

# Michael Foot and the Labour Leadership



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by

Andrew Scott Crines

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Michael Foot and the Labour Leadership,  
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Dedicated to Patricia and Harold Crines, loving parents of the author.

Michael Foot  
(1913-2010)



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## PREFACE

A deep affection for the aspirations and values which underpinned the evolution of the Labour Party ensured the central theme of this book should be the Party of my upbringing. No other political Party would have been able to appeal on such a level. Growing up in a socialist home, with a dedication to socialism from a young age and a strong sense of opposition to the laissez-faire policies of Thatcherism, it was clear that any period of sustained political research would revolve around the Party.

New Labour studies did not appeal to me on a similar level. As a result, I felt the research for this book should revolve around a period of pre-New Labour history where the debates of previous decades resonated strongly within the Party. This was the Party of the people; the party of Clement Attlee, Hugh Gaitskell, Aneurin Bevan, Michael Foot and Tony Benn. The Labour Party is not, in my view, a mechanism for gaining power for a selection of elitist individuals. It exists to defend the exploited through engagement with the people through a strong rank and file movement.

My doctoral supervisor, Professor Brendan Evans continually guided this research by pointing out areas for development and also potential shortfalls of specific arguments made during various chapters. By doing so, Professor Evans prevented this book being much less than has materialised, and provided the tracks through which it was guided. My second supervisor, Professor Jim McAuley also made a number of valuable suggestions which have improved this book. Thanks must also be extended to Doctor Tim Heppell for suggesting a career in academia.

As part of their formal role in the research monitoring process, Dr Andrew Mycock and Dr John Craig made valuable suggestions. It is a common trend in contemporary political analysis to specifically use the memory of Foot's leadership as an illustration and justification for the development of New Labour. This risks being at the expense of *both* traditional left and old right ideologies of the Labour Party. In reality, Foot's contributions to the Labour Party go beyond merely providing a justification for New Labour; rather, Foot should be commended for campaigning for the leadership, against his initial desires, to ensure the survival of the Party.

He also fought against the threat of entryism and potential disintegration of the Party. He deserves credit for this achievement, and so this research seeks to avoid the orthodoxies of the New Labour historical narrative.

Robert Nicholls, a doctoral researcher provided invaluable advice and direction for this book. On our trips to Manchester and Leeds together to conduct research, I developed a great deal of respect for his ability to see clarity. He also recommended amendments to parts of the book in order to ensure its presentation and arguments were drawn out to their full potential.

Thanks must also be extended to the People's History Museum in Manchester for providing me with copies of *Labour Weekly*, *The New Statesman* and of course *The Foot Papers* among other sources. Finally, thanks must be made to all those in other various libraries who have assisted in aiding with the research to draw from an eclectic range of sources.

—Dr. Andrew Scott Crines  
March 2011

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On a personal level, I should like to thank my brother, Darren Lee Crines for providing me with the finance necessary to undertake these years of exhaustive research. Without his money, I should surely have retreated to a bank job some years ago!

I should like to thank John Isles for helping me 'keep it real', and also I should like to thank Kevin Hiley for putting up with my fears and doubts for so many years. Special thanks to Carl Bowler who has been an unending source of inspiration.

Extra special thanks must be extended to Lord Clark, Lord Rodgers, Lord Anderson, Lord Graham, Stanley Crowther, John Cartwright and to those who did not wish to be named for the assistance they provided in guiding this research.

Although very frail, Michael Foot took the time to respond to my early request for an interview. He was unable to reciprocate due to his ill health, which unfortunately caught up with him in 2010. However, Professor Evans had previously interviewed him and was invaluable in disclosing relevant insights into Foot's political career.

I should also like to express my profound thanks to the following organisations that have allowed me to access their archives in the course of the research of this book. The staff of the *People's History Museum* in

Manchester, the staff of the *University of Huddersfield Library and Archive*, the staff of the *University of Leeds* library (especially their Hansards collection), the staff of the *John Rylands University Library* at the *University of Manchester*, and the staff of the *British Library* in London.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Alternative Economic Strategy	AES
British Broadcasting Corporation	BBC
Britain In Europe	BIE
Campaign for Labour Party Democracy	CLPD
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	CND
Constituency Labour Party	CLP
European Union	EU
Industrial Relations	IR
International Monetary Fund	IMF
Labour Representation Committee	LRC
London School of Economics	LSE
Member of Parliament	MP
National Executive Committee	NEC
National Referendum Campaign	NRC
National Union of Journalists	NUJ
National Union of Mineworkers	NUM
Parliamentary Conservative Party	PCP
Parliamentary Labour Party	PLP
Trade Union Congress	TUC
Social Democratic Party	SDP



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

How and why did Michael Foot become the leader of an ideologically driven Labour Party in 1980 when he had apparently shown no previous aspirations towards the leadership? Such an outcome would have been unlikely even in the late 1960s. This book presents the results of research into the composition of Foot's electoral performance in the Labour leadership elections of 1976 and 1980. To aid the analysis two sets of data of the Parliamentary Labour Party are presented. The data is supported by a contextual analysis of Foot's political education, his evolution to becoming a member of the front bench and his period as Labour Party leader.

This chapter briefly describes its main character, Michael Foot. It also presents the approach which is used to test previous work undertaken on leadership elections in British political parties as well as advancing an ideological characterisation of the Parliamentary Labour Party in the period under review.

It must be noted that both Kenneth Morgan (2007) and Mervyn Jones (1994) have contributed seminal works on Foot. Both works provide excellent biographical accounts of his political and personal life. They discuss his youth, schooling, and family relationships as well as his political career up to 1992 and beyond. This book, however, is not such a biography. It does not strive to provide a detailed narrative of Foot's life. Rather this book uses Foot to focus upon the ideology of the Labour Party in a particular period, through a study of leadership elections in which he was engaged. Morgan dedicated just three pages to the 1976 leadership campaign, and just five pages to the 1980 leadership campaign, whilst Jones dedicates two pages to the 1976 campaign and nine pages to the 1980 leadership campaign. This demonstrates that the contests are a significantly under researched area of political analysis (Morgan, 2007, pp.328-330; pp.376-380; Jones, 1994, pp.394-395; pp.447-455).

An understanding of Foot's character and political background is important in enabling a full explanation for his eventual election as Labour leader. It is necessary in order to appreciate why MP's, including some who were agnostic or hostile towards his political beliefs, turned to him

rather than Denis Healey in 1980. Foot represented a non-dogmatic interpretation of socialism within the Labour Party and also maintained respect for the history of the British Parliamentary system. His personal character and loyalty to the Labour Party enabled him to develop an appeal beyond his ideological roots. His socialism evolved from liberal and socialist ideas and he eschewed the certainties of Marxist scientific socialism.

Foot rejected Communism as a viable political system because of its anti democratic and illiberal restrictions on individual liberties; he only opposed the policies of *any* government when they appeared to ignore the aspirations of his liberal socialism (Schneer, 1988, p.1;9;12). He was also a highly literate man with a sound comprehension of the importance of history, the impact of literature towards inspiring political ideals and he had a deep affection for the romanticism of some liberal reformers. This approach to his socialism enabled some commentators to ask...

...in what role was a man with such talents most useful to his party? One suspects that Foot himself preferred to be a spur, a voice, exhorting the government to live up to its heritage, and the people to support it. Probably he did not even conceive that he could be the future leader of the Labour Party (Schneer, 1988, p.222).

“Unusually, for a senior politician, Michael Foot was not fired by strong personal ambition” (Shore, 1993, p138). Foot was not a careerist. The means by which such an individual, who had few apparent aspirations towards achieving high political office, came to lead the Labour Party during one of its most turbulent periods is a journey of significant interest.

The quotations which have been cited suggest that Foot's preferred position within British Politics was to remain on the edges of government and Party, acting to promote the ideals and aspirations of the inside left. How then did he become Party leader? It is vital to understand his background, political ideals and experiences and to couple them with a greater understanding of the ideological divisions of the PLP in the 1970s and 1980s. Without an understanding of both Foot's and Labour's political history the answer would be less clear.

Since joining the Labour Party, Foot opposed those who sought to appease capitalism and place restrictions on civil liberties (Morgan, 2007). Throughout his career, Foot saw himself as the enemy of dogmatic theories of economic management from both the right *and* left. His opposition to Bennite socialism was almost as fierce as his opposition to Thatcher's free market ideas. He retained his left-wing credentials



throughout his career, including the 1970s when his evolution towards the mainstream was being consolidated.

In government Foot successfully established himself as a Secretary of State who was capable to effecting virtually immediate improvements to the circumstances that had undermined Edward Heath's government. He repealed Heath's divisive anti-union legislation, swiftly ended the miners strike and he also campaigned against continued British membership of the Common Market (Pelling, 1985, pp.162-174). His effectiveness in government enabled him to perform impressively during the 1976 leadership election, which in turn helped establish his credentials and credibility for the subsequent leadership election in 1980. Throughout the decade Foot's reputation continued to grow. These events are discussed later in chapters 4 and 5. It must be remembered that Foot's development owes much to his experiences in the 1970s, and that without such an evolution his leadership potential would have been much reduced.

Both Healey and Benn were more identified with their respective ideological bedfellows and so lacked the confidence of MP's required to unify the PLP. Healey's personal shortcomings resulted in his potential supporters doubting his ability to lead the Party. It must also be remembered that increasingly influential militant left-wing groups within the broader Labour movement created an image of entryism and extremism. Foot was perceived to be a potentially healing figure when these problems were bedevilling the Labour Party. With both James Callaghan and Healey, Foot's main opponents in each respective leadership election favouring a 'right'-wing position, and Tony Benn, Foot's main 'left'-wing challenger in 1980 favouring a harder 'left'-wing position, only Foot appealed to the PLP as the candidate most likely to maintain the traditional coalition of views.

Even committed social democrats within the Labour Party such as Giles Radice acknowledged Foot was "an honourable man and an outstanding orator, journalist and writer" (Radice, 2004, p.500). Over the course of his political lifetime, he evolved within the Labour Party from political protest and towards the mainstream of cabinet government. His membership of the cabinet from 1974-1979 provided the launching pad for his successive bids for the leadership of the Labour Party.

This book goes beyond political history in explaining how Foot became leader of the Labour Party. The leadership elections of 1976 and 1980 were the final ones in which the electorate was confined to the members of the PLP. Such a limited electorate facilitates the utilisation of the approach previously devised by Heppell to undertake an analysis of the

ideological affiliations of MP's in leadership elections within the Conservative Party.

Heppell has produced a number of journal articles relating to purely ideological conflicts within the Conservative Party. These conflicts enabled Heppell to produce illuminating insights of the Conservative Party. Given the success of his approach to the Conservative Party, might an application of an adapted version to the Labour Party possess the potential to produce equally insightful results? An adapted version is necessary because a shortcoming in his approach is his assumption that the exclusive dominance of a ideological variable can explain an MP's voting behaviour in leadership elections. Given the complex character of the Labour Party's internal debates, a basic dualism between left and right is inadequate.

Heppell's approach has its origins in an article entitled *Rebels and Rebellions: Conservative MP's in the 1992 Parliament* by Phillip Cowley and Phillip Norton which examined the leadership of John Major (Cowley & Norton, 1999). Influenced by Cowley & Norton's findings, Heppell developed his own approach to assess voting behaviour of MP's during leadership elections. By doing so, he argues that it becomes possible to see the ideological motivations underpinning leadership votes.

For his research into the leaderships of John Major, William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and more recently David Cameron, Heppell (2002; 2006; 2008; 2010) proceeded to construct ideological typologies that consisted of three similar variables. It is worth noting that Heppell's ideological typology was also the genesis<sup>1</sup> of the approach of this book. The three ideological divides which Heppell analysed were the attitudes of Conservative MP's towards social, sexual and morality issues, economic policy, and Euroscepticism. Heppell argued that Conservative MP's were either 'wet' or 'dry' on his three ideological divides. As will be argued later in the chapter a nuanced approach to Labour in the 1970s prevents an analogous typology of simply left and right. This was supplemented by a database of MP's positioned against the candidate for whom they voted. The anonymity of the vote was overcome by researching broadsheet newspapers published around the day of the ballot, analysing published interviews, and writing to Conservative Parliamentarians (Heppell & Hill, 2008, p.70). By undertaking these actions, Heppell was able to construct an ideological typology.

While Heppell influenced the collection and analysis of the data in this book it proves unsatisfactory as a complete approach in the context of the leadership elections in which Foot was a candidate. Heppell's simple dualism can not simply be transferred to the Labour Party. First, Labour's

ideological tensions were more complex than those which Heppell discerned in the Conservative Party. Second, Heppell assumes ideology to be mono-causal in shaping voting behaviour in leadership elections. The reverse could be true. Downs (1957) argues that ideology can be adapted to acquire power and can shift to achieve that aim. A Labour MP's voting behaviour may be linked to his or her region or external affiliations such as trade union and Clark (2010) suggests that MP's elected in or after 1970 had a different outlook from those who served in the earlier postwar debates.

The particularly fractious and ideologically riven nature of the Labour Party in the 1970s predisposed MP's to consider candidates for the leadership who might be able to unify the Party (Clark, 2010). It would be an oversimplification to argue that ideology played no role in this. Heppell *et al* (2010) subsequently attempted the transfer of his approach to the Conservative Party on to the Labour Party in a paper entitled 'Ideological Alignments within the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Leadership Election of 1976' (Heppell *et al*, 2010). The three issues which Heppell utilised to classify Labour MP's as either left or right were British membership of the Common Market, defence policy and economic policy (*ibid*). There appears to be no problem in accepting defence as an issue since MP's were either unilateralist, and therefore to the left, or multilateralist, and therefore to the right of the Party. Positions on the Common Market are also acceptable as an indicator of left or right leanings although it must be recognised that there were exceptions with left-wing supporters of the Common Market and right-wing opponents sometimes being evident (Hayter, 2005, p.6). Heppell's utilisation of the economic dimension is particularly inadequate owing to his view that Labour MP's can be readily classified as either consolidators or expansionists and with the consequent assumption that they respectively reflected a right-wing or a left-wing position. In the economic sphere they did not appreciate the complexity of the economic issues at the time and assumed a simple dualism of left and right would suffice. The variable of economic policy is too complex as applied to the Labour Party debates in the 1970s.

This requires a different approach in understanding Labour's leadership elections of 1976 and 1980. The variable of economic policy is too complex as applied to Labour Party debates in the 1970s. The intra-party debates on economic policy covered a wider range of issues. They included whether an MP was for or against continued nationalisation, attitudes towards public expenditure symbolised by the IMF intervention in 1976, views on monetarism, support or opposition to the Alternative

Economic Strategy as proposed by Holland (1975), opinions on incomes policy and orientations towards trade union reform (Booth, 2002, p.125; Cronin, 2004, pp.42-43; Rosen, 2005, pp.331-337; p.353). Heppell reduced an MP's position on economic policy to the simple alternatives of *expansionist* or *consolidator* (Heppell *et al*, 2010). Heppell's distinction between expansionist and consolidator fails to reflect the realities faced by the riven PLP during the debates on economic policy in the 1970s. Fortuitously many Labour MP's classified themselves ideologically in the 1970s by their decision to join either the Tribune or Manifesto Groups (Hayter, 2005, p.4; p.6). Whilst some MP's chose not to identify themselves as leaning towards the centre right in the Party reflected by the Manifesto Group, or the centre left reflected by the Tribune Group, nevertheless, membership or non-membership is broadly indicative of a right, left or centrist position within the Party. For this reason, group membership is substituted here for Heppell's use of economic policy as an indicator of stances adopted by Labour MP's.

In order to produce a more meaningful understanding of the leadership election results this book includes a selection of other determinants which Heppell's approach excluded. These variables seek to produce considerations beyond ideology. Principally, these are the region which an MP represented, the majority the MP was defending, trade-union affiliation (if any) as well as the MP's length of service within the House of Commons. An MP's length of service has the potential to affect their voting intentions because their experiences and Parliamentary careers may affect their expectations from a new leader. The region and their constituency location may also have the potential to affect their vote. For example, an MP from a working-class constituency in the north of England may be expected to behave differently to an MP from a middle-class constituency in the south. Also, an MP's voting behaviour may be affected by the size of his or her majority. An MP with a smaller majority may vote for a leader most likely to prove electorally beneficial, thereby enticing them to vote for a candidate that does not necessarily appeal to them politically. Also, an MP's trade union affiliation may affect their vote, given the role of such organisations historically within the Party and especially following on from the 1979 electoral defeat. When combined with the ideological factors, a more complete understanding of the leadership elections can be achieved, thereby building upon the approaches provided by Cowley & Norton and Heppell. The heuristic value of Heppell's approach is undeniable, but it has only partial validity when transferred to the Labour Party.

Two databases for the leadership elections of 1976 and 1980 are presented and analysed in chapters 4 and 5. Each database has been thoroughly researched to ensure the credibility of the results are maintained. Initially, the names of all MP's were gathered from the relevant *Dods Parliamentary Companions* (Dods, 1977; Smith, 1980), with any deaths or changes researched via *The Times* obituaries throughout the period. Given *The Times* accepted reputation as the *paper of record*, it was utilised for the purpose of gathering specific information. The initial ideological database was then constructed, yet when the inadequacy of the economic field became clear, further research was undertaken to construct the ideological groupings. Biographies and diaries such as Benn's (1989) *Against the Tide* and Hayter's (2005) *Fightback!* provided information regarding ideological group memberships. In addition, *The Times* was again instrumental in providing membership lists of both groups, enabling the list to be completed. MP's voting behaviour, voting lists from *The Times* and other broadsheets, and Norton (1980) provided invaluable information relating to MP's views on nuclear disarmament and the Common Market. By consistently voting in favour or against unilateralist measures, or Britain's position as a member of the Common Market, it became possible to determine an MP's view on either or both policy areas.

The other aspects of the database, such as an MP's constituency, age, majority, length of service and union affiliation were drawn from the *Dods Parliamentary Companion* and *The Times*. Once completed, the two databases provided a comprehensive source upon which to evaluate the 1976 and 1980 Labour leadership elections.

The role of ideology in an MP's behaviour accounts for a significant part of their vote. However, factors such as the personal likability of the candidates remain significant. It was apparent that Foot was the object of a great deal of affection within the Labour Party (Clark, 2010). Heppell produced an analysis which examined ideology as a mono-causal influence. Given the riven nature of the Labour Party during the period under review, it would be inadequate to follow uncritically Heppell's approach in restricting the analysis to a single factor of political analysis such as ideology. For this reason an enhancement to Heppell's approach is used. It is necessary to explain why Heppell's approach requires a more penetrating analysis when applied to the Labour Party in the period under review.

It is necessary to explain why Heppell's approach is not sufficiently penetrating within the PLP in the 1970s. The Labour Party has since its inception been a disparate collection of groups and individuals united behind a quest for a more socialist society. Since its founding, the Labour

Party evolved as a coalition of different views and policy positions in which diversities coexisted. This ensured that the Labour Party would be characterised by division and debate. These are normal enough components of a democratic socialist Party. Labour evolved over the twentieth century as a colourful, vibrant and divided Party. To achieve socialism in Britain, individuals and groups diverged into differing theories about how to effect socialist change. Some believed the harsher characteristics of capitalism could be tamed, whilst others believed it must be abolished entirely, whilst few adhered to the Marxist theories of revolutionary change. These ideas, however, all existed within the same Labour Party, and so its ideological character was eclectic. Yet, over the course of the 1970s, the intra-party coalition started to deteriorate when outside militants, some with radical socialist sympathies, began to gain gradual control of the mechanisms of the Party through the infiltration into CLP's and annual conference. To understand the ideological characterisations advanced in this book, it is necessary to consider the intensifying ideological conflicts which culminated in the period under review.

Broad terms such as 'left' and 'right' are frequently used to classify individuals into ideological categories within the PLP<sup>2</sup>. Heppell was influenced by commentators such as Kellner (1976) who defined left and right using arbitrary criteria including an MP's position on Britain's membership of the Common Market. Kellner argued that an opponent of Britain's membership automatically indicated a left-wing perspective.

However, this definition negates the possibility that the MP may oppose UK membership of the Common Market for reasons other than ideology, such as pressure from their more left leaning constituency party or a view of British economic interests. Consequently, this dualism is too crude.

Individual MP's are frequently not so easy to classify and even those who accept the labels of left- and right-wing will often be inconsistent in the policies they support. Because of these deviations, determining a set of left- or right-wing policies which can be attributed to every MP is highly problematic. Left and right are, therefore inadequate terms without considerable qualification, but remain vital aspects of the Labour Party because they are commonly used by MP's, journalists and academics. It is argued in this book that left and right facilitate a lazy shorthand account of the complexities in the Labour Party. The following demonstrates the diversity of "the left" and why accepting basic terms must be avoided:

commentators lost few opportunities to contrast Nye Bevan's 'passionate Parliamentary' and the Bevanite 'legitimate left' in the 1950s, with the anti-Parliamentary extremism of the Bennites and the hard left of the

1980s. Asked in 1980 what Bevan would have thought of the hard left then, Harold Wilson briskly replied 'Nye wouldn't have been seen dead with that lot' (Jeffreys, 2002, p.82).

It will be a perverse overreaction, however to abandon the concepts of left and right entirely. The concepts are so long entrenched in the political discourse that to discard them would be iconoclastic. However, it must always be remembered that overarching terms, such as Heppell's *expansionist* in economic policy as an indicator of a 'left' position, would place Bevan and Benn in the same category without any qualification (Heppell et al, 2010). Clearly this would be inadequate.

Heppell's own extension of this approach to the Labour Party negates the concept of the centre of the PLP. This is admittedly fluid as it encompasses MP's with a softer allegiance to either social democracy or to the inside left, or who place loyalty to the Labour Party over all other considerations. Because of the shifting meaning of ideological terms within the Labour Party throughout the twentieth century, it is necessary to briefly define the terms used throughout this book. The key terms are *inside left*, *outside left*<sup>3</sup>, *social democratic right*, *traditional right* and *the centre* (Bernstein, 1899; Kogan & Kogan, 1982).

The inside left, also regarded as the legitimate left within the Labour Party, was loyal to what its members saw as the ethical socialism<sup>4</sup> of the early Labour Party and did not associate with proscribed organisations, nor did the inside left set up pressure groups in local constituencies (Kogan & Kogan, 1982, p.37). The goals of ethical socialism were to be gained through an extension of nationalisation, an active state, greater equality and an ethical foreign policy. It argued that through nationalisation came greater equality and that an extended role for the state in industry is an effective means of rearranging industry in the public interest. Its ethical foreign policy was to be gained by an independent British foreign policy working with other socialist groups throughout Europe and the Commonwealth in order to create a *third* power bloc separate from the United States and the Soviet Union, without adopting a fully neutralist foreign policy. The inside left were willing to criticise Labour governments through publications such as *Tribune*, yet this did not extend to destructive attacks. It argued that the Labour governments must be preserved in order to prevent Conservative rule. Yet this did not preclude it from arguing against the policies of the Labour government on matters such as Vietnam, the Common Market and the pace of socialist change. The pedigree of the inside left in postwar Britain can be traced through the *Keep Left* group of 1947, Bevanism in the 1950s and the *Tribune* journal. Its supporters were Parliamentary socialists, who believed in representative democracy. Foot

must be placed firmly within the inside left throughout his active political life, as he remained broadly committed to these ideals even during his time on the Labour front benches.

As Whitely (1983) argues, "one of the apparently innocuous decisions taken in 1973 as a result of the swing to the left in the Party was the decision to abolish the list of proscribed organisations" (Whitely, 1983, p.6). The Proscribed List had acted as a safeguard against individuals belonging to hard, outside left organisations with radical socialist sympathies trying to infiltrate and pursue their agenda within the Labour Party. Its abolition, however, removed this safeguard and, subsequently, the outside left groups straggled the ideological boundaries of the Labour Party. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, the outside left were represented by groups such as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Labour Coordinating Committee, inspired by an ideal that underpinned Bennite Direct Democracy (Kogan & Kogan, 1982, p.37; p.50). Direct Democracy was a commitment to both industrial and political democracy, with workers and Party members controlling their workplaces and the rank and file controlling the Parliamentary representatives. Just as outside left groups transcended the boundaries of the Labour Party, so they overlapped with external organisations which were infiltrating the Party, such as the Militant Tendency<sup>5</sup>. Outside left adherents viewed socialism as a unified ideology so that all who professed themselves socialists could be retained within the ranks of the Labour Party. In short, they were adhering to the Kerensky dictum of "no enemies to the left", whereas the inside left implicitly accepted the existence of an ideological boundary to the left of the Party (Mosse, 1967, p.107). For example, when called upon to vote in favour of naming 25 companies for compulsory nationalisation during 1973, Foot voted *against* other figures on the left and voted *with* the social democrats arguing such a statement would be electorally damaging (Hatfield, 31 May 1973, p.1). Admittedly, the desire of Labour's leadership to protect the precise definition of the ideological boundaries of the Labour Party was difficult to distinguish from electoral considerations. The outside left, however did not possess such a constraint. It was essentially a hybrid grouping seeking radical social change and encompassed extreme democrats and various versions of Marxism, loosely associated with a sometimes messianic view of Benn. A key difference between the political ideologies of Foot and Benn was that Benn was radicalised by his period in political office and that he was a "pedantic advocate of strict adherence to manifesto, conference resolution and NEC edict" and that he "chose defiantly to pursue his own path" within the outside left (Benn, 1979, p.16; Morgan, 1987, p.302-303).



Benn's socialism connects the Levellers and the radicals of the seventeenth century English revolution with present day socialists. Speaking in Burford in 1976, Benn remarked that the Levellers were part of "a popular liberation movement that can be traced back to the teachings of the Bible and which has retained its vitality over the intervening centuries and which speak to us here with undiminished force" (Brind, 21 May 1976, p.3). Indeed, Benn also sought to shift decision making processes from any Labour cabinet and towards the PLP. In a letter to Foot, Benn remarks that

I think there ought to be more deliberate arrangements made also for general discussions within the Parliamentary Party before any Cabinet decisions are taken... I would hope to see many more debates taking place at an earlier stage within the Parliamentary Party so that the discussions should have a genuine influence on the decisions (Benn, 1976, p.3).

The change of procedure advocated by Benn in this instance would enable the factions and ideological groups within the PLP to influence the decisions taken by the cabinet. Without wishing to repudiate the role of the conference, Foot, by contrast was an exponent of Parliamentary democracy and was content for Members of Parliament to remain the main sources of policy scrutiny.

The social democratic right were those who sought to modernise the Labour Party to ensure it reflected the expectations of the electorate and the evolving nature of capitalism. Social democracy aims to look beyond the class-war ideals which underpinned revolutionary socialism. Their historical philosophy derived from figures such as Eduard Bernstein who argued that the influence of socialism

would be much greater than it is today if the social democracy could find the courage to emancipate itself from a phraseology which is actually outworn and if it would make up its mind to appear what it is in reality today: a democratic, socialistic party of reform (Bernstein, 1899).

Anthony Crosland provided the contemporary intellectual weight to the ideas behind this wing of Labour thought, arguing that the Party constitution of 1918 had little relevance to the Britain of 1955 and that its objectives had to be updated. Labour's 'one class image' made it appear outdated to those amongst the electorate who did not subscribe to class based politics (Jeffreys, 1999, pp.76-78). Gaitskell felt that responsibility and respectability within the Labour Party would be best demonstrated by its gradual, reformist approach to capitalism and by rejecting the emotionalism and romanticism of transforming capitalism in "one go"

(Brivati, 1997, p.290). Gaitskell, the Labour Leader after 1955, sympathised greatly with the ideas that underpinned this argument, yet shied away from constitutional reform until Labour's electoral defeat in 1959 (*ibid*). This defeat led to an attempt to reform Labour's commitment to nationalisation by way of Clause 4. This was a key target of the social democrats because they argued nationalisation was an unnecessary ideological commitment and that the benefits gained by state ownership of key industries can be achieved by other means. They argued that the nature of capitalism had changed and that democratic socialism was to be achieved and consolidated through increasing public expenditure, redistributive taxation and an egalitarian education system (Crosland, 1956, p.46).

Social democracy in the Labour Party must not be confused with the Social Democratic Party. This distinction is encapsulated by the ideas of Crosland, Gaitskell and figures such as Giles Radice. Radice warned against those considering defection to the SDP, arguing they should "stay in the party and fight" for their ideas rather than establish their own party (Radice, 30 January 1981, p.7). "Centre party apologists have made great play of claiming the traditions of both Crosland and Gaitskell for their 'new politics'. Lady Gaitskell reminded them in the *Guardian* that her husband would never have considered leaving the Labour Party" (Holland, 6 February 1981, p.10). Consequently, the social democrats within the Labour Party should not be confused with the SDP.

The traditional right, who dwindled over the course of the 1960s, were content mainly to consolidate the achievements of the Attlee administration. The primary advocate of this position, Herbert Morrison accepted nationalisation, but did not wish to extend it beyond the vital industries that dominated the economy. Those MP's who gravitated more towards this position included Alfred Broughton, Michael Cocks, Stanley Cohen, Jack Dunnett, Andrew Faulds and Brynmor John (Evans, 2010). They initially identified more with the traditional right yet mostly gravitated towards Manifesto Group membership during the 1970s. This indicates that the traditional right evolved more towards the social democratic right of the Party.

Those MP's, who can be best characterised as constituting the centre, avoided the conflicts between left and right. Essentially, they were Labour Party loyalists who carried little ideological baggage beyond a generalised appreciation of a vague commitment to social democracy (Clark, 18 May 2010). Their motivation was maintaining party unity and to ensure they remained electable. They also consisted of MP's who gravitated towards more rightish perspectives such as social democracy on some issues but tended towards an agnosticism towards intra party ideological debates. In

some cases they adhered to the traditional Morrisonian dictum that "socialism is what the Labour Party does" (Nelson, 1 January 2006). They eschewed membership of Parliamentary groups as the Tribune and the Manifesto Groups, preferring instead to remain independent. While the group of centrist MP's were relevant within the debates of the 1970s, as a group they are under researched.

Some MP's were located in the centre because they were sceptical about the contentious issue of the Common Market. Wilson, whilst coming initially from a centre left position owing to his associations with Bevan, in many ways symbolises the centre grouping in the PLP. "As leader, Harold Wilson had seen it as his prime function to hold the party together, whatever the cost in ideology" (Castle, 1980, p.12). He remained unenthusiastic about Common Market membership. The changing economic circumstances did not blind him to the potential benefits of Common Market membership, along with his desire to keep the Party together (Clark, 18 May 2010). In short it is suggested here that by the 1970s Labour tendencies were not simply those of left and right but were inside left, outside left, centrist and social democratic. These categories are utilised in the data analysis in the course of this book.

This analysis of the ideological tendencies within the PLP confirms that Foot must be positioned within the inside left. As is discussed in chapters 2 and 3, he was initially a Liberal who became socialist and went on to evolve politically towards the inside left of the PLP (Harris, 1984, p.143). As a well known figure of the broader left, Foot drew from his literary and philosophical knowledge to extend the message of greater social justice and the sovereign nature of Parliamentary democracy to both the electorate and those within the Party, even if this sometimes meant standing up against his own colleagues. Despite these moments of contention, he was fiercely loyal to the Labour Party, even at times of great ideological contention. This was partly because he believed it was the sole body capable of posing a credible opposition to the established orthodoxies of the Conservative Party (Rollyson, 2005, p.160; Foot, 2003, p.150).

This book uses Foot's candidacies for the position of Labour leader as a means of presenting the results of exhaustive research focusing upon the composition of his vote. The leadership elections of 1976 and 1980 act as windows through which an understanding of the PLP in that period can be discerned. Personality matters in politics. Through understanding Foot, his loyalty to the Party, his evolution towards the mainstream and his cross-party appeal at a time of internal division, it becomes possible to understand his election as leader at the second attempt. Foot's personal

political history enhanced his reputation and explains his evolution towards the leadership. The data analysis presented in the book is contextualised by describing his political character and the historical circumstances in which he conducted his career.

It is clear that Heppell's singular focus upon the importance of ideology requires qualification as does his simple dualism between left and right. The assumption that MP's can be subdivided and labelled exclusively on a bipolar dualism is crude. Both left and right have their own ideological subdivisions, also any analysis of the Labour Party which rejects the importance of the ballast provided by the centre is incomplete. To understand the subdivisions of left and right within the Labour Party during the 1970s, it is necessary to consider the various debates and contentions in the Party during that period. It is also necessary to remember the relevance of non ideological factors, and to exclude them, as Heppell does, becomes problematic when attempting to determine the motives behind MP's voting behaviour.

Chapters 2 and 3 respectively discuss Foot's political education and his progress from left-wing critic to front bench stalwart. Chapters 4 and 5 present the data on MP's voting behaviour and an analysis of their motivations in casting their vote. The immediate circumstances following Foot's election and his role in stabilising a turbulent party is the subject of Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MICHAEL FOOT'S POLITICAL EDUCATION

Foot was a man of deep scholarship and learning which led to him acquiring respect within the Labour Party. His scholarship assisted the development of his deep political convictions and his learning enabled him to acquire a reputation as a clever man who was perceived by many in the Labour Party as occupying a higher intellectual plane than most politicians. This enhanced his credibility as a potential leader. His intellectual capacity sets him apart from most politicians as an intellectual who drew inspiration and determination from a rich array of historical and contemporary figures. Foot's philosophical richness distanced him from the dogmatic socialism of figures such as Benn and traditional Labour politicians. Thinkers such as Hazlitt and Marx influenced the development of Foot's liberal socialism. Foot's political education was a blend of philosophical influences and contemporary inspirations who comprise an interesting, eclectic collection of thoughts and ideas. They both confirm and challenge his liberal socialism. They contributed towards his own principles, yet also possessed anomalous characteristics within themselves. For example, Beaverbrook's Conservatism conflicted with Foot's socialism, whilst Marx's advocacy of inevitable violent revolution contrasted to Foot's passionate commitment to Parliamentary democracy<sup>6</sup>. These anomalies were disregarded by Foot because he drew from them *specific* intellectual arguments or inspiration which overrode any evident contradictions.

Foot was also given to a sense of loyalty towards individuals which enabled him to conceal from himself these inconsistencies. It can be a relatively thin line between being a person of deep principle, rather than of purblind dogmatism, which prevented Foot from recognising the contradictions.

This chapter provides an interpretation and evaluation of a selection of major historical and contemporary figures who inspired and challenged Foot. This examination of Foot's political development enables the reader to benefit from a greater, richer appreciation of Foot's political philosophy and personality.

Foot's emerging values drew from the philosophers who both reflected and developed his views. He was by no means a *tabula rasa* which these thinkers determined. The philosophers served to confirm and nourish his existing values, although they represented conflicting political ideologies in themselves, such as socialists, conservatives or liberals as well as independent thinkers. Burke as a Tory, Cobbett as a rural nostalgic, Wells as a eugenicist, Beaverbrook as a patron; these anomalous characteristics are subverted by Foot's loyalty to the richness they contributed to his broader political analysis. He was, of course selective in the arguments and views which he drew from these influences.

When considering the political decisions made by Foot during his career, appreciation of his positions can be achieved by considering those with whom he drew close as well as the philosophical influences. Together they had an impact on his beliefs regarding the potential role of a political party as a force for developing a fairer and more equal society.

Foot possessed a capacity to universalise political principles which cross political divisions and he managed to select common strands. He disregarded temporal political limitations if they appeared to distance him from a political principle that he admired and utilise these selective strands of philosophical thought to enhance his own knowledge of politics.

To understand Foot adequately and to comprehend his political background, it is necessary to summarise aspects of his political development. To this end, this chapter introduces Foot as a political *liberal socialist*, backed up by an eclectic range of writers and thinkers from across the political spectrum. Foot's upbringing coloured him with the liberal arguments for political and electoral reform and the need to oppose Conservatism. His father, his education, and his reading of various political thinkers ensured that he retained a liberal instinct throughout his political career. His socialism was drawn very much from the political and social situations he encountered in the prewar years. The squalor of Liverpool, the decline of the Liberal Party, and the arguments for greater collectivisation of the economy against the excesses of the free market ensured that his political maturity would be as a socialist. Foot merged what he considered to be the best ideas of the liberal arguments drawn from the age of reform with the very urgent need to advance a socialist alternative, thereby making him a liberal socialist.

Foot was from a large Liberal family. His father, Isaac, served as a Liberal MP, read widely, and influenced all his children to develop a love of books and intellectualism. Before joining the Liberal Party, he trained as a solicitor in Plymouth and served on the city council, rising to the position of Deputy Mayor. His Parliamentary career was retarded by