

THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF THE LABOUR PARTY: A LEADER-CENTRED PARTY?

The Past, Present And Future Of Intra-Party Democracy In The United Kingdom

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INTRODUCTION

The internal structures of the Labour Party are said in analytical accounts by advocates of New Labour to have been brought up-to-date and made more democratic. Whereas, alterations in policy positions have been considered at some length, changes in the party's internal structures have been afforded less space. Many are content merely to employ such phrases as 'control freak', but this does not coincide with Blair's stated aims of increased democracy.

This paper seeks to describe the changes that have been made to the internal structures of the Labour Party. Particular emphasis is placed upon the reforms carried out under Blair. These have been justified on the basis of claims of increased participation for the party membership. However, attention will also be given over to reforms made by Kinnock and John Smith as these helped to lay the foundations for the Blair Labour Party. Since the advent of New Labour, which can be said to have begun either with the election of Neil Kinnock or Tony Blair as leader, there have been a large number of internal reforms. These have centralised power in the hands of the parliamentary elite and, arguably, further towards the leader of the party.

‘Classic’ theories of party organisation will frame the examination of New Labour. These theories examined will include contributions by Duverger, Michels, Kirchheimer and Panebianco. Each describes the power relations in political parties and vary over the role for members. This will help characterise New Labour.

THEORIES OF PARTY ORGANISATION

Each of these theories of party organisation suggests a different set of relations between leaders and members. The models can be divided into Ware’s (1996) model types - electoral competition, institutional and sociological. The electoral competition models examine the effect that other actors in the political system have on party organisation. The institutional models give greater consideration to internal party relations as an explanatory factor in organisation formation. In these models intra-party debate prevents any moves towards a single model of party organisation. Sociological models contend that party organisations arise as a result of access to resources.

Electoral competition models

The authors who best represent this approach are Duverger and Epstein. Duverger (1954) proposed are two party ‘types’ - cadre and mass. Each party differs in its structure and basic unit of organisation. Cadre parties are structured around caucuses which contain a small number of members. A caucus seeks no expansion and is a closed group - ‘membership is achieved only by a kind of tacit co-option or by formal nomination’ (Duverger, 1990: 37). In a caucus the ‘quality’ of the members is all important. Duverger equates the caucus with a group of local notabilities. The branch of a mass party, however,

is less decentralised and is part of a much larger closely-knit structure. Branches attempt to enrol members and, therefore, do not have the same restrictions as caucuses. Greater membership is regarded by the branch as a source of strength, making 'quantity' a guiding principle. A branch is open to all. So whereas 'the caucus is a union of notabilities chosen only because of their influence: the branch appeals to the masses' (Duverger, 1990: 39).

There are many difference between the caucus and the branch:

- they vary in level at which they operate with the former acting much more on a geographical basis;
- branches are more permanent than caucuses;
- branches focus more closely on election tactics and political education.

The branch is closely associated with socialist parties because they attempted to organise the masses and recruit from their ranks. Whereas, in general cadre parties rely upon capitalists financing their activities, mass parties look to spread the financial burden over as many members as possible so they may be in a position to be free from capitalist pressures. The caucuses include 'influential' persons who provide connections and prestige; experts, who organise the campaigns; and, financiers (Duverger, 1990: 42).

According to Duverger, the social and political substructure decides the structure of the party, i.e. its relation to civil society. Cadre parties existed in the early stages of political development and allowed for flexibility in the system by pretending to open themselves up to the masses. However, in order for the working class to free themselves from middle class domination and put forward working class candidates, freedom from capitalist financing was required. This was achieved through collective finances and only a mass

organisation could achieve this. Duverger believed that the caucus party, in order to compete effectively for votes and to retain loyalty, should either transform themselves into branch parties or adopt some of their characteristics. This means that electoral competition lay at the heart of the determination of party organisation.

Epstein (1967) also sees party organisation as a response to the competition for votes, or 'vote structuring'. In his analysis, American-type parties are best suited to this. They lack members and allow them little influence in policy-making. Instead, the parties spend money to purchase the services required in an election campaign - television advertising, opinion polls, focus groups, and spin doctors. The finance comes from interest groups and individual donors rather than members because the latter are seen to constrain the actions of leaders in their electoral strategy and policy options. Flexibility is the key to Epstein's version of party organisation (Ware, 1996: 97).

Institutional models

Panbianco (1988) contends that the degree of institutionalisation is the main variable for political parties. By institutionalisation he means that a party ceases to be a means to an end and becomes 'valuable in and of itself, and its goals become inseparable and indistinguishable from it' (Ware, 1996: 98). It refers to way in which an organisation 'solidifies' (Panbianco, 1988: 49).

Institutionalisation has two measures. The first is the degree of autonomy which an organisation enjoys in relation to its environment - its supporters, finances, external organisations etc. If a party is highly institutionalised then it enjoys a considerable degree

of power over its environment and can change it if required. A weakly institutionalised party is forced to respond to its environment. The second measure is the degree of systemness, meaning the interdependence of its internal actors. A low level of systemness is the result of power being in the hands of sub-groups within the party. A high level of systemness is the result of the centralised control of resources leading to interdependence among sub-groups. If systemness is low then the party will find it difficult to control their environment.

From this analysis Panebianco constructs two 'ideal' types of parties:

- a weakly institutionalised party with a low degree of autonomy and a low degree of interdependence among its sub-groups;
- a highly institutionalised party with a high degree of autonomy over its environment and a high degree of interdependence among its sub-groups (Maor, 1997: 70).

Panebianco's work links the origins of the party to its organisational structure.

Organisational change is the result of internal relations that were themselves set in place by the party's founding.

Sociological models

A series of theories advance a sociological explanation and they place resources, whether they be capital or labour, at the heart of organisational design. The selection between these two resources in order to fulfil a party's electoral ambitions will aid the shaping of the organisation.

Strom (1990) believes that members look to control the party and obtain promises made to them by the leadership, and that leaders want to see activists working to obtain votes. Parties have an office-seeking strategy and are led by those expecting to benefit from election. Strom differentiates between capital- and labour-intensive parties. The former rely upon professional labour, whilst the latter build an exchange relationship with their activists because they cannot afford professional assistance (Ware, 1992). Leaders offer activists incentives for their labour which can only be delivered once they enter office. These incentives may take varying forms, but often rely upon activists being integrated into decision-making processes, restricting recruitment to offices to existing members and maintaining the leaders' accountability to the members (Maor, 1997: 97). Such measures impair the flexibility of the party's leaders. Strom believes that in placing members at the heart of decision-making, policy issues take precedence over office-seeking or vote-seeking strategies. He also suggests that the incentives focus the attention of leaders on policy (because of the activists' preoccupation with it [Maor, 1997: 98]), advance short-term considerations because of the vulnerability of leaders. Strom, therefore, contends that leaders in a labour-intensive party become fixated with policy at the expense of other considerations.

Kirchheimer's (1990) 'catch-all' party model believes that social and economic changes after World War II have meant that the nature of the electorate has altered with the decline of the 'old' working class and rise of a 'new' middle class. This forced parties to adopt a new method of organisation which centralised power in the hands of the leadership and removed influence from the membership in policy-making, finance and campaigning, with a shift towards the greater use of professionals and capital. Links with specific classes or

groups were minimised and securing access to a variety of interest groups rose in importance.

In terms of appeals to the electorate, the catch-all party moved to accommodate preferences leading to greater convergence on the centre of the political spectrum. A necessary consequence of this movement was the dissipation of ideology that resulted in an enhanced emphasis on the quality of political leaders and of their managerial skills. Holding the assumption that all parties have a single vote maximising strategy leads to the realisation that there is a general centripetal pressure. Kirchheimer suggested that mass parties could find the transition more problematic because of their stronger links to ideology, class and members.

Katz and Mair (1994) state that more recent economic and social changes have shifted the organisations of parties to produce a cartel party. They do not believe that parties have declined per se but that parties on the ground have diminished in importance whilst a party's central office has strengthened. Katz and Mair place the role of the state at the centre of their new model. There is an increased linkage between party and the state, so that parties effectively use the state to strengthen their position and ensure that they are not challenged (by either new parties or new issues). The political space is fixed by its existing parties. In elections, voters choose between a fixed number of parties with similar platforms.

Katz and Mair contend that parties are increasingly bound to the state and that they alter 'the rules of the game' to suit themselves, this has, in turn, effected the organisation of the parties. The parties and the political class, through parliamentary institutions, effectively

'award' themselves benefits. There has been a shift to the use of capital-intensive campaigning because of access to state funding which allows for the appointment of staff and enhanced communication techniques; and access to the mass media which is regulated by the parties themselves. Leaders, as a consequence, have less need for members. A party's central office becomes 'increasingly staffed by representatives and/or ex-officio members of the party in public office rather than by representatives of the party on the ground' [Katz and Mair, 1994: 12]). The members retain a role in helping to maintain a party's image, occupy some offices and act as a resource for the leadership in internal disputes (or elections) but have little to do with the 'important' work of the party.

Robert Michels (1959) looked at organisation in order to examine the level of control in political parties. His 'iron law of oligarchy' suggested that the development of a party organisation necessarily led to an oligarchy. Michels used as his basis Duverger's branch-mass party model and with it the assumption that members controlled the policy and objectives of the party making it internally democratic. However, Michels belief was that once a party established an organisation to carry out various tasks, those that occupied these offices would assume control themselves. Direct democracy is, therefore, replaced by rule by oligarchy - mass control is destroyed. The party may retain the appearance of democracy but the real decision-making occurs away from the membership. The organisation develops a series of interests of its own, with its preservation becoming paramount.

Robert McKenzie (1963) applied the work of Michels to the Labour Party and Conservative Party in Britain. He found evidence to suggest that the theory was accurate but added that leaders could be removed from office. Leaders, therefore, have to pay

attention to their members for fear of removal. McKenzie stated that the British system encourages oligarchy because of its parliamentary system, that MPs are representatives not delegates and that they are answerable to voters not party conferences.

The gradual emergence of the above models suggests to Maor that there has been a four-stage process 'in which elitist, electorally-oriented party organisations tended to give way to mass, purposive (i.e. policy-oriented) parties, which then tended to be replaced by new professional, electorally-oriented, catch-all parties which were in turn replaced by cartel parties' (Maor, 1997: 112).

NEW LABOUR'S REFORMS

During the 1980s, and especially after Tony Blair became leader in 1994, the Labour Party has witnessed a series of internal reforms performed under the banner of greater democracy and participation. In Blair's view, members are an important resource and should, therefore, be nurtured. This would, therefore, fit the model of a mass party. Blair's speeches and writings give constant reference to the need for a strong membership and one of John Prescott's first tasks on being elected deputy leader was to raise membership levels. Blair claims that the membership has seen their role rise in policy-making and candidate selection. But if it is the case that these reforms have enhanced debate and democracy in the party, then it has to be asked why there was a grassroots campaign against them in the 1998 National Executive Committee (NEC) elections. The reforms carried out by Blair, and by Kinnock and Smith before him, have in reality sought to more tightly control the party. The leadership has, during this period, obtained a deal of power. The outcome of the party's reforms has been to undermine activists. The most appropriate manner to

examine the Labour Party's organisational reforms is to deal with each facet in turn - candidate selection, policy-making and leadership elections.

Candidate selection

The Labour Party has moved away from the use of activists in candidate selection to the wider membership. The General Management Committees (GMC) were said to contain unrepresentative activists who dominated proceedings and ensured that only candidates who followed their own ideological line were selected. The role for the trade unions was large, having seats on the GMCs and having their own section for nominations. The early 1980s saw a number of reforms passed by the party's annual conference one of which, mandatory reselection, was meant to, more effectively, hold the party's MPs to account - it meant that every MP had to stand for re-election. This, it was hoped by those who sponsored the reforms, would help to remove MPs who moved against the wishes of the membership. The interpreters of these wishes were, in effect, the activists.

A series of reforms after the election of Neil Kinnock ensured that the leadership regained control of the selection procedure from the activists with the first tentative use of selection panels. NEC endorsement of candidates meant that those deemed unsuitable could be refused after the selection procedure had been completed. Whilst this risked the enagement of local party activists it could ensure greater cohesion among the parliamentary elite. The NEC also holds the power to impose a candidate on a constituency.

An electoral college was introduced in 1989 which gave local party members 60 per cent of the vote and 40 per cent to affiliated organisations. The introduction of One Member One Vote (OMOV) in 1993 under Smith, fundamentally shifted power away from the activist base. Under the new rules, selection was placed in the hands of individual party members and fee-paying trade unionists. They were able to vote directly for the shortlisted candidate of their choice. Also approved in the same rule changes was the use of all-women shortlists, to enhance the representation of women in parliament. These were, however, deemed illegal and a breach of equal rights legislation by a court.

Further centralising reforms have been agreed to for the selection of candidates for the Westminster, European and Scottish elections.

Westminster elections

Proposed procedural guidelines for Westminster elections suggested by a NEC working group were passed by the 1998 party conference. The procedures were said to provide for:

- 'a transparent and straightforward process which is relatively simple for party officers to administer;
- the maximum membership involvement;
- quality and diversity of selected candidates' (Labour Party, 1998b: 2).

The new procedures agreed a national panel of potential candidates approved by the NEC in order to help local parties promote quality and diversity. The re-selection of existing MPs will only take place if, after soundings are taken from constituency parties, the trigger mechanism is activated. This method of a 'trigger' ballot makes the position of a MP safer

because local opposition has to be united as well as being a majority of those who make an ‘indication’ to the constituency. Whilst all MPs should face a ‘trigger’ ballot, the NEC can determine otherwise. The Chief Whip of the party will report to the NEC on any MP who has undertaken unauthorised absences or has abstained on votes. If the NEC then deems it necessary the MP can be interviewed prior to endorsement with the clear indication being that it could be refused. Each of the potential candidates has to conform to a code of conduct and a level of minimum standards. The parliamentary panel is selected from the candidates who attend a training and assessment weekend. Whilst most candidates have to have been members of the Labour Party continuously for two years, under exceptional circumstances this can be waived by the NEC. This would enable them to ‘parachute’ candidates in. Once the candidate has been elected, under OMOV by the members, they have to sign a form agreeing to abide by the code of conduct of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Candidates may, however unlikely, come from outside of the national panel but they would then be subject to an endorsement interview conducted by the NEC, as would MPs referred by the whips’ office. The whole procedure is dominated by the NEC and provides them with considerable discretionary powers.

European elections

The selection procedures for the European elections were altered following the Labour governments introduction of Proportional Representation for the and the subsequent creation of eleven regional lists. Within each region the number of MEPs elected will be approximately in proportion to the percentage of the vote for the party. Under this procedure not only is being on the party list important but so is the position on that list, those higher up the list being more likely to achieve election. The selection of the

candidates takes place from a national pool, with each candidate specifying which region/s they wish to represent. All those on the national list take part in a training and information session and agree to abide by the EPLP code of conduct. A joint regional/national selection board then decides which nominees are shortlisted based upon their application form (30%), a presentation (30%) and an interview (40%). These selection boards are made of:

5 NEC members

3 members from each Regional European Constituency

1 member of National Trade Union Liaison Committee

1 ethnic minority member appointed by the NEC

General Secretary.

The above composition is most likely to lead to a majority in favour of the position of the national parliamentary leadership. The final selection and ranking of each regional list is agreed by the regional/national board 'taking account of performance, the need to manage the transition to a new electoral system (i.e. to ensure flexibility and continuity) and the need for diversity of candidates including improving the gender balance and increasing the number of black MEPs' (Labour Party, 1998d). Endorsement is then sought through Annual Conference.

Scottish Parliament

The new electoral system for the Scottish parliament provides each voter with two votes, one for a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) and the second for a 'top-up' list of MSPs which are allocated proportionally. A Selections Board is set-up by the Scottish

Executive Committee (SEC) to offer a national panel of candidates. The Board compromises of:

- a) five members appointed from the SEC;
- b) SEC appoints five 'independent' members who are prominent members in Scotland;
- c) the NEC is invited to appoint five representatives who have a knowledge of Scottish politics;
- d) five advisors with 'relevant' experience, who do not vote.

The national list of candidates is offered to the CLPs, and from this each General Committee (Shortlisting Committee) shortlists. From those shortlisted, members are invited to a hustings where the candidates address the group and are available to answer questions. An OMOV ballot is then held. The results of the ballot are reported to the SEC for its endorsement and then to the NEC.

For the list section a special committee will be established, its membership consisting of four SEC members, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish General Secretary (in an ex-officio capacity). This group decides the composition and ranking of the lists, being approved by an electoral conference in each region (including three representatives from each of the nine CLPs). 'The electoral conference would therefore approve or refer back the regional list until agreement is reached on the same day' (Labour Party, 1998e: 8).

The procedures for all the candidate selections place authority in the hands of the party leadership, whilst maintaining a constrained role for the membership. In all the procedures examined above, the scope for leadership intervention and the constraining of the

memberships' choices is large. The moves to lists and panels means that central control and patronage is increased.

Policy-making

One of the major changes to the operation of the Labour Party which occurred under the Smith leadership was the introduction of One Member One Vote in candidate selection and leadership elections. Along with this, a general reduction of the voting power of the trade unions at Conference looked to increase the role of members. However, the manner in which Blair has employed OMOV has been to legitimise the decisions of the leadership and bypass the trade unions and Conference. Direct votes by the membership over 'Clause IV' and 'The Road To The Manifesto' (a draft election manifesto which allowed for no specific policy alterations, just an overall 'yes' or 'no') presented Conference with an already agreed package of proposals which they were, therefore, obliged to accept.

Labour Party mythology has always maintained that the annual conference was the supreme policy-making body. It was also the forum by which the leadership could be held to account. However, the passing of the 'Partnership in Power' document at the 1997 conference effectively ended the sovereignty of conference (although this is not how the document saw it). As well as altering Conference and the policy-making processes, the document also changed the composition of the NEC.

The changes included:

* reducing conference's power by stopping it from passing judgement on the performance of a Labour government. It would no longer discuss all the big policy issues each year;

instead, it would look at two or three issues in depth and produce long-term options for the government;

- * inviting outside experts such as businessmen and academics, including people who do not support Labour, to address delegates to show the party is in touch with the real world;

- * getting cabinet ministers to brief delegates in informal private sessions from which the media would be excluded;

- * transferring detailed work to policy forums which already meet during the year. They will be given extra powers, even though that are regarded as merely a talking shop by Blair's critics (Grice, 1997).

Under 'Partnership in Power' Conference became a smaller segment of the policy-making process with more scope given to Policy Forums and a new Joint Policy Committee. The leadership controls the Joint Policy Committee which effectively runs the National Policy Forum process. The Conference's role instead is to 'set out and publicise Labour's achievements and plans'(Labour Party, 1997b: 14). 'Partnership in Power' effectively enhanced the leaderships' control over policy and limited the scope for dissent. By placing policy-making in the hands of the National Policy Forums, which allows for all groups to have an equal input, trade unions no longer have any greater degree of say and power is effectively removed from the Conference. In addition, the NEC has lost many of its policy-making abilities and has become more of a system of management of the party. The revision of the NEC and the creation of a number of new sections provided the leadership with an in-built majority.

Leadership elections

The election of party leaders has shifted several times over the past twenty years. The elections are no longer the preserve of MPs, and the electoral college which replaced it has changed in composition. The college began as 40% of the vote to the trade unions, 30% to the MPs and 30% to the constituency section. The MP section by the beginning of the 1990s also included Euro MPs and the passing of OMOV ensured that the constituency section was no longer dominated by activists but expanded to the wider membership. The percentages of the electoral college also changed to one third for each section, thereby downgrading the role of the trade unions. When in opposition the leader is open to annual election if 20% of the PLP support a candidate. However, once in government the leader is much safer as 'the election shall take place only if requested by the majority of the party conference on a card vote', making the displacement of a leader virtually impossible. It remains that only MPs can nominate potential leaders.

In opposition members of the shadow cabinet are elected. But the leader decides which position they get and this may bear little relation to the level of vote they received. Once in government the requirement for annual elections ceases. This allows the leadership to bring forward favoured candidates or even people from outside their own party. Another source of strength that the leadership can rely upon is the selection of the Chief Whip who, in the past, was elected. This means that the view of the leadership can be maintained among the PLP.

The rise of dissent - the case of the 1998 NEC elections

Far from ending debate in the Labour Party the above reforms have reinvigorated the membership, although this was not the intention. The first set of elections to the newly expanded NEC took place in 1998. Far from demonstrating the total control of the Labour Party by the Blairites, the 'Grassroots Alliance' came together to show that opposition still existed. It comprised of those who believed that the Labour Government were failing to further the ideals of social justice and democratic politics. It was based around 'Labour Party democracy, redistribution of wealth and power, defending and enhancing the welfare state' (Davies, 1998). The Alliance addressed two connected concerns. 'The first is the inadequacies of Government policy in tackling urgent social need, long-term social injustices and impending economic crisis. The second is the inability of Party members to use the current structures of the Labour Party to press the Government for change on these and other matters' (Frost, 1998).

The Alliance was a response to the organisation of a 'leadership slate' by Lord Steve Bassam called 'Members First' as well as the success of Ken Livingstone in the previous year's election held under the old rules. The two most high profile names on the Alliance's slate were Mark Seddon (editor of Tribune) and Liz Davies (the rejected candidate for Leeds North East). The Alliance was much more organised and disciplined than the leadership's group and both Tribune and Labour Left Briefing provided the Alliance with press coverage.

The realisation that the Alliance could do well forced the party's leadership into action. A series of high profile attacks upon the members of the Alliance by Neil Kinnock and Tom

Sawyer merely provided the Alliance with a more 'mainstream' platform from which to air their case. Kinnock (1998) accused the Alliance of 'sour sectarianism' and being 'an ultra-left clique', 'Trotskyists, sectarians and.. selfish parasites'. The overall aim of the piece was to tarnish them as part of the group who helped to destroy the electability of the Labour Party in the 1970s and 1980s. To Kinnock, Seddon was merely being 'exploited by the sectarians of the far left'. The revelation that members of the 'Members First' slate were attempting to join the Alliance also served to undermine the leadership. 'Members First' benefited from a sizeable financial contribution from the engineering union, the AEEU, meaning that overall they had funds in excess of £100,000 enabling them to use direct mailshots and telephone canvassing.

The attacks and the extra resources available to 'Members First' did not succeed in damaging the results of the Alliance. Seddon topped the list with Davies, Jamieson and Willsman also being successful. From 'Members First' only Michael Cashman (a gay rights activist) and Diana Jeuda (a former NEC member and USDAW political officer) were elected. As a result of the results being unfavourable to the leadership the results were released early. The percentage of members voting in the election was around 35%, although those involved in the Alliance claimed 50% because of inaccurate party membership figures. If this is accurate then it would put the party membership figures at only around 200,000. It could, therefore, be suggested that the Grassroots Alliance performed well because those that have left the party were the more fair-weather 'Blairite' members. This has left a more 'traditional' form of party member who is more open to the Alliance's traditional message. In the light of the result, the party leadership adopted the position that the results did not matter because the NEC no longer had any power (although this was not their opinion when 'Partnership in Power' was discussed) and that

'awkward' members would not see any policy documents in advance of their discussion at NEC meetings. However, better news for the leadership followed with the election of loyalists Clive Soley, Pauline Green and Anne Begg to the NEC's PLP/EPLP section. To counteract any possible dissent from the new-look NEC, the General Secretary of the Party, Margaret McDonagh, issued a 'guidance' document on handling media relations. It advised against NEC members entering into 'head-to-head' debates with party members, thus minimising the chance of exposing splits.

CONCLUSION

The Labour Party could never be described as a mass party in Duverger's sense because for much of the party's existence there was only an indirect membership (i.e. they became members only as a result of their membership of an affiliated organisation) and whilst the illusion of democracy was high, the reality was different. The cartel party may well be attractive to Blair, given the consideration provided to the state funding of political parties, but this has not yet been embraced. There is also the case of a change in the electoral system which may well hinder the Labour Party and force them to form coalition governments. There has been an increased emphasis placed on the recruitment of members and the rhetoric of 'stakeholding' and the 'third way' both appear to place greater democracy and participation at their heart. Yet, part of the rise in Labour membership could be attributed to the attractiveness of Blair as party leader. So that, if asked, they would back the line of the leadership. This rise would, therefore, act on three levels; to provide the leadership with an additional source of legitimacy; to provide the party with a dynamic new image; and, counteract the formerly dominant activists who the leadership always claim to be extremist. Reports of falling membership in the aftermath of the 1997

election result should, therefore, be of particular concern to Blair (members are said to be leaving at the rate of 4,000 a month [McSmith and Nelson, 1998]). Blair's empowerment of the members requires mainstream views, so there is a constant need for new members.

None of the models of party organisation appear particularly suited to the modern Labour Party because they do not highlight the interplay between leaders and members, although Strom does attempt to do this. The models do not explain the greater centralisation of power together with the greater demands of members for participation and rewards. Katz and Mair appear correct in their observation of the growing independence of the central office; however, to merely dismiss the role of the members as image-making is inadequate.

The reforms undertaken in recent years have shifted power further into the hands of the party leader. The NEC which, in the past, had the capacity to act as a counterbalance to the parliamentary leadership is no longer afforded such powers. The use of selection panels and lists in candidate selection are merely the most recent forms of centralisation.

However, one could suggest that the movement of power has been even more dramatic with a shift in emphasis towards the party leader as opposed to the parliamentary or party leadership.

It is possible, therefore, to suggest that a new model of organisation has developed - a leader-centred party. Blair has lessened reference to the party, its symbols, heritage etc. and chooses only to 'use' the party when it is advantageous to do so. The 'participation' of members is employed solely to strengthen the position of the leader, whilst they are at the same time sidelined as the leader builds links with external groups such as the media and businesses. Blair's use of media consultants, polling experts, policy consultants, as

well as having extra resources at his disposal, have all meant that his personal position has been strengthened. The leader is coming to 'represent' the party, its characteristics and ideological positioning. The tendency of the party leadership without reference to the wider party is also increasing, such as the announcement of greater co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. The main concern has become one of proving the competence of the leader, being helped in this by the leaders' personal accumulation of campaign finance and expertise.

Blair leads the Labour Party, as demonstrated by his personal campaign over Clause IV, and there is a growing independence from the party by the leader and his circle of advisors deciding the strategy of the party. There appears to be a suspicion of anyone from outside of his group and even of PLP members including leading cabinet figures. Blair could be said to rely upon an 'inner circle'. Blair's response to the Grassroots Alliance illustrates these centralising tendencies and he sought to sideline their activities, largely having the ability to do so.

The Grassroots Alliance shows that internal opposition is not dead and, in addition, there appears to a revolt by the membership over Blair's centralising tactics - in Scotland, Wales and London where candidates favoured by the membership are finding the paths blocked. If a widespread revolt does occur then a balance between members and leaders remains to be found.

The recent acceleration of centralisation and the concentration on Blair's inner circle and appointed, as opposed to elected, officials means that there is a possibility of a decline in the level of activism amongst members (Seyd and Whiteley, 1998), and an increasingly

emphasis on national campaigns may lead to a falling level of identification with party politics and issues. Now that the electoral imperative has been removed the element which bound the party together is gradually unravelling. This, paradoxically, appears to make centralisation even more important in the eyes of the leader.

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