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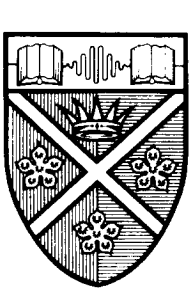

THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE – THE BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION OF 1983

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INTRODUCTION

There may be widespread agreement that the 1983 election was lost by Labour rather than won by the Conservatives. (See I. Crewe, 'Why Labour lost the British election', Public Opinion, July, 1983). But there will be less agreement on the nature, extent and causes of Labour's defeat. Various pieces of evidence seem to point to different answers and over-concentration on any one kind of evidence can be seriously misleading.

Focusing on an intensive analysis of the BBC/Gallup Election-day Poll which he designed, Professor Crewe reaches the following six conclusions:

1. The Result was 43% Conservative, 28% Labour and 26% Alliance: 'If performance is judged by the average share of the constituency vote going to Labour candidates, this was Labour's poorest showing since the party was founded in 1900. Thus, what needs to be explained about 1983 is not why the Conservatives did so well, but why labour did so badly, and the Alliance not quite well enough.'

2. Class depolarization continued in 1983: 'Mass unemployment failed to produce the widely anticipated class polarization of the vote.' 'The class basis of party choice has weakened at an accelerating rate over the last quarter century.'

3. The SDP intervention accounted for only a 1.4% swing between Labour and Conservative: 'The overall effect of the two-way traffic between the Alliance and the major parties was a mere 1.4% swing from Labour to Conservative - just over a third of total swing.'

4. The Falklands Affair had little effect on the outcome: 'Reflecting the politicians, electors were staggeringly parochial. Foreign affairs and international peace came to the lips of only 24 of the 4141 respondents; Northern Ireland to a minuscule 3. And the Falklands? Precisely 1.4% claimed that it affected their vote.'

5. The outcome was the result of the electorate's judgment on issues, not personalities: 'Evidence from the 1983 election strongly suggests that, as in previous elections, policies counted for much more than personalities and perceptions of the country's interest more than self-interest.'

6. The issues were overwhelming against Labour: 'The new Conservative government has been elected on a minority vote that is lower and more negative than in 1979. What kind of mandate, if any, does it have? As it turns out, a surprisingly strong one.' 'Only one Conservative policy - cutting the provision of education, health, and welfare in order to reduce income tax - was emphatically rejected. But then that was not a Conservative proposal; it was only part of its alleged hidden manifesto.'

Such conclusions flow naturally enough from an analysis of the BBC/Gallup survey and would probably be confirmed in broad terms by other surveys taken at the same time, even if details varied a little. None the less, I want to suggest that: every one of these six conclusions is arithmetically correct but politically misleading.

1. Was the Result 43% Conservative, 28% Labour and 26% Alliance?

The 1983 result had several facets. Shares of the vote came out at 43% Conservative, 28% Labour and 26% Alliance. But shares of the vote have little political significance and no constitutional significance at all.

Two other facets of the result ---party identification and seats in parliament, have much greater significance now and for

the future. When surveys tried to measure party identification - i.e. the electors feelings of 'belong to' parties or 'commitment to' them, the Labour party came out far ahead of the Alliance. In the BBC/Gallup survey 44% said they 'generally thought of themselves as Conservatives', 38% Labour and only 16% Alliance. A TVam/ASL survey put Labour even closer to the Conservatives in terms of party identification.

In the past, voting behaviour in Britain has closely followed party identification, but not in 1983. Labour won the votes of only just over two-thirds of those who identified with the party: 16% of Labour identifiers voted for the Alliance, 5% for the Conservatives and 10% did not vote at all. We can also measure the strength of party identification and relate it to voting behaviour. Overall, 69% of Labour identifiers loyally voted Labour. Amongst those who said they were 'very strong' identifiers, 86% voted Labour; amongst the 'fairly strong' identifiers, 69%; and amongst those whose Labour identification was 'not very strong', only 41% actually voted Labour. That defection by Labour identifiers explains why Labour's vote was so much less than its level of identification, particularly because defections from Labour were not balanced by any substantial defection to Labour by other parties' identifiers. Non-Labour voting by Labour identifiers was so great in 1983 that it will be possible later to look at some of the characteristics of those Labour partisans who voted against their own party. But the basic fact that many non-Labour voters retained a Labour party

identification is of more significance than a detailed analysis of the defectors.

********** TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE *********

Party identifications, like votes, have no constitutional significance. Only seats in parliament matter for government. And in terms of seats in parliament the result was 397 Conservative, 209 Labour and a mere 23 for the Alliance.

So both in terms of parliamentary seats and in terms of party identification we do not have to explain 'why Labour did so badly, and the Alliance not quite well enough'. By either of these measures the result was not a near miss for the Alliance - it was a total rout, a complete disaster. Alliance leaders had gambled against precedent and they had lost.

But surely this is a trivial point? Surely it is a matter of personal choice whether we describe the result in terms of votes, seats or identifications? I think not: the fact that neither seats nor identifications reflected votes has several important implications.

First, for analysis, there is no simple relationship between votes and seats. We cannot explain the reelection of a Conservative government with a landslide majority simply by explaining the party shares of the vote: the spatial distribution of the vote has come to be as important as the party distribution. Nationwide surveys are becoming less and less powerful tools for explaining the parliamentary outcome of British elections.

Second, while the numbers of seats won by the different parties do not reflect shares of the vote at all well, the numbers of seats won fit much better with party shares of party identification. The Alliance came a very poor third in parliament just as it came a poor third in terms of party identification. In the summer of 1983 the Alliance won people's votes but not their sense of commitment or identification. Hence the lack of a real groundswell in favour of proportional representation. Few electors could feel very cheated by the way the electoral system transformed votes into seats. Alliance voters were not commited partisans.

We know that the degree of commitment to the major parties has declined over the last two decades (though the level of strong commitment to them rose slightly in 1983) but commitment to the Alliance by its voters was outstandingly weaker than commitment by Labour and Conservative voters to their parties.

Labour and Conservative identification was not only more widespread than Alliance identification, it was more strongly held. Just over one third of Labour and Conservative identifiers said they 'very strongly' identified with their party, but only one sixth of Alliance identifiers (Liberal, Social Democrat, or plain 'Alliance') expressed similarly strong commitment. Contrary to the trends found by Sarlvik and Crewe during the seventies, both Labour and Conservative party identification (especially Conservative) strengthened in 1983. Since many Alliance voters did not identify with the Alliance at all, the differences between

parties on strength of identification are even more striking if we look at voters for the different parties: 32% of Conservative voters strongly identified with the Conservative party, and fully 37% of Labour voters strongly identified with the Labour party, but only 10% of Alliance voters strongly identified with the Alliance (6% with the Liberal party and 4% with the SDP, zero percent with the 'Alliance' itself).

********** TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE **********

Typically, a disillusioned Labour or Conservative partisan cast a vote for the Alliance while still retaining his identification with his old party; then the electoral system operated so as to elect a Conservative or Labour MP in his constituency. He might feel a bit flat, a bit unenthusiastic about the election result (in parliamentary terms), but hardly cheated by the system - his vote for the Alliance had not expressed commitment to it.

Third, 23 MPs simply do not provide the basis for a credible claim that the Alliance is THE opposition. So it will be difficult for them to consolidate their vote and they will not be the natural beneficiaries of the 'swing of the pendulum' if and when the public turns against the Conservative government. There is an enormous political gap between 26% of the vote with 23 MPs and 28% of the vote with 209 MPs, and that gap has almost nothing to do with shares of the vote. If Proportional Representation had already been established before the formation of the Alliance then

the story would have been quite different. In another world the 1983 election outcome might be counted as a near miss for the Alliance but in reality the election ended the Alliance's dreams of power based, as they were, on too much attention to nationwide opinion polls and on too little attention to the mechanics of the electoral system.

2. Did Class Depolarization Continue in 1983?

According to the opinion polls, yes; according to the parliamentary election results, no. Labour was protected more by continuing class polarization than by its share of the national vote.

For two decades now, opinion polls have shown a steady decline in class polarization - in the sense that the voting choices of middle-class individuals and working-class individuals have become ever more similar to each other. In 1983 the BBC/Gallup survey shows that those who lived in households headed by a non-manual worker (i.e. the middle class, as conventionally defined) voted 58% Conservative, 26% Alliance and 17% Labour; while the working-class voted 33% Conservative, 29% Alliance and 38% Labour. One way of reducing these figures to a simple index of Conservative/Labour class polarization is to calculate the

difference between the Conservative lead (over Labour) in the middle-class and their lead in the working class. The Conservative lead in the working class is negative; so the calculation goes:

% class diff in Cons lead = (58-17) - (33-38)

= 41 - (-5)

= 46%

Now if these opinion poll figures told us all the relevant facts about class polarization then, in any group of people who were M% middle class the Conservative lead should be approximately:

1983 CON LEAD = -5 + 0.46M

(The minus five equals the Conservative lead in a totally working class group, and the 0.46 equals the difference in Conservative leads in the middle and working classes, expressed as a proportion rather than as a percentage).

Similar calculations based on earlier surveys (recalculated from B. Sarlvik and I. Crewe, Decade of Dealignment) give the following results:

1964 CON LEAD = -36 + 0.76M

1974 CON LEAD = -33 + 0.62M

1979 CON LEAD = -15 + 0.52M

1983 CON LEAD = -5 + 0.46M

Quite clearly, the opinion poll evidence points to declining class differences, from 76% to 46% over two decades.

But if class had not polarized the vote much more strongly than these polls imply, then Labour's 2% voting margin over the Alliance would not have given it ten times as many seats. If we look at constituency election results over the last two decades two features of class polarization are immediately apparent: first, class polarization between constituencies is vastly greater than that implied by a simplistic interpretation of nationwide opinion poll results; second, class polarization between constituencies has not declined over the past two decades. In short, the votes of individuals may no longer be very easily predictable from their social class, but the votes of parliamentary constituencies do remain easily predictable from their social class characteristics.

Statistical regression analysis of actual constituency election results shows that the equations that best describe their voting patterns in 1979 and 1983 are:

1979 CON LEAD = -56 + 1.82M

1983 CON LEAD = -50 + 1.88M

Class polarization between constituencies did not decline in 1983, and it ran at four times the level implied by nationwide opinion polls.

Chart 1 illustrates the constituency pattern of votes in 1979 and 1983. Conservative votes were much the same in both years, though the Conservatives lost a trifle more votes in the most working-class areas. Labour lost heavily everywhere but it lost a trifle more votes in the more middle-class areas despite the fact

that it had least to lose in those places. (Only in a very few extremely middle class constituencies was the Labour loss in 1983 heavily constrained by the party's lack of 1979 votes to lose). And the Alliance, in comparison with the 1979 Liberals, made its gains fairly evenly in all kinds of constituency.

Since the Conservative and Labour lines in Chart 1 steepened slightly between 1979 and 1983, their votes became slightly more class-polarized in 1983, not less.

I have discussed elsewhere the reasons for this discrepancy between opinion poll findings on class polarization and election results in the constituencies. (W.L.Miller,'Social class and party choice in England', British Journal of Political Science, 1978, 257-284 ; W.L.Miller, 'Variations in electoral behaviour in the United Kingdom', in The Territorial Dimension in United Kingdom Politics , eds. P.Madgwick and R.Rose, 1982, 224-250). Class polarization has increasingly become an attribute of communities rather than individuals; and the depolarization of individuals may even be a cause of the polarization of constituencies. But whatever the reasons for it, the consequences are highly significant for parliamentary election outcomes. The high level of class polarization between constituencies explains (1)why the Labour party won so many more seats than the Alliance with so few more votes, and (2)why the Labour party came third in so many constituencies.

********** CHART ONE ABOUT HERE **********

Statistical analysis may quantify this relationship between class and party but the broad outlines of its structure were obvious before the election to activists in all the parties. Labour party activists could not believe they would lose their working class strongholds despite their party's sagging fortunes in the opinion polls -- and they were right, Labour did have areas of great strength even at a time of great weakness.

Alliance leaders also knew the likely distribution of their vote whatever its size. Despite their notorious obsession with nationwide opinion polls all kinds of other evidence, particularly local election results, had already made it clear that the formation of the SDP had not altered the structure of electoral support though it had altered the level of the third party protest vote. Looking back, it is difficult to justify the SDP strategy. Their close alliance with the Liberals almost inevitably meant that they could do no more than augment the old Liberal protest vote. (I do not wish to suggest that all Liberal votes were protest votes, but the alliance with the SDP was likely to augment the protest component of the Liberal vote without much affecting its other components such as its local strength in the South West). Unfortunately, changing the size of the old third party vote without changing its structure could not produce many seats in parliament unless the increment in size was extremely large.

Chart 2 shows the number of seats in parliament that would have gone to the Alliance at any level of Alliance vote, on the assumptions of uniform constituency swings since 1979 and Alliance

voting gains taken equally from both Labour and Conservative. Those were highly favourable assumptions from the Alliance standpoint, given the long established tendency of the Liberal vote to 'plateau' (i.e. to go up least in precisely those places where a rise in vote would be most rewarding) and given also the net swing from Labour to Conservative coupled with the preponderance of close Liberal second places (in 1979) in Conservative held seats. Thus chart 2 shows the likely maximum return in seats for any level of the Alliance vote. In the event the Alliance did not do as well as this curve suggested, but even this optimistic curve implied that the Alliance needed at least a third of the vote, rather than a quarter, if it was to win a substantial number of seats without altering the structure of its vote.

********** CHART TWO ABOUT HERE **********

As long as the degree of class polarization shown in Chart 1 persists, the Alliance can have little real prospect of a substantial number of MPs. It might hope for substantial political influence in an evenly divided House of Commons even without many MPs, a rerun of the 1974-79 parliamentary situation, but that is the only realistic hope. There is little prospect of it breaking the structure rather than merely changing the levels, of electoral support. If Benn had beaten Healey for the Deputy Leadership in 1981, if Healey and others had defected to the SDP, if the SDP had been able to attract half the Labour MPs instead of

a mere tenth then it might have laid claim to be the 'real' Labour Party, the true descendant of Attlee's party, and that might well have broken the structure of class voting. As it was, defections to the SDP were large enough to damage Labour's image without being large enough to establish the SDP as the rightful heir to old Labour loyalties, and the pattern of class polarization in British constituencies did not change.

3. Did the SDP Intervention Account for Only a 1.4% Swing between Labour and Conservative?

If we crosstabulate the BBC/Gallup respondents' memories of their votes in 1979 against their stated votes in 1983 then we can calculate the percentages who say they have switched between each pair of parties or between voting and non-voting. The Conservatives picked up more votes than Labour from previous Liberals, from previous abstainers and from those who were previously too young. The Conservatives also picked up more ex-Labour voters than they lost to Labour. And the Conservatives lost fewer of their former voters to the Alliance than did Labour.

Of the total net swing from Labour to Conservative caused by differential losses to the Alliance, differential gains from the Alliance, differential gains from previous non-voters (whether

abstainers or too young in 1979), and direct vote switching between Labour and Conservative, only one third, 1.4%, of the total swing was contributed by differential vote switching to and from the Alliance. In that sense the formation of the SDP and the Alliance accounts for only a 1.4% swing.

There are two ways in which this statement misleads, however. First , we might well argue that the formation of the SDP was a cause of some of the direct vote switching from Labour to Conservative; or that the formation of the SDP was a cause of previous abstainers and new entrants into the electorate opting so much more heavily for the Conservatives than Labour. Second , and perhaps a little less obvious, the total swing is an arbitrary figure. Had it not been for the formation of the SDP the swing might not have been merely zero, it might have been a swing from Conservative to Labour.

As early as August 1979, Labour went ahead of the Conservatives in the monthly opinion polls (see Chart 3) and stayed there until the end of 1981. Unemployment passed the 2 million mark in September 1980 and in October the MORI poll put Labour at 50%, Conservatives 34%, Liberals 15%. Despite the election of Michael Foot as leader, Labour was still 10% points ahead of the Conservatives in January 1981.

However at the end of January 1981, Labour held its special Wembley Conference at which it accepted the principle of an Electoral College for electing the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Party. The Gang of Four issued their Limehouse Declaration on

24th January and formally launched the SDP on 26th March. Despite a surge in support for the newly formed SDP, Labour maintained a lead of just under 10% right through to September 1981 when the regular Labour Conference voted on whether Healey or Benn should be Deputy Leader. Healey won by a whisker in circumstances that cast some doubts on the political validity of his victory.

Following that Healey/Benn vote, Labour support dropped abruptly and Alliance support shot up to peak at 44% in November, the month when Shirley Williams won the Crosby by-election. Alliance support went into a decline almost immediately, but as it declined both Labour and Conservative support rose together; so that just before the outbreak of the Falklands crisis all three parties were running neck and neck. Meanwhile, unemployment had just passed 3 millions.

Between October 1980 and November 1981, Labour's share in the MORI poll dropped from 50% to 27% and its lead over the Conservatives from 16% to zero - a swing of 8%. Even over the two months from September to November 1981 (i.e.the two months after the Benn versus Healey vote) Labour dropped 11% and the Alliance rose 11% - equivalent to a Labour to Conservative swing of 5.5%. Perhaps some of that swing would have happened anyway. Even without the formation of the SDP, Benn would still have stood against Healey for the Deputy Leadership. But the charges of disunity and extremism that were leveled at Labour during 1981 came all the more convincingly from the mouths of former Labour Cabinet members who now headed a rival party.

Given the brutal contrast between the Conservative posters of 1979 ---'Labour isn't working' was their slogan, and the mounting unemployment of 1981 and 1982 there is no reason to take the 1979 election result as the baseline for assessing 1983. Other things being equal, Labour should not have equalled its dismal 1979 performance, it should have done very much better. Other factors had to wipe out Labour's huge lead in the 1980 polls before they could go on to create a massive Conservative lead in 1983. Direct vote trading with the Alliance may well have produced a mere 1.4% swing from Conservative to Labour, but the impact of the Alliance on Labour's actual and potential support was almost certainly considerably greater.

********** CHART THREE ABOUT HERE **********

4. Did the Falklands Affair have Little Effect on the Outcome?

According to respondents in the BBC/Gallup poll only 1.4% of them were influenced in their voting choice by the Falklands Affair. That tells us something about the superficial nature of the opinions elicited in the poll, but it does not prove the Falklands had little effect on the outcome.

Just before the Falklands crisis, indeed throughout the winter of 1981-82, the Conservatives were running between one and two percent behind Labour, though both were gaining at the expense of the Alliance. Three months later, in June 1982, the Conservatives were 20% ahead of Labour. For the three months of the crisis, large percentages of Gallup respondents quoted foreign affairs as the most important issue facing the country. As soon as Port Stanley was retaken, however, foreign affairs dropped right out of the list of salient issues. The Conservative party lead dropped much more slowly however. Mrs. Thatcher's personal rating as Prime Minister also shot up during the crisis and only partially dropped back again afterwards. Roughly, MORI figures suggest that half the Falklands boost in both party support and leadership approval was retained after the crisis had passed.

During 1983 events reminded the electorate of both Labour disunity and the Falklands. Mrs. Thatcher paid a well publicised visit to the Falklands in January and Peter Tatchell lost the Bermondsey by-election at the end of February. Tatchell's candidacy was a propaganda gift to the Conservatives ---a pacifist, denounced by Foot himself as a dangerous extremist, fighting a by-election caused by the resignation of a former Labour Chief Whip who promoted another candidate against him, a homosexual and an immigrant -- he was viciously and forthrightly attacked on all those grounds.

By the summer of 1983 the Falklands Crisis was no longer in the forefront of people's minds but is was evoked by all kinds of

codes and symbols. Thatcher was photographed against the world's biggest Union Jack. She siezed on the Defence Issue in order to portray Labour as divided and unpatriotic. And in somewhat more subtle vein she chose 'The Resolute Approach' as her campaign theme. James Naughtie, writing in the Scotsman summed up the impact of the Falklands thus:

> 'There is an argument that the Falklands War established Mrs. Thatcher's strength and allowed her to surmount some of the criticism of her economic policy. The truth may be rather different: that the war was a catalyst which now (10th May 1983) has little direct impact on most of the electorate but which simply escapsulated the essence of the resolute approach and crystallised Mrs. Thatcher's insistence on seeing the world in terms of opposing camps who watch each other in the sure knowledge that there is always, and must be, a clear distinction between black and white, good and evil, resolution and weakness.'

Winning the Falklands War could have been a disaster for a liberal pacifist like Foot, but it added a touch of verisimilitude to the tattered image of a nationalistic authoritarian like Thatcher. Image and event matched perfectly. By 1983 the event had been pushed back into the public subconscious, leaving only the refurbished image to directly influence voting behaviour. Even those who judge that the Falklands Affair had a major impact on the 1983 outcome would not expect very many of the BBC/Gallup respondents to quote it as a major determinant of their vote. The link between event and vote was not that direct.

5. Was the Outcome a Result of the Electorate's Judgement on Issues rather than Personalities?

If we crosstabulate BBC/Gallup respondents' voting choices by which party they thought had the 'best policies' and the 'best leader' it seems that policies rather than leaders determine votes: 'When people prefer the policies of one party but the leader of another they split (their votes) 83% to 17% in favour of the first'.(Crewe)

I hope that when jurymen prefer the arguments of one side but the advocate of the other they split 100% to zero in favour of the first. British party leaders are not American Presidential candidates. When Panorama or TV Eye give them prime time television it is to make the case for their party, not for themselves. In 1983 only 13% chose Foot as the 'best for Prime Minister', only 17% said Labour had 'the best team of leaders' and only 25% said Labour had 'the best policies' although 28% voted for Labour and 38% said they 'generally identified with Labour'. Judged against that 38% standard, Labour policies were unpopular, Labour leaders very unpopular and Michael Foot extremely unconvincing as a potential prime minister.

There can be little doubt that when there is a conflict of view as to which party has the best leaders and which the best policies, British electors vote for the party they imagine has the best policies. However that does not mean that the personality of the leadership is irrelevant, it means that the function of the party leadership is to sell their party, not themselves ---just as the advocate in the court of law must convince the jury of his client's case rather than appear as a good advocate in a bad cause. Wilson and Callaghan owed some of their popularity to the contrast between them and their left-wing opponents within their own party. So that to a certain extent their personal popularity damaged their party instead of helping it.

But if Wilson and Callaghan's personal popularity did not transfer to their party in 1970 and 1979, the unpopularity of Foot and the 1983 Labour leadership did rub off on the party. Chart 4 shows the trends in party support during the election campaign. Compared to the last few months before the announcement of an election on 8th May, the first fortnight of the campaign showed a very steady picture with Conservative and Labour doing a little better than earlier in the year, and the Alliance clearly under pressure -- its support down to an average of 18%. Within the period from 8th to 25th May however there was no evidence of movement or trend, Alliance support was down compared to the pre-campaign period but was trending neither up nor down. From the 25th May however, there was a progressive collapse of Labour support and a surge in Alliance support. Labour had been 15%

ahead of the Alliance in the first two weeks of the campaign but sank to parity with the Alliance by the fourth week, recovering slightly in the election itself.

********** CHART FOUR ABOUT HERE **********

Labour's collapse after 25th May is all the more remarkable because on that day the press carried the news that Mr. Edward du Cann had put his name to what the Times called 'a damning analysis of the Government's management of the economy, which claims that unemployment is six percentage points higher than even pessimistic estimates suggest was needed to control inflation, and that less than half the rise in Britain's unemployment can plausibly be blamed on the world recession.' The document Mr. du Cann was reported to have signed was a draft report by the Commons Treasury and Civil Service Committee.

But the report on unemployment did not capture the main headlines on 25th May. They were reserved for quarrels within the Labour leadership. Earlier in the campaign Hattersley had shown a marked lack of enthusiasm for Labour's policy on the EEC and Healey had attempted to define Labour's Defence Policy in such a way as to turn unilateralism into a multilateralism. Foot had tried to clarify Labour's Defense Policy by defining it in more unilateralist terms. The Times main headline on 25th May was not about unemployment but about an alleged ultimatum by Healey threatening that he would withdraw from the campaign if Foot insisted that Labour's Defence Policy involved unilateral

abandonment of all British nuclear weapons. The press focused on each Labour leader's personal Defence Policy. It was a good way to sell newspapers. A perfect way, in the journalists' phrase, 'to keep the story moving'. Foot clearly had a different policy from his Deputy, Healey and from his predecessor, Callaghan. The Times editorial on 6th June commented: 'the Labour Party has been living a lie; what is perhaps surprising is that the pressure of a mere three weeks' electioneering has so cruelly exposed the deceit at the core of the travail'.

********** CUTTING OF TIMES ABOUT HERE *********

In such circumstances we could hardly expect many voters to rate Foot as the best for Prime Minister nor could we expect many to describe Labour as having the 'best team of leaders' (those were the words of the BBC/Gallup question). Nor indeed could we expect them to rate Labour as having the 'best policies'. What team? What policies? But equally it is hardly likely that policy evaluation was entirely self-contained. Poor and divided leadership was bound to produce negative evaluations of policy. Voting choices correlate with policy better than with explicit leadership evaluations mainly because those leadership evaluations were so very negative.

Of those Labour identifiers in the BBC/Gallup survey who voted for the Conservatives or the Alliance, only 12% said Labour had the best policies and a mere 3% said it had the best team of leaders. Amongst those Labour identifiers who actually voted

Labour, 81% said Labour had the best policies but only 58% said it had the best leaders. The reason why the 'best team of leaders' question fails to discriminate between loyalists and defectors is simply that even Labour loyalists were unimpressed by the party's team of leaders. Technically that prevents the 'leadership' question from predicting whether Labour partisans would or would not defect, but it does not support the argument that the Labour leadership had little effect upon defection. On the contrary, it indicates that Labour's leadership was so bad that even those partisans who stayed loyal to the party could not quote the leadership as a reason for so doing. A universally recognised failing in a party can never be a good statistical discriminator between those who defect and those who stay loyal. Yet it may well be a powerful cause of defection amongst those whose other ties to the party are weak, and of demoralisation amongst those whose other ties are too strong to let them make the break. If Labour partisans could still believe in Labour policies (whatever they imagined Labour policies were) despite the behavior of Labour leaders they would vote Labour while criticising the Labour leadership. But that hardly proves the dominance of issues over personalities: personalities conditioned issue attitudes, both in terms of issue salience and issue position.

Harold Wilson's treatment of the Defence issue in his 1964 campaign provides a useful contrast. Wilson fudged it. The British Independent Nuclear Deterrent (Polaris) was 'neither British, nor Independent, nor a Deterrent' said Labour's Manifesto

in 1964. The Manifesto sounded unilateralist without ever stating a unilateralist commitment. And it made the distinction between unilateralism and multilateralism appear at once obscure and unimportant. Defence was not the major item in Wilson's election campaigns, but his Defence policy certainly did not prevent him winning a large majority.

What was different in 1983? Not the Manifesto. Had it been the work of one clear mind deliberately bent on confusing the reader it would have been another example of Wilson-style fudge: 'Labour's commitment is to establish a non-nuclear defence policy for this country. This means the rejection of any fresh nuclear bases or weapons on British soil or in British waters, and the removal of all existing nuclear bases and weapons... However all this cannot be done at once, and the way we do it must be designed to assist in the task to which we are also committed--securing nuclear disarmament agreements with other countries and maintaining cooperation with our allies.' It went on to oppose Cruise and Trident but reaffirm support for NATO and proposed that 'Britain's Polaris force be included in the nuclear disarmament negotiations.' The Manifesto itself allowed plenty of flexibilty and obscurity both in the campaign and in any future government.

What was really differnt in 1983 was not the Manifesto but the Leadership. Fudge may be good politics, compromise may be good politics, but the 1983 Manifesto represented neither fudge nor compromise to the Labour leaders. They did not dismiss the importance of Defence policy. Indeed Foot had a long history of

stressing the unique (in his view) importance of the issue. And Labour leaders did their best to make their Defence policy clear rather than obscure. Unfortunately they presented several clear but contradictory policies. In short, there was no such thing as a Labour Defence Policy. The Times was wrong: the campaign exposed fundamental, deeply held disagreement, rather than deceit. In contrast to the sixties Labour in 1983 had several clearly stated alternative Defence Policies rather than a single obscure fudge. Labour's collapse during the second half of the 1983 campaign coincided with a public debate between Labour leaders on what their policy should be. It did not coincide with a sudden exposure by the Conservatives of an unpopular Labour Defence Policy. If the Conservatives succeeded in exposing anything it was the lack of a Labour Defence Policy--popular or unpopular.

6. Were the Issues Overwhelmingly Against Labour?

Even the BBC/Gallup survey itself hardly sustains the argument that the issues were overwhelmingly anti-Labour. Only 4 issues were quoted by more than ten percent of respondents as 'one of the two most important in influencing their vote'. They were the NHS (quoted by 11%), Prices (20%), Defence (38%) and unemployment (72%). On these issues Labour had a lead of 4% on

unemployment and 15% on the NHS but lagged behind the Conservatives by 47% on Defence and 21% on Prices. If we restrict attention only to those who declared the issue important these four party preferences on issues rise to 16%, 46%, 54% and 40% respectively.

So Labour was ahead on two of the top four issues, including the most important issue of all: unemployment. But Labour had only a small lead on unemployment and relatively few people put the NHS as a major issue. By contrast the Conservatives were well ahead on two issues that were quoted by moderately large numbers of respondents.

Some issues that were not quoted by respondents as important may nonetheless have been so, even if respondents were less immediately conscious of them ---but once again they were not overwhelmingly anti-Labour: 72% supported stricter laws against trades unions but only 57% supported the idea of selling off parts of British Steel and British Leyland to private enterprise and a massive 80% opted for maintaining public services in health, education and welfare rather than cutting taxes.

How could the Labour Party do so badly in an election when the main issue was unemployment and the Conservative government had pushed unemployment up to well over 3 million? When the public were antagonistic towards trades unions but unenthusiastic about privatisation and massively in favour of public services rather than tax cuts? That was <u>not</u> a bad background for a Labour election campaign. Labour's problems were of its own making.

The issues were not inherently against Labour. Instead, disunity and incompetence in the Labour leadership destroyed Labour's credibility on its own natural issues and allowed its opponents to put their issues on the agenda.

On Defense :At the start of 1983 there was a large majority against Cruise and Trident but in favour of NATO and Polaris. That combination of attitudes fits closely with the text of the Labour Manifesto and with the views put by Healey during the campaign. It does not fit the views of many Labour activists nor the known position of Michael Foot which he chose to reiterate during the campaign. Defence is always a risky campaign theme for a party whose patriotism is perennially suspect. So even though popular attitudes at the start of 1983 matched Labour's Manifesto policy the subject was never likely to be a great vote-winner for Labour especially at an election held on the anniversary of the Falklands Affair. But the Labour leadership turned it into a vote loser by allowing the Conservatives to redefine the issue as unilateral disarmament instead of a new round in the Arms Race, and by disagreeing with each other on what Britain's Defence Policy should be, while agreeing on its vital importance. As the election approached public opinion turned in favour of Cruise and Trident, but that was a response to the Defence debate. It is not at all obvious that public opinion would have moved away from its initial position if the Labour leadership had been united in reinforcing that initial view and if they had forced the Conservatives to defend a new Arms Race rather than old alliances.

But above all, Labour leaders themselves were guilty of making Defence a major issue at all.

On the EEC :the Conservatives succeeded in convincing the electorate that Britain should remain in the EEC and that the Conservative party was best able to stand up for Britain within the EEC. So the Conservatives succeeded in presenting themselves as agressively British despite their EEC commitment.

On the NHS :the press leaked Think Tank proposals for privatisation in the Health Service but Labour failed to make it a major issue.

But the Unemployment issue provides the clearest evidence that Labour was defeated by disuinity and incompetence as much as by unattractive policies. The TSRU poll during the Hillhead by-election shows the problem that faced Labour in 1982: when asked whether 'any government could bring unemployment down a lot', 56% replied that no government could do that, 25% opted for Labour, 7% for the Alliance and 3% for the Conservatives.

Throughout Britain, not just in Hillhead, Labour's desire to bring down unemployment was widely accepted but people doubted its ability to fulfil that desire, especially after the rise in unemployment under the 1964-70 and 1974-79 Labour governments. Polls consistently showed that (except during the short Falklands Crisis) unemployment was quoted as the major issue. But could Labour do anything about it? In Mrs. Thatcher's phrase 'was there any alternative' policy that would promote higher levels of employment? Du Cann's Committee paper assures us that there was,

and a united Labour leadership might have used such a document to increase their credibility on the issue.

Early in May 1983 MORI reported a 5% majority (49% to 44%) for the proposition that the Government was largely responsible for unemployment. Gallup reported a 34% majority for the proposition that a Conservative victory would increase unemployment. Late in May Harris reported an 8% majority saying Labour would reduce unemployment and Gallup reported a 4% majority saying Labour had the best policies on unemployment. These Labour majorities on such a natural Labour issue were low enough but at the end of May Harris reported a Conservative majority of 7% on the question of which party respondents 'trusted most to take the right decisions on unemployment'. And in election week itself MARPLAN put Conservative and Labour equal as the 'best party on unemployment' while NOP put the Conservatives 4% ahead. Compared to other polls the BBC/Gallup election-day poll which put Labour 4% ahead was rather kind to Labour on unemployment. Earlier in the parliament Labour had failed to get as much advantage out of the unemployment issue as it might have hoped, because people were not entirely convinced that it could do better; but by the time of the election Labour had lost its advantage even on the unemployment issue, and even when independent evidence supported its case.

Back in 1982 TSRU's Hillhead survey asked respondents to say in their own words why they 'would not vote' for each of the four parties ---Conservative, Labour, Alliance, and Scottish

Nationalist. At that time 22% said they would not vote Labour because it was 'extremist' and 17% because it was 'divided' or disunited. Amongst TSRU respondents who did not intend to vote Labour but who named Labour as their second choice, 24% said they were not going to vote Labour because it was extremist and 27% because it was divided.

********** TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE **********

The BBC/Gallup Election-day poll asked quite explicitly whether Labour's alleged extremism and disunity had influenced respondents' votes. Almost half the Labour identifiers who voted Conservative or Alliance quoted one or other of these factors as influencing their vote: 14% mentioned disunity, 20% extremism, and 10% mentioned both.

Labour's disunity was consciously recognised and quoted as a reason for switching away from Labour. But it also operated on the unconscious: much of Labour's reputation for extremism in 1983 derived from its disunity, from its consequent inability to put its case on policy, and from the charges of extremism that various Labour (and ex-Labour) factions hurled at each other.

The attitude profiles of Labour identifiers whose votes were influenced by the party's alleged extremism were remarkably similar to the profiles of those who mentioned Labour's disunity. Almost to a man they were agreed that Foot was an unsuitable candidate for Prime Minister; 38% of both groups prefered Healey as a successor, and similar percentages in both groups opted for

Kinnock (15% and 18%) and again for Hattersley (10% and 9%). Tony Benn was a little more popular with those who criticised Labour's extremism than with those who criticised its disunity. On the deployment of Cruise missiles, 53% of those who alleged extremism favoured Cruise compared to 43% of those who alleged disunity; 46% of the former favoured privatisation of steel and cars, as did 34% of the latter. Both groups were overwhelmingly against tax-cuts if that meant a cut in public services, and 80% of both groups favoured the retention of Polaris. To a considerable extent therefore it appears as if the charges of extremism and disunity were very much the same thing, two ways of describing the same phenomenon.

Labour was so divided at the top, its most prominent leaders so clearly disagreed with each other on matters that they judged crucially important, that they were unable to convince the electorate about anything, even the government's responsibility for unemployment.

Worse, Labour leaders looked as if they might be more comfortable in defeat than in victory since victory would force an unambiguous decision on questions like Defence. Labour's leaders were divided into two wings within the shadow cabinet plus the Bennites further to the left and the SDP to the right. Mrs. Thatcher was wrong to claim that there were no alternatives to her policies but there was clearly no alternative to her government. At its best the British system of adversarial politics is meant to present the electorate with a clear choice between two alternative

governments. In 1983 it did not do so. The electorate were given no opportunity to reject an alternative to Thatcher's government, instead they were presented with a variety of warring factions intent on pursuing an internal party debate against the distracting backdrop of an election campaign.

PROSPECT

Everything considered, 1983 was kind to Labour. Identification with the party held up very well ---slipping a little behind the Conservatives but remaining far ahead of the Alliance. And the electoral system coupled with continued class polarization (of areas) protected Labour from the consequences of its own folly.

Some of the difficulties of 1979-83 may not recur. The Alliance is no longer excitingly new, though it will carry a little more weight than the Liberals in the past. Another Falklands with so happy an outcome for the government is as unlikely as was the first Falklands Affair. Those who gained new powers within the Labour Party may be encouraged by the 1983 result to exercise them more responsibly. Kinnock may command more genuine loyalty than Foot as well as being much more aware of the requirements necessary to win elections.

Twelve of the 28 Governments since 1880 have had overall majorities in excess of 100 seats ---but only 2 of them won a workable majority at the next election. The odds must be on a swing of the pendulum against the Conservatives at the next election and the electoral system has left Labour as the only sizable opposition party. Unless Labour once again opts for the role of debating society rather than governing party its prospects are not too bleak.

I have suggested that dissension at the top rather than spontaneous desertion at the bottom was the cause of Labour's very poor performance in 1983. That does not mean that policies are irrelevant. If Labour leaders cannot agree policies amongst themselves on what they define as the central issues in politics then they will not succeed in convincing the electorate either that Labour has the policies or that it has the men to form a government. If they can agree on policies, however,they may well be able to turn public opinion in their favour or divert public attention to issues on which they do have public support. In particular the left must either convince the right or compromise with it, not because left wing policies in themselves preclude electoral success, but because they need the support or acquiescence of all wings of the party before they can present a credible alternative to the present government. The personal bitterness and unrestrained hostility between Labour leaders that has been so evident in recent internal disputes has been more damaging than any policy proposals. Labour was not ready for government in 1983 and the electorate knew it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have made use of the following sources:

(1) the BBC/Gallup Election-day Poll supplied in computer-readable form through the SSRC Archive at Essex University;

(2) the Parliamentary Constituency volume of the 1981 OPCS Census;

(3) the BBC/ITN Guide to the New Parliamentary Constituencies which is an invaluable source of estimates of how the new constituencies voted in 1979;

(4) the Times report of the 1983 constituency election results.

I wish to thank Ivor Crewe of Essex University and Robert Wybrow of Gallup for providing access to their survey, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University for providing such superb facilities for computer analysis, and Steve Tagg and Ann Mair of Strathclyde University for helping me connect data and computer.

TABLE 1: VOTING BY PARTY IDENTIFIERS

	Percent voting for CON	LAB	ALLIANCE	NO VOTE	
Amongst CON identifiers	84	1	7	8	100%
Amongst LAB identifiers	5	69	16	10	100%
Amongst LIB identifiers	13	5	76	6	100%
Amongst SDP identifiers	10	1	77	12	100%
Amongst those with no party identity	27	10	23	38	100%

Source: author's reanalysis of BBC/Gallup Election-day Poll

TABLE 2: STRENGTH OF IDENTIFICATION

		Percentage 'very strongly' identifying with CON	LAB	ALLIANCE
Amongst the party's own identifiers in	1964	48	51	32
	1966	49	50	35
	1970	51	47	26
	Feb. 1974	32	41	12
	Oct. 1974	27	36	14
	1979	24	29	14
	1983	36	33	17
Amongst the party's actual voters in	1983	32	37	10

Sources:
1983 author's reanalysis of BBC/Gallup Election-day Poll.
1964-79 B. Sarlvik and I. Crewe. Decade of Dealignment, p. 337.

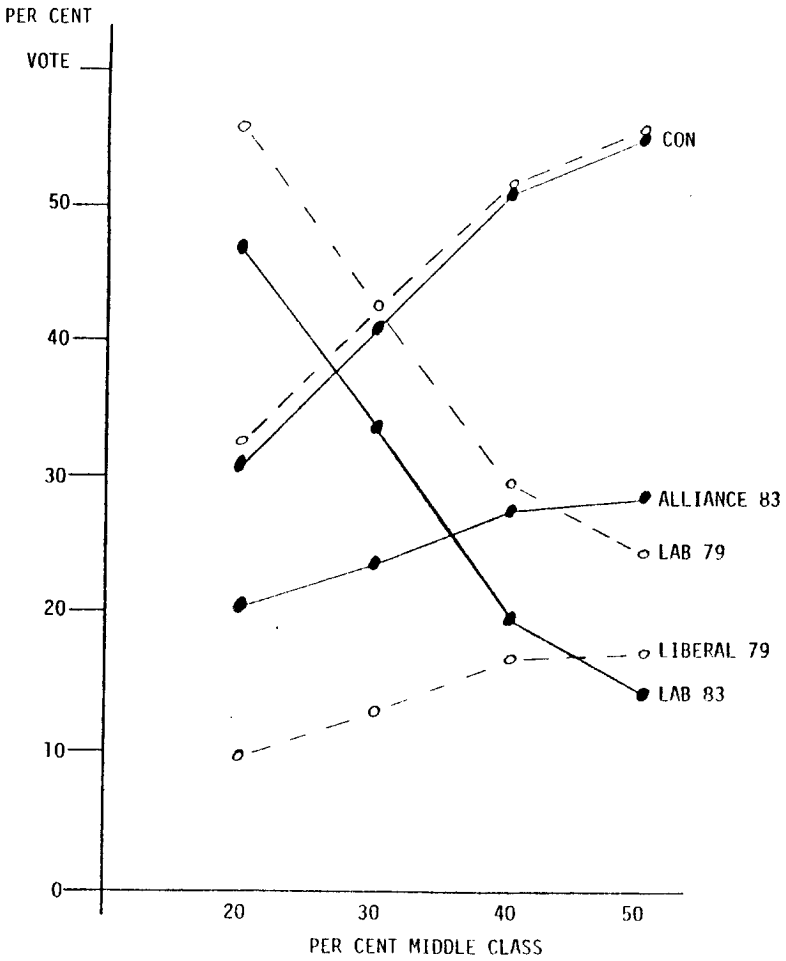
TABLE 3: WHY NOT VOTE FOR SECOND CHOICE PARTY?

Reason for refusal to vote for party.	Percent giving this reason for refusal to vote for: CON	LAB	ALLIANCE	SNP
general dislike	18	-	5	6
prefer another party	10	13	14	11
candidate	1	4	22	3
leaders	8	4	1	3
extreme	9	24	-	3
incapable	-	4	19	29
middle class	9	-	-	-
Scots policy	2	9	3	9
unemployment	14	-	-	-
economic mess	14	2	-	-
no policies	2	-	18	2
wasted vote	-	-	2	27
untrustworthy	-	7	6	-
divided	-	27	4	5

Notes:
(1) Table restricted to those who named the party as their second choice.
(2) Unprompted answers classified by interviewers.

Source: TSRU Hillhead by-election-poll, 1982.

CHART 1: CONSTITUENCY CLASS POLARIZATION



Notes: (1) Using Census percent professional, managerial and non-manual to define middle class

(2) Based only on English (not Scots or Welsh) constituencies where there was a Liberal candidate in 1979, where none of the MPs elected in 1979 was standing for a different party in 1983, and where fourth party candidates took an insignificant share of the vote.

CHART 2: VOTES TO SEATS FOR THE ALLIANCE

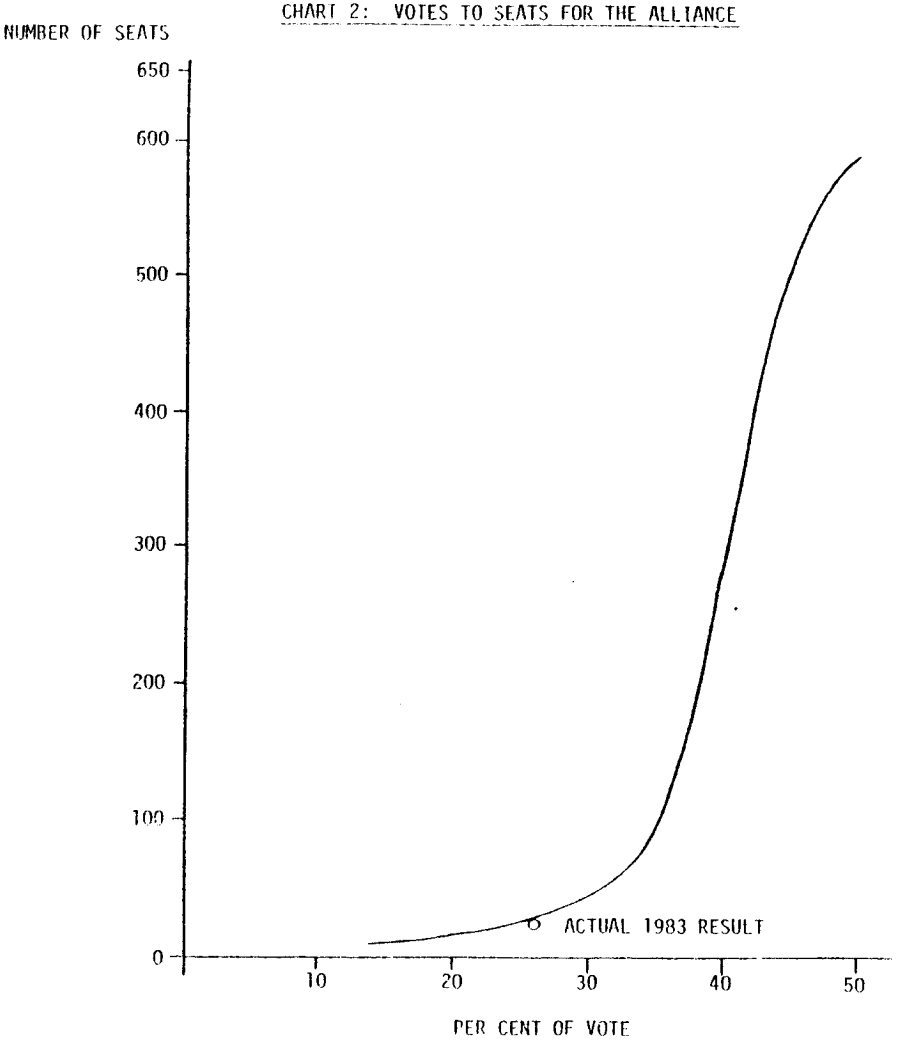
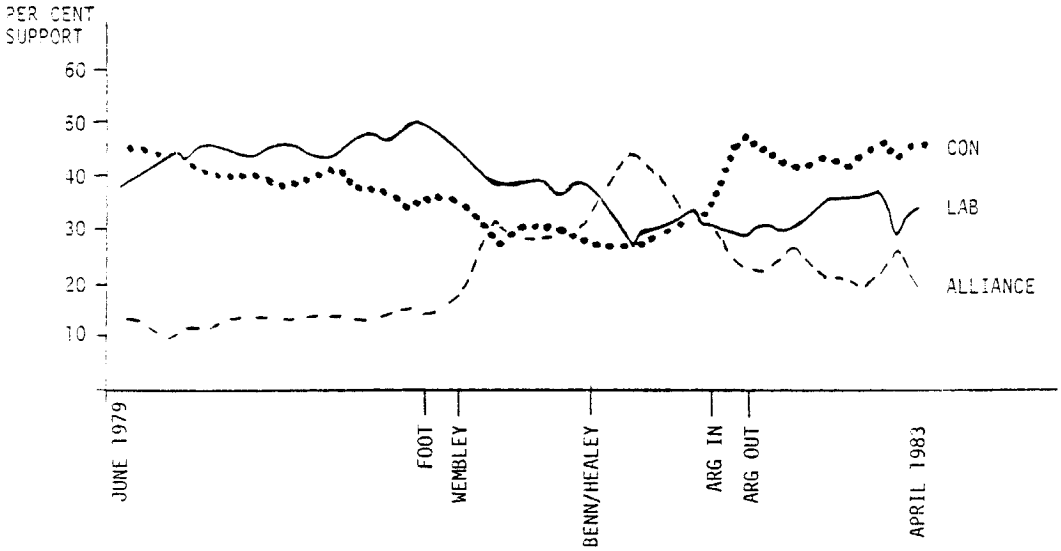
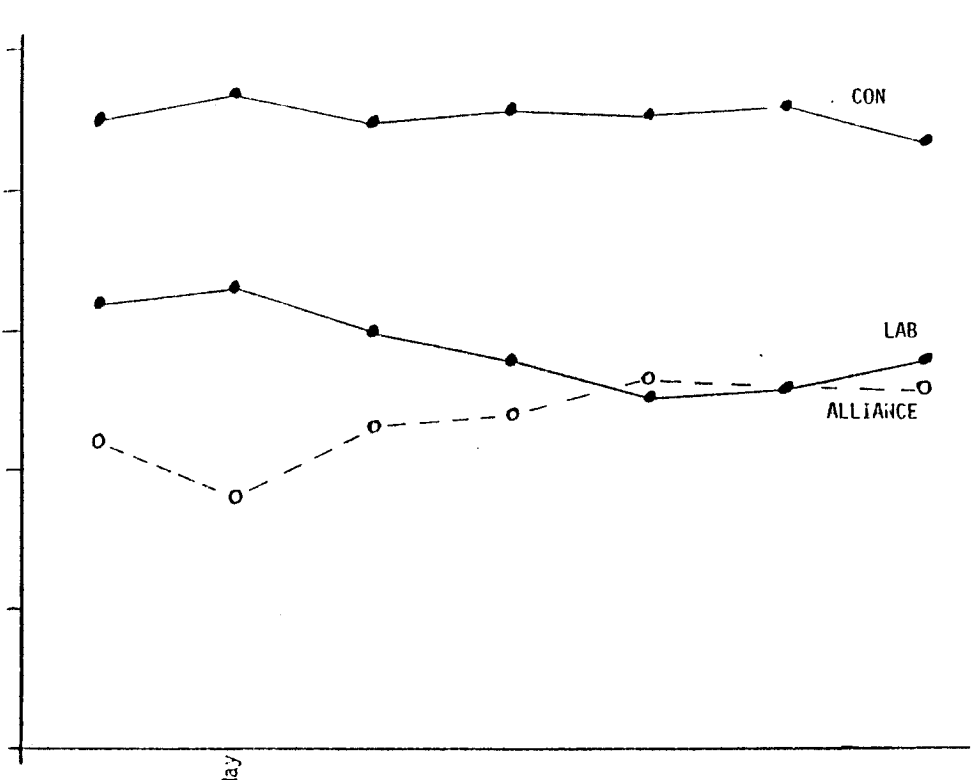


CHART 3: LONG TERM TRENDS



Source: MORI polls voting intentions.

CHART 4: SHORT-TERM TRENDS



Last 17 polls before announcement on 8th May.

First 20 polls of campaign: 9th-25th May (no trend within this period)

7 polls up to 1st June

7 polls up to 3rd June

4 polls up to 7th June

5 polls on 8th June

GENERAL ELECTION RESULT (9th June, 1983)

Sources: press clippings from all national Dailies and Sundays.

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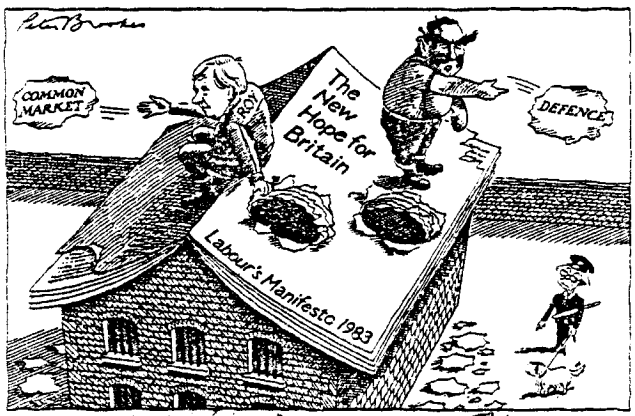
WEDNESDAY MAY 25 1983



Healey wins battle on Polaris with Foot

● Mr Michael Foot has accepted Mr Denis Healey's definition of non-nuclear defence policy, thus curbing any commitment by the Labour leader to phase out Polaris (page 1)

● Leaked Cabinet papers show that measures further reducing the economic power of trade unions have been considered by senior ministers

● A draft report under the name of Mr Edward du Cann, the Tory backbencher, condemns the Government's management of the economy

● Mr James Mortimer, general secretary of the Labour Party, denied that it would invest people's pension and insurance savings in industry (page 5)

● The Tories are well ahead in electronic sophistication in the first election to make serious use of computers (page 4)

● Mr David Steel, confident that Alliance tactics are right, rejected a poll showing support would increase if he were Prime Minister-designate (page 5)

Ultimatum on withdrawing campaign support succeeds

By Anthony Bevins, Political Correspondent

Mr Denis Healey has secured any possibility of Mr Michael Foot making a firm, unqualified pledge that Britain's Polaris nuclear deterrent would be phased out [illegible] Labour government over the lifetime of Parliament.

But after a breakfast time unspoken conversation with Mr Foot, prompted by mounting press speculation about the Labour defence issue, Mr Healey said that his leader would be making it clear that they were in agreement; in [illegible]

[illegible] ham: "Labour will cancel Trident and stop Cruise and move towards the establishment of an effective 'non-nuclear defence policy.

"Labour will put Britain's Polaris force into the nuclear arms talks so that Britain can [illegible]

[illegible] interpretation of policy.

He said: "We will unilaterally [illegible] end of Trident and cruise, and we will put Polaris into the arms talks with the Soviet Union and hope to phase it out in multilateral negotiations."

Mr Healey then added the crucial rider: "If the Russians, contrary to what Mr Andropov has said, fail to cut their nuclear forces accordingly it would be a new situation that we would consider at the time."

He explained last night on BBC Radio One's *Frontline*, one of six separate attempts, that unilateralism and multilateralism went hand in hand in Labour policy. "A unilateral measure is one you take on your own, a multilateral is one you take only of others take a similar measure. We can unilaterally decide not to have cruise or Tridents. We can seek to phase out Polaris as part of multilateral negotiations."

Within hours of Mr Healey's Newcastle statement, Mr Foot said, in a carefully prepared speech at Cotteridge, Birmingham: "We will unilaterally get rid of Trident and cruise, and we will put Polaris into the arms talks with the Soviet Union and hope to phase it out in multilateral negotiations."

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JUNE 9 83

Campaigning wives	4
Ulster divisions	4
Animal league gift	5
Jock Bruce-Gardyne	14
Leading article, letters	15
Frank Johnson	30

In the election on June 9 there will be 2,579 candidates, three more than in May, 1979. Only 66 of the 650 seats being fought have unchanged boundaries.

Four-page guide inside

negotiating table. "Nuclear arms negotiations are too important to be left to President Reagan and Mr Andropov. Our aim at the talks will be to reduce nuclear arms on all sides. Phasing out our Polaris force will be part of that process. We will, after consultation, move to the removal of existing nuclear bases."

But Mr Healey said at Labour's official press conference last Friday: "We would propose to negotiate the phasing out of Polaris in the context of these negotiations. If the Russians, of course, refuse to make any response, that would be a new situation and we should have to consider it when it came."

Mr Foot also said yesterday: "We want to see Nato's defence strategy shifted entirely away from the idea of using nuclear weapons first."

He added: "We intend to reduce Britain's share of the burden of Nato's defence – but without making Nato more dependent on nuclear weapons". Mr Healey said on May 16: "I am very doubtful if we could do that."

The interest in Labour's defence difficulties was yesterday heightened by the failure of Mr Foot to arrive at yesterday's Labour press conference.

Meanwhile, Mr Peter Shore, Labour's shadow Chancellor, was 20 minutes late for a live BBC Election *Call* and there was Westminster speculation last night that Mr Foot, Mr Healey and Mr Shore had been agreeing a common line.

When Mr Shore was asked whether he would say that a Labour government would give up Polaris, "as the manifesto

Continued on back page, col 1

Tories may tighten union curbs

By Julian Haviland, Political Editor

Cabinet papers leaked to the radical journal *Time Out* demonstrate that senior ministers have actively considered some politically highly sensitive measures aimed at further [illegible]

[illegible] policies, the economic [illegible]

These measures include the complete removal of the immunity of trade unions from liability for civil conspiracy; the cession of a fighting fund for employers; and action to weaken the bargaining power of public sector unions.

The documents, some of which have been made available to *The Times*, give no indication of which ideas have found favour with the Prime Minister and Cabinet and which have been rejected or temporarily put aside. But published extracts will feed the suspicions of the Labour Party leadership that the Conservative manifesto conceals the Government's intentions for a second term.

The ideas are contained in a paper sent in September, 1981 from Sir Geoffrey Howe, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to Mr Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Employment. The covering letter said that Sir Geoffrey recognized that not all the possibilities were practicable but felt some ought to be considered further.

Discussing the Bill, then in preparation, which became the Employment Act 1982, the paper raised the possibility of empowering employers to dismiss strikers selectively and of removing all immunity of unions from liability for civil conspiracy, both "highly contentious" steps. The first proposal was enacted, the second not, but more curbs on the unions are now planned.

The paper recommends action to weaken the bargaining power of public sector unions, which it says are worth particular attention "because of their unique disruptive capabilities"

Continued on back page, col 1

Du Cann report 'slates economic policy'

By Graham Searjeant

Mr Edward du Cann, the senior Conservative backbencher, has put his name to a damning analysis of the Government's management of the economy which claims that unemployment is six percentage points higher than even pessimistic estimates suggest was necessary to control inflation, and that less than half the rise in Britain's unemployment can plausibly be blamed on the world recession.

Mr Peter Shore claimed yesterday that the report "shares the Government's central economic strategy" and that Mr du Cann has "stripped Mrs Thatcher of her principal excuse – world recession – for the appalling loss of jobs here in Britain since 1979."

The report is a draft, under Mr du Cann's name, in his role as chairman of the all-party Commons Treasury and Civil Service Committee, which has been investigating "international Monetary Arrangements" for the past 15 months. The report was rushed out in time for this weekend's Williamsburg summit. But there was not time to finish a full report before the dissolution of Parliament.

The draft is mainly an analysis of exchange rate management aimed at finding ways in which the Government, preferably with international cooperation, could make currencies more stable.

It notes that unemployment in Britain has risen much further than in other advanced countries and blames this on the high level of the pound in 1980 and 1981, sterling's unexpected move because of the Government's monetarist policies than North Sea oil.

It prescribes the support for sterling in late 1981 as "ill-advised", and calls for governments to reverse its policy by pursuing joint targets for money supply and for an exchange rate around recent levels.

It also calls for higher government borrowing to cure the excess 3 per cent unemployment and for joint action initiative among countries at the summit to coordinate their exchange rates in order to pursue a "mix of expansionary policies".

Mr du Cann said last night that he found it "very difficult to understand the fuss". He said: "The report is an early draft produced by the committee's advisers. It is not the committee's report, nor is it mine."

It had been agreed at the last committee meeting before dissolution that the one-page covering report would say that the chairman's draft represented the general line the committee would have taken if it had had time to complete its report, but this was excised after a Conservative MP objected.

Mr Shore said the burden of the report was that "Mrs Thatcher has been charging the outside world too much for British goods. She is a poor shopkeeper. The result has been that exports have suffered, imports have flooded in and British industry has suffered a catastrophic fall in output.

"We should charge the world not too much and not too little for our goods, but the right price."

Mr du Cann, left, and Mr Shore