most of the delegates appeared to be 'loyal but restless' members of the Party with a lower average age than was usual at Labour Party meetings. Discussion at the meeting focused mainly on the proposals which had been put forward in Tho' Cowards Flinch; particular interest was reserved for the suggestions which dealt with the reform of the block vote at Conference - these voting arrangements were codified in Clause Six of the constitution. It was important for supporters of reform to push this issue at the time because 1956 was a year in which constitutional changes could be discussed at the Party Conference. Under Labour's rules, amendments to the constitution could be considered only at every third annual
Victory for Socialism's campaign for democracy in the Party appears to have made an impact. The agenda for the 1956 Blackpool Conference included several proposed amendments to Clause Six which drew directly on ideas from Tho' Cowards Flinch. (36) Ultimately, though, the attempt by VFS and its supporters in the constituency parties to reform the block vote was unsuccessful. The main problem they faced was clear enough. Constitutional changes had to be carried by a vote at Conference. As long as the trade union executives wished to hold on to their power, no other section of the Party had sufficient voting strength to take it away. In the words of Tribune, the outcome of the votes on the reform of the constitution in 1956 were 'as close as a race between a jet plane and a helicopter'. (37) The proposed changes to the voting arrangements at Conference were defeated during a private session of delegates at Blackpool. (38)

This defeat led to a temporary decline in VFS activity. Under the rules of the Party, the next opportunity to change Labour's constitution would not arrive until 1959, and there was little reason to expect that a renewed campaign would be more successful than before. It was the leadership's victories at the 1957 Brighton Conference which eventually provided the impetus for the second revival of VFS. For the Left, Brighton was a disaster. As we have seen, in addition to the approval of Industry and Society, the Left was defeated on a motion which called for Britain to renounce unilaterally its nuclear weapons. To make matters worse, the opposition to the unilateralist motion had been led by Aneurin Bevan. Michael Foot recalled the impact which this made on the Left in his biography of Bevan:

'The Left of the Party looked for a moment as if it had exterminated itself. Without its incomparable leader it was unlikely to regather strength for years.' (39)

In the aftermath of the defeats at Brighton, it appeared that the marginalisation of the Left within the PLP, the NEC and at Conference ruled out the possibility of victories on policy
inside the Party apparatus. Disillusioned ex-Bevanites decided instead to revive Victory for Socialism and to continue to fight for the Left outside of the PLP and the NEC. The main initiative this time was provided by Michael Foot, Ian Mikardo and Stephen Swingler, who became chairman of the new organisation. The revival was announced in February 1958 - the same month that CND was launched - and the general aims, according to Swingler, were to fight apathy in the Labour ranks, stimulate support for a forthright socialist policy and reaffirm the validity of Clause Four. In an attempt to achieve these objectives, the revived VFS adopted an ambitious organisational structure which included an Executive Committee, two policy committees, fourteen area groups and an annual conference. The plan was to recruit members from the constituencies, the unions and the PLP who could fill this network throughout the country. Some areas were more receptive than others. The north-west, for example, was described by one Gaitskell supporter as 'an absolute hotbed of Victory for Socialism'.

This assessment, though, should be placed in perspective - even at its height in 1958 VFS managed to recruit only approximately 1000 members. In fact, according to the sample of local parties that was used for this thesis, throughout the second half of the 1950s VFS encountered a mixed reception in the constituencies. For example, Sheffield Hallam CLP opposed the campaign to amend the block vote, and no mention is made of VFS in their General Management Committee minutes. Newcastle West CLP opposed VFS, but York CLP and Salford City CLP both supported the group unequivocally. Stockport CLP rejected the suggestion from Croydon CLP that an annual meeting of constituency parties should precede Conference, but in 1956 their delegate to Conference was instructed to support any composite resolutions which called for an increase in the influence of the local parties. Woolwich CLP received literature from VFS, but the minutes of their meetings contain no response to the group's overtures. Hornchurch CLP agreed that 'something should be done to overcome the block vote', but the local party leadership was equivocal about the attendance of its members at VFS meetings. Hornchurch CLP was in an
interesting position on this issue because its prospective parliamentary candidate was Jo Richardson, the secretary of Victory for Socialism. In July 1960 she was asked to appear before the General Management Committee of the local party to defend VFS against a charge of disloyalty to the Labour Party - this was after the group had issued a statement of no confidence in Gaitskell's leadership. The vote of censure was lost, but the episode confirmed that VFS had to operate with a degree of caution to maintain its support among the local parties.

Despite the relatively low membership of VFS, the NEC was again disturbed by the prospect of a new organisation within the Party with its own policy groups. Morgan Phillips reminded VFS and all local Labour parties of the rules which governed separate organisations within the Party. Representatives of the group were also asked to meet the Chairmen's Sub-Committee, the body within the NEC which at the time dealt with disciplinary matters. The NEC argued that the unity of the Party was essential as a general election was expected in 1959. Phillips, in a letter sent to every CLP in the country, complained that the publication of alternative policy statements would lead to confusion, especially as the Executive had almost completed its own three year review of policy. If VFS was allowed to organise in the constituencies, he argued, it would distract Labour from its real aim of defeating the Tories and it would help to persuade the electorate that serious divisions continued to exist within the Party.

Representatives from VFS, though, emphasised that they 'had no intention of adopting a separate programme or policy' during their meeting with the Chairmen's Sub-Committee in March. The simple aim of the group, they argued, was to stimulate discussion on socialist principles. Gaitskell was not persuaded by this argument and told the leaders of VFS that their organisation was unacceptable because it represented a party within the Party. According to the minutes of the meeting, Gaitskell argued that;

'A national organisation composed of like minded people, with an executive committee, an annual conference and branches, existing not only to discuss policy, but also to propogate
particular views seemed to go beyond the limits of what was permissible'. (55)

The precautionary measures which the NEC took against VFS were understandable. The amendment to the constitution which dealt with the existence of separate groups within the Party had been passed by an overwhelming majority of delegates at the 1946 Conference. (56) It was an important part of the NEC's function to enforce the rules and constitution of the Party, especially if it believed that action by a group within the movement might damage Labour's prospects of electoral success. The policy review had signalled the leadership's desire to modernise the Party and to move Labour away from an economic policy which was based upon increased state ownership through public corporations. Victory for Socialism effectively wished to reverse this process and to return to a policy which was driven by Clause Four fundamentalism. Michael Foot, at the revived group's inaugural meeting in London in March 1958, based his argument for increased public ownership on the most 'spectacular fact' of the last 30 years - the way in which the Communist states had revived their economies. (57) According to the account of his speech in the Manchester Guardian, Foot also predicted that the world was heading towards another economic slump and that increased nationalisation was required to enable Britain to deal with this impending crisis;

'Did anyone in the Labour Party really think that it would be able to cope with this [crisis] without more extensive public ownership than was at present foreseen in the Party's programme?' (58)

The revisionist Labour leadership rejected Foot's economics as firmly as they rejected his unilateralism. The national press was broadly united in its support for the leadership's action of the NEC against VFS. (59) In the Daily Mirror, for example, Cassandra argued that while the Tories were unpopular in the country, there was still little enthusiasm for Labour. Instead there was only apathy;
'This lassitude will not be swept away by Mr Mikardo and his band of political liquorice all-sorts. The voters will either yawn more widely or will turn their backs on a party that spawns discontent on the eve of battle. Victory for Socialism is one of the great misnomers of recent political history. It is defeat for Socialism and victory only for dissension, for apostasy, for chaos and for selfish muddleheadedness.' (60)

The chairman of VFS denied that the group created division within Labour's ranks. Instead, he argued that VFS aimed to infuse Labour with a 'Socialist spirit' and to contribute to a 'living unity' in the Party by stimulating discussion on important issues. (61) Nevertheless, the attention of the Chairmen's Sub-Committee of the NEC led Victory for Socialism to change the descriptions of its activities in an attempt to lower its profile and to deflect accusations that it was a party within the Party. As a result, VFS 'branches in the constituencies' became 'discussion groups' and VFS 'manifestos' became 'statements to the press'. (62) Neither the representatives of the group nor the Chairmen's Sub-Committee was willing to discuss their meeting in March in any depth, beyond stating that a 'full and frank discussion' had taken place - an ominous formula. (63) The press, meanwhile, noted the absence of Aneurin Bevan from the meeting with his former colleagues. As Party treasurer, Bevan was included on the disciplinary committee which had called for a meeting with VFS, but he failed to attend. (64)

Although the meeting with the Chairmen's Sub-Committee was a clear warning to VFS, the group decided to publish its Statement of Aims as a basis for discussion within the Labour Party on 21 March 1958. A summary of this statement illustrates the extent to which the domestic policy priorities of the group differed from those of the leadership. Victory for Socialism called for;

1. A rapid expansion of the social ownership of all the centres of financial, commercial, industrial and land-owning power, by selecting the most appropriate of a number of
different means - nationalisation, municipalisation and co-operative enterprises.

2. More accountability to Parliament in the public sector of the economy and the creation of an effective system of workers' and consumers' participation in management.

3. Meanwhile, the private sector must be subjected to effective controls, financial and physical, to ensure that it operates in the national interest. The gambling functions of the City must be eliminated.

4. The widest possible extension of the social services, including an education system in which every form of privilege is removed and the public schools are placed at the disposal of the nation.

5. The creation of a society with full civil and personal freedom, and with the widest opportunities for every man and woman to take part in shaping it.'(65)

The statement's first aim was the most important departure from official Labour policy. Despite the ambiguities which Party statements on public ownership frequently contained, it was at least clear that Labour's programme did not aim to achieve an extension of the public sector on the scale that was envisaged by Victory for Socialism - even in the longer-term. One of the aims expressed in the second point in the statement, increased workers' participation in management, was discussed by delegates at the 1957 Conference during the debate on Public Enterprise, and it was rejected after the trade unions had made it clear that they were opposed to the idea. And as we have seen, the absorption of public schools into the state system was eventually rejected by the policy makers in 1958 on the grounds of impracticality. The aims expressed in the third and fifth points of the statement were much closer to official Labour policy, but the task of finding a practical way of achieving these aims was an entirely more complex matter. The absence of new thinking by the Left, or even a recognition that structural changes had taken place in the British economy since the war, was a marked feature of the Statement of Aims. The impact of the welfare state, the increase in white-collar work, the growing
influence of the managerial sector and the opportunities which seemed to be offered by Keynesian economic management were not addressed. Aside from the fact that VFS called for an expansion of the public sector and the welfare state - because progress had already been made in these areas - their main ideas differed little from those of the Labour Left of the 1930s. (66)

After the initial interest which had accompanied the group's revival and its problems with the Executive, VFS faded from public view during the months which led up to the 1959 election. Jo Richardson, the group's secretary, has rejected the idea that the threat of disciplinary action by the NEC seriously impaired VFS activity, but she acknowledged that the organisation backtracked after March 1958. (67) The original vision of a highly organised, national group was not realised, primarily because of a lack of support in the constituencies. Even if a high degree of organisation had been achieved, though, there is no reason to believe that VFS wished to engage in an open conflict with the Party leadership, especially when a general election was imminent. To be sure, the Left disagreed with Gaitskell's development of policy, but their desire to see a Labour victory at the election was genuine. Recrimination could always come after the campaign.

The Left did not welcome the 1959 defeat, but they saw it as a vindication of the attacks which they had made on the leadership's policies and this strengthened their resolve to continue the fight. Under the headline 'What Are We Going To Do?', Tribune offered its analysis of the election result and its early thoughts on Labour's future. According to this article, the Party's main weakness was its economic policy. It argued that while voters were attracted by many of Labour's promises, particularly on housing and pensions, they did not believe that a socialist government would be able to finance these commitments without higher rates of income tax. Gaitskell's promise to fulfil the manifesto pledges without increasing income tax was blamed for persuading the public 'that Labour did not believe in its own programme'. (68) The solution offered by Tribune was predictable: increased state planning and
an expansion of the public sector. Commitments on public ownership were unpopular with the electorate, it was claimed, because the Labour leadership had failed to present this part of the programme with any enthusiasm;

'Of course, nationalisation is unpopular. How could it be otherwise, when at each successive election Labour leaders show that they regard it, not as a means to advance Britain's future, but as an outdated dogma they would love to discard?'(69)

The defence of nationalisation was continued by the Left in the weeks after the defeat. The Executive Committee of Victory for Socialism published its new manifesto, The Age For Socialism, a month after the election. Its central theme was the defence of traditional socialist principles. Instead of revising socialism, the manifesto argued, the Party should undertake a long-term programme to educate voters about its history and purpose. A return to policies that were based firmly on the Party's old principles was offered as a route to electoral success. This meant an expansion of social ownership, redistribution of income and wealth, dispersal of economic power, full employment and disarmament.(70) According to the authors, these policies had to be combined with a vision of a society which was based on 'higher moral values' - though this section of the manifesto was understandably vague. The familiar demand for constitutional change in the Party was also included in the manifesto.(71)

The response of Victory for Socialism to the election defeat showed that the group was still preoccupied with the battles of the mid-1950s. However, there were at least signs after October 1959 that members of the Left were prepared to engage in new thinking. Richard Crossman, the former Bevanite, moved from being a 'temporary Gaitskellite' to a 'rogue elephant' after the election.(72) He began to question the direction in which the Party was led and he produced the first significant challenge to the revisionists' analysis of Party strategy in the post-war prosperous society. His estrangement from the Party leader was
motivated both by personal and political factors, but for the purposes of this study the result of the breach is of greater significance than the cause. Crossman's Fabian pamphlet of June 1960, *Labour in the Affluent Society*, was based upon a lecture he had delivered in November 1959. Its theme was the future of the Labour Party in a society which enjoyed economic growth and rising living standards. The important question for Crossman was whether Labour still had the potential to win elections when the Conservatives apparently had the ability to manipulate both the economic cycle and the electoral timetable in their favour. The answer, according to the pamphlet, depended on the political role which the Labour Party chose for itself.

The two roles which the party in opposition could choose, according to Crossman, were either 'Fighting Opposition' or 'Alternative Government'. As a fighting opposition, Labour would need to present itself as an 'anti-Establishment' party of radical change which was committed to a thorough reorganisation of the British economy. As an alternative government, the emphasis would be on caution and responsibility. There would be a commitment to minor reforms and to an increase in social expenditure, but the basic structure of the mixed economy would remain untouched. As we have seen, alternative government was the role which Gaitskell had chosen for Labour: Crossman likened the Party in this respect to the Democrats in the USA and described Labour as 'an alternative team of management inside the Establishment'.

Crossman believed that Gaitskell and the revisionists had chosen the wrong role for Labour and he accused them of having placed too much faith in the 'swing of the pendulum' in British politics - this pendulum theory was based on the assumption that political power oscillated between the two major parties at regular intervals. Gaitskell and his colleagues had concluded apparently that concessions which the Left had won on policy had prevented the pendulum from swinging. In particular, the leadership appeared to believe that the electorate saw Labour as a party which was 'dogmatically wedded to wholesale nationalisation'. In essence, revisionists argued that Labour had to regain the trust of the floating voters by adopting a
cautious, moderate programme which did not include radical economic measures and which did not imply a return to the austerity of the Attlee years. Crossman argued that this approach was mistaken because the pendulum theory on which it was based was simply untenable. Power was not shared between the parties in modern Britain, he explained, it was usually held by the Conservatives. According to Crossman, Labour governments were only elected in exceptional circumstances;

'A left-wing government is required only where the change must be radical and involve a repudiation of orthodoxy; and the occasion for it will be a crisis in which the people, shaken out of its complacency, loses confidence in its traditional rulers...and quite deliberately insists that what the country needs are new men and a big step forward.' (75)

If this proposition was accepted, the revisionists' strategy for Labour in opposition had to be reversed. Instead of moderation, Labour needed to offer the electorate a new approach to economic, social and foreign issues which differed clearly from the policies of the Conservatives. The Party needed to have radical policies in place in order to offer a way out of the 'crisis' when it came. Labour had to maintain a 'Socialist challenge to the established order' and to wait in the wings for the inevitable call from the electorate once the Conservatives had been overtaken by crisis. Crossman was aware that his thesis implied long periods out of office for Labour, but a left-wing party which attempted to adapt its policies in order to gain regular power in his view ultimately lost its principles and its sense of direction.

This strategy, of course, was reliant on the arrival of a crisis from which Labour could rescue the country. Crossman believed that he had detected such a crisis in the distance. The affluent societies of the West, he argued, were inherently unstable because of the way in which they neglected investment in the public sector. Schools, housing, roads and public services generally were starved of resources because Western governments preferred to keep taxation to a minimum in order to
fuel consumerism - this was the familiar Galbraithian critique of private affluence and public squalor. Consequently, according to Crossman, Western economies would be overtaken by the planned economies of the Communist world;

'in terms of military power, of industrial development, of technological advance, of mass literacy and, eventually, of mass consumption too, the planned Socialist economy, as exemplified in the Communist States, is proving its capacity to outpace and overtake the wealthy and comfortable Western economies.' (76)

Labour's task, therefore, was to convince the electorate about the impending crisis in the nation's public services and infrastructure, and to explain that the economies of the West were failing to match the economic growth rates of the Communist states. The proposed solution to this 'crisis' of declining public services and low growth was a reversal of the balance of the economy. In other words, an interesting analysis was followed by the familiar call for state planning and public ownership:

'It is, I believe, for this creeping crisis of the 1960s and 1970s that the leadership of the Labour Party should hold itself in reserve, refusing in any way to come to terms with the Affluent Society, warning the electorate of the troubles that lie ahead and explaining why they can only be tackled by ensuring that public enterprise dominates the whole economy and creates the climate in which private enterprise works.'(77)

Crossman was characteristically pleased with his work. In a letter to Thomas Balogh, at the time Wilson's unofficial economics adviser, he declared that his pamphlet had 'filled a vacuum by providing the first reasoned, serious reply to the Crosland - Jenkins - Jay - Gaitskell Revisionist offensive'. (78) Not only had trade union leaders apparently accepted his analysis, Wilson had taken over the whole argument
and George Brown had accepted his ideas. In the same way that
the Party would eventually rescue the country from crisis, so
Crossman believed that he had rescued the Party from
intellectual stagnation. 'The fact is the Party hasn't got any
theory, and this miserable little pamphlet has provided them
some.' (79)

It is now clear of course that Crossman over-estimated both
the scale of the 'crisis' which was required to bring Labour
back into power in 1964 and the strength of the Communist
economies. His analysis nevertheless had an impact in the Party
in the first half of the 1960s. Wilson's 'New Britain' campaign,
with its emphasis on scientific planning as a means of reversing
economic decline, recalled the tone if not the substance of
Crossman's thesis - the 1964 manifesto did not focus on the
decline of the West generally in relation to the Communist
states, it emphasised instead Britain's failure to match the
'roaring progress of other western powers'. (80) It was perhaps to
be expected that Crossman and others on the Labour Left would
look to the Communist states for evidence of the success of
state planning and public ownership. This did not necessarily
imply, though, that they supported other aspects of Communist
rule. Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 and Krushchov's
denunciation of Stalin in the same year had led to mass
resignations from the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)
and a growing disillusionment with communism on the broad left
of British politics. As a result of this disillusionment, a
group of Marxist intellectuals in Britain sought to establish a
New Left. Their aim was to adapt the traditional Marxist concern
with class structure and power to the new conditions of the
affluent society and the Cold War. This New Left had no tangible
influence on Labour politics - there is no evidence to suggest
that a single line of Labour's policy documents would have been
different if the New Left had never existed - but it offered a
sustained critique of the Party and the Labour Left which is
relevant to this study.

The origins of the New Left can be traced back to May 1957
and the first publication of The New Reasoner, a journal which
was edited by two Marxist intellectuals and historians who had
resigned from the CPGB, John Saville and E.P. Thompson. This publication shared similar concerns with another journal, the Universities and Left Review. In January 1960 the two publications merged to form the New Left Review with an editorial board that contained a novelist and specialists in history, sociology and literature. This eclectic collection demonstrated the desire of the New Left to move towards a broader concept of politics - one that examined cultural and social developments in Britain as well as the traditional narrow concerns of economics and politics.

According to the New Left, socialists had to recognise that political views and attitudes were continually shaped by everyday experience. The influence of advertisers, film-makers, television programmes and popular music, for example, were a central part of the political process because they shaped individuals' expectations and perceptions. In its first editorial the New Left Review argued that the narrow materialism which was constantly promoted in the affluent society had to be challenged, the benefits of co-operation and living as a community had to be set against a world in which self-interest and the accumulation of luxury consumer goods were the principal guides to behaviour. In their view, Labour's mistake was that it continued to rely on poverty and exploitation as factors which would drive voters to support the Party;

'People have to be confronted with experience, called to the "society of equals", not because they have never had it so bad, but because the "society of equals" is better than the best soft-selling consumer-capitalist society, and life is something lived, not something one passes through like tea through a strainer'. (81)

The New Left had an ambivalent attitude towards the Labour Party. They constantly accused both wings of the Party of conservatism, but they were aware too that Labour was the only party which could implement some of the economic and social changes in Britain which they believed were necessary. Where possible, therefore, the New Left Review engaged in constructive
criticism, though this often meant that difficult questions were asked rather than answered. After the Clause Four debate in the summer of 1960, for example, the 'weakness' of the Labour Left was outlined in an editorial. (82) This accused the Left of failing to convert a manoeuvre that was intended to destroy them into a political debate that could have transformed the movement. It argued that the Left received the backing of the constituency parties purely because of past loyalties, not because they had been convinced by the arguments: 'The constituency parties are still instinctively inclined to the left, but they have not heard a convincing case for common ownership since 1945'. (83) The concluding paragraph aimed to give some hope to the Labour Left, but the scale of the tasks which it was set was more likely to induce despair;

'There are, surely, three main tasks for the Left. The first is to develop the moral and economic case for socialism in a developed and so-called 'affluent' society. The second is to recreate the tattered vision of a new society. The third is to discover the political means for taking us through to that society in the sixties, without the risk of nuclear extermination. Are there no answers to these questions? ' (84)

If the editors had any answers they chose not to print them. The New Left Review preferred analysis to practical politics. It aimed primarily to provide a forum for new ideas about the development of the Left, but too often it failed to acknowledge that new ideas and quality writing were of little or no political value without a corresponding strategy for winning power in Britain. In New Left politics, winning power was never a primary consideration.

Ralph Miliband, a leading theorist on the New Left, argued that the election of a Labour government was largely meaningless until the Party was committed to radical change. And on the evidence of the recent past, Miliband did not believe that a Labour government that was elected in the early 1960s would implement any substantive reform. He was particularly critical of Gaitskell and the revisionists for their belief in the
virtues of a mixed economy. By adopting a cautious, empirical approach in an effort to reassure voters, Miliband believed that the Party had lost sight of the need to challenge modern capitalism. Instead, Labour presented socialism as 'a mean little experiment in bureaucratic piecemeal social engineering', which emphasised reform on single issues. Miliband believed that Labour had to rediscover its class consciousness and to commit itself to the alteration of the structure of Britain's economy - even though the evidence suggested that the bulk of the electorate would reject the policy. Indeed, he attacked the Party's preoccupation with winning power and argued that the 1945 election victory had given Labour a 'ministerial obsession'. His alternative strategy for Labour in opposition could have appeared in any Tribune editorial since the first edition was published in 1937;

'In terms of programme and in the immediate, local context, this means, above all, a specific and unambiguous rededication to common ownership as Labour's central and distinctive purpose.' (86)

For all the professed new thinking of the New Left, therefore, the centrepiece of their economic policy remained a dominant public sector. Long articles which criticised Crosland's thesis on the changed nature of capitalism ended with a straightforward call for more public ownership. For these writers, Crosland had underestimated the significance of the profit motive as the driving force behind the dominant private sector. This was a similar argument to the one which had been presented by J.K. Galbraith and Crossman. According to the New Left, the structural problems within capitalism could be solved only by transforming the economy and ensuring that capital and profits were held in the main by the public sector and used for the benefit of the whole community. Increased taxation of the profits of the private sector was not seen as a viable alternative, because high levels of taxation would discourage private inward investment in Britain. Public ownership, the New Left argued, was the only mechanism a government could use to
direct the economy, to safeguard public services and to achieve steady growth without inflation. This proposition, however, led to a series of difficult questions which the New Left failed to answer satisfactorily. For example: how would units in the private sector be transferred to the public sector? Once these units were transferred, who would decide how to allocate resources between them or define what the 'interests of the community' meant in practical terms?

Although questions remained about the implementation of the policy of public ownership, the New Left and the Left were at least clear that one of the justifications for the policy was the continued existence of poverty in the affluent society: Tribune and the New Left Review carried regular articles on this topic. The imbalance between poverty and prosperity in Britain, though, had long been recognised by the Party leadership - as we have seen, social equality was at the centre of Labour's election campaign in 1959. Nevertheless, the New Left believed that a Party which was led by Gaitskell would never be able to tackle the poverty and economic problems which they publicised. As a result, his death in 1963 caused them little grief. Tom Nairn, writing in the New Left Review in the summer of 1964, referred to Gaitskell's 'utterly uninventive mind' and 'political blunders' and described him as a 'one-dimensional figure'. He concluded his article with a strong personal attack;

'Gaitskell's death was not tragic... The tragedy lay in his life, in the very ignominious triumph which occasioned the idolatry of his name... It was the tragedy of the Labour Party, and above all of the Labour left, trampled upon so easily by mediocrity acting in the service of dead ideals... Bourgeois society no longer gives birth to heroes, only to charlatans. But only in British bourgeois society can a great charlatan act out his part as head of the Labour movement, as the political guide of the working class, under a socialist banner, and without fear of detection by his victims.'
The views of the New Left on Wilson during this period were much more favourable. In 1964 the *New Left Review* published this analysis of Gaitskell's successor:

'For the first time in its history, the Labour Party is now led by a man who by any standards is a consumately adroit and aggressive politician. The long reign of mediocrity is over, MacDonald, Henderson, Attlee, Gaitskell - whether honourable or contemptible, the leaders of the Labour Party have always had in common political timidity, tactical incapacity and miserable intellectual vacuity...The Labour Party has at last after 50 years of failing, produced a dynamic and capable leader.' (91)

To be sure, the belief that 'one of their own' had captured the leadership in 1963 was a fillip for the Left. As Mikardo has pointed out, even if the change of leadership was not accompanied by a corresponding change of policy, the symbolic importance of the result was clear: 'Harold's victory was a negative triumph for the Left because it was a defeat for the Right'. (92) The proposition that Wilson's succession was a 'triumph for the Left', though, requires some qualification. As we have seen, the election of Wilson by the PLP was by no means an endorsement of policies which had been advocated by the Left - to a large extent, his success was a comment on the personal problems of George Brown. Also, the main gains for the Left under Wilson concerned personnel rather than policy. Five Labour rebels from whom the whip had been withdrawn in March 1961 for voting against the defence estimates were readmitted to the PLP. (93) Crossman was brought back to the front bench and it was made clear to Barbara Castle and Tony Greenwood that they could expect to be promoted to senior positions. (94) As we have seen, though, policy remained largely unchanged under Wilson. The Left were no doubt reassured by Wilson's continual use of the language of planning, but substantive changes of policy are difficult to find.
To conclude, Wilson's victory should be set against a background of failure for the Left since 1955. They consistently failed to prevent the revisionists from dominating policy formation, mainly because of the balance of power within the NEC, but also because they failed to construct policies which attracted widespread support in either the Party or among the wider electorate. Their main policy concerns - more public ownership and less armaments - remained unchanged over the period. Indeed, it was even argued that policies which had served the Party in the 1930s and 1940s continued to be relevant in the 1950s and 1960s. Michael Foot argued in Tribune in 1958 that 'the old dogmas are as good as ever'. (95) Tom Swain, the Labour MP, reinforced this view in the same publication in 1962:

'Let us return to the simple leadership of the Cloth Caps. Is it so difficult for some of our leaders to believe that the passionate, deep yearnings of the people can only be satisfied by the Socialism of the Cloth Caps with their direct demands?'. (96)

The absence of new policy ideas among the Left was largely matched by a failure to offer a new strategy which would help Labour to defeat the Conservatives. Crossman at least offered some thoughts on the subject, but his analysis essentially implied that the Party should resign itself to long periods of opposition which would end only when the country was overtaken by a crisis. Fortunately for the Party this analysis was flawed: to be sure, the Conservative Government was unpopular in 1964, but Labour was not elected at this time to rescue Britain from an economic crisis. Writers on the New Left offered an alternative analysis and argued that the Party in opposition should not be concerned primarily with its electoral fortunes - in their view it was better to be a 'radical' opposition than a 'moderate' government. This interpretation of Labour's role in British politics was shared by others on the Left. Fenner Brockway, the former Bevanite and an original member of Victory for Socialism, conceded in his autobiography that he preferred the comfort of opposition to the responsibility of power:
'I have never wanted to be in government because not even a Labour Government will do things which I feel are fundamentally important. But this has allowed me uninhibited action without responsibility...To be in a pressure group is child's play compared with participation in administration tackling day-to-day problems which inevitably compel compromise.' (97)

The apparent inability of the Left to understand either the importance or the requirements of winning power was perhaps their greatest failing after 1951. This failing alone justified the leadership's marginalisation of the Left throughout the period under discussion.

References

5. Ibid., 10 June 1955.
8. Ibid. See also article by Hugh Delargy, ibid., 16 August 1957.
10. Tribune, 5 October 1956. See also the report of a speech by George Barratt, Secretary of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, ibid., 23 August 1957.
11. Ibid., 4 May, 11 May and 3 August 1956.
12. Ibid., 28 June and 23 August 1957.
13. Ibid., 6 September 1957. See also letter from Maurice Edelman to the New Statesman, 23 July 1957, Maurice Edelman papers, M.R.C., MSS.125/Temp 41.

14. Tribune, 4 October 1957.

15. Ibid., 13 September 1957.


17. Griffiths received 141 votes and Bevan 111. One ballot paper was spoiled and 22 were not returned, Parliamentary Committee Minutes 2 February 1956.

18. The Times, 6 February 1956.


20. Sir Frederick Messer to Morgan Philips, 12 March 1956, General Secretary's papers, GS/VS/21. Messer at the time was Chairman of VFS.


22. Ibid., pp.3 and 7.

23. Ibid., pp.10-11.

24. Ibid., p.15. The pamphlet declared that Labour had to achieve the objective which was set out in Clause Four or the Party would 'die' - the authors wished to see 50 per cent of industry under public ownership.

25. Ibid., p.17.

26. Ibid., p.18.

27. Ibid., pp.19-21.

28. Ibid., p.11.


30. Letter from Morgan Phillips to signatories of above
circular, 22 February 1956, General Secretary's papers, GS/VS/5-11. See also NEC Minutes 22 February 1956. For replies to Phillips’ letter see GS/VS/12-14.

31. Letter from Morgan Phillips to Secretaries of CLPs in London and the Southern Region, 21 March 1956, General Secretary's papers, GS/VS/35. See also Chairmen's Sub-Committee Minutes, 15 March 1956 and NEC Minutes, 21 March 1956. At the NEC meeting, Greenwood and Castle attempted to prevent Phillips from sending the warning to the CLPs. They argued that the warning was unnecessary because the proposed Conference was confined to Greater London and participants would not vote on any resolutions. This proposal, however, only received three votes and was defeated. For CLP replies to the Phillips letter see GS/VS/39-60.

32. Len Williams to Morgan Phillips, 6 April 1956, General Secretary's papers, GS/VS/65. For Williams' list see GS/VS/64.

33. Manchester Guardian, 9 April 1956. See also, Tribune, 13 April 1956.

34. The Times, 9 April 1956 and Tribune, 13 April 1956. Also represented were 12 Co-operative parties, 16 Women’s Co-operative guilds and 15 trade union branches.

35. The Times, 9 April 1956.


37. Tribune, 5 October 1956.


40. Sir Frederick Messer was the President of the revived VFS; other MPs on the Executive Committee were Mikardo, Zilliacus, Silverman, A.E. Otam, F. Allaun, W. Monslow, H. Davies; other members of the Committee were Foot, Levy, Dr Soper and Hugh Jenkins. The Times, 13 February 1958.

41. Ibid.

42. L. Minkin, op. cit., p.35. According to Minkin this organisational structure was never very effective. The area
groups were always reluctant to accept central direction and there were often policy differences between the areas and the Executive.

43. Interview with Dick Taverne.
44. L. Minkin, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
45. Sheffield Hallam CLP, General Management Committee (GMC) Minutes, 13 April 1955 and 12 September 1956, Sheffield City Archives.
46. Newcastle West CLP, Executive Committee (EC) Minutes, 6 March 1958, Tyne and Wear Archives; York CLP, EC Minutes, 11 April 1956, North Yorkshire County Library; West Salford CLP, GMC Minutes, 19 March 1958, Salford Archives Centre.
47. Stockport CLP, EC Minutes, 21 June 1956; GMC Minutes, 26 July 1956; and EC Minutes, 25 September 1956, B/MM/3/2, Stockport Central Library.
48. Woolwich CLP, see Box 58, Woolwich Local History Library.
50. Ibid., 28 July 1960.
52. NEC Minutes, 26 February 1958.
54. Chairmen's Sub-Committee Minutes, 4 March 1958.
55. Ibid.
56. Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1946, pp. 14 and 174. The amendment was passed by 2,413,000 votes to 667,000.
58. Ibid.
64. See for example; Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Manchester
   Guardian and The Times, 5 March 1958.
66. For a detailed discussion of this see B. Pimlott, Labour
   and the Left in the 1930s, (Cambridge, 1977).
67. E. Shaw, op. cit., p.54.
68. Tribune, 16 October 1959.
69. Ibid.
70. VFS manifesto, The Age For Socialism, in Tribune, 13
   November 1959.
71. Ibid.
72. A. Howard, op. cit., p.227. Crossman left the Opposition
   front bench in March 1960. He returned under Wilson in
   February 1963.
73. R.H.S. Crossman, Labour in the Affluent Society, Fabian
   Tract 325, (June 1960). A similar, less detailed version of
   this argument can be found in Crossman's article, 'The
   Spectre of Revisionism: A Reply to Crosland', Encounter,
   (April 1960).
74. R.H.S. Crossman, Labour in the Affluent Society, pp.3-6
75. Ibid., p.5.
76. Ibid., p.9.
77. Ibid., p.16.
78. Crossman to Balogh, 12 July 1960, Richard Crossman papers,
   MSS.154/3/AU/1/403.
79. Ibid.
80. Let's Go with Labour for the New Britain.
   overview of the concerns of the New Left can be found in
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. R. Miliband, 'The Sickness of Labourism', New Left Review,
86. Ibid.
87. See 'Crosland Territory' and C. Taylor, 'What's Wrong With


90. Ibid., p.68.


96. Ibid., 13 April 1962.

8. Local Labour politics in the affluent society

This thesis has concentrated so far on the Labour Party at a national level - it has focused primarily on the Parliamentary Labour Party, the National Executive Committee, annual Conference and the Party's general election campaigns. The aim of this final chapter is to review briefly the Party's strength at a local level during the thirteen years of opposition. This is an area which has been ignored frequently by historians. No attempt has been made to assess in any depth the effect of post-war affluence or the disappointment of consecutive election defeats in the 1950s on Labour's core supporters - the members and activists in the constituencies. The following paragraphs, therefore, will focus on the local party members, their role in the Party and their attitude towards domestic policy issues. Using records from wards, constituency and divisional parties, and interviews with activists who were present in the Party during the period, it will be argued that Labour retained a high degree of enthusiasm and support among its membership in the 1950s and early 1960s. The real significance of this commitment in the local parties is that it should be seen as part of a wider picture of Labour renewal and strength between 1951 and 1964.

The first point to make about local Labour politics at this time is the relatively high and consistent level of Party membership in the constituencies. Although individual membership peaked at over 1 million in 1952, by 1964 the total was only slightly lower than it had been in 1951: the official figures were 876,275 in 1951 and 830,116 in 1964. Despite successive Conservative victories in general elections, therefore, the average size of Labour's membership in the 1950s easily surpassed any previous or subsequent decade.
Table 1
Average Individual Party Membership per Decade, 1930 - 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Average No. of members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930 - 1939</td>
<td>382,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940 - 1949</td>
<td>435,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950 - 1959</td>
<td>907,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 - 1969</td>
<td>767,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 - 1979</td>
<td>678,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 - 1989</td>
<td>297,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - Figures calculated on the basis of NEC Reports. No record of Party membership was published before 1928. These figures represent individual members rather than levy payers who affiliate to the Party through the trade unions.

These figures should be used with a degree of caution because almost certainly they overstate the true level of individual Labour membership. Since 1928 constituency parties have been required to enrol a minimum number of members in order to affiliate to the national Party. In 1929 the minimum requirement for affiliation was a constituency party membership of 250. This was increased to 800 in 1957 and to 1000 in 1963, but it was lowered to approximately 250 in 1980. These minimum requirements have encouraged local activists where necessary to exaggerate the size of their party's membership at a ward or constituency level in order to maintain their affiliation. (3) Even allowing for inaccuracies in the compilation of totals, though, the pattern in the figures shows that the high point of Labour's individual membership coincided with the sequence of election defeats which began in 1951. This indicates that the morale and commitment of Labour's core support in the 1950s can be compared favourably with any other period.

Although crude totals for membership are a useful guide to the strength of Labour's core support, they disguise significant local variations. An analysis of 600 constituencies in 1958
showed that the size of local parties could vary between several hundred members and over 4,000. The smallest were to be found in very safe Labour and Conservative seats and some marginals, but the rest were distributed in a haphazard fashion. The socio-economic character or location of a constituency were found to have had little effect on the strength of the Labour membership; instead, the usual reason for a strong local party was the presence of an efficient full-time agent or a group of committed members who were prepared to spend time building up the size of the party. (4) As a result, there was no guarantee that the distribution of Party members across the country would necessarily best meet Labour's electoral requirements.

Despite the regional variations, the high totals for individual membership can be seen as evidence of the Party's strength during the period under discussion. A large individual membership has long been important for Labour because the constituency parties perform a number of vital functions. Primarily they are the organisational and electoral machine of the national Party at a local level. It is significant in this respect that both the major political parties have recognised the need for a large, active and well organised membership. The Conservatives, for example, responded to the surprise defeat of 1945 with the Maxwell Fife report into party organisation. (5) As we have seen, Labour followed this precedent after the 1955 election defeat with the most thorough and methodical enquiry into grass roots organisation in the Party's history. Of course, the Wilson report of 1955 did not help to solve all of Labour's organisational problems overnight, but at least it acknowledged the importance of the CLPs in electoral terms. It also led to improvements in organisation in parts of the country. For example, Len Williams, the Party's National Agent, discussed with the London Labour Party new forms of regional organisation in May 1957. (6) Partly as a result of discussions such as this, Williams was able to point to 'a noticeable improvement in electoral organisation in the marginal constituencies' in the 1959 election. (7) The size of Labour's membership between 1951 and 1964 should be seen in this context: the first requirement of effective organisation across the country during elections is
a large and active membership.

In addition to their organisational responsibilities during election campaigns, the local parties also helped to publicise Labour policy in their constituencies in the longer term. Bermondsey CLP, for example, emphasised throughout 1959 that Labour's policies were the 'only possible solution' to the housing problem in its area. The constituency party's annual report for 1959 described how its weekly advice bureau dealt with approximately 30 enquiries each week, the majority of which were about housing. As well as attempting to deal with each specific enquiry, the advice bureau also ensured that Labour's policies on rents and municipalisation were outlined in the most positive light for its clients.\(^8\) Other constituency parties publicised Labour policy by sending resolutions to the local press and some produced their own publicity material: Abingdon CLP published the bi-monthly *Digest* from 1962 which frequently covered 20 pages or more.\(^9\)

As we have seen, the local parties did not simply publicise Labour's programme, they also contributed to policy-making. They elected seven representatives on the NEC and their delegates voted on resolutions and statements at annual Conference. Equally as important in this respect was the role of the larger local or divisional parties in investigating the particular policy needs of their own areas. Between 1957 and 1959, for example, a working party of the Executive Committee of the London Labour Party studied the practical implications of the national Party's policy for the municipalisation of housing. The working party concluded that municipalisation was a practicable proposal, but it also made several recommendations which it believed should accompany the policy.\(^10\) On a related theme, the London Labour Party arranged a delegate conference in the capital in November 1961 to discuss the issue of homelessness.\(^11\) This work by a local party was beneficial in two particular ways. First, it enabled the London party to establish its policy priorities in housing - both in terms of municipalisation and homelessness. These findings could then be passed to the National Executive for use by the Party as a whole. Secondly, the efforts of the London party demonstrated to
the electorate in the capital that Labour was working to tackle issues such as housing and homelessness. In short, even though Labour was not in government nationally, at a local level the Party was seen to be engaged in detailed work on important issues. The reward for the London party came in April 1964 when Labour won 64 seats against 36 for the Conservatives in the first elections for the Greater London Council.\(^{(12)}\) This success was repeated six months later when the swing to Labour in Greater London in the general election was greater than the national average.\(^{(13)}\)

In order to perform their functions in terms of organisation and policy, the local parties required a high level of active participation by the membership as well as a high aggregate total. Many members would pay their subscription, but attend few if any meetings and take no part in any of the other functions of their local party. A study of Labour wards in Leeds in the 1950s, for example, found that party meetings at which more than one-fifth of the membership attended were unusual.\(^{(14)}\) The secretary of the Central ward of Bermondsey CLP in 1955 stated that attendance at meetings was frequently restricted to a 'few stalwarts' and argued that the problem of low attendance was caused in the main by the rival attractions of television and radio.\(^{(15)}\) In fact, frequent participation in local Labour politics was usually confined to those activists who served as delegates on their constituency party's General Management Committee (GMC). The GMC was the governing body of the Party at constituency level. Its decisions were binding upon the local party, it selected resolutions for Conference, it selected candidates for local and national elections and it could take action to expel members. The size of each constituency's GMC was governed by the size of their local membership, but on average the monthly meetings of the Committees were attended by 60-90 delegates.\(^{(16)}\)

In constituency parties which contained several thousand members, committed activists clearly represented only a fraction of the whole local party. However, although the proportion of active members was smaller when there was a large total membership, it is reasonable to assume that the total number of
activists in the Party peaked in the 1950s along with the record level of individual membership. In other words, the morale of Labour activists does not appear to have suffered as a result of electoral setbacks after 1951. This impression was confirmed by an activist from Hornchurch CLP who recalled;

'1951 to 1964 was an exciting time. The great spirit of renewal and achievement brought about by the Labour Government between '45 and '50 still carried on in the Party, even though the country had rejected Labour in 1951...Even after Labour lost again in 1955 we still felt that this was just a temporary aberration on the part of the British public and that they would swing back our way in 1959.' (17)

A similar interpretation was offered by a member of Romford CLP's League of Youth - the forerunner of the Young Socialists. Although part of the attraction of this branch of the League of Youth was its provision of social activities, young Labour supporters in Romford clearly believed that the Party had a mission that was relevant in post-war Britain;

'We met as a League of Youth. We had about 60 active members and we did something almost every day. We did rambles on Sunday, we had drama groups, music groups; you name it, we had it...Politically, we thought that a start had been made in 1945, but we felt that there was still a lot of work to do, particularly in public ownership. We believed that running things for the sake of the community was the highest aim that you could have.' (18)

After the 1955 election defeat, one of the wards of Bermondsey CLP explained that they were 'deeply disappointed' but 'not disillusioned' by the result. (19) The same resolve was displayed after the 1959 defeat by the London Regional Organiser, who explained to the National Agent;
'Organisationally we have never been better. We were brilliantly led; our T.V. programmes and other publicity was excellent. The help and service from Head Office enabled Parties to plan their work from the outset. Inside the Parties there was a wonderful spirit'. (20)

The commitment and the resolution of Labour activists at this time suggests that they were satisfied on the whole with Party policy. Ultimately, the membership remained loyal to the Party and campaigned for official policy in local and national contests, even though specific aspects of Labour's programme were sometimes criticised by individual CLPs. This overall support for the Party's policies should be set against the familiar descriptions of Labour activists as ideologues and extremists. For example, Sydney Webb in 1930 complained that the CLPs consisted of 'unrepresentative groups of nonentities dominated by fanatics and cranks and extremists'. (21) Douglas Jay borrowed Webb's description and referred to activists as 'extremists, cranks and theorists'. (22) Denis Healey was less dismissive, but he believed nonetheless that activists were 'rarely typical of Labour voters, or even of Labour Party members'. (23) From a more detached perspective, Nick Tiratsoo has argued recently that the majority of Labour activists in Coventry in the mid-1950s were 'well to the left' of the national leadership. (24)

To be sure, Labour has attracted its share of members who disagree with what they would perceive to be a moderate national leadership. The Independent Labour Party before 1932, Victory For Socialism in the 1950s and Militant in the 1980s all found support within the Party's ranks. With an individual membership of several hundred thousand, it was to be expected that the Party would embrace a range of political opinion. However, most Labour activists in the years under discussion were much closer politically to the Party leadership than is often believed. The majority of members endorsed the work of the policy makers on the National Executive Committee and caused few if any problems for the Party hierarchy. A survey of more than 2,500 resolutions submitted by CLPs to annual Conference between 1955 and 1960
confirmed this point. It found that 65 per cent of the
resolutions were either non-ideological (these would include,
for example, calls for more teachers, better roads or the relief
of the housing shortage), or they simply supported distinct
Labour policies (for example, comprehensive secondary education
or the restoration of a free health service). As the author of
the survey concluded;

'The analysis immediately reveals that the description of
local parties as a force constantly pressing extremist
views upon national party leaders is false...Differences
in policy exist within parties, and conflict is sometimes
great, but this is not a conflict between a monolithic bloc
of activists and a monolithic leadership. Rather it would
seem that factional disputes divide parties vertically,
joining some Privy Councillors, MPs, lobbyists, activists
and voters into a faction which is in conflict with another
which also contains members drawn from all ranks of the
party.'(25)

CLP minute books between 1951 and 1964 endorse the view that the
local parties were not necessarily to the left of the Labour
leadership. In fact, several of the resolutions passed by CLPs
in London during the period were surprisingly conservative and
in isolated cases perhaps even reactionary. In 1953 Greenwich
CLP called on the Government to consider the payment of an extra
week's money to pensioners in order to help them to enjoy the
celebrations for the Coronation. (26) The Falconwood ward of
Woolwich CLP followed this with a complaint that the Borough
Council had failed to supply each child of school age in the
area with a permanent memento of the Coronation ceremony. (27)
West Ham South CLP called for the reintroduction of corporal
punishment for violent crime in 1955. Later, a ward resolution
in the same constituency suggested that all immigrants into
Britain should undergo medical examinations and should only be
admitted if they had arranged accommodation and employment in
advance. (28)
The assumption that activists tended to be to the left of the Party leadership in this period was mainly based on two points: the CLPs support for extensions of public ownership and the success of left-wing candidates in elections for the constituency section of the NEC after 1952. Both of these factors, though, should be seen in part as a manifestation of the entrenched commitment of activists to traditional socialist symbolism and rhetoric, not as confirmation that there was clear-sighted support in the local parties for a specific left-wing programme which differed from the policies produced by the NEC. In a sense, both factors illustrated the conservatism of the CLPs rather than their radicalism. Many activists were most comfortable with an interpretation of British democratic socialism which had its roots in the 1880s and 1890s and which was expressed in simple form in 1918 when Clause Four of the Party constitution positioned public ownership at the centre of Labour's ideology. All of the local parties which were sampled for this thesis supported extensions of public ownership between 1951 and 1964. Some called for specific measures of nationalisation. For example, Greenwich CLP advocated public ownership of the chemicals industry and the British Oxygen Company. (29) York CLP and West Ham South CLP both called for public ownership of land as a priority. (30) Hornchurch CLP took a different line and consistently pressed for a more wide-ranging programme. In 1953 it called for the 'full ownership of land, wealth and industry'. (31) It followed this in 1957 with a resolution for annual Conference which said that the local party would 'welcome any further extension of the powers of public ownership'. (32) In 1960 it demanded the nationalisation of all companies with more than 50 employees and the public ownership of all British owned shares in foreign companies. (33)

The most widespread demonstration of support for public ownership in the constituencies, though, came when Gaitskell attempted to amend Clause Four of the constitution after the 1959 election defeat. Sixty local parties sent resolutions to the NEC protesting against any proposed changes to the constitution which would downgrade the status of nationalisation as a central socialist objective. (34) Feelings clearly ran high
in some of these parties. In Stockport CLP only one delegate on the GMC supported Gaitskell's line. The remainder of the Committee endorsed a resolution which called for;

'new proposals for social ownership which will make workers and consumers feel that they have a full share in the management and control of socialised industries.' (35)

Similarly, in Newcastle West CLP only one member voted against a resolution which described Clause Four as 'the main foundation plank of our movement', and which went on to state that a departure from this principle 'can only end in the destruction of the Party as an effective working class force'. (36) West Salford CLP went further and twice passed motions of no confidence in Gaitskell as leader of the Party - once in December 1959 and again in October 1960. (37)

This controversy showed that the leadership had run ahead of the membership on the issue of Clause Four. As we have seen, Gaitskell was right to argue that nationalisation was unpopular with most voters, but he failed to appreciate the powerful symbolic importance of Clause Four for Party activists. The significance of this, though, should not be overstated. Although the leadership was defeated over the amendment to the constitution, nationalisation had already been downgraded as an element of policy by 1959. Labour's position on the ownership of industry was based mainly on the 1957 policy statement Industry and Society, a document which was at best lukewarm about the future nationalisation of whole industries. In fact, the only specific commitment to full-scale public ownership which survived in all three manifestos of 1955, 1959 and 1964 was the renationalisation of the steel industry. In practice, therefore, the leadership largely freed itself from commitments in this area without encountering a substantial loss of support from the membership. As Harold Wilson observed in 1959, the local parties' commitment to Clause Four was largely a matter of tradition and ethics rather than policy;
'The Party faithful could paste Clause Four over their beds at night, but, provided no one rewrote the Constitution, in the morning they would happily work for the opposite'.

The activists' rearguard action over Clause Four, therefore, should not be seen as a major breach with the leadership. After the Clause Four controversy, it was noticeable that policy statements appeared to be much more positive about the role of public ownership as a component of economic management, but it was also significant that there was no increase in specific commitments on nationalisation. In other words, the local parties were uneasy about the abandonment of traditional socialist rhetoric, but they endorsed the policy of the Labour leadership - a policy which was based increasingly on the Croslandite thesis about public ownership and socialist objectives.

In the same way that the activists' commitment to public ownership can be seen to be rather more equivocal than is sometimes assumed, their apparent support for left-wing candidates for the constituency section of the NEC also deserves re-examination. As we have seen, this section of the NEC gained a reputation as a stronghold of the Left when Bevanites, who were locked in a struggle with the Party leadership, captured all seven of its places in 1952. Yet three of the longest serving members on the constituency section after 1955 were James Callaghan, Richard Crossman and Harold Wilson. All of these were associated closely with the Party hierarchy for much of the period under discussion. Wilson was Shadow Chancellor and later Shadow Foreign Secretary, Crossman was chosen to co-ordinate the 1959 election campaign and Callaghan was a loyalist who took over as Shadow Chancellor in 1961. Crossman and Wilson both fell out with Gaitskell after the 1959 defeat, but neither of them could have been mistaken for a member of the Labour Left. Their presence along with Callaghan on the NEC meant that there was only a bare left-wing majority in the constituency section after 1955. The four members who usually made up the left-wing block on this section - Barbara Castle, Tom Driberg, Anthony Greenwood and Ian Mikardo - owed their
success mainly to a combination of exposure through Tribune and what Lewis Minkin has described as 'powerful forces of inertia' which enabled representatives to retain their seat on the NEC once elected. (39) Tribune was read widely in the constituencies and was often sold at local party meetings; it usually presented the socialist case in simple, fundamentalist terms and it provided left-wing candidates for the NEC with useful publicity. After election at Conference, constituency representatives benefitted from the exposure they gained as members of the NEC, and also from the custom of CLPs to support virtually the same group of candidates each year. The composition of the constituency section of the NEC, therefore, did not reflect the presence of a strong left-wing ideology among activists nor a lack of support for the leadership.

Although it has been argued so far that the local parties were a source of strength for Labour in this period, a recent charge against them is that they helped to prevent the Party from adapting to social change in the affluent society and thus contributed to the sequence of election defeats in the 1950s. (40) In essence, the local parties are accused of failing to understand the way in which society was changed by post-war prosperity and the development of new forms of consumerism. Consequently, it is argued, Labour lost touch with important sections of the electorate. It made little attempt to appeal specifically to women or to younger voters and instead continued to direct its message to male, working-class trade union members.

The evidence of the local parties used in this study suggests that a proportion of CLPs were indeed suspicious of some of the social and cultural changes which took place after 1951 - particularly in terms of the development of consumerism and popular culture. For example, York CLP's resolution for Conference in 1963 expressed concern about the growing power of advertising and its effect on national life; it called on the NEC to devise policies which would ensure that a future Labour government 'stop waste, exploitation of the consumer, and other abuses by commercial advertising'. (41) Woolwich CLP had earlier supported a branch resolution from the engineers' union which
opposed the start of commercial television on the grounds that it would be dominated by 'big business concerns'. The same branch also called for a boycott of cinemas which showed 'the degrading American films which glorify violence, war and brutality thus poisoning the minds of the young people of this country'. (42) One activist from Hornchurch CLP believed that people's priorities became confused in the 1950s. In his view, spending on durables and luxuries replaced spending on essentials;

'We could see British society changing and we were desperate to put a halt to that element of Conservatism that was coming in - the get-rich-quick society of Harold Macmillan...the first signs of me first and greed. Outside the Labour Party, it was obvious that people were beginning to get more concerned with their own affairs and improving their own position and the wonderful spirit that was around in 1945 had dissipated...I remember the horror my wife and I felt when we saw a young family from the East End at Stratford Co-op - the children obviously needed some decent footwear, the mother was rather shabbily dressed - discussing the merits of various television sets.' (43)

The Party's 1959 election manifesto certainly reflected the idea that consumerism and affluence were in some way superficial. Instead, the emphasis was on traditional Labour themes such as tackling poverty, narrowing the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', and criticising the Tories for their refusal to use economic controls. (44) The Conservatives in contrast caught the mood of a greater share of the public with a campaign which emphasised the optimism of the late 1950s and which promised to protect individual prosperity - it was summarised by the slogan, 'Life's better with the Conservatives, Don't let Labour ruin it'. But is it reasonable to argue that the CLPs acted as a brake which prevented Labour from broadening its appeal to the wider electorate in the years of prosperity after 1951? Were the CLPs in some way responsible for Labour's election defeats in the 1950s?
These are difficult issues to resolve with any degree of certainty, but three points are worthy of note. First, it has been argued throughout this thesis that Labour was unlikely to win the elections of 1955 and 1959, regardless of the way in which it shaped its appeal. There was simply no compelling reason for the country to vote for a change of government in either of these contests, so to hold any section of the Party responsible for the defeats makes little sense. Secondly, it should be recognised that individual Labour Party members played a vital role in elections between 1951 and 1964. Much of the credit for the consistency of Labour's electoral performance in this period should be given to the local activists who ensured that Labour supporters cast their vote. After the 1955 defeat, Labour's National Agent calculated that the Party had lost 35 seats in marginal constituencies primarily because of poor organisation. This shows the impact which a sharp drop in Labour's membership could have made before 1964. The Party was at least organised a little more efficiently after 1955, but this was only made possible by the continued commitment of Party activists. Labour won a very narrow victory in 1964 - the loss of just two marginal seats through poor organisation at a local level would have cost Wilson his majority. The third and final point to make is that the collapse in Labour's share of the vote in general elections since 1970 has coincided with a sharp decline in individual membership (see Table I). This implies that a large individual membership is important in electoral terms for Labour and that the size of the Party's membership between 1951 and 1964 was a further sign of Labour's strength and vitality in the period.

References

1. The sample used contains the following Constituency and Divisional Labour Parties: Abingdon, Berkshire North, Bermondsey, Greenwich, Hornchurch, London, Newcastle West, Romford, Ruislip Northwood, Stockport Central, Sheffield Hallam, Southall & Hanwell, West Ham South, West Salford,
Woolwich and York. The composition of this sample was largely governed by the availability of material in local archives and ease of access, both of which vary widely across the country. Activists who were interviewed were contacted by writing to the secretaries of 120 local parties in southern England.

7. 'Scheme of Help to Marginal Constituencies', Organisation Sub-Committee Minutes, 15 March 1960.
9. A copy of the Abingdon Constituency Labour Party Digest was provided by Mr Norman Nunn-Price.
10. London Labour Party Memo, 'Labour's Housing Policy', 15 October 1959, London Labour Party Presented Papers, A/40. The memo suggested that low interest rates should accompany municipalisation. It also argued that much of the property which was to be acquired by local authorities needed to have a remaining useful life of at least 30 years. Finally, it warned that municipalisation would have to be a gradual process.
16. These figures are based on evidence from the sample of local parties which was used for this thesis.
17. Interview with Alan Thake, Hornchurch CLP.
18. Interview with Cllr Margaret Latham, Romford CLP.
29. Greenwich CLP, GMC Minutes, 26 June 1952.
32. Ibid., 27 June 1957, A/HHL/3.
33. Hornchurch CLP, EC Minutes, 20 April 1960, A/HHL/5
34. NEC Minutes, 16 March 1960.
37. West Salford CLP, GMC Minutes, 15 December 1959 and 18 October 1960, Salford Archives Centre.
38. P. Foot, op. cit., p.127.
39. L. Minkin, op. cit., p.246.
40. N. Tiratsoo, 'Popular politics, affluence and the Labour party in the 1950s', cited in A. Gorst, L. Johnman and


42. Letter from Mr R. Simons, Secretary of North Woolwich branch of Engineers Union to Mr T Knight, Secretary of Woolwich CLP, 5 January 1953, Box 57, Woolwich Labour Party records.

43. Interview with Alan Thake.

44. *Britain Belongs to You.*

9. Conclusion

Post-war prosperity damaged the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party for at least a decade after it left office in 1951. In an era of full employment, economic growth and widespread affluence there was simply no compelling reason for the country to vote for a change of government in the general elections of 1955 and 1959. The remarkable feature of the Party's support in these circumstances, therefore, is its consistency rather than its decline. Despite the fact that economic conditions favoured the Conservative Governments, Labour's average share of the vote in the general elections of 1955 and 1959 was 45.1 per cent. In the context of Labour's performance in elections since the extension of the franchise in 1918 this is an unusually high percentage. Between 1918 and 1951 the Party's average share of the vote was 36.2 per cent. Between 1918 and 1992 its average share was 37.7 per cent. In fact, Labour has not managed to poll more than 40 per cent of the vote since 1970.\(^{(1)}\)

It should also be remembered that no British party since 1918 has won a greater share of the vote than Labour in 1955 or 1959 and failed to secure a majority of seats in Parliament.\(^{(2)}\)

Historians who wish to emphasise the decline in Labour's electoral support between 1951 and 1959 have pointed to the fall in the Party's aggregate vote over the period: this declined from 13.9 million in 1951 to 12.2 million in 1959.\(^{(3)}\) These figures, however, should be approached with a degree of caution. Labour's aggregate vote in 1951 was unusually high largely because of the reduced number of Liberal candidates in the contest. Only 109 Liberal candidates fought in the 1951 election, whereas 216 stood in 1959.\(^{(4)}\) If the 1955 election is used as the basis for comparison, Labour's aggregate vote in the period which is covered by this thesis remained stable: the totals are 12.4 million in 1955, 12.2 million in 1959 and 12.2 million in 1964.\(^{(5)}\) Again it should be recognised that these are historically high totals for the Labour Party. Only in 1950, 1951 and 1966 has the Party secured a greater aggregate vote than it did in the contests of 1955 and 1959.\(^{(6)}\) One other factor
also supports the proposition that Labour maintained its electoral popularity in the 1950s in difficult circumstances. The Party enjoyed a lead in the Gallup opinion polls on voting intentions for most of the period between December 1951 and December 1959 - this included an unbroken Labour lead between November 1955 and June 1958. (7)

As we have seen, it was the consistency of this support which helped to bring Labour back into government in 1964. The Party's aggregate vote in 1964 was approximately 10,000 fewer than it had been in 1959, and its share of the vote rose by just 0.3 per cent. This level of support was sufficient to secure Labour's victory in 1964 because of a sharp decline in Conservative support and a large increase in the Liberal vote. As the General Secretary's analysis of the 1964 result acknowledged;

'Labour won not by any increase in Labour support, but by massive defections from the Tories...The large scale intervention of Liberal candidates no doubt was responsible to some degree for the failure to increase the Labour vote...In terms of seats Liberal intervention probably was more helpful than harmful...'. (8)

The fact that Labour was able to return to power in 1964 with approximately the same level of support as it enjoyed in 1955 and 1959 suggests that the familiar descriptions of weakness and failure which have been applied to the Party in the 1950s are inaccurate. It has been argued throughout this thesis that Labour won the 1964 election largely because of developments which took place in the Party before 1960. These developments ensured that Labour was able to take advantage of the political misfortune of the Conservatives after 1960: as the elections of 1983, 1987 and 1992 demonstrated, Labour does not profit inevitably from the unpopularity of Conservative governments. (9)

After the defeat of 1951, the Labour leadership asserted its authority in the Party, marginalised its opponents on the Left and began to formulate a programme which aimed to build on the reforms of the Attlee Governments. After the 1955 election the Parliamentary Labour Party was organised into a more effective
opposition with the allocation of shadow posts to front bench spokesmen. Organisation of local parties in marginal constituencies was improved and the commitment of Labour activists was maintained, despite the disappointment of consecutive election defeats. In addition to improvements in organisation, the Party also adopted more modern campaigning techniques after 1955 and made particularly effective use of televised broadcasts in the 1959 contest. More importantly, Labour began a long-term review of policy in 1955 which eventually provided the basis of the Party's manifestos in 1959 and 1964. The programme which the policy makers produced during the review was dominated by the ideas of Gaitskell, Crosland and the revisionists: it was marked by optimism in the existing balance in the mixed economy and by a strong commitment to increased social and economic equality. As we have seen, this programme remained largely unchanged between 1959 and 1964. The main development in Labour's programme after 1959 was an increased emphasis on the theme of planning. However, this emphasis on planning appears to have made only a limited impact on the electorate. It is also worth noting that the commitment to economic planning was one of the least successful components of the Wilson Government's programme after October 1964. The national plan was effectively abandoned in July 1966 and the achievements of the Ministry of Technology were limited. (10) In contrast, the commitment to greater social equality, which had been at the centre of Labour's programme in 1959, provided the Wilson Government with some of its most notable successes. Important reforms were carried out in the fields of education, pensions, social security and housing. Liberal legislation was passed on homosexuality, divorce and abortion between 1964 and 1970 and progress was also made on equal pay between the sexes. (11)

A full comparative study of the Wilson Government's reforms and policy-making in the Labour Party during the thirteen years of opposition will not be possible until the public records for the whole period are available. An examination of the Party between 1951 and 1964 which makes full use of Hugh Gaitskell's papers is similarly impossible until the collection is made
available to researchers. Much more work is also required on the history of Labour's constituency parties. This thesis, however, has focused on the Labour Party's attempt to recover from the loss of office in 1951. It has argued in particular that the 1950s can be seen as a positive and productive period for the Party. Post-war prosperity for a time appeared to threaten Labour's future as a party of government in Britain: developments in the Party in the 1950s helped to ensure that Labour regained power at the first realistic opportunity after 1951.

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1. These percentages are calculated on the basis of figures cited in F.W.S. Craig, *op. cit.*, p.90.
3. See, for example, N. Tiratsoo, *op. cit.*, p.45. K. Jefferys, *op. cit.*, p.35 and J. Hinton, *op. cit.*, p.177 have also referred to the fall in Labour's vote after 1951 to illustrate the long-term decline in the Party's electoral support.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.102-103. Craig lists the figures for 87 months between December 1951 and December 1959; Labour had an opinion poll lead in 57 of these months.
8. 'General Election 1964, Final Report by the General Secretary', NEC Minutes, 28 October 1964.
9. The Conservatives lost the 1964 election with a 43.4 per cent share of the vote. They won the elections of 1983, 1987 and 1992 with votes of 42.4 per cent, 42.3 per cent and 41.9 per cent respectively.
10. The 'July crisis' of 1966 saw the introduction of deflationary measures which included public spending cuts and a six months freeze on prices and wages. This signalled the end of the policy of planned expansion. For a more

Ponting assessed the Ministry of Technology as follows: 'After just over five years in office the government had little to show for its efforts. Transformation of British industry through the 'white heat' of technological revolution had not occurred. Perhaps some of these problems were beyond the capacity of any government to solve. But what was certain was that a few slogans about technology, a new ministry operating in the same way as its predecessors, together with some ill-thought-out proposals for change that lacked any coherent plan, were not enough even to tackle the problems, let alone solve them', C. Ponting, op. cit. p.280.

11. For a discussion of these reforms see ibid., pp.120-139 and pp.391-393.
Appendix

United Kingdom General Election results, 1951-1964.

**General Election, October 1951 - Turnout 82.6 per cent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>13,718,199</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>13,948,883</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>730,546</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>198,966</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28,596,594</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,376</strong></td>
<td><strong>625</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Election, May 1955 - Turnout 76.8 per cent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>13,310,891</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>12,405,254</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>722,402</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>321,182</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26,759,729</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,409</strong></td>
<td><strong>630</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Election, October 1959 - Turnout 78.7 per cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>13,750,875</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>12,216,172</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1,640,760</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>254,845</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27,862,652</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,536</td>
<td>630</td>
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</table>

General Election, October 1964 - Turnout 77.1 per cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>12,002,642</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>12,205,808</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>3,099,283</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>349,415</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27,657,148</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,757</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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