

Was New Labour a hegemonic project?

‘In front of us is the historic choice; capitulate to the Thatcherite future, or find a new way of imagining’¹

Abstract

Tony Blair swept to power with a landslide victory in the 1997 General Election, off the back of a petering out of eighteen years of Conservative party dominance. Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has been applied to both Thatcherism and New Labour. Thatcherism, which brought sweeping social, political and cultural change, was regarded by both supporters and critics as a genuinely ‘hegemonic’ project. Conversely, despite thirteen years in government, New Labour is generally not regarded by neo-Gramscian scholars in the same vein, and is instead viewed as a ‘transformist accommodation’ with Thatcherism². The work of Stuart Hall and Eric Hobsbawm – the two most prominent neo-Gramscian critics – is analysed and applied in this piece of work to demonstrate the flaws in their argument. The analysis then applies the concept of hegemony to New Labour and makes a three-part case, whilst critiquing the aforementioned scholars, to show that New Labour deserves to be given the label of a hegemonic project. Whilst Thatcher seized on currents of change to implement her own radical change – as befitting of a hegemonic project – New Labour did the same by placing modernity at the centre of their programme, and thus working within the context of a world changed by Thatcherism and wider forces.

¹ Hall, Stuart. ‘Gramsci and Us’. *Marxism Today*. June 1987. Page 21

² Pearmain, Andrew. *Politics of New Labour: A Gramscian Analysis*. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. 2011

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Introduction

Tony Blair swept to power with a landslide victory in the 1997 General Election, off the back of a petering out of eighteen years of Conservative party dominance. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony has been applied to both Thatcherism and New Labour. Thatcherism, which brought sweeping social, political and cultural change, was regarded by both supporters and critics as a genuinely 'hegemonic' project. Conversely, despite thirteen years in government, New Labour is generally not regarded by neo-Gramscian scholars in the same vein, and is instead viewed as a 'transformist accommodation' with Thatcherism³. This piece of work will first lay out the broad argument of the neo-Gramscian critiques of New Labour, and will then define and discuss Gramsci's concept of hegemony. There will be then three chapters of analysis, centred around the ways in which New Labour was a hegemonic project both in intent and, in part, in outcome. The first chapter will centre on New Labour's part-accommodation with Thatcherite economics, explained by their understanding of needing to adapt to a changed world. That aside, it will demonstrate three economic reforms which did mark a break from Thatcherite hegemony, thus satisfying Gramsci's stricture that intellectual and moral reform needed to be grounded in economic reform⁴. The second chapter will outline examples of New Labour's social, cultural, and political reforms, all of which were firmly accompanied by the introduction of a new modernity discourse, which seized on a popular desire for change, just as Thatcher had done previously. Again, this strategy cohered with the importance which Gramsci placed on a hegemonic project needing to develop a distinctive vision of modernity⁵. The final chapter will centre on Blair's deliberate intention of making New Labour the 'natural party of government', of having 'no enemies', and of marginalising the Conservative Party, to show how, overall, New Labour can be regarded as a hegemonic project which marked a distinctive break from Thatcherism

³ Pearmain, Andrew. *Politics of New Labour: A Gramscian Analysis*. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. 2011

⁴ Hoare, Quintin and Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey, Ed and Trans. Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited. 2007. Page 133

⁵ Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Page 324

Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony sits at the heart of neo-Gramscian analyses of the political projects of Thatcherism and New Labour. Central to hegemony is the duality of dominance and leadership, and coercion and consent⁶. Gramsci referred to the 'spontaneous' consent given by the 'great masses' to the 'general direction' imposed on social life by 'the dominant fundamental group'⁷. In essence, a majority of the population give consent to the direction desired by those in power, and in doing so, determine the boundaries of a paradigm where the accepted ideology exists and expands⁸. Alongside hegemony is Gramsci's criticism of economic determinism; he recognised that changes amongst the working classes made the notion of achieving socialism through a deterministic coming together of events obsolete. Therefore, a 'hegemonic project' within the changed landscape of twentieth century capitalism would be one that moved beyond 'traditional concerns, styles and constituencies of the left' to construct a 'new historic bloc'⁹. It would need to seize the 'leading edge'¹⁰ of social, economic, and political change by constructing a vision of modernity and thus develop and maintain hegemony.

Hall and Hobsbawm view Thatcherism through the prism of a hegemonic project. They argue that Thatcher seized upon social and economic changes and the decline of post-war social democracy to radically alter vast swathes of policy and install a policy paradigm which would remain dominant into and beyond the New Labour period¹¹. In that sense, Thatcherism was, in their eyes, the definition of a hegemonic project. By contrast, they cast New Labour in a distinctly unfavourable light. They argue that 1997 did not 'usher in a new era' but instead 'belongs to the end of the previous one'¹². Jacques, writing in 1998, said that Blair had so-far failed to offer a 'different view of modernity... one which marks a fundamental break with the neo-liberal era'¹³. Similarly, Pearmain's analysis picks up on the

⁶ Ibid. Page 83

⁷ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Page 12

⁸ Stillo, Monica. *What exactly is the meaning of hegemony?* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-gram.htm> . [Accessed: 19th May 2017]

⁹ Pearmain. *Politics of New Labour*. Page 139

¹⁰ Leggett, Will. 'Prince of modernisers: Gramsci, New Labour and the meaning of modernity'. In: McNally, Mark and Schwarzmantel, John. Ed. *Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and resistance*. Oxford: Routledge. 2008. Page 155

¹¹ Hall, Stuart. 'Gramsci and Us'. *Marxism Today*. June 1987. Page 17

¹² Jacques, Martin. 'Good to be back'. *Marxism Today*. November 1998. Page 3

¹³ Ibid. Page 2

same themes, and argues that the ‘neo-liberal revolution’ enacted by Thatcher, along with the ‘globalisation of capitalism’, provided the context in which New Labour had to attempt to govern Britain¹⁴. Consequently, New Labour was a ‘transformist’ accommodation within the ‘epochal shifts’ engineered by Thatcher’s hegemonic project¹⁵. Along the same lines, both Townsend¹⁶ and Pearmain¹⁷ cohere with the view laid out by Hall, that New Labour merely consolidated Thatcher’s hegemonic project.

Others make broadly the same argument, such as Gray¹⁸ and Jenkins¹⁹. Gray asserts that New Labour turned out not to be a ‘successor’ to Thatcherism, but rather a continuation of it, because of the continued imposition of ‘market mechanisms’ in ‘health, education and other public services’²⁰. Jenkins traces a current of ideas centred around monetarism and free market economics which were put into practice by Thatcher’s governments and then pursued with apparent zeal by her successors; Major, Blair and Brown²¹.

However, nearly all of the critics outlined above view New Labour from the perspective of outcomes, and either gloss over the intent of the New Labour modernisers, or, like Hall, argue that their specific intention was simply ‘adjusting us [Britain] to it [Thatcherism]’²². Further, on a number of occasions, they recognise the nature of the ‘changed world’ – such as constraints placed on domestic governments by globalisation – and thus assert that the left needed to adapt to modernity. Yet, despite the repeated claims made by New Labour figures that a vision of modernity lay at the heart of their project, the likes of Hall and Hobsbawm fail to elucidate in what different ways New Labour should have proceeded to implement their project within the constraints of the modern world. Therefore, by failing to take the New Labour figures at their word, and in criticising the accommodative aspects of New Labour with Thatcherism, which the likes of Blair deemed to be necessary, they unfairly bracket New Labour as a continuation of Thatcherite hegemony. This view runs contrary to

¹⁴ Pearmain. *Politics of New Labour*. Page 177

¹⁵ Ibid. Page 18

¹⁶ Townsend, Jules. ‘Giddens’s ‘Third Way’ and Gramsci’s ‘passive revolution’. In: McNally, Mark and Schwarzmantel, John. Ed. *Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and resistance*. Oxford: Routledge. 2008. Page 156

¹⁷ Pearmain. *Politics of New Labour*. Page 18

¹⁸ Gray, John. 2004. ‘Blair’s Project in Retrospect’. *International Affairs*. 80 (1). Page 39

¹⁹ Jenkins, Simon. *Thatcher and Sons: a revolution in three acts*. London: Penguin. 2007

²⁰ Gray. ‘Blair’s Project in Retrospect’. Page 39

²¹ Jenkins. *Thatcher and Sons*

²² Hall, Stuart. ‘The Great Moving Nowhere Show’. *Marxism Today*. November 1998. Page 14.

the explicit articulation of New Labour's project by Peter Hyman, Tony Blair's former speechwriter:

New Labour was not intended merely as a short-term electoral fix after 18 years out of power...but as a radical new force in British politics. The "project" was infinitely more revolutionary than anything proposed by Jeremy Corbyn... The idea of New Labour was not to be a good opposition party... but, rather, to take and hold on to the levers of power. New Labour sought political hegemony: winning power and locking out the Tories to ensure that the 21st century was a Labour century with Labour values in contrast to a Tory-dominated 20th century... If Labour could be in power for a serious amount of time, then the country would, we believed, change for good; not a burst of socialism for one time... but changed institutions and values that could shape the country for all time²³

Hyman's assertions deserve scrutiny, for they are an account of the New Labour project by a key insider figure, and, taken alongside Leggett's analysis of the 'project', they appear to have to some substance. Leggett asserts that, far from being 'just spin', the New Labour project was 'authentically hegemonic in intent, and was based on an account of a 'changed world' – predominantly that of Giddens²⁴ – which the left needed to adapt to. From this perspective, he argues, New Labour should be seen as having attempted a 'genuinely hegemonic politics just as bold as Thatcherism'²⁵. Leggett has specifically taken *intent* into account but largely neglects outcome. Rentoul tries to address both intent and outcome from a sympathetic perspective, and gives credit to the notion that Blair's intention was to displace the hegemony of Thatcherism. Further, he elucidates the depth of the 'no enemies' strategy, discussed in Chapter 3. This analysis will also seek to draw intent and outcome together, and will explain how, from the perspective of their attempt to redefine modernity, and in recognising the need to work within the nature of a world changed by Thatcherism, New Labour's project can be authentically viewed as hegemonic.

²³ Hyman, Peter. 'This is an existential moment in Labour's history. It may not survive. And it may never win again'. December 2015. *The Guardian*. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/20/labour-party-directionless-political-future>.

[Accessed: 19th May 2017

²⁴ Giddens, Anthony. *The Third Way: the Renewal of Social Democracy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1998

²⁵ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 155

Chapter 1 – The Economy

As mentioned above, the critiques of New Labour are generally grounded on the notion that, in accepting free market economics and advancing programmes of privatisation further into state institutions such as the NHS, the Labour governments from 1997 represented nothing more than an accommodation with Thatcherism's hegemonic project²⁶. Indeed, this chapter will draw on Gramsci to demonstrate that the superficial plausibility of this argument, but will also show that, when New Labour's reading of modernity and globalisation is considered, along with the intent behind their actions, a plausible case can be made to say that, despite the accommodative aspects of New Labour's economic policy, their project was hegemonic in intent and, in part, in outcome.

Gramsci and the 'decisive nucleus of the economic'

Part of Gramsci's popularity rested on his critique of Marxist economism, he was, says Pearmain, its 'arch-foe'²⁷, and he believed that the 'arch sin' of economism was its 'exclusive focus on the wage struggle'²⁸. He was critical of the notion that socialism would be delivered through a deterministic coming-together of events, because changes in society and the lives of the 'working class' had made that notion obsolete. He continues that Gramsci re-cast the 'base-superstructure' model of orthodox Marxism by narrowing the economic base 'to include only the material and technical instruments of production', whilst broadening the superstructure to include 'political society, civil society, and the state'²⁹. Nonetheless, Gramsci was insistent that despite hegemony being about more than the economy, in that it also encompassed 'the ethical-political', it 'must also be economic' and be based on 'the decisive nucleus of economic activity'³⁰. From this assertion, the basis of critiques of New Labour is clear: in merely adapting Thatcher's economic programme, Labour had failed to offer up an alternative hegemonic vision. Indeed, Pearmain seizes on this, but rather misrepresents Gramsci's argument, writing that Gramsci 'always understood' that 'political

²⁶ Pearmain. *Politics of New Labour*. Page 177

²⁷ Ibid. Page 49

²⁸ Ibid. Page 25

²⁹ Ibid. Page 42

³⁰ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Page 161

manoeuvre' could only be justified 'in the service of... the construction of a socialised economy and an egalitarian, ultimately communist society'³¹. This criticism would in fact invalidate any analysis of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project, and thus must be discounted. Gramsci's assertion was simply that economic policy had to be at the heart of a hegemonic project, not that said economic policy had to be orientated towards the aims of socialism, communism, or the left.

Working within the new reality

Central to the intentions of New Labour's project was an acceptance of a changed world³²; it was, conversely, one coherently laid out by Stuart Hall's seminal *New Times*³³ analysis and given further backing by Hobsbawm. Drawing on the work of Gramsci, Hall asserts that 'social, cultural, economic, political and cultural changes of a deeper kind' were taking place in western societies³⁴. These changes, he says, 'form the necessary shaping context, the material and cultural conditions of existence, for *any* [sic] political strategy, whether of the right or left'³⁵. Playing on the same theme, Hobsbawm asserts that no Labour Party could be expected 'simply to reverse everything Thatcher had done', and continues that 'some of it... needed doing'³⁶. He goes on to concede that, because of globalisation, 'some things... are actually beyond the power of any single government to achieve at present', and thus economists must acknowledge 'the real world'³⁷. Then, in a criticism of New Labour, he writes that despite the need to accept the reality of globalisation and some of Thatcher's reforms, future policy did not necessarily need to cohere along the lines laid out by Thatcher; globalisation and the like did not need to be viewed only through a 'neo-liberal' lens³⁸. The analysis of New Labour figures was precisely the same, though their contention would have been that they were no longer seeing globalisation and economics through a

³¹ Pearmain. *Politics of New Labour*. Page 238

³² Giddens, Anthony. *The Third Way and its Critics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2000. Page 55

³³ Hall, Stuart. 'The meaning of New Times'. In: Jacques, Martin. Ed. *New Times*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. 1989

³⁴ Ibid. Page 222

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric. 'The Death of Neo-liberalism'. *Marxism Today*. November 1998. Page 5

³⁷ Ibid. Page 6

³⁸ Ibid.

purely 'neo-liberal' lens. Leggett demonstrates that the 'political genius' of Thatcherism was the way in which it 'tapped in to the new individualism and the decline of deference, and stamped it with a neo-liberal inflection'³⁹. In a similar fashion, it could be argued that, whilst New Labour viewed their economic policy as needing to be accepting of, and accommodative with, Thatcher's reforms, they could arrange such policies within a New Labour paradigm rather than a Thatcherite one. Hobsbawm's criticism then, rests on the assumption that New Labour should have shifted further from the new consensus than they did, but in conceding the new reality, and in accepting that some of its facets were desirable, he fails to outline in what way they should have done so.

Sassoon backs up the New Labour defence, saying that the Commission on Social Justice report of 1994⁴⁰, which contributed to Labour's policy revisions during the 1990s, was predicated on the notion that the world had to be looked at as it was changing, in order to have 'social justice and a dynamic economy'⁴¹. Indeed, the report cited three 'revolutions' which the UK needed to 'keep up' with, one of which was the 'economic revolution' in which 'finance, competition, skill, and technology' came together, the notion of a 'job for life' was obsolete, and macroeconomic power was no longer held exclusively by individual nation states⁴². Such changes had not been created by Thatcherism, it was merely that she had seized the 'leading edge' of change in order to take advantage of them⁴³. Geoffrey Norris, a former industrial advisor to Tony Blair, concedes that New Labour adapted itself to this new 'emerging economic consensus' centred on a free market economy, but argues that the notion of a 'socialist planned economy alternative to a market economy just looks completely absurd'⁴⁴. He continues that adaption along the lines of 'where the consensus had emerged' was necessary, and asserts that it was 'hard' to make a case for 'let's re-nationalise all these things that Mrs Thatcher has privatised'⁴⁵. Hay puts this view aptly, 'the Keynesian welfare state is gone. The post-war settlement cannot be reconstructed... like all realistic visions, it must be grounded in a tightly focused analysis of the current

³⁹ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 140

⁴⁰ Commission for Social Justice. *Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal*. London: Vintage. 1994

⁴¹ Personal interview with Anne Showstack Sassoon. See Appendix F. Page 57

⁴² Commission for Social Justice. *Social Justice*. Page 3

⁴³ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 140

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 47

⁴⁵ Ibid.

conjuncture⁴⁶. Philip Gould, who was heavily involved with New Labour and their policy shifts, like Norris alludes to the electoral necessity of appealing to voters whose desires had been addressed by Thatcherism,

Thatcherism, we discovered, was the political norm for these people [the electorate] – not an aberration, but the basis for their political thought. They took for granted many of its principles and any political idea was considered within that framework⁴⁷.

It is a point that is even conceded by Hall, who writes that ‘there is a tiny bit of all of us’ in the Thatcherite project, that just before the ‘demonstration’, ‘we go to Sainsbury’s and we’re just a tiny bit of a Thatcherite subject’⁴⁸. On this basis then, it can be argued that from New Labour’s perspective, their economic policy needed to be firmly grounded within an electorally popular, and economically credible, framework which would underpin their project. It is worth noting Tincknell’s point here, that ‘it is difficult to see how else the party could have remade itself within the context of the postmodern flux’⁴⁹.

The Minimum Wage

Despite the need to work within reality as it was, many economic policy positions can be identified which mark a break with Thatcherite economic hegemony. They were devised in an attempt to address the changed nature of work within the context of a globalised economy. Such an attempt chimes again with Gramsci, who wrote extensively about the changing nature of the world of work:

‘A forced selection will ineluctably take place; a part of the old working class will be pitilessly eliminated from the world of labour, and perhaps from the world tout court’⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Hay, Colin. ‘The Political Economy of New Labour’. In: Chadwick, Andrew & Heffernan, Richard. Eds. *New Labour Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2003. Page 63

⁴⁷ Gould, Philip. *The Unfinished Revolution: How New Labour Changed British Politics for Ever*. Great Britain: Abacus. 2011

⁴⁸ Hall. ‘Gramsci and Us’. Page 19

⁴⁹ Tincknell, Estella. ‘Virtual members? The internal party culture of New Labour’. In: Steinberg, Deborah Lynn & Johnson, Richard. Ed. *Blairism and the War of Persuasion: Labour’s Passive Revolution*. United Kingdom: Lawrence and Wishart. 2004. Page 159

⁵⁰ Gramsci. *Selections*. Page 302

Therefore, policies needed to address the less-stable and less secure nature of modern employment. The most prominent such policy was the 1999 introduction of the minimum wage. Norris rightly asserts that it was ‘not a free market policy’⁵¹. Similarly, the policy was popular enough for it to be adopted by the Conservative Party, despite their previous opposition to it, with Norris continuing in reference to the former Chancellor George Osborne’s 2015 decision to raise the minimum wage to a ‘living wage’⁵², that ‘they decide[ed] to grab our policy and take it even further with the living wage’⁵³. People now, he says, would ‘laugh’ at the notion of repealing the policy⁵⁴. Sassoon too, links New Labour’s wage with the additions to the policy under the Conservative Governments⁵⁵, and argues that it was important to ‘embed’ policies which no future government could realistically undo, so that it could ‘set the agenda’ for successive generations⁵⁶. As mentioned above, Gramsci argued that economic reform was central to hegemony in that it provided the basis for ‘intellectual and moral reform’⁵⁷. Such reform – centred around the ‘moral worth’ of work – was, says Leggett, a ‘defining thread of Gordon Brown’s actions as Chancellor and Prime Minister’, and the minimum wage was just one example of this. He continues that such policies aimed to ‘use work to regenerate not just the economy, but also the national psyche’⁵⁸. Indeed, the minimum wage policy can be placed within a coherent concept of hegemony in that it represented a policy paradigm which shifted from Thatcherism, was adopted by the Conservative opposition, and remains now at the forefront of the economic policies of all main political parties. Further, given this popularity and acceptance, as well as consent being a key part of hegemony, it could be seen as part of an attempt to build a social coalition, or ‘historic bloc’ and outline a hegemonic project which was different from that of Thatcherism.

⁵¹ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 49

⁵² ‘Budget 2015: Osborne unveils National Living Wage’. *BBC*. 8th July 2015. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-33437115>. [Accessed 24th May 2017]

⁵³ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 48

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Page 47

⁵⁵ Personal interview with Anne Sassoon. See Appendix F. Page 64

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Gramsci. *Selections*. Page 133

⁵⁸ Leggett. ‘Prince of modernisers’. Page 144

Bank of England Independence

In a further highlight of New Labour deviation from Thatcher's economic hegemony was the surprise decision in 1997, soon after the election, to make the Bank of England independent from Government. From that point on, the power to set interest rates was in the hands of the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee. The former governor, Sir Mervyn King, argues that the decision 'transformed' the setting of interest rates by 'taking politics out of the process'⁵⁹. He continues that everyone now knows when interest rate decisions will be announced, and that it is 'hard' to 'imagine monetary policy without the MPC [Monetary Policy Committee] and an independent Bank'⁶⁰. Indeed, the BBC referred to the move as having been described at the time by commentators as 'the most radical shake-up in the Bank's 300-year history'⁶¹. So, given the fact that the change appears unlikely to be reversed, as well as its acknowledged radical nature, it is another indication of New Labour's attempt to stamp economic policy – which they viewed to be necessarily accommodative with a globalised economy and a changed workforce – with their own inflection.

Spending increases

One final significant divergence from Thatcherite economic policy was the shift, after 2000, away from New Labour's commitment – a point which will be addressed in the final chapter – to follow previous Conservative spending plans for their first years in office.

Fraser Nelson writes that Gordon Brown's spending increases after the first three years represented a 'massive, audacious project' that was an attempt to 'shift our political centre of gravity'. He continues that Brown 'stood out from every other global finance minister in borrowing like crazy, *during* [sic] the boom', and that, by 2006, there was a budget deficit of 3 per cent of GDP and national debt had increased by 43%⁶². Though his analysis is a

⁵⁹ King, Mervyn. 'How the Bank of England was set free'. *Financial Times*. 5th May 2017. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/388fae86-3184-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a>. [Accessed: 24th May 2017]

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ 'Brown sets Bank of England free'. BBC. 1997. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/6/newsid_3806000/3806313.stm. [Accessed 24th May 2017]

⁶² Nelson, Fraser. 'The truth about Labour and overspending'. *The Spectator*. 30th April 2015. Available at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2015/04/the-truth-about-labour-and-overspending/>. [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

deliberately biased one, it chimes with that of Robert Peston, who argues that Labour financed growth through borrowing, despite successive years in which the economy was growing strongly⁶³.

Despite the critical nature of Nelson and Peston's analyses, they highlight a significant divergence away from the narrative of spending cuts and the commitment to 'thrift' – not spending more than you earn – that characterised the Thatcher period⁶⁴. 'Profligacy' and, 'even worse, borrowing', was, says *The Economist*, Thatcher's 'road to perdition'⁶⁵. By contrast, Blair referred to the debate about taxation and spending as 'sterile', and said the key question was not 'how much to spend, but what to spend it on'⁶⁶. One significant area of spending increase was in education, where it grew by 5.1% per year in real terms between 2000 and 2010, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies defines as the 'fastest growth over any decade since the mid-1970s'⁶⁷. In addition, health spending between 1997 and 2008 more than doubled⁶⁸. Overall, spending on public services increased by an average of 4.4% a year, whilst under the Conservative governments of 1979 to 1997 the comparative figure was just 0.7%⁶⁹. Giddens states that economic reform was central to New Labour's pursuit of its 'Third Way' project, because in the new 'information economy', 'human (and social) capital becomes central to economic success'⁷⁰. Therefore, 'extensive social investment', such as in the areas outlined above, was deemed to be necessary to 'cultivate' this 'human' resource⁷¹. Of course, it could be argued that, given the 'austerity' mantra adopted after 2010 and the consequent spending cuts⁷², Labour's spending patterns were

⁶³ Peston, Robert. 'Did Labour over-spend?'. *BBC News*. 1st May 2015. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-32549892>. [Accessed 25th May 2017]

⁶⁴ 'A cut above the rest'. *The Economist*. 8th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/blightly/2013/04/margaret-thatcher-0>. [Accessed 25th May 2017]

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Blair, Tony. 'Mais lecture'. 23rd May 1995. In: Gould. *The Unfinished Revolution*. Page 239

⁶⁷ Chowdry, Haroon & Sibieta, Luke. 'Trends in education and schools spending'. *Institute for Fiscal Studies*. 2011. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/bns/bn121.pdf>. [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

⁶⁸ Boyle, Sean. 'Doubling expenditure on the NHS between 1997 and 2010 had a variable impact on health system performance'. *London School of Economics*. 2011. Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/website-archive/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2011/03/nhsreport.aspx>. [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

⁶⁹ Chote, Robert et al. 'Public Spending under Labour'. *Institute for Fiscal Studies*. 2010. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/bns/bn92.pdf>. [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

⁷⁰ Giddens, Anthony. *The Third Way and its Critics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2000. Page 52

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Pimlott, Daniel and Giles, Chris. 'UK unveils dramatic austerity measures'. *The Financial Times*. 20th October 2010. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/53fe06e2-dc98-11df-84f5-00144feabdc0>. [Accessed: 29th May 2017]

not 'hegemonic' because they were not long-lasting. However, in the way that they increased the size of the state, and to the extent that health spending has continued to rise since 2010, Norris's claim that Labour 'entrenched the NHS'⁷³, and consequently its increased spending since 1997, appears to have foundation.

An Alternative Hegemony

Three economic measures have been detailed above, and, whilst there isn't space in this analysis to delve further into this facet of the New Labour project, it has been demonstrated that the New Labour intention of reading, interpreting and implementing a divergent economic reality to the previously dominant Thatcherite one, was at least partly successful. Where the accommodations with Thatcherism do exist, and they are significant, such as in the extension of privatisation into aspects of the health service and other areas, they can be seen from a New Labour perspective as being necessary accommodations with the changed nature of the world as it was. As has been shown, this interpretation is consistent with the viewpoints of critics such as Hall and Hobsbawm, all of whom accept the need to adapt to globalisation and find a new way of applying social democratic values. Their critique appears to rest on New Labour's chosen path, but at no point is a coherent alternative offered. In this way, the New Labour accommodation with Thatcherite economic principles can be regarded as an attempt to create an alternative hegemony, one which Leggett argues had 'sufficient depth' to compete with neo-liberalism 'at the organic level'⁷⁴. Thatcherism, he writes, wasn't inevitable, and in that context, 'far from being an extension of neo-liberalism', New Labour had 'the theoretical and political resources to offer an alternative'⁷⁵.

⁷³ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 49

⁷⁴ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 148

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 2 – Political, social, and cultural reform

How is it possible to consider the present, and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded? When someone does this, it means that he is a walking anachronism, a fossil, and not living in the modern world, or at the least that he is strangely composite

Antonio Gramsci⁷⁶

The key to understanding New Labour's attempt to create an alternative hegemonic project is to go beyond economics. They deemed their economic policy as needing to be accommodative with Thatcherism, but their social, cultural, and political reforms can be seen as necessarily and radically different. Norris makes this point, arguing that, beyond the economy, 'New Labour was more transformative', in that they did things which have 'changed Britain' and have thus become 'part of the fabric'⁷⁷. He continues that, 'if you think politics is simply about economic questions, then I think you're missing quite a lot of the story of modern society'⁷⁸. This chapter will try to show how, in a number of ways, New Labour undoubtedly shifted the political paradigm and thus achieved their own hegemony.

Embracing modernity

The notion of modernity was central to the analyses of the left's successive defeats at the hands of Thatcherism. Writing amidst the height of Thatcherism, Hall argues that Thatcher recognised, whilst the left did not, 'that there is no serious political project which is not also about constructing... an image of what modernity would be like for our people'⁷⁹. Similarly, Jacques contends that whilst the secret of Thatcherism's success was its 'understanding of modernity and its ability to appropriate the latter for itself', the left had 'lost touch' with it⁸⁰. Thatcher's method of appropriating modernity, and one of the 'unexpected sources of her popularity' was, says Hall, to defend a sense of 'Englishness' and 'being British', and to

⁷⁶ Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Page 324

⁷⁷ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 49

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Hall. 'Gramsci and Us'. Page 19

⁸⁰ Jacques. 'Good to be back'. Page 2

advance a feeling of Britain being 'great again'⁸¹. Further, says Leadbeater, Thatcherism's modernisation was a 'memorial to the past' in that it appealed to 'Victorian values'⁸². Hall again concurs, saying that Thatcherism confused 'the Left no end', because it espoused a form of 'regressive modernisation' in seeking to advance through modernity by appealing to 19th Century values⁸³.

However, just as Thatcherism had become successful by seizing the 'leading edge' of change, New Labour were able to do the same in 1997. Weeks writes that New Labour came to power amidst a 'profound transformation of intimate life, sexuality, and of patterns of domestic life', many of which were 'global in their extent'⁸⁴. Examples of these transformations included more liberal attitudes to sexual diversity – discussed later – a proliferation of single parent families and divorce, and a society that was generally more relaxed in its moral outlook⁸⁵. It is apt here to reference Gramsci again, he writes that, 'the decisive moment in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit'⁸⁶

In this context, Leggett's assertion that New Labour was 'precisely this long-prepared force' looks very plausible. Further weight is added by the former Conservative minister Michael Heseltine's assertion in 2001 after New Labour's second landslide victory that, amidst 'marital breakdown, single-parent families, partners, gay rights, [and] a multi-ethnic population', Labour had 'adopted the vocabulary of the future'⁸⁷. By contrast, former *Daily Telegraph* editor Max Hastings wrote that the Conservatives had sought – 'implicitly or explicitly for years' to 'deny' the reality of modernity⁸⁸. Modernity was therefore a 'hallmark' of New Labour, say Clarke and Newman, and by 'realigning state and society in

⁸¹ Hall, Stuart. 'The meaning of New Times'. In: Jacques, Martin. Ed. *New Times*. Page 235

⁸² Leadbeater, Charlie. 'Back to the Future'. *Marxism Today*. May 1989. Page 12

⁸³ Hall. 'Gramsci and Us'. Page 19

⁸⁴ Weeks, Jeffrey. 'Labour's loves lost? The legacies of moral conservatism and sex reform'. In: Steinberg, Lynn Deborah & Johnson, Richard. Ed. *Blairism and the War of Persuasion*. Page 72

⁸⁵ Ibid. Page 72-73

⁸⁶ Gramsci. *Selections*. Page 185

⁸⁷ Heseltine, Michael. 'A Disaster for the Tories – A Personal Tragedy for William'. *Evening Standard*. 8th June 2001

⁸⁸ Hastings, Max. 'The Tories Need Not Just a Leader, but to join the 21st Century'. *Evening Standard*. 8th June 2001

new ways', Britain could 'catch up' and hence 'take its place in a new global order'⁸⁹. Overall then, New Labour had shown themselves capable of, from 1997, of aligning with what Epstein, Johnson and Steinberg describe as 'considerable hopes for change across a range of social policies'⁹⁰. There was, they say, 'an unequivocal yearning for a new, more tolerant and gentle society, a new order of government and social life'⁹¹.

In successfully converging with a variety of societal trends, New Labour could replace the Victorian 'regressive' aspect of the hegemony of Thatcherism with a liberal hegemony of their own. This is clear in the way in which Blair attacked 'the forces of Conservatism' in 1999, going on to say that,

'it is us, the new radicals, the Labour Party modernised, that must undertake this historic mission [to set out potential free]. To liberate Britain from the old class divisions, old structures, old prejudices, old ways of working and of doing things, that will not do in this world of change'⁹²

In doing so, says Suzanne Moore, they 'successfully redefined all those who would dissent from it [modernity] as regressive, as living in the past, or belonging to a bygone culture'⁹³.

Civil partnerships and gay rights

One facet of the new modernity was the issue of gay rights, which is referred to briefly above. In 2004, the Blair government introduced civil partnerships for gay couples, a move which, it could be plausibly argued, made the 2013 legalisation of same-sex marriage possible. Sassoon takes this view, saying that, 'we would never have had gay marriage unless we'd had civil partnerships'⁹⁴. Similarly, Norris argues that 'you would look well off the pale if you came along and said you were going to reverse that'⁹⁵. Again, this can be contrasted with Margaret Thatcher's disapproving assertion at the 1987 Conservative Party

⁸⁹ Clarke, John and Newman, Janet. 'Governing in the modern world?'. In: Steinberg, Lynn Deborah & Johnson, Richard. Ed. *Blairism and the War of Persuasion*. Page 53

⁹⁰ Epstein, Debbie, Jonson, Richard and Steinberg, Lynn Deborah. 'Thrice told tales: modernising sexualities in the age of consent'. In: Steinberg, Lynn Deborah & Johnson, Richard. Ed. *Blairism and the War of Persuasion*. Page 53

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Blair, Tony. 'Tony Blair's full speech'. *The Guardian*. 28th September 1999. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1999/sep/28/labourconference.labour14>. [Accessed: 26th May 2017]

⁹³ Moore, Suzanne. 'The Cultural Revolution'. *Marxism Today*. November 1998. Page 18

⁹⁴ Personal Interview with Anne Sassoon. See Appendix F. Page 63

⁹⁵ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 49

conference that, rather than being taught to ‘respect traditional moral values’ in classrooms, children were being told ‘that they have an inalienable right to be gay’⁹⁶. The Thatcher government subsequently introduced the much-criticised ‘Section 28’ clause of the 1988 Local Government Act, which prohibited the promotion in schools of the acceptability of ‘homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’⁹⁷. It is important to note that there was always vociferous opposition to this legislation, and thus popular consent, which was a key part of Thatcherism’s hegemony, was likely never present. However, as has been shown, the key to establishing an alternative hegemony was judging when a ‘situation is favourable’, and thus building popular consent from this situation. New Labour abolished Section 28, gave adoption rights to same-sex couples, allowed gay people to serve in the military, made discrimination on the basis of sexuality illegal, legalised the age of sexual consent, and, as mentioned above, introduced civil partnerships. It is clear then that here they successfully aligned with the popular mood, and built consent with further legislation, thus establishing their own liberal hegemony which has been further extended by the Conservative Party.

Constitutional reform

New Labour’s sweeping constitutional reforms must surely be judged to be an integral part of their alternative hegemony. The changes included the removal of all but 92 hereditary peers from the House of Lords, the passage of the Human Rights Act and consequent enforcement of the European Convention of Human Rights, the passing of the Freedom of Information Act, and devolution of power to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Citrin argues that New Labour’s programme of reform – a ‘revolution’ comparable with Thatcher’s elevation of the market over the state – ‘substantially altered the structure of government in Britain’⁹⁸. He continues that the reforms ‘undeniably’ encroached upon parliamentary sovereignty, unitary government, and the fusion of executive and legislative power. Citrin

⁹⁶ Thatcher, Margaret. ‘Speech to Conservative Party Conference’. 9th October 1987. Available at: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941>. [Accessed: 26th May 2017]

⁹⁷ Local Government Act 1988. S 28. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>. [Accessed: 27th May 2017]

⁹⁸ Citrin, Jack. ‘Constitutional reform and British political identity’. In: McDonald, Andrew. Ed. *Reinventing Britain: Constitutional Change under New Labour*. California: University of California Press. 2007. Page 193

raises the issue of consent, arguing that ‘public acceptance of what has already been achieved’ was vital for the ‘successful institutionalisation of New Labour’s reforms’⁹⁹. His conclusion is that the public were generally supportive of the main pillars of reform, and now view the new institutions ‘as part of the normal way of doing business’¹⁰⁰. Others concur with Citrin’s view, with Hennessey arguing that Labour’s reforms amounted to ‘the greatest change [to constitutional affairs] since the completion of the franchise’¹⁰¹. Further, whilst the completion of the franchise ‘took 116 years’, ‘this has happened in the space of roughly three and a half’¹⁰². Cronin argues that, taken together, the reforms could be seen as a ‘genuine revolution in Britain’s constitutional arrangements’¹⁰³. Overall then, constitutional reform has changed the way politics is conducted, and has led to changes to the political system which are probably politically irreversible. In that sense, constitutional reform was a key part of New Labour’s hegemonic project, and has successfully changed the way in which politics is conducted.

Mass university expansion

Rentoul is critical of the notion that because New Labour partly accommodated with the Thatcherite economic consensus, or because Blair used soundbites such as ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’, that he was a ‘Tory in disguise’¹⁰⁴. He asserts that ‘rhetorical feints to the right concealed a moderate egalitarianism that dared not speak its name’¹⁰⁵. The 2001 introduction of tuition fees can be seen in this context, which were, says Rentoul, egalitarian in objective, but necessarily pragmatic in their implementation¹⁰⁶. Indeed, fees were introduced in response to Blair’s policy of expanding higher education access, with a target of reaching 50% participation amongst young adults. Given the Conservative Party’s

⁹⁹ Ibid. Page 194

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Page 216

¹⁰¹ Hennessey, Peter. Quoted in: Studemann, Frederick and Cook, Christopher. ‘UK Constitution: Rolling revolution’. *Financial Times*. 25th February 2010. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/690ea1b0-2265-11df-a93d-00144feab49a>. [Accessed: 27th May 2017]

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Cronin, James. *New Labour’s Pasts: The Labour Party and its Discontents*. Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited. 2004. Page 423

¹⁰⁴ Rentoul, John. *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*. London: Faber and Faber. 2013. Page 435

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Page 436

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Page 437

wholehearted and continued commitment to this policy, it is a clear example of a Blairite hegemonic project that has been successful in outcome.

Tax Credits

One other definable aspect of the 'moral worth' of work – referred to in the previous chapter - defined by Leggett was the introduction of working tax credits in 1999¹⁰⁷. The policy in many ways can be interpreted in both economic and social terms in that it was aimed at supporting modern, 21st-century workers, many of whom were in less secure and less well-paid jobs than their traditional unionised 'working class' predecessors. Similarly, the introduction of child tax credits amidst the 2003 shake-up of the system was partly an attempt to address the changed nature of family life, which saw an increase in the numbers of children growing up in single-parent families on low incomes. Weeks notes that New Labour's welfare policies were 'concentrated' on children rather than families, whilst taxation policies were 'neutral between the merits of married and unmarried parenting'¹⁰⁸. Tax credits are an example of such policy. Poyntee describes tax credits as having been a 'hugely successful social policy' in that they helped to reduce inequality and child poverty. Similarly, in 'easing the cost of parenthood'¹⁰⁹ and being taken up by millions of workers and parents, they were a symbol of a new policy consensus which represented an embracement of modernity. Clarke and Newman assert that the tax credits policy was central to the New Labour's placing of reform of the tax and benefits system at the centre of the 'construction of a modern society'¹¹⁰. Further, Rentoul asserts that the introduction of tax credits was another example of 'moderate egalitarianism'¹¹¹. He writes that, whilst words like 'equality' and 'redistribution' had been dropped as part of New Labour's attempt to be electable¹¹², their spirit remained in the likes of the tax credits policy, which was an aspect of 'sharply redistributive' 'tax and benefits changes'¹¹³. As with the minimum wage, the tax credits

¹⁰⁷ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 148

¹⁰⁸ Weeks, Jeffrey. 'Labour's loves lost?'. Page 74

¹⁰⁹ Toynbee, Polly. *The Verdict: Did Labour Change Britain?*. London: Granta Publications. 2010

¹¹⁰ Clarke and Newman. 'Governing in the modern world?'. In: Steinberg and Johnson. *Blairism and the War of Persuasion*. Page 58

¹¹¹ Rentoul. *Tony Blair*. Page 436

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. Page 440

system has remained a fundamental feature of successive governments, and the 2015 attempt by the Conservative Government to make restrictive changes to the policy was reversed after heavy press and public criticism¹¹⁴.

Beyond economic hegemony

It has been shown how Labour were able to move beyond economics and to make changes which displaced Thatcher's hegemony in order to make space for their own. There isn't scope in this analysis to discuss other relevant factors, such as the deliberate policy of 'multiculturalism', which came alongside consistent large-scale annual immigration. Nonetheless, a case has been made which demonstrates how, by pursuing constitutional reform, social liberalisation policies such as the move towards gay equality, benefits and taxation reform through the introduction of working and child tax credits, and the pursuit of mass university expansion, New Labour established their own hegemony which has largely been maintained or extended. To bolster their project, they employed a discourse centred on the notion of modernity, just as Thatcher had done. By doing so, says Leggett, they attempted to 'grasp and develop a narrative around a changing nature of modernity itself, as befits a hegemonic project'¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ Stewart, Heather & Watt, Nicholas. 'George Osborne scraps tax credits cuts in welfare U-turn'. *The Guardian*. 25th November 2015. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/nov/25/george-osborne-u-turn-scrap-tax-credit-cuts-autumn-statement> [Accessed: 24th May 2017]

¹¹⁵ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 140

Chapter 3 – Becoming the ‘natural party of government’

‘I cannot imagine why you think it [New Labour] made “no real change in the Thatcherite weather”. We now have a Tory party committed in principle to no extension of selection in schools, to equal rights for gay people, to a foreign aid budget of 0.7 per cent of national income, to the minimum wage, early years support, massive universities expansion, protected spending on the NHS and no tax breaks for private insurance. So why the long face? Just miserablism, I suppose’

John Rentoul¹¹⁶

This final chapter deals with a crucial pillar of New Labour’s hegemonic project, that of being the ‘natural party of government’. Embodied in this was the strategy of having ‘no enemies’, and of marginalising the Conservative Party. By drawing once again on Gramsci, and citing Sassoon, Norris, and New Labour critic Neal Lawson, as well as drawing upon secondary literature, this chapter will show how this facet of New Labour’s project represented a plausible and successful alternative to Thatcherism’s hegemonic project.

The Natural Party of Government

One of the central claims of New Labour’s 1997 election manifesto was that the Labour party was the ‘political arm of none other than the British people as a whole’¹¹⁷. This claim is noticed by Neal Lawson, New Labour critic and chairman of the lobby group Compass. He argues that the message was quite ‘scary’, and ‘totalitarian’, in that it ‘wanted to encompass everything’¹¹⁸. Indeed, Peter Mandelson, who was an instrumental figure during the formation of New Labour and its time in government, reflects that, ‘the execution [of the project] was military-style’, and ‘the unity total’. He continues that, ‘the strength of Labour at this time was quite overwhelming... we almost gave the electorate no alternative but to vote Labour’¹¹⁹. In this way, it could be argued that New Labour wanted to become the

¹¹⁶ Rentoul, John. ‘The wrong people were voting Labour’: an exchange with Neal Lawson’. *The Independent*. 17th January 2015. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/the-wrong-people-were-voting-labour-an-exchange-with-neal-lawson-9984569.html>. [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

¹¹⁷ ‘New Labour: because Britain deserves better’. London: Labour Party. 1997. Available at: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab97.htm>. [Accessed: 28th May 2017]

¹¹⁸ Personal interview with Neal Lawson. See Appendix B. Page 41

¹¹⁹ Mandelson, Peter and Livermore, Spencer. ‘Where did it all go right?’ *Progress*. 6th April 2017. Available at: <http://www.progressonline.org.uk/2017/04/06/where-did-it-all-go-right/>. [Accessed 28th May 2017]

‘natural party of government’. This view is taken by Leggett, who writes that, ‘the modernisers sought nothing less than to irreversibly reconstruct the British centre-left and become the “natural party of government” for a generation or more’¹²⁰. Satirising this view, Hall writes that Blair talked in ‘apocalyptic terms’ about New Labour being, “one of the great, radical, reforming governments of our history... a beacon to the world...[and] the natural party of government”¹²¹. He then outlines his view of a ‘natural party of government’, writing that they are those whose,

‘ideas lead on all fronts, carrying authority in every domain of life; whose philosophy of change has become the common sense of the age. In the old days we used to call them hegemonic.’¹²²

Despite Hall’s view that New Labour was emphatically not hegemonic, and therefore not a ‘natural party of government’, it has been shown throughout this analysis that New Labour’s attempt to be the ‘natural party of government’, has some purchase. Further, as will be shown below, the notion has a number of facets to it, ones which are different to those which made up Thatcherism’s claim to the same title.

No Enemies

Central to the New Labour project was the attempt to pitch to all the British people, to have no enemies. This is criticised by Hall. He writes that New Labour attempted to be ‘between’, ‘above’, and ‘beyond’, so that ‘everyone can [could] belong’¹²³. In his view, a political project which does not ‘transform and modernise society in a radical direction’, and which does not ‘disturb existing interests and has no enemies, is not a serious political enterprise’¹²⁴.

Similarly, Lawson takes the same view, and is cynically dismissive of the New Labour strategy whilst conceding the positives of the likes of tax credits,

‘other stuff, like tax credits was kind of under the radar, don’t build agency for it, don’t have a moral crusade for it, just do it quietly so you don’t upset the Daily Mail, what you never do is confront any

¹²⁰ Leggett. ‘Prince of modernisers’. Page 139

¹²¹ Hall. ‘The Great Moving Nowhere Show’. Page 9

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. Page 10

¹²⁴ Ibid.

of the forces of capital really... you go on your prawn cocktail offensive with the City and say look, “whatever happens, we will not challenge your economic and cultural dominance of the country”¹²⁵

By contrast, Hall asserts, Thatcherism had clearly defined enemies. Its aim was to ‘transform the landscape irrevocably’¹²⁶. Above all, Thatcher knew that ‘to achieve radical change, politics must be conducted like a war of position between adversaries. She clearly defined her enemies, remorselessly dividing the political field: Wets vs Dries, Us vs Them...’¹²⁷.

However, in reference to the notion of recognising reality as it was – mentioned in the first chapter – New Labour acknowledged that they needed to appeal to voters who had consistently voted for the Conservative Party if they were to win elections. Norris takes this view, arguing that, previously, the Labour Party ‘wasn’t really listening to voters and it wasn’t primarily seeing its job as representing their interests’¹²⁸. So, whilst having enemies was central to Thatcherism, Rentoul argues that Blair’s objective was to ‘establish his own hegemony over British politics, based on the ruthless cultivation of the centre ground’¹²⁹. He therefore went into the previously hostile, ‘tents of the ungodly but powerful and convinced them he deserved a chance: the media, big business celebrities...’¹³⁰. In doing so, he was ‘breathtakingly successful’, and so whilst Thatcher established governmental hegemony, ‘Blair secured domination of the entire British political landscape while in opposition’¹³¹. Indeed, he continues that Blair’s strategy of ‘drawing every centre of power or influence’ towards New Labour was ‘paying rich dividends’, and this was part of his attempt to establish his own hegemony¹³².

Further, Sassoon argues that the ‘no enemies’ strategy can be seen as part of Blair’s attempt to construct ‘a new social coalition, or what Gramsci would have called an historic bloc, around a wide set of social issues to underpin the Labour Party in a much longer term sense than people often imagine’¹³³. For example, she writes that the attempt to tackle ‘social

¹²⁵ Personal interview with Neal Lawson. See Appendix B. Page 38

¹²⁶ Hall. ‘The Great Moving Nowhere Show’. Page 9

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Personal interview with Geoffrey Norris. See Appendix D. Page 54

¹²⁹ Rentoul. ‘Tony Blair: Prime Minister’. Page 276

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid. Page 343

¹³³ Sassoon, Anne Showstack. *Gramsci and Contemporary Politics: Beyond Pessimism of the Intellect*. London: Routledge. 2000. Page 102

exclusion' and boosting the quality of 'universal provision of services like health and education' was a part of expanding the notion of 'we' beyond the 'left', and thus 'expanding the basis of hegemony'¹³⁴. Reforms though needed to 'correspond to real needs', and thus work with the population as it had been changed by Thatcherism. In trying to create 'widespread and active consent around social and economic reforms' – which they arguably achieved – they were aiming at establishing an 'alternative hegemony'¹³⁵

Destroying the Conservative Party

The final pillar in New Labour's attempt to establish hegemony was to marginalise the appeal of the Conservative Party. This objective is made clear by Gould, who firstly concedes a point which has been alluded to in the first chapter, that the 'confidence and consistency of fifteen years of Conservative government' had established the 'framework' by which the voters saw the world. Therefore, Labour's 'only chance was to rebuild completely from the ground up'¹³⁶. Alongside this, New Labour had the specific aim, by adopting a number of their policies and thus denying them political space, of 'the total destruction of the Conservatives'¹³⁷. This is, says Sassoon, a distinctly Gramscian strategy; broadening consent and thus 'undercutting the potential appeal of the opposition'¹³⁸. It could be argued that the commitment to adhere to Conservative spending plans during much of their first term, was one such example of this strategy in action. Fairclough too, touches upon this, writing that the Conservative Party ended up in disarray because Labour, 'built a new political discourse [which] incorporated elements of the political discourse of Thatchersim, and has thus transformed the field of political discourse'¹³⁹. Tincknell argues that this discourse remained 'powerfully hegemonic', and thus New Labour 'successfully established itself as the major political force in the Britain of the twenty-first century'¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Page 101

¹³⁵ Ibid. Page 96

¹³⁶ Gould. *The Unfinished Revolution*. Page 206

¹³⁷ Ibid. Page 208

¹³⁸ Sassoon. *Gramsci and contemporary politics*

¹³⁹ Fairclough, Norman. *New Labour's Pasts: The Labour Party and its Discontents*. New York: Routledge. 2000. Page 21

¹⁴⁰ Tincknell. 'Virtual members?'. Page 159

However, the Conservative Party did not collapse, and therefore it could be argued that, on the face of it, Gould's avowed aim of 'total destruction' failed. This though, is a thin analysis. After the 2005 election, and three successive electoral defeats, the Conservative Party attempted to shift their image and policy positions under new leader David Cameron. Spours writes that the Conservative leadership 'embraced social and civil liberalism', with one prominent aforementioned example being the embracement of gay rights and the later legalisation of gay marriage¹⁴¹. This was an attempt to extend the 'political and cultural base' of the party, and thus revitalise its status as a political force. Indeed, he continues that, after a decade of New Labour, the Party was 'cut off from liberal, cosmopolitan, and youthful Britain', and consequently 'weak to non-existent' outside of their southern heartlands¹⁴². Further, the complexion of the professional party has itself changed out of necessity, so that its members of parliament 'more closely resemble and represent modern Britain', and are therefore no longer 'almost exclusively white and male, as they were before 1997'¹⁴³. Leggett concludes that, as New Labour declined in popularity, its best chance of survival was via the adoption by the Conservative Party of 'key Third Way tenets', such as what he calls the 'dual focus on economic efficiency *and* [sic] social cohesion' by David Cameron's Conservative Party¹⁴⁴. Certainly, it is difficult to deny that, despite the implementation of austerity, there has been a governmental focus on improving social cohesion, such as through welfare reform, and the work of the affiliate think-tank the Centre for Social Justice. Overall then, the Conservative Party of the 21st Century is more a product of the legacy of New Labour's hegemonic project than it is a throwback to the Thatcherite hegemony. It has clearly been forced to adapt to the new socially liberal paradigm established by Blair's Labour.

¹⁴¹ Spours, Ken. 'The Osborne supremacy'. *Juncture*. Vol 22 (2). 2015. Page 92

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Ibid. Page 95

¹⁴⁴ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 149

Hegemony of the Centre

Gilbert asserts that it is 'quite wrong' to 'berate' New Labour for 'failing to construct a hegemonic project'. Just because it adopted tenets of Thatcherism, and thus was not 'led clearly from the left', it did not mean that it was not hegemonic in its own right¹⁴⁵. He continues that, it was as much as anything, a 'socio-political coalition which [sought] to consolidate a solid centre-ground'¹⁴⁶. This final chapter has demonstrated these facts, and has shown the success of New Labour's alternative hegemonic project. It sought to become the 'natural party of government', and in winning three elections and its policies being taken up by the Conservative Party, it could maintain its project beyond its own period in office. Its 'no enemies' strategy of appealing to millions of people who had previously voted Conservative was also successful, and one way in which it did this was by neutralising the likes of a previously hostile media and big business core by going 'into the tents of the ungodly'. Further, its strategy of appropriating Conservative policies had more to it than the likes of Hall and Lawson concede. It was not simply a matter of adopting policies which were popular, but rather a deliberate strategy, which, as Sassoon has shown, can be viewed as a Gramscian tactic, of marginalising the political opposition in order to occupy the largest possible political terrain. In this way, they were at least partly successful in establishing their own alternative hegemonic project.

Conclusion

This analysis has sought to address one central question: was New Labour a hegemonic project? In doing so, it has consistently analysed the neo-Gramscian currents of literature on this topic; specifically the work of Hall, Hobsbawm and Jacques. It has then outlined Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which has been applied to both Thatcherism and New Labour.

The analysis centres on three identified pillars of the New Labour governing project. Firstly, its part-accommodation with Thatcherite economics, which the New Labour modernisers

¹⁴⁵ Gilbert, Jeremy. 'The Hard Centre: New Labour's Technocratic Hegemony'. Available at: <http://www.signsofthetimes.org.uk/pamphlet1/The%20Hard%20Centre.html>. [Accessed: 20th May 2017]

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

deemed to be entirely necessary as part of their reading of modernity. Globalisation, the changed nature of work and the working population, and the consequent tightened constraints which the modern state needed to work within, meant that the left needed to offer a different policy programme and adopt different strategies than it had at the height of the post-war consensus. This recognition of the nature of modernity was referred to in Gramsci's writing, and heavily referenced by Hall and Hobsbawm, both of whom acknowledge the need to adapt to the world as it was, but fail to give credit to New Labour's project which was grounded on this very necessity. Three divergent economic policies have been identified to demonstrate a break with Thatcherite hegemony, thus satisfying Gramsci's stricture that moral and intellectual reform needed to be based on economic reform. The introduction of the minimum wage, the independence of the Bank of England, and vast spending increases in a number of policy areas, such as health and education, were all aspects of a shift away from the 'thrift' discourse of Thatcherism towards an economic policy which tried to reconcile the free market with improving social cohesion.

The second key part of New Labour's attempt to establish an alternative hegemony was their political, cultural and social reforms, again centred around an embracement of modernity. Hall and Hobsbawm acknowledge the necessity of a hegemonic project needing to have modernity at its centre, and they aptly recognise this in their analysis of Thatcherism. However, they again fail to give credit to the New Labour project in this regard, which quite clearly was centred on modernity. This analysis has made clear that New Labour's reading of modernity marked a decisive shift from that which Thatcherism was built on, at a time in which social liberalisation over several decades had generated a decisive desire for change. By legislating for improved gay rights, introducing tax credits, embarking on a programme of radical constitutional reform, and rapidly expanding university numbers, New Labour successfully imposed their own hegemony, all of which has outlasted their period in office.

Further, this analysis has focussed on New Labour's attempt at becoming the 'natural party of government', which included adopting a 'no enemies' strategy and marginalising the Conservative opposition. All three factors were discernible aspects of a hegemonic project. The 'no enemies' strategy was fundamentally different from Thatcher's approach, and, despite being criticised by the likes of Hall, proved able to overcome a previously hostile

electorate, media, and business community. Their approach of appropriating Conservative policies was partly necessary to win over the hostile electorate, but was also part of a deliberate strategy to marginalise the Conservative opposition. The success of this strategy is clear when David Cameron's attempts to refashion the Party's image are analysed, as well as the fact that, as Rentoul points out, they have adopted and are committed to a number of New Labour policies.

Finally, this piece of work has added a new dimension to the neo-Gramscian discussions of this topic by attempting to address the flawed critiques of the likes of Hall and Hobsbawm. It has done this by taking the avowed aims of Gould and other figures concerning the intentions of the New Labour project, and placing those aims alongside the outcomes of their project. It has drawn upon the recollections of Neal Lawson, a left-wing critic, Geoffrey Norris, and Anne Showstack Sassoon, an academic whose work has focused on Antonio Gramsci's writings. In sum, the claim made by Leggett, that New Labour's project can be understood as a 'counter-hegemonic account of the direction of late modernity', and one which had sufficient depth to compete with Neo-Liberalism at the organic level¹⁴⁷, has been shown to be entirely plausible.

¹⁴⁷ Leggett. 'Prince of modernisers'. Page 148

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent form, Neal Lawson interview

Consent form for Project Participants

Project Title: Was New Labour a hegemonic project?

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Allow the interview to be video recorded / audio recorded
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that I have given my approval for my name and/or the name of my town/community, and / or the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project, and in further publications.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name:

NEAL LAWSON

Signature:



Date:

31/3/17

I believe that Neal Lawson (name) understands the above project and gives his/her consent voluntarily.

Name: HARRY HOWARD

Signature:



Address: 5 INVICTA VILLAS, THE GREEN, BEARSTED, KENT, ME14 4DT

Date: 31.03.17

Appendix B: Neal Lawson interview

Neal Lawson (NL): (01min): Talks about NL accommodation with globalisation, e.g. tuition fees. So the difference between them and Thatcherism was that NL used 'active state intervention to ensure that people could live within a neo-liberal global economy. Now that's better than them not being supported by the state, but actually, it's not a left project in any shape or form.'

The big critique of New Labour as a hegemonic project, its not that it didn't do some things that haven't been 'entrenched' as it were, e.g. the minimum wage, you know... but a lot of its coming unstuck, even the bloody Northern Ireland peace accord is you know coming unstuck . The thing about New Labour was it was profoundly unpolitical in its kind of analysis in how you... so the analysis is this very quickly: social democracy in long term decline for decades, you know Hobsbawm's Forward March of Labour halted' written in 1979, not about 1979, he traces back the forward march being halted from the late '40s, early '50s, that's when the class composition and the development of the working class and the scale and intensity of the working class starts going downhill. So you've got class decline, trade union decline, the end of the Soviet Union. The role of the Soviet Union as a kind of maker of Western Social Democracy was enormous, it brought the capitalists to the table because they were fearful of the same thing happening here. So you've got this massive cultural... you know, memories of the war, the solidarity of the war, the war machinery which became the peacetime machinery... top down, nationalised, all of that, everything was unfolding, so by the time you get to the late '80s, early '90s, there isn't any agency, there isn't any theory of change, there's no transformative capacity to hold up social democratic parties. So you get a bunch of clever people come along, you know, Brown, Blair, Gould, Mandelson, Campbell etc, who the best they can do is spin a position of kind of modernity and vision and whatever else. Now that doesn't meant to say that there's not a bit of theory around Giddens and Leadbeater and Legrand? And people like that, but it was always smoke and mirrors. So how are you going to have a hegemonic project based on smoke and mirrors, that had no sense of agency whatsoever? Who were going to be the carriers of the New Labour project? They never said, they never developed it, they had no theory of change, other than 'we're smart, we can reposition old Labour to New Labour and put a new rose on it, and come up with a pledge card and whatever, and I'm not saying that professionalism and all of that isn't important, and positioning etc, but its not enough to sustain a project is it?

Harry Howard (HH): There's so much criticism along the lines of what you've said, especially in Marxism Today, but I think there was a lot they did that is kind of irreversible, like devolution or House of Lords reform, or tax credits and things... the narrative has shifted, and the image of

Cameron's Conservative Party was so... he called Blair 'the master'... he was so far removed from Thatcher's Tory Party, and I think, they did something, they changed something.

NL: Yes, and I accept that, but if we live in a world of May, Brexit, UKIP, polarisation... I mean... its pretty thin gruel what you mentioned. House of Lords wasn't really much of House of Lords reform, devolution has kind of blown up in their face, but don't forget that Blair wanted to ditch the commitment to a Scottish Parliament, he tried actively to ditch it and couldn't do it. He couldn't do it because there was some agency stopping him, which was the Scottish constitutional convention, which was the big civil society campaign, and they said look 'you can't defeat that because there'll be a fucking uprising.' So even one of the biggest things he wanted to do... and the other stuff, like tax credits was kind of under the radar, don't build agency for it, don't have a moral crusade for it, just do it quietly so you don't upset the Daily Mail, what you never do is confront any of the forces of capital really. You don't confront the City, you go on your prawn cocktail offensive with the City, and say look, "Whatever happens, we will not challenge your economic and cultural dominance of the country. What we will do is give you the freedoms to grow and do whatever you want, and we'll turn a blind eye to that. We will then redistribute, under the radar, the fruits of your endeavours." Where does that take us? It takes us to 2008, and the whole thing fucking blows up in our face. So I admit that there were bits of what they did, and I don't want to be ungenerous to anyone, but structurally, they created a lot of the toxic mess we're in. Immigration: don't say anything about it, just welcome in all these people to increase the productivity of the British economy immeasurably... don't build any fucking houses for them, don't worry about what the cultural identity implications are for the people who are here.

HH: I feel that... immigration was a deliberate attempt to change the country in a way that would be very difficult to...

NL: Well partly an attempt to have an influx of potential Labour voters as well. It was quite a cynical move, I'm not against cynical moves if they help... I suppose the difference for me is... I'm not denying that they did a number of good things, but is that a hegemonic project, and does that add up to a transformation or a big step-change in the nature and culture, and sentiment and politics of our political life, compared to 'they did a number of good things', some of which are unravelling, and a lot of which have led to the mess we're in now.

HH: The Thatcher period... the whole culture of the British people has shifted... the narrative now is around... I don't know how to explain it... well maybe mass university expansion is one quite big enormous thing that they did that now the Conservative Party seem totally committed to.

NL: (10 mins) Well again, it was all supply-side stuff... it all went back to Charlie Leadbeater's 'Living on Thin Air' book, which was, you know... the country can consult its way to its place in the world, where the truth is that the vast majority of jobs created in that era were burger flipping jobs, of that ilk'. So I suppose a lot would depend on your definitions of hegemony...

HH: I guess I could define it myself at the start....

NL: Yes... and then say does some of the stuff, you know gay marriage, do they then fit with that... but the question is again, would the Tories have been any different? Neo-liberalism doesn't mind people getting married, as long as they work hard, and shop even harder, and borrow even more... But where did Labour actually confront the economic power of neo-liberalism? That, I would say, is a pretty good test of whether or not it was a hegemonic project.

HH: Peter Hitchens talks about this... that it was wrong to talk about the neo-liberal accommodation, that it was actually the shifts in the cultural side... so that just because they liked the free market, doesn't mean that they weren't socialists, or trying to input a hegemonic project. You know, the battleground wasn't in economics anymore because it had gone too far the other way, you couldn't start implementing a planned economy.

NL: Yes sure, that wasn't gonna happen. But then you had things like Will Hutton's stakeholder society stuff, which was really alive and relevant just at the cusp of New Labour stepping into power, which gave you a very different take on what form of capitalism you wanted, that was completely ripped up... so even an alternative form of capitalism was seen as too threatening and unacceptable. And all of that is for maybe good, judgemental political reasons, we don't have any strength anymore, we can't confront these people, let's not poke and upset the tiger, let's ride it, and in riding it, do the best we possibly can for the people we really wanna kind of help. Now that was the judgement call of the era, and in a sense that's not necessarily the wrong judgement call

about where you start, the problem is, the fuckers just kept on going. They didn't reconnect with the British people, secure a base, use their 100 seat whatever majority to start developing a different or tangential political project, Blair in particular just really kept going, and got more persuaded by marketisation is the only way to reform the public sector. You know, accommodation with the forces of globalisation is the only way ahead. There wasn't any a kind of like pragmatic... yes of course the Labour Party has to reconnect with the British People and earn their trust in terms of finances and whatever else, but with a view to saying we do have to have a bigger transformation, as I say, they just kept going.

HH: The bit of [your exchange with Rentoul] that I was really interested in was... 'We now have a Tory Party committed in principle to no extension of selection in schools, to equal rights for gay people, to a foreign aid budget of 0.7 per cent of national income, to the minimum wage, early years support, massive universities expansion, protected spending on the NHS and no tax breaks for private insurance. So why the long face? Just miserablism, I suppose.' That's what I'm trying to say, there are changes that have shifted the whole ideology of the Conservative Party, maybe now not since May, but at least Cameron... you know he's the mirror image of Blair's Labour.

NL: Yeah yeah yeah

HH: Just imagine if Thatcher had turned the Labour Party into... lets say if Michael Foot became a clone of her, like...

NL: But that was always Thatcher's aim, that quote, she said "my goal isn't to change the Conservative Party, my goal is to change the Labour Party. You know, so who's really hegemonic, is it Thatcherism, or is it Blairism. Did they do some good things, yes. Did they change the kind of you know, in any fundamental way, in any way that matches up to what Thatcher did in '79, to what Labour did in '45, absolutely not, and what is the price that has been paid, in terms of their electoral strategy, which said 'everyone to the left of us we can take for granted because they've got nowhere else to go... we'll just plough on with our middle England, target swing voter, swing seat, playbook strategy, as long as you focus on the centre, then you're always going to win, deny the Conservatives that space, and we're here forever. That's the Gould playbook. What happens? SNP, Greens, Liberal Democrats, fracturing, you know... you can't take fucking people for granted and you can't ignore huge swathes of the population, and just say, "suck it up", can you?

HH: When Cameron became Prime Minister, he could've... you know Thatcher won three elections with her style and she had clearly defined enemies, that was very successful. And Blair clearly did something which meant that the Conservative party was never going to go back to that style of leadership...

NL: Yeah but Major was a precursor to that as well, it wasn't an abrupt thing, none of these are completely abrupt, were they? Major was an outlier for Blair a bit, just as Blair was an outlier for Cameron. I'm hearing what you're saying, you should stick to that kind of like me I'm a rabid lunatic frothing at the mouth, you should stick to that more... obviously its an academic thing...

HH: I would probably write a better thing if I just went down, I've found so much literature that supports what you're saying, I could just write that, but that's too easy because its not original is it?

NL: its not original and its not very nuanced is it? Was it Blair who said that the Labour Party was the political wing of the British population? Fucking brilliant quote isn't it.

HH: That's what I mean. You said in your Independent piece that he had no enemies and that was bad, and there was no project there, but surely that is a strategy to try and please everyone?

NL: By trying to be... that idea that single party can cover all of the terrain and it doesn't matter what terrain you cover as long as you cover it... you know I fundamentally disagree with that.

HH: Doesn't that go right down to real socialism? With the communist party...

NL: I don't agree with that either! I agree with tension, and I agree with difference, I don't want... its quite totalitarian isn't it almost. Its quite scary isn't it, you know 'we can encompass everything and everyone can be part of our... project, and our big tent can cover all the terrain. But it couldn't do, it couldn't contain all the...

HH: But you can see where I'm coming from that that is a facet of what I'm trying to argue.

NL: Sure, I think you should explore that and you should explore the feasibility and desirability of that big tent strategy.

HH: And also, the shift in the communication strategy, Alastair Campbell... I've heard from a couple of journalists who've said, if you weren't on their side, then you were locked out of lobby briefings...

NL: Yes and it's the same with... and this is one of the, I'm sure unintended consequences of their strategy, that both the media, but also internally, you had to be on-line and on-message etc, which then just wastes a whole generation of people, which we're now paying the price for, who don't know how to think, who don't know how to argue, they don't know how to develop a different view, because why would you do that? There is a line, someone up there sends you a message on your pager, which tells you what the line is, you know, that's how politics works.

HH: I think this helps what I'm trying to say, because its, the communication thing is part of what I think is a plausible case to say...

NL: But that just sows the seeds of death doesn't it, because eventually New Labour isn't new anymore. Finlayson has a great line, more recently he's written it, he says that New Labour thought it was the start of something new, when it was the end of something old, which is a kind of version of my line, the two problems of New Labour is its not new enough and its not Labour enough. Unless a project can renew itself, and you can only renew yourself with a critically constructive culture which allows you to test and question what you've done and then re-think it as you learn from what you're doing and as the situation changes, then you're fucked aren't you. That's proved to be the

case, you get all of these articles by people on Progress going 'New Labour 2.0' or whatever, when its no different from New Labour 1.0, its exactly the same.

HH: Could you not make the case, I know it's a very depressing point, that that was what they had to do to get elected?

NL: My issue there is... I was gung ho for it, I could see we had lost all the elections, we had to reposition ourselves, what was the purpose of repositioning ourselves? What did we believe in, and where were we trying to take the country in trying to reposition ourselves? I wanted to go over here, and they wanted to go over there. So its not a question of reconnecting and repositioning and rebranding, I'm happy with all of that, but what purpose... I think in the end, their purpose was one... not new enough or Labour enough.

HH: This is what I'm finding in MT reading, before New Labour, it was social democracy, the left needs to realise the terrain has fundamentally shifted, it can't keep banging on about the same stuff, and that we are the only ones that seem to see, the real changes of what Thatcherism has done. And yet New Labour comes along, doing all the things they're suggesting, and they suddenly, hate them and they're wrong, and I don't understand what... its like they didn't quite do what they wanted them to do... I don't understand how it could've been different to be electable and to be long-lasting, they were both...

NL: That is a central question, could it have been different? If they'd done stakeholding, if he'd stuck with a more communitarian politics which seemed to go out the window, and I think Labour had to be a mix of cosmopolitan and communitarian, and it went completely out the window and was completely and utterly cosmopolitan and global. If they hadn't have ripped up the stakeholder speech they were supposed to give in Singapore, if a whole number of ifs... you know... could it have been different, or was the context such that it was inevitable that it went off in the direction that it went? Who knows? But they made decisions about what to do and how to do it, which if they'd made other decisions, the path and the history and whatever may have been very different.

HH: Maybe its because they realised the British people are very socially conservative, or were.

NL: Well that's fine, and have you read the Unfinished Revolution, Gould's book, its worth flicking, that's what Phillip, bless him, believed very strongly, that... my line on this was that they treated the British electorate... they felt like gatecrashers at a party. Even when they won by a hundred seats, they never felt that they were legitimately there, that they were going to be thrown out at any stage. It was always a really nervous... that was partly... borne of the defeats, and particularly the defeat of '92 which burnt the life and the soul out of the party, when he thought he was going to

win... You never take victory for granted... for all their kind of swagger and self-belief, it was always a really nervous project, and it came back to Thatcher, she said, people have the capacity to be selfish, conservative etc, and they have the capacity to be selfish, compassionate, politics is about, the economy is the means, the goal is to change the soul. Politics is about creating institutions and cultures which bring out what you want in people. I think, after those defeats, New Labour bought the line that the people will only be like this, and there's only so far you can go, and so therefore your programme has to be incredibly limited. Not, yes you have to start where they are, but can you build a transformative project, and do you believe the best in people or the worst in people? New Labour believed the worst in people, and set up a whole marketisation... you know, thing, where they... politics at the end of the day, just as Thatcher was... has to be a moral project, it has to be about a different version of a good society, New Labour had some different aspects of that and it should bring that out, but it didn't really challenge the fundamental.

... (27 mins) they did waste a fucking massive opportunity. You're right to remind me that they did some good things but...

HH: For me its not good things, I'm trying to look at it in a different way...

NL: Yeah, and would they have happened anyway? Was Major gonna do them, was Cameron gonna do them? There are things that are going to be done by any government, aren't there? It's the bits that probably weren't gonna be done that... did they change things that... politics is about making things happen that you wanna happen, what did they make happen that was probably not going to happen anyway? A lot of cultural stuff was going to happen because culture was more deeply embedded...

...

NL: (30mins): ...again the hubris of politicians... you know, it was only New Labour that won in '97... bollocks! People were sick and tired of the Tories...

HH: They might've got one term if it had been someone else...

NL: Well, and maybe they'd have got one term like '45 where they'd have done some really big things and really made a hegemonic project. Its not so much time, its what you do with the time that you've got. You know...

HH: I read in Sassoon's book, she talks about things like civil partnerships and tax credits, she thought they were the examples of a construction of a new historic bloc around a wide set of social issues that underpinned the Labour Party in a much longer-term sense than people often imagine'.

NL: Yeah, a bit. But we do live in a country now that is more fucking divided than ever... how many years of government was it, 13... you know massive majorities, you know, clearly whatever they did... it was not enough in order to kind of cushion, transform the lives of a lot our voters in a lot of places, which has now led us to a fairly sour, divided country.

...

HH: I emailed John Rentoul... he said it's a rather pseudo-intellectual way of saying some rather obvious things...

NL: Right. You know, as critical as I am of where it ended up, compared to what we've got today, I'm in awe of the fact that they had a political project. which set up think tanks, which tried to capture enemy territory, which engaged with the enemy, which is what you have to do with any serious political project. Its kind of like, why are you doing it, and where's this taking you to, and whats the strategy? There was too much... to win to be in office, there wasn't enough to win to be in power. They're two very different things, you know. It was a project, and their lead project...

New Labour was just a complete and utter capture of a vehicle by a small group of people. You know, brilliantly ambitious, determined, clever, smart and all of that, but it was just all head and no body, there was nothing else to it. They never developed that, despite all of their clever manoeuvres about capturing and bringing people over and whatever, which I think is part of any political project. It was all necessary but not sufficient.

HH: So you think the other element was the clear defined goal, the endpoint.

NL: Yes, what sort of vision of society were they trying to do? And what was the means to try to do that? Spin, to bring some tories over is fine, but that's not agency, not real political power is it, that's not real coalitions, not real alliances. And if you don't have trade unions, if you don't develop local authorities, if you don't have an activist base, if you don't connect with a myriad civil society organisations that are all going to be advocates for your politics, and really culturally embed all of that stuff, you know, what are you? I'm not saying any of that would have been easy, you know. They were up against it, and, you know, but they did have a long time and big majorities and a lot of good will.

Appendix C: Consent form, Geoffrey Norris interview

Consent form for Project Participants

Project Title: Was New Labour a hegemonic project?

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Allow the interview to be video recorded / audio recorded
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that I have given my approval for my name and/or the name of my town/community, and / or the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project, and in further publications.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name: GEOFFREY NORRIS

Signature: 

Date: 31.3.2017

I believe that Geoffrey Norris (name) understands the above project and gives his her consent voluntarily.

Name: HARRY HOWARD

Signature: 

Address: 5 INVICTA VILLAS, THE GREEN, BEARSTED, MAIDSTONE, KENT,
ME14 4DT

Date: 31.03.2017

Appendix D: Geoffrey Norris interview

Geoffrey Norris (GN): (05 secs) I think Thatcherism was hegemonic. The changes that followed Thatcherism, I'm not sure that they were as quite intended. They never thought the pound was going to go up by as much as it did between 1979 and 1981. The consequence of that was the collapse of British manufacturing, which they didn't intend. The collapse then led to a number of consequences, one of which was massive weakening of trade unions.

(2min 40)... On the economy, New Labour was adaptive. We basically adapted ourselves to that emerging economic consensus.

Harry Howard (HH): That's the criticism though from people like Stuart Hall in *Marxism Today*, was that all it did was adapt to Thatcherism.

GN: Well. You say 'all' that it did... You can argue, that beyond the economy, that actually New Labour was more transformative, and its transformative in ways that, some of which have proved to be not very durable, like in Europe, the others are potentially durable, but quite where they're going to end up we're not quite sure. I.e. the decision to have a Scottish Parliament. But I also think, in terms of social liberalisation, when we were in government we were a big social liberalising government, again I think the consequences of that have turned out to be slightly mixed, in that I suspect that one of the forces in the referendum were people who didn't quite share that happy liberal consensus, feeling that they wanted to kick back.

HH: What you mentioned about going beyond the economic... What I've read is that it's a very shallow criticism to say that 'they adopted the free market, so they weren't really left wing', because there's so much more to it.

GN: Yes I think there's so much more. I think the other point I would make is... the reality was... after 1992, we had turned out to be a spectacularly unsuccessful electoral force. The notion that you could completely change the way people thought on the economy just seems to me to be ludicrous. To an extent you had to adapt and accept where the consensus had emerged.

HH: That's what I've got from my reading. Prior to New Labour, Stuart Hall and Eric Hobsbawm were talking about the left not understanding where social democracy was and they didn't understand the changes in British society and that there needed to be a radical re-thinking and that they were the only ones that were doing it. Then New Labour comes along and they don't like it.

GN: You're absolutely right. The Forward March stuff, well the other thing is, the problem about Stuart Hall, they had no political economy, which is... because if you actually look intellectually what

is the other thing about New Labour, I wouldn't sort of labour this point, but the reality was... so you basically have the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, with it, rightly or wrongly, but the notion that there is a socialist planned economy alternative to a market economy just looks completely absurd. Thank you very much Stuart Hall who had [fellow travelled? 6min 20] with the Communist Party and Eric Hobsbawm... their model of political economy had collapsed. The other problem that New Labour was facing, and the more pressing problem that New Labour was dealing with, which was, Keynesian demand management looked a bit flawed, and it was quite hard to basically make a case, let's say for nationalisation, to make a case to say 'lets re-nationalise all these things that Mrs Thatcher has privatised.' So actually, where was the left's political economy, where was... if you go and read *Marxism Today*, it didn't have a lot of articles on how you could improve the growth rate, or productivity.

HH: *I put Neal Lawson's comments to him; that New Labour didn't change people's view of things etc*

GN: Well there is an issue about the extent to which social democratic parties transform people's view of the world, it's not clear to me. So for instance if you looked at Thatcherism, she had some social consequences, but I think it's quite interesting that Mrs Thatcher has not turned the British people against a belief in the NHS, she did not turn the British people against a belief in a state-funded education service. So the notion that Thatcher consciously set off on a project to transform the way people, and somehow found a way of getting people to think differently about the world, seems to me is exaggerated.

HH: Most of the stuff I've read in *Marxism Today*, they ended up admiring Thatcherism, because they saw it as genuinely hegemonic, whereas Thatcher didn't fundamentally change the welfare state. What's wrong with saying, 'Thatcher's hegemonic, but didn't change the welfare state', and saying 'New Labour's hegemonic, but they didn't get rid of the free market'. In my opinion it's the same sort of...

GN: Well I would say that there are limits in a democratic society, in an affluent democratic society, the populace, the population, the voters, are not sort of a blank sheet on which politicians basically get people to think. Actually, voters are their own masters and mistresses, and the story of post-war Britain is basically about those people themselves increasingly defining how they're going to lead their lives. What Mrs Thatcher did do was that she addressed – by the 1970s, the political economy looked under strain, so demand management, Keynesianism looked as if it wasn't working – she aligned herself with people that had a different political economy. She, by combination, on council house sales, she kind of identified a weakness in the welfare state which is that basically people who

were in a council house were basically told that they had to have that they couldn't paint their own front door the colour they wanted. She also realised that, certainly in the southern parts of the country, basically subsidising the sale of council houses was a transformative balm to loss of voters. Basically people who didn't have any capital assets suddenly had a capital asset which was worth thousands of pounds. This was a slightly unsustainable political thing because you can't constantly sell of these things, but I mean she was quite cute in her politics so one of the reasons why, in 1983, they advanced so strongly in London and the South East is that they were basically, 'what's not to like'. If you get a council house you're suddenly worth a hundred thousand pounds, that's pretty transformative.

HH: Stuart Hall said, that there's a bit of Thatcherism in all of us; before the demonstration we head to Sainsburys...

GN: All that is to say is that we're all a mix of motives. I think there is another thing which would be my argument with Neal, which is I think that there are some people that are in politics and they have a notion that they're on a romantic mission, I basically, without wanting to be... I think politics is a retail business, and you trying at the margins to make lives better...

HH: *I put the John Rentoul quote to him and say that its quite plausible → the notion that NL did fundamentally change things*

GN: I think people underplay the impact that 13 years of Labour government had, and the Rentoul list, I think is a good one.... Actually you had forced the Conservatives on the minimum wage for instance, something they had been completely opposed to, and even under Osborne they decide to grab our policy and take it even further with the living wage.

HH: Well Cameron's Conservative party is, almost a... he called Tony Blair 'the master'.

NL: He adapted... I think it is quite interesting that May... Brexit notwithstanding, May is talking about a role for the state in a way that Mrs Thatcher would never have talked about it.

GN: This tells us the psychological thing. What is the psychology of the left? The psychology of the left is, it has a slightly romantic notion about what it can achieve. There's nothing the left likes more than denigrating itself. 'We never achieved anything' etc... quite where this leads you... it leads you nowhere. Why should anybody support something which spends most of its time basically saying 'we never achieved anything'? I don't actually think its true that we've never achieved anything, but I actually think it's a strange basis for trying to run a political party and a philosophy on the basis that you spend quite a lot of time basically saying "we're rubbish".

HH: There's also the fact that you have to be electable to do anything.

GN: Well there's the electability but I think there is a danger that... social democrats... the criticism of Corbyn is partially about electability, its partially about competence and balance, but its also about, have you got policies that actually work for the modern society. Clause IV, etc planned economy, its very hard to see how that would actually be very useful at this particular juncture.

HH: So the fundamental criticism of the New Labour project is framed by it moving on the terrain of Thatcherism, that it didn't fundamentally change that. Would you....

GN: I think that we were adaptive on the economy, that's not to say that we were simply, we were palpably not simply a continuation of Mrs Thatcher. We didn't seek to break radically with Thatcherism, but equally introducing the minimum wage was not a free market policy. We then took it in some interesting directions, like independent bank, the fact was we did increase public spending, we necessarily were cautious in the beginning, but we did increase whatever... I don't think we were that... we were possibly insufficiently radical on some areas, I mean the big issue is about financialisation and the argument about whether or not we were excessively relaxed about the growth of the financial sector and regulation. Its not clear to me that there were a lot of people in 1997 who were saying that you've got to have a lot of regulation because otherwise you are going have a financial sector induced recession.

HH: Would you agree that there were changes made... like devolution for example that would be, like Thatcher's reforms that would be almost impossible to reverse, and therefore with the hegemonic thing, they're long lasting...

GN: I think we entrenched the NHS, and I think Rentoul is absolutely right, Mrs Thatcher was very interested in trying to move towards a private health system, people would laugh at the notion that you were going to repeal the minimum wage, it is interesting now that with gay marriage people think that that's just... you would look well off the pale if you came along and said you were going to reverse that. If you think politics is simply about economic questions, then I think you're missing quite a lot about the story of modern society. I'm agreeing that we were adaptive rather than sort of seeking to break abruptly with, the trend on the economy, but actually we did a lot of other things which have changed Britain in a way that I think that are now just part of the fabric.

HH: Also, the communications changes. This criticism that New Labour had no enemies, but from where I'm coming from its not a criticism. That backs up the idea that they're trying to be all things

to all people, but that's almost like a communist thing, trying to fit everyone under the same umbrella.

GN: Sadly, the Labour party is going to have to, will go through the process of re-learning the lessons that we learnt in the 1980s and 1990s, which is simply pleasing yourself, which the Corbynistas do, making yourself feel happy, which is what Corbynista politics is about... its not actually about changing anything. If you want to persuade a majority of people to support you, you actually have to listen... the starting point is them, not you. The Labour party will have to re-learn that lesson, part of that process is... you build a coalition of people, not all of whom basically share your starting point, your obsessions. You need to have a strategy to deal with the media, it will be different, because the social media has grown, but the Daily Mail remains, the Sun remains influential, as we saw in the Brexit referendum, and you need to have a strategy for dealing with it, dealing with the media, and that sometimes involves concessions. You've basically got to get yourself... Labour's current polling is 25-26%, and under Corbyn at a General election we'll have less. If you want to begin to change Britain you have to get closer to 40%. To go from 25-40 is going to persuade a lot of people who currently have a very different approach to things. Being popular requires you to do certain stuff, listening to people, understanding what motivates them, as opposed to what motivates you.

HH: In the Summer of 2015 I managed to interview Alastair Campbell for the student newspaper, that was quite good.

GN: What Alastair was about was managing our ability to handle what had previously been a very very hostile press.

HH: I've heard a lot of criticism from journalists, and read it as well, that if you didn't agree with the New Labour line, then basically you were out of the lobby briefing and you were...

GN: Well you didn't get any favours but thank you very much, the Daily Mail and The Sun never showed us very much favours, it's a tough tough world.

HH: He said to me, I did an essay last year and I asked him, I did it on communication, comparing Thatcher and New Labour, I spoke to Bernard Ingham, and he said that Ingham was always 'reasonably reasonable' with him even though he knew that 'I was hostile to the Government'. So he says that Ingham was reasonable with him and yet Campbell had a reputation for being unreasonable when it came to Lobby briefings and dealing with journalists generally.

GN: The thing about Alastair, you've got to remember, Alastair was basically because he had been a journalist, was very cynical about journalists and was therefore he was prepared to be tough, he knew they were in a cynical game.

HH: Peter Hitchens talks about the radical pasts of a lot of New Labour figures, like Peter Mandelson and Alastair Campbell's partner being former Marxists.

GN: Well I think Peter's young communist league days were a very long time ago.... By 1992, the state of the Labour Party was dire. I have to say, in retrospect to today, we were in a better place in 1992 than the Labour Party is today, but in order to come back, it was a tough battle. What did Mr Lawson [Neal] have to tell us about Corbyn?

HH: He said that he voted for him twice, but he doesn't think he's competent, he just thinks that he did it because he thinks there needs to be a change from sort of reverting to, 'oh we need to go back to Blairite techniques' or whatever. He basically thought that Labour needed a wake-up call and that Corbyn was that.

GN: Sort of slash your wrists... You see Neal is... I think it's a very interesting phenomena. I first met Neal when he was working for Gordon Brown, so Neal had been a member of the LCC, which had become the kind of soft left organisation in the 1980s, 1990s, what is Neal's journey from working for Gordon Brown, then the shadow chancellor, to supporting Jeremy Corbyn? That's just bonkers.

HH: Well he said he was a Blairite because he wanted to win but he really didn't think they were going anywhere, so that's why he... but I didn't really understand what it was that he exactly...

GN: No, well that's the thing with Neal, he's in with Stuart Hall, there's no political economy, its just romantic critique.

HH: Aleks Szczerbiak said the same thing...

GN: Its sort of just... the danger of it... the movement becomes everything. Its kind of Compass, it's the Compass events, its sort of us holding hands together and feeling good about ourselves.

HH: He talked about the 45 Degree politics thing, but it didn't seem to mean very much...

GN: It tells you something about where the Labour Party is... the 2015 Labour leadership contest, there was a kind of parallel universe, where the people that voted for Jeremy Corbyn, were having an election about one thing, which was what they liked and what they wanted, whereas the other candidates were basically having an inquest into why the voters decided they didn't like us. We continue to be in those two worlds. Basically a bleaty movement which wants to feel good about itself, and there are other people who worry about 'how do we have a programme that voters want'?

HH: I don't think Corbyn has any intention of, trying to become electable, and he can't imagine himself as Prime Minister.

GN: No he can't imagine himself as Prime Minister and they will think they're building the movement, but this goes back to what I regard as the irresponsibility of Neal's position, which is... this has broken, this is not actually about Blairism. Jeremy Corbyn is on the far left, the Labour Party has never been led by members of the far left. We are not a far left party, that has not been our history. You might disagree with Blairism and say we need a slightly different course, but we are not a far left party, that is not the purpose of the Labour Party.

HH: And I suppose when they were briefly in charge, Michael Foot, it was er...

GN: But you see, Michael Foot wasn't a sort of far left person like Corbyn, by the time he became leader of the Labour Party, he was an old man and a romantic leftist. Remember, Michael Foot had been employment secretary and has basically imposed a pay policy, this guy was not a far leftist. He stuck with the whole of the 1974-1979 Labour Government, he didn't resign from [it]. In comparison to Jeremy Corbyn...

HH: What comes after Corbyn...

GN: I think that is a huge... the Corbynistas, I think they are getting themselves ready for Corbyn to stand down. Then we're going to have, Angela Rayner or Rebecca Long-Bailey, they look to be the two people that Compass seem to be promoting. So the British electorate have absolutely no idea who these people are, have absolutely no reason to give them a second thought. There's no evidence that they're going to have anything better to say to the British people.

HH: and they've only been in politics a few years, they don't seem like they'd be qualified to be leading a national party.

GN: That's an interesting thing, it be that they end up being quite right wing people... to be fair to Jeremy Corbyn, he has been in politics a long time and has always held the same wrong views. You where he's at. Whereas some of these other people have been in the Labour Party not that long, certainly not been in politics or in Parliament for that long, and you really don't know where they're going to end up.

HH: Going back to, would you say the term socialist can be applied to... [New Labour], or is it not a very relevant term anymore?

GN: To use the term socialist implies that you believe that there is a different way of organising the economy to a market economy in which there is large amounts of private ownership. I don't basically believe that there is a different way of organising the economy. I believe you can make the economy better and more just, but I don't think there is an alternative to a market economy. That's

why I'm a social democrat, not when it comes to it, a socialist, because I don't believe there is a different way of producing wealth. Be it by planning or collective ownership of the means of production.

HH: The weight of the literature is on the other side of the argument for what I'm going for, I was wondering if I was missing something about... They don't seem to mention the other aspects of the whole thing...

GN: Well no, that goes back to my point which is that the whole culture of the left is one of criticism.

HH: I don't understand, I can see a plausible argument and they don't seem to, I don't see how its so hard to see, that it goes beyond economics...

GN: It tells you something about the left but it is also a characteristic of large parts of the left that its more comfortable with critique than it is with construction; that there's an element of self-loathing. Tony Blair made mistakes, but if you look at the pathological dislike of Tony Blair amongst some people on the left, seems to me to be not explicable by anything other than some strange psychological problem.

HH: Surely its to do with Iraq and you know...

GN: Yes but, Blair was not a war monger, in a difficult situation he made a mistake in judgment. But he weighed a whole number of things in order to decide this was the best course of action, in order to defend his country. The idea that he's a war criminal is absurd in my mind. The fact that some people do think that tells you more about them than it does about Tony Blair.

To go back to the hegemonic point, a permanently weakened Labour Party, if that is what the impact of Corbynism is, I think then does create opportunities for the right to be... the reason Cameron didn't attempt to back... the reason why the Conservative Party post-Blair has not gone back to the sort of private health insurance ideas is basically because they know there was an electorally challenging centre left party that would punish them if they did. If there is no centre left party that is a significantly challenging political force, then the centre right will feel its got much more freedom to pursue the kind of agendas that it wants.

HH: What I said to Neal Lawson is that Thatcher won three elections, she had clearly defined enemies and she had a project that you could define in proper terms. And yet, Blair's opponents in the Conservative party when he was Prime Minister, only briefly did they dally with Thatcherite... they basically ended up adopting everything that Blair was saying, and then the narrative was that

and Cameron was... and it was much less about who your enemies are, and instead about persuading people and Blair was responsible for that, it was a shift in the narrative.

GN: It was, but by hegemonic... but basically you could only really explain Thatcherism in part from the history of Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. So the breakdown of industrial relations, the faltering of economic performance, and a widespread notion that in terms of the economic arrangements you needed some changes. Then people kind of saw Thatcher, they probably saw that some of what Thatcher did was necessary, but actually found her deeply unattractive in the way that she did it. The lasting legacy of Thatcher was some changes in the economy, some changes in the kind of 'loads of money' approach, but also actually that some people still today regard Mrs Thatcher as a deeply damaging... interestingly now the number of people who would remember Mrs Thatcher [would be smaller], but she as a deeply divisive figure. Actually on the whole British voters don't like deeply divisive figures. Blair was not. Because of Iraq, he became a divisive figure, but the intention in 1997 was that New Labour was an antithesis of Thatcherite divisiveness.

HH: Yes. I think it was in the 1997 manifesto, I think it said New Labour was the electoral arm of the British people, which is actually quite a frightening thing to say really. That assumption that...

GN: Well what that was about was us showing that who was sovereign was the voter. That is only significant when you think... the fact was that in the 1980s... well in the 1970s and 1980s, lots of people's view was that the Labour Party was focused on itself, that it wasn't really listening to voters and it wasn't primarily seeing its job as representing their interests. The quote was about us flagging that, no, we understand that the voters are the masters.

HH: But its also saying that there's no alternative, and that we are...

GN: No I don't think that was... I don't think... because the point about 1997 was that... TB... it was by no means certain that we were going to win in 1997. Despite the fact that in the opinion polls we had a very strong lead, we didn't think that we were the masters now of this stuff. We were incredibly cautious and kind of realised that we had to sort of win support right up to the last moment.

HH: This was another criticism. Lawson said that you were always wondering, 'when are they [the electorate] going to kick us out? There was no focus on really trying to change people, that you were squatting basically.

GN: Well we were very very cautious. But this goes back to the prior thing which is, what do you think political parties can do in our types of societies. Neal thinks that political parties are capable of bringing great changes in the way people think. Personally I'm a sceptic about the ability of

political parties to sort of lead people to change the way they think about a lot of stuff. I actually think that the political process is more about... people themselves generate a view of what's in their best interests and have their values and then political parties have to sort of catch up with the voters.

HH: I think Neal Lawson seems to have an extremely rosy view of human nature and even more so than the left generally.

GN: Well that's his romantic thing. I think people are mixtures of sort of altruism and self-interest.

HH: Its almost demonstrably true that statement?

GN: It is demonstrably true but there are some people that choose to ignore it.

HH: Its almost like utopianism, it never actually comes about, its just... you want it and it leads down very dangerous paths.

GN: Well there is the totalitarian danger, I think the bigger danger is that this is a form of politics that gives you no traction with most people. Therefore... I come back, I think politics is a retail business in which you're trying to persuade people to support you, and when you can get them so support you, you can do some good things. But that's not a very utopian, exciting vision of a completely different society. That's not what social democracy is about

Appendix E:, Consent form, Anne Showstack Sassoon interview

Consent form for Project Participants

Project Title: Was New Labour a hegemonic project?

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Allow the interview to be video recorded / audio recorded
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that I have given my approval for my name and/or the name of my town/community, and / or the name of my workplace to be used in the final report of the project, and in further publications.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name: *Anne Showstack Sassoon*

Signature: *Anne Showstack Sassoon*

Date: *9 April 2017*

I believe that Anne Showstack Sassoon (name) understands the above project and gives his/her consent voluntarily.

Name: *HARRY HOWARD*

Signature: *Harry Howard*

Address: *5 INVICTA VILLAS, THE GREEN, BEARSTED, KENT, ME14 4DT*

Date: *9/04/2017*

Appendix F: Anne Showstack Sassoon interview

Harry Howard (HH): Hitchens takes the view that Peter Hyman takes, that New Labour was, below the radar, very hegemonic, revolutionary...

Anne Sassoon (AS): Oh I didn't know he did, that's interesting.

HH: Yes, he's very critical of the people who say that they were just accommodating with Thatcher...

AS: That's interesting, I didn't know because we are all operating in these echo chambers, you know and he's not everybody's cup of tea.

HH: Obviously, he's critical of them but he recognises them that... he completely agrees with Peter Hyman's view that they made a lot of changes... he talks about a cultural revolution that went on from the 1960s, the sexual revolution, and he sees New Labour as part of that, the sort of 'Long March through the institutions'.

AS: I may be wrong but I think Hitchens moved from the far left...

HH: He did.

AS: I've come across a lot of people who make that journey, and I had a period of being a Trotskyist, but I think... you might want to think about this in terms of the discussions that were going on in the 1990s, sort of running up to 1997. There was a real ferment of ideas, the IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) was set up, something that really influenced me personally because I've done this work on Gramsci and then I did a lot of work on women and welfare provision in the wider sense, not just benefits. But it was the Commission on Social Justice Report and the Commission was based at the IPPR, it was not of the Labour Party but there were academics from all sorts of angles. David Miliband was the secretary. Patricia Hewitt was the deputy director of the IPPR. What that report of this commission, which was published in 1994, promoted was very much that we've got to look at the world as its changing if you want to have social justice and a dynamic economy. It grew out of the frustration of the 1992 defeat, and this worry that e.g. child benefit was going to be eliminated. The real question was, how could you harness a consensus around the welfare state that will sustain it. This really influenced me, I was very impressed with this. It was situated in a wider European discussion, I forget the fellow's name, Peter Langer [?] I think, a German, who came up with this idea of the two thirds/one thirds society. Two thirds of the society are doing fairly well, this was before the stagnation of wages and so on, but basically two thirds are fairly independent, are in work, increasing affluence, not all wealthy, but increasing affluence, and one third are on benefits etc. The real question was how can you create a political consensus around the welfare state in that

situation. This was not a Labour Party report, on purpose it was not a Labour Party report, but it informed, it was launched by Blair in 1994 after he'd been elected leader. It wasn't followed to the letter, but it was that perspective. It won't have mentioned Gramsci or anything, but it really is you know, if you look at hegemony in terms of influencing society, having consensus around a political programme, that was one of the inputs to New Labour and that's my journey into it. It was slammed by progressive academics because of small-c conservatism, and there's an understandable fear. I was very favourable to it because it put women's socio-economic roles right at the centre of this analysis. If you can use this term with a light touch, I hesitate to use this because it sounds so old Marxist, but it was a bit of a materialist analysis, it was empirical, it was filled with analysis of what was actually happening in British society. They had hearings all through the country, and they talked to people. The report didn't become Labour Party policy but it does give an insight into some of the new thinking that's going on.

So I agree with Hitchens, it really wasn't Thatcher re-warmed. But you know we can then make the criticism about the banks, about not having reformed elements of the financial sector and so on, there's plenty to be critical about, but the inspiration what put it into effect was actually quite different. If anything it was some kind of, this is to general for you to quote, but it was version of types of social democracy which went hand in hand with trying to see that things are moving on, we've got to prepare people for the future. We know it hasn't all worked out, we know people have been left behind, but in a sense framing the questions in a very advanced way I think.

We've got to think about the policies that are progressive today, that express our values, in this changed context. Now the content of policies are often very different, and they do open doors sometimes to a Conservative government coming in and... its like there are cracks in the old and you try to create the new, and if other political forces come in they can make use of those political spaces, going in directions that you wouldn't want to follow. So that's the landscape in which I became very attracted to New Labour.

HH: So with my reading of *Marxism Today*, they like Thatcherism theoretically in terms of it being a hegemonic project, they were saying that the left isn't seeing how the left really is now, they were very critical of the left arguing amongst themselves.

AS: One the one hand you have Eric Hobsbawm and the Forward March of Labour Halted, and then on the other you have Martin Jacques and Stuart Hall, saying, 'if we're going to understand this, we have to understand what kind of project it is and what kind of popular support, and actually don't just criticise people for supporting it.' That was a very Gramscian kind of analysis. There was a lot of really innovative thinking in *Marxism Today*, so it was quite interesting to me that... it didn't just stick

to some of the rather arid and totemistic positions of the left of the Labour Party, you know, that nationalisation is a good thing... you look at countries like Sweden, they never nationalised... To me it was quite shocking, it was just before the 1997 election, it was Martin Jacques and Stuart Hall came out and lambasted New Labour.

HH: Yes, they were calling for a new way of thinking. New Labour comes along, doing exactly that, and yet they're so critical, that's what I want to ask, what do you think the basis of that was?

AS: I really don't know. Stuart Hall was very critical of some of the things... because to some extent what Bill Clinton had done... I never actually talked to them about it, I really don't know. I'm now very active in the Labour Party and I know there was an attitude of criticism in the Labour Party, this is now ironic in the present context, that just tries to get people elected, and there's no intellectual, you know, ambience in it, compared to the rest of the left.

HH: Do you think that Stuart Hall and Hobsbawm were just saying that New Labour was an accommodation with Thatcherism, and why do you think that's wrong?

AS: I couldn't speak for Hobsbawm... in the Forward March of Labour Halted, he was looking very clearly at the changes in industry and so on. Stuart Hall, it was almost a visceral dislike and I just don't know if it was something about... that piece it was in The Observer, I still remember this, it was just before the 1997 election. It is true, and what Labour did not do, it did not say that we are against the liberalisation of the economy, and it did aim at ameliorating the effects, and had a perspective of preparing the population better to cope in this kind of context. And they did make, you've probably seen these lists of fifty things New Labour has accomplished and so on.

HH: John Rentoul said in the Independent, and this is good for my argument in relation to how New Labour shifted the paradigm of thinking, that: 'We now have a Tory Party committed in principle to no extension of selection in schools, to equal rights for gay people, to a foreign aid budget of 0.7 per cent of national income, to the minimum wage, early years support, massive universities expansion, protected spending on the NHS and no tax breaks for private insurance. So why the long face? Just miserablism, I suppose.'

AS: No that's a very good thing.

HH: I'm not trying to say, were New Labour good, I'm trying to say, did they change...

AS: ...Were they able to shift the terrain on which politics takes place?

HH: Yes (19.05 min), because Thatcher had won three elections and she had clearly defined enemies and New Labour came along and the answer to combatting them was obviously not Thatcherism.

And they changed the Tory Party, because they turned them into a clone of themselves basically. I don't know if it fits with Gramsci's definition of hegemony, I don't know...

AS: Well I would see... its an application of a concept, the concept is not rooted only in the period in which its created. I think you can use that and I think you can use it in all sorts of contexts in which the outcomes are not, I'm assuming, what you would want or I would want. I think that's a very good thing... and I'm thinking you know its just coming into effect, is Osborne's minimum wage...

HH: And also the free childcare... something like 30 hours free childcare per week.

AS: Yes yes, and I think that's [Rentoul's list] is a very good way to pinpoint it. They [the Tories] did undermine things later, you know the [scrapping of] the Educational Maintenance Allowance, all of a sudden they just chopped the building schools for the future, I think the paradigm has shifted. I'm just allergic to, when people start using the phrase 'neo-liberal', it is an excuse not to think. Its just pigeon-holing, not sitting back and thinking, 'well what is going on, what's different, the paradoxes, the contradictions' and so-on, and I agree with that. It doesn't mean that I support the coalition government, much of what they did or indeed what's going on now. But it does provide some kind of contours on this terrain on which we're fighting. The real question, moving forward, is trying to understand what's changed in the last twenty years, and how we can really think about the country. Gramsci didn't have much to say about parliamentary politics, but its kind of this formulation saying 'if you want to have impact in a context, you have to understand what's going on'. This is what was so good about that [Marxism Today] analysis of Thatcherism. Gramsci, stuck in prison, was saying, 'our politics has been defeated in the short term, people are supporting the fascist regime, it is hegemonic, because parts of the population are gaining, their lives are improving out of this situation'. If you are in the context of Britain, why are people supporting Thatcherism, and also what are we doing wrong if we're not having an impact?' Its learning, if the people are saying ABC, and are supporting various political forces, what's beneath this, and part of that is a material analysis; de-industrialisation, or sections of countries that have been left behind. Really trying to understand what is hapneing, which is not just created by a political force. Blair said something recently about this, globalisation is not created by a political force, this is really hard, we would like to see how the negative effects could be addressed and people not be affected so badly.

With Gramsci, it isn't just hegemony, but if you see the analysis of Americanism and Fordism, there too he is trying to figure out what's happening. You know, in that period in the 30's, there were a lot of people in Europe who admired Americanism and Fordism, the Bolsheviks did too, because this was modernisation... there were very positive aspects of that, as well as grinding assembly line work. There is that kind of analysis, which I think is very... the acceptable side of Marxism, trying to analyse

what's there. I don't think I can say it much better than John Rentoul. Now Neal Lawson is an interesting case, because I was going to lots of seminars and discussions, and he was very supportive of the New Labour project until they got elected. My personal interpretation, because he wasn't drawn into the inner sanctum after they got elected... I don't want to reduce it just to that.

For example he on the one hand, and Roy Hattersley on the other... and I'm all for equality, but it isn't enough to say you're for it, how are you going to achieve it? Actually, just cutting down the richest is not necessarily the way that you achieve it. I want to make a difference in the world and make things change for the better.

(32 mins) The other thing about New Labour, and I think I talked about it in one of the other things I wrote, which I think most people would say is very quirky, using Gramsci with New Labour. Two thirds/one third, is also a perspective, improving the health service, improving education, weaving the absolute vast majority into services that everybody uses.

HH: Is it kind of the idea of forming a social coalition around... is that the right term.

AS: Yes, but its also people's lived experience of the health service, and if you really want support for these services, to quote somebody who was a Fabian radical, Titmuss said 'services for the poor are poor services'. So you want services that will kind of hook them into this manner of social integration if you like. This goes back to the hegemony of the post-war Labour governments, its part of the culture isn't it. So that was part of the perspective and part of a hegemonic presence in society. It doesn't meant that it's a battle won for all time, you can see things being chipped away now. You know, this idea of more grammar schools, or whatever but... the idea of providing high quality state education, the health service, its also a way of saying we want the majority of the population to support what we're trying to do.

HH: Also, one of New Labour's criticisms was that New Labour had no enemies. As in Blair was trying to capture everyone in the 'centre ground'.

AS: Why does he say that?

HH: Well he [Lawson] likes the idea of having sides, and general debate, but I think it was in the '97 manifesto, he said New Labour was the electoral arm of the British people. He [Lawson], said there's something quite almost totalitarian about that...

AS: I think that [speaking in more collegiate terms] was a way to get across in ways that broke through divisive ways of putting things.

HH: Their communications changes were very radical as well. If you look at the difference between them and Thatcher's methods, and the way they... their communications unit at Downing Street was enormous. Of course the criticism of that was that it was all presentation, there was no substance. So one of my chapters will be their communications changes.

AS: That will be very interesting. I really want to see this when its done.

HH: Yes! Do you know Andrew Pearmain?

AS: Yes yes

HH: He wrote a book about New Labour from a Gramscian perspective. He was very critical, he said they were just a transformist adaptation to Thatcherism, but he tried to make the case from a devil's advocate point of view of New Labour being a Gramscian project, and he said, 'At a push the practice of Clintonian triangulation, where you appropriate the best of your opponent's policies in order to neutralise their political challenge, can look like an attempt to form a historic bloc of social allies under your leadership'. That was one, and then he said, 'at an even bigger push, these accretions of policy look like a pre-figurative attempt to construct elements of a progressive movement, which might just one day amount to a new or good society'. But in the end he said that 'Gramsci always understood that political manoeuvre, even Leninist style manipulation... could only be justified in the service of a larger objective, the construction of a socialised economy and egalitarian, ultimately communist society'. He said they [New Labour] never had that aim, so they can't be regarded as hegemonic.

AS: Its been ages, but he did invite me to a conference that I did go to in the end, and I was the object of all the criticism. If you disentangle that, it is quite interesting, because he is acknowledging... its that triangulation that came from Clinton that Stuart Hall didn't like. Often, I'm thinking now under the Coalition government and under the Conservatives, you look at some of these policies which I personally really dislike, and then I'm thinking, but they're addressing some real problems there. I can't give you an example of that... the desire for very good education for your children. You're addressing the desire of people who want their kids to get a good education, so what you have to... you realise that there's a core of... Gramsci would call it 'good sense', not in terms of policies but a good sense that sometimes is expressed under the influence of all sorts of quite reactionary ideas that are out there. But what is the aspiration, what is the desire, what are the problems that are there.

HH: So I'm going to have three chapters, and in the introduction I'll have a theory bit where I talk about hegemony. I need to talk about three things that they did that could fit into that concept, so

things like devolution, or cultural change: tax credits, civil partnerships, that could be like a new historic bloc, then the war of position, I don't know enough about the concept... Maybe I should define the concept myself... and then transforming the Conservative Party, which they did... they kind of consumed the whole ground of politics so they.

AS: That's right, they're addressing a very broad section of the political realm. Part of this is political strategy, but its partly, seeing how society is changing anyway, to be seen to be representing the way of the future, which isn't just going along with anything. Something else which I know Stuart Hall really hated, the idea of modernisation, because of course that has all sorts of connotations, it isn't that you're doing it to society, but its almost that... you know civil partnerships, getting rid of Section 28...

HH: Well yes, Thatcher was so traditional in moral terms...

AS: Yes but society is moving beyond it, I mean there are other people, saying that very often, what governments do is harness, or formalise things that are in train or on the way.

HH: Yes, for example at a conference speech towards the end of her time in office, she said that yes its good that homosexuals had more rights, but that a child can be told in school that its okay to be gay. If you look how far we've shifted...

AS: Exactly

HH: Obviously, it wasn't New Labour that made them think like that but obviously they tapped into... I don't think the British public agreed with Thatcher then, she was twenty years too late. So what they did, look where we are now, it was partly a result of what their changes did.

AS: Yes I mean we would never have had gay marriage unless we'd had civil partnerships, and okay you allow faith organisations to formalise it or not, to the extent that I identify with anything, I'm proud of the fact that liberal Judaism went... anyway that's again on the side. I think this debate also politically on the left that you should be talking about utopias so that people can see... you know this phrase, 'another Europe is possible' and all this, well yes of course but sensible people would have liked New Labour to be bolder but it was absolutely a determination not to get too far ahead but pull people with you, really hold on to this solid basis of support. Its not a simple thing to have won all those elections they did, that's not a right wing thing to do, its not a neo-liberal thing to do.

HH: Also, Marxism Today regarded Thatcherism as genuinely hegemonic, and yet she didn't touch the welfare state fundamentally, she couldn't break the British people's connection with the idea of healthcare free at the point of use and other things. Yet they regard that as hegemonic, even though

she didn't change that, and yet they don't see New Labour in the same terms just because they accommodated with the free market?

AS: I think that's a good analogy, because its also how that got embedded. Clare Short said something, that it was important to embed policy [e.g. childcare support] that no future government would be able to undo.

HH: Yes, that's obviously part of what I'm trying to say. And you look at tax credits, and even devolution, I'm sure they didn't intend for what might come in the future... but you can't undo that.

AS: It sorts of sets the agenda for generations after.

HH: And you know that those policies will persist beyond their term in office, and that's surely part of hegemony.

AS: It was a very interesting shift in the late 1970s, once Thatcher got into office, on the left particularly socialist feminsits, all of a sudden they looked at the EU. The left position was to be against the Common Market or whatever it was called at the time, and all of a sudden it was a guarantee, you couldn't undo certain things, that's what's horrible at the moment.'

HH: (51 min) Do you know of Geoffrey Norris? He was industrial advisor to Blair, very close to Blair, and now he works with Peter Mandelson at Global Counsel, the lobbying firm. I spoke to him as well...

AS: Oh good...

HH: He's still very pro-New Labour obviously, and he admitted that they were accommodating in terms of the economic side but that there was so much that they did that entrenched new values that existed beyond their term of office. He knew Neal Lawson as well but was quite dismissive of him.

AS: I was in seminars with Neal Lawson too and I was just taken aback, and I don't want to reduce it to that but he was not in the inner sanctum as it were.... It was a very exciting time, and I think very radical. A lot of these people are still my personal friends, but we will probably talk politics even less now because many of them are very supportive of Jeremy Corbyn. The actual watershed for me was the action of that Commission on Social Justice report, which was so innovative and so forward looking and also kind of had a wide perspective; not to copy other countries but realising in all these ways the left should be, that there are other ways of doing things. And they just slammed it because it was... really you know the conservatism of some of the left, you know, just holding on to things, and not being interested in...

HH: Almost ironic that you know...

AS: Yes, small-c conservative. And also not being interested in what's happening in the society, and it is also kind of arrogance. I'm not calling for a kind of populism, but you know this is a Gramscian thing, what's the good sense, the common sense in the way people just live their lives? I don't know, for instance, reducing the idea of aspiration to having a conservatory of something, rather than aspiring to different ways of living; your kids not having to do go down the mine, and you know, having possibilities out there.

HH: Geoffrey Norris said one thing that you'll probably agree with, about the psychology of the left generally. He said that the left has a slightly romantic notion about what it can achieve, there's nothing the left likes more than denigrating itself... 'we never achieved anything' etc... quite where this leads you, it leads you nowhere. Why should anybody support something which spends most of its time basically saying we never achieved anything. I don't think it's actually true that we never achieved anything, and I think it's a strange basis for running a political party and a philosophy on the basis that you spend quite a lot of time basically saying we're rubbish.

AS: I know! And it's so infuriating. I do know the two Miliband brothers, not really because of... but it was the fact that their father was my PHD supervisor! David was at the Institute for Public Policy Research, and I knew him with that, and Ed was part of some of these discussions and so on. But you come up, you have to define yourself in contrast by denigrating, it's just, it's just crazy.

HH: I think part of the problem is the Iraq thing, if you throw that in, it muddies the waters so much, and people forget what New Labour actually achieved.

AS: Absolutely. But there is, I don't know where, but when you see these things on Facebook, you can never remember where you see them. There is somewhere you can see where people...

HH: The list of the achievements? So the line I'll be arguing is the fact that they did things that were long lasting and even continuing now and that they changed the sort of practice of politics generally, in strategy terms and policy terms.

AS: What also happens, and I remember somebody who I... I saw last night at a party, Steve [Reed? 55:55 min] he was the leader of a Labour council and now he's a Labour MP. This is original to him but he said that the population banks something. You improve a school... and what he means is you just take it for granted, it's in the bank you know... so we're probably talking about local politics and how to keep Labour in power here... umm... you can't just pat yourself on the back for what you have done. You know, it isn't just promises in the future, you see that's the flipside of this, and I

remember somebody else talking to me, its actually someone who was a colleague at Kingston, who was a Labour councillor in Kensington and Chelsea, but when she was talking to people on coffee mornings on a council estate or whatever, and the mum had kids and was taking advantage of Sure Start or whatever, and somebody said, 'what did that have to do with the Labour government', you know what I mean? Its not a bad thing, and they shouldn't be grateful and so on, but also, once its very embedded, it becomes... it isn't just yours anymore, it becomes part of society. You know, if people are going to continue to give you their support, they have to feel that you are looking forward, that you understand things as they are, and you have some perspective to move into the future and make things better.

HH: Did you know Philip Gould the...

AS: No I didn't, and I actually have not read his book which I think I would like...

HH: Because he actually talks about needing to understand what the British people were like and working from there, not this romantic idea of socialism, but the practical reality and dealing with that...

AS: It's a really interesting thing, because if you look at a certain kind of romantic blue Labour or whatever, there's an assumed understanding of that, but its never saying 'do we understand', and some of it isn't thing we like, that you'd agree with... and you know it isn't just the downtrodden, people get on with their lives, you know, more power to them if they're able to. It isn't just the material, it isn't just an accumulation of goods or certain income or something.

HH: I've got a theory question. What's passive revolution and hegemony and do they fit together or...?

AS: I'm trying to think if one of my essays would explain it a bit better?

HH: I did come across one of the definitions in your Gramsci and Contemporary Politics book...

AS: Good, well look at that. There's this idea that... you know Gramsci's sitting in prison and he had this idea that... he uses the term passive revolution, the term isn't his. It goes back to figures – the other one is revolution-restoration – it goes back to the post French Revolution period, and it was the idea... I actually think Burke is the best expression... but this idea you've got to change things and be in Gramscian terms, hegemonic over the change, but to maintain a social order. The other thing which is along that, which Gramsci doesn't... because its written later, after he dies, but there's the novel *The Leopard*, and there's a quote in that 'you have to change everything for things to remain the same'... the social order is going to continue, pretty much as... more than in new clothes because

things are... So passive revolution, he uses that term to talk about what fascism is doing, and he interestingly links Nazism, fascism and even the New Deal, so it means that the forms are not all reactionary. But he recognises that... the massive changes that were going on in Italy, the new towns, the swamps drained, its much more than making the trains run on time. He's in prison, but if we're going to confront and defeat fascism, we have to understand what changes they're making in the society, but there's this hierarchy of order. In an interesting way, he kind of infers that the Soviet Union is doing the same kind of thing, because its not a positive thing, because it's the restructuring of hierarchical political power. So the question you could raise in this, is was New Labour a passive revolution? So I think you could do that as a counter point.

HH: So if it was a passive revolution, does that conform with the hegemonic thing? Or is one or the other or...?

AS: No, you can be hegemonic and promote a passive revolution, or you could be hegemonic and run a more progressive politics, ok? So, different types of politics, each one of which might be hegemonic, and really change the terrain and so on. So passive revolution really is a concept that is really fundamental to Gramsci, but its used in a critical way, but its also used to understand, not to just reduce everything to reactionary politics, because again, if you're going to understand why sections of the population really support a regime, it is yes individually what they get out of it, but also how its harnessing, how its promoting change.

HH: Because Marxism Today frequently refers to Thatcherism as a passive revolution.

The criticism in Marxism Today was that because they [New Labour] didn't fundamentally change the economic thinking, it couldn't be regarded as hegemonic. But you say, I think this is your quote, that, 'long term, modern progressive outcomes are only possible by attempting to shape historical change that is already underway, deep rooted, and that cannot be reversed. Politics which goes with the grain of change does not mean endorsing the forms which it has taken hitherto. If it succeeds in connecting with and influencing the way in which institutions, cultures and peoples develop and interact with trends and tendencies that we cannot control, it operates on the 'terrain of effective reality', to create and initiate rather than simply to reinforce the status quo.

AS: I sound rather good there! Yes absolutely.

(1.09min) The other thing which drives me crazy, its not to say that everything they did was perfect. They might not have been able to do more, be bolder, be this or that. I don't know, its just such a shallow intellectual approach, and just can't you know...

The other side of this, this is Gramsci... there are people politically, who you don't like, you'd oppose them politically, but you also have to have the maturity to stand back and say, is there anything in what they're saying, that again, we have to think about, learn from, because they have their finger on the pulse, or they're touching something that is real.

HH: Yes, there's another quote of yours on this issue, where you say, 'the refusal to confine to the right many issues of concern to a wide sector of the population, could be a sign of aiming to create the basis for a radical restructuring of British democracy, rather than a passive revolution' you say. So you kind of appropriate the opposition's policies because you know that they're popular...

AS: Well it isn't just that they're popular, but they have something to offer. So they're popular if they are actually doing something positive, and it isn't necessarily, I don't know, I'm trying to think about something... ummm.... Just thing about this aspiration for your children to have a good education. So there can be progressive response to that, and there can be quite a reactionary... that's a bit too simplistic. But I'm thinking about, there was an attitude about schooling that you just give schools more money, which they probably did need, but weren't kind of critical if the outcomes weren't helping those kids that really needed it that really needed it you know. Or you kept saying, 'well these kids live in a poor area, and they're poor'... poverty affects outcomes, but this is the other part of it, that should not be used as an excuse, you know, you've got to figure out, what are the strategies that are going to really help those kids achieve. And something I, I have to say, and this is not New Labour or anything else, but the terminology in this country, that children are able or not able. You know, people have different abilities, you may play a musical instrument, I don't, not everybody can be a surgeon or a ballet dancer or an athlete or whatever. You just sort of think, children have all sorts of potentials.

That was another thing in New Labour, Patricia Hewitt tried to think about how to umm... you do have to address child poverty and family poverty, and New Labour did, New Labour did, and that's the other thing that's just been wiped out, you know. But that mustn't be used as an excuse for schools not to be doing a really good job with the kids that they have. And there have been some real achievements in that and if it hasn't been extended to certain parts of the country... like this Government is trying to do it with spending formula changes, but you know there's a lot of other... having high aspirations for the kids, you know and really making it a conceivable thing for more kids to be able to go to university... and its not about the parents being bad parents, but if they're working several jobs, if they're exhausted, you know the number of kids in London who aren't even... out of the very immediate area. And I do know one of the... because I've had the fun of visiting schools...

So anyway, that's the kind of thing I was very very keen on in New Labour, very much about education, and that kind of high aspiration, and not using certain things as excuses... so you're very leftist and we need higher benefits to overcome poverty... of course we do, but sometimes it isn't just welfare payments, its making real possibilities open up for people.

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