

CHAPTER 1

THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY AND EUROPE

As noted by Kevin Featherstone, few political parties have “been troubled by questions concerned with European integration as much as the British Labour Party”.¹ Since the formation of the Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1950–52, which the Labour government declined to join, the party showed little enthusiasm for deeper involvement with the European integration process during the fifties.² Although initially being reluctant to involvement with core Europe integration (EEC/EC/EU), the party’s position evolved.³ When the Conservative government led by Harold Macmillan re-evaluated its European policies from 1960 onwards, eventually leading to the mid-1961 application for EEC membership, the process accelerated. In 1967, a Labour government headed by Harold Wilson submitted an application to join the EC. Despite being vetoed by French president Charles de Gaulle, who had also blocked the 1961 Macmillan application, Wilson continued his efforts to achieve British EC membership. In the wake of the 1969 Haag meeting, at which the heads of the Community countries agreed to enlarge the club, Wilson prepared for membership negotiations. Because Labour surprisingly lost the 1970 general election, it was the new Tory government headed by Prime Minister Edward Heath who negotiated entry and subsequently obtained British membership in 1973. Following the election defeat, intra-party tensions and Eurosceptic sentiments rose in the Labour Party, eventually resulting in demands for renegotiations of the terms and promise of a referendum. As a result, only two years after Britain joined the EC, the new Labour government in office from March 1974 renegotiated the terms and called a referendum on continued membership.

In contrast to the British Labour Party, the fifties had been essential in defining party attitudes towards the European integration process for the Socialist parties of the six Community member states. The French socialist party (SFIO) had been among the protagonists of European integration in the postwar years, and it had played a major part in creating core Europe and equipping it with institutions that would bring it into being. It could also claim it was a socialist-led government that negotiated the Treaties of Rome.⁴ The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) had both in exile, while underground during the Nazi regime, and after World War II, advocated a European system designed to weaken the position of the nation states and reduce national sovereignty. Although the party voted against concrete integration projects in the early fifties, it was an integrative force in the sense that it fa-

1 Featherstone 1988: 41.

2 Newman 1993: 163.

3 In this work, core Europe, the Common Market, the Six and the Community has been used interchangeably to describe the European integration process.

4 Loth 1993: 25 and Lefebvre 1993: 56.

voured policies involving reduced national sovereignty. The party could also explain its shifting attitudes towards the European integration process as both a symptom and cause of the fundamental change in its ideological stance and national role in those years. In 1957, it supported the setting up of the Rome Treaties and West Germany's membership of the EEC. Subsequently, party representatives engaged in efforts to further core Europe integration.⁵ In much the same way, the Italian, Dutch and Belgian socialist parties, although approaching the issue in different ways during the early fifties, supported the Rome Treaties and the creation of the Common Market.⁶ Hence, on the eve of the 1960s core Europe socialist parties explicitly supported the integration process, although it had chiefly been brought about by conservative and Christian social parties.

Compared with these parties, the British Labour Party and the Scandinavian labour parties made up a group of reluctant northern European socialist parties during the period.⁷ It "is no accident", Denis Healy pointed out in the early fifties, "that in their approach to European unity since 1945 the socialist parties of Britain and Scandinavia have been most conservative – for they have most to conserve".⁸ An important reason, he argued, was that economic planning reinforced the trend towards nationalism in a governing socialist party. In a predominantly capitalist world, national economic planning often would be inconsistent with forms of international cooperation an economic liberal government would be inclined to accept. Roy Jenkins, recognising the importance of economic planning, argued at the 1961 Annual Conference that joining the EEC would not inhibit "social progress".⁹ Putting emphasis on economic planning Healy and Jenkins drew attention to a key ideological strand of the British Labour Party and a core component of the party's discussions on British membership of the EEC/EC during 1960–73. The leadership of the British Labour Party and the Scandinavian labour parties considered their parties' ability to carry out socialist policies in a national and wider European context vital throughout the period.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE – AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

What does existing research tell about Labour's relations with the European integration process in the 1960s? And what are the main deficiencies in this research body? A large number of studies have tried to explain why successive British governments from the early sixties opted for EEC/EC membership.¹⁰ Yet the debate on

5 Hrbek 1993: 63, 74 and Bellers 1993: 78–89.

6 Nolfo 1993: 90–98, Brusse 1993: 106–134 and Mommens and Minten 1993: 140–61.

7 Thomsen 1993b, Robins 1979, Gstöhl 2002, Gowland and Turner 2000, Jowell and Spence 1975, Miljan 1977, George 1990.

8 Quoted from Dell 1995: 190.

9 LAM, Report Labour Party Annual Conference 1961: 216.

10 Camps 1966, Kitzinger 1973, George 1990, George 1991, Young 1993, Kaiser 1996, Beloff 1996, Tratt 1996, Morgan 1997, Young 1998, May 1999, Gowland and Turner 2000, Broad and Preston 2001, Milward 2002, Kaiser 2002, Daddow 2004, Mullen 2007 and Wall 2013.

the British Labour Party's relations with core Europe suggests that it is a history of ambiguity. The party's European policies seemed to vacillate between whether to oppose, support or even apply for membership during the sixties and early seventies. The predominant interpretation of the party's European policies is that of a reluctant and divided party excluding itself from early core Europe integration in 1950, when it declined the invitation to join the ECSC, subsequently remaining aloof from the process during the fifties and early sixties. Profoundly shaken by the prevailing economic and political realities, however, it gradually and reluctantly reassessed its European policy at some point in the mid-sixties. From the early seventies it slipped back into opposition.

Due to the perceived aloofness and ambiguity, the Labour Party's response to the Macmillan government's 1961 application was "ambivalent, uncertain, vague and cautious", Robins notes in his study of the Labour Party and the EEC.¹¹ Initially, party leader Hugh Gaitskell is believed to have been indifferent and even unenthusiastic towards core Europe integration.¹² Lieber, Robins and Rippingale hold that Gaitskell did not make up his mind on the issue until the late summer and autumn of 1962.¹³ When the Conservative government reappraised its European policies in the early sixties, Gaitskell allegedly hesitated and kept the party on the fence for over a year. After vacillating between making pro- and contra-European statements, he suddenly turned against entry in a highly emotional speech at the party's 1962 annual conference at Brighton. He declared, in a statement that also forms the basis for the argument in the research literature, that membership of the EEC would mean "the end of Britain as an independent European state. I make no apology for repeating it. It means the end of a thousand years of history. You may say, 'let it end', but my goodness, it is a decision that needs a little care and thought."¹⁴ In keeping with Stephen George, Brian Brivati is among those who argue that Gaitskell united the party behind his leadership in a single speech, and that its effects were tremendous.¹⁵ Apparently, a small minority of devoted EEC supporters, grouped around Roy Jenkins and George Brown, became largely isolated after the speech as the overwhelming majority of the party united against EEC membership.¹⁶ Phillip Williams claims that the party leader never outright opposed British membership of core Europe but rejected the particular terms secured by Macmillan in his bid for entry and not membership in principle.¹⁷ Yet as recently demonstrated by Mullen, Meredith and Gowland, Turner and Wright, the impres-

11 Robins 1979: 16.

12 Young 1998: 148–71. Hugh Gaitskell was party leader during 1955–63

13 Lieber 1970: 175–77, Robins 1979: 27–28, 41–42, Rippingale 1996: 243–63. This is also in keeping with Featherstone. Featherstone 1988: 53.

14 Report of the 61st Annual Conference of the Labour Party, Brighton, 1–5 October, 1962: 159.

15 Brivati 1996: 404 pp, 416, Brivati 1999: 112, George 1991: 74–75, Delaney 2002: 125 and Featherstone 1988: 53–54. See also Meredith 2012: 333–34.

16 Among them: Anthony Crosland, Fred Mulley, Nicholas Kaldor, Robert Neild, Thomas Balogh, Shirley Williams, Charles Pannell, Douglas Houghton, John Hynd, Sam Watson, Ray Gunter and others.

17 Williams 1979: 702–29. See also Broad and Daddow 2010.

sion of a reluctant party leader dominates interpretations of Gaitskell's attitude towards EEC membership.¹⁸

In keeping with this line of reasoning, Labour's opposition to entering the EEC eventually was overturned by the 1966–67 Labour government's membership bid. The bulk of the literature dealing with Harold Wilson and his position on the issue argues that he realised – albeit unenthusiastically – that Britain had to enter core Europe in the mid-sixties.¹⁹ In his PhD dissertation, Simon Rippingale believes that shadow chancellor and former President of the Board of Trade Harold Wilson, then commonly associated with the centre-left of the party, was reluctant about British involvement in the European integration process in the mid-fifties.²⁰ When discussions on the Free Trade Area (FTA) were underway during the second half of the decade, he rhetorically asked, “can we afford to stand out? ... I am sure the answer is that we cannot”, but he later pointed out that there was “no suggestion that Britain should join the Common Market”.²¹ By the sixties he reportedly acknowledged there was “a strong desire for a really effective and intimate basis of association between Great Britain and Scandinavian countries on the one hand” and core Europe on the other.²² In June 1960, he wrote a paper on behalf of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) carefully outlining arguments for and against joining the EEC. He took no definite position himself. Yet according to Wilson's biographer Ben Pimlott, it was evident from his conclusions that the arguments against outweighed the pros.²³ Apparently, he approached the question in a pragmatic way, weighing up the costs and benefits. John W. Young suggests that Wilson was largely in keeping with Gaitskell's handling of the EEC membership issue in the early sixties.²⁴

The Labour government elected in 1964 demonstrated “little overt interest in European integration”, Rollings observes.²⁵ Anne Deighton refers to Wilson in a debate in the House of Commons in April 1965 in which he “made it clear that ‘there is no question whatever of Britain either seeking or being asked to seek entry into the Common Market in the immediately foreseeable future’”. Allegedly, she argues, his position was “consistent with the stance taken by Labour when in opposition”.²⁶ In keeping with this tradition, Wilson's biographer, Austen Morgan, believes Wilson “made up his mind” in favour of joining the EEC in January 1966. During the spring of 1965 “pressures began to build up, which resulted in the application two years later”, John Young suggests.²⁷ In line with Lord Beloff, he maintains that Wilson's attitude to the EEC was “clearly of enormous importance”,

18 Mullen 2007: 75–76, Meredith 2012: 333–36, Gowland, Turner and Wright 2010: 63.

19 Harold Wilson was party leader during 1963–76.

20 Rippingale 1996: 217.

21 Foot 1968: 220, quoted from Pine 2007: 15.

22 Pine 2007: 15.

23 Pimlott 1992: 246.

24 Young 1993: 88.

25 Rollings 2007: 143.

26 Deighton 2001: 392. See also Deighton 2003: 39–41. See Hansard, Vol. 711, 1965: 623.

27 See also Rasmussen 2004. He purports the conventional wisdom claiming that with “the victory of Harold Wilson at the British election in October 1964, it was not likely that Britain would apply for EC membership in the near future”. Rasmussen 2004: 150.

indicating that “evidence points to Wilson becoming more ‘pro-European’ in 1964–66”, but obscured his intentions for domestic political reasons. “Exactly *why* he became better disposed to the EEC is even more difficult to assess,” he claims.²⁸ Thus, Young as Delaney suggest that Wilson only reluctantly realised in 1966 that Britain had to enter core Europe.²⁹ Parr corroborate him, arguing that the decision to develop a new approach to the EEC was pragmatic and a result of the July 1966 sterling crisis.³⁰ In his memoirs, George Wigg, Wilson’s adviser on security issues, compared Wilson’s “conversion” to the EEC to St Paul’s on the road to Damascus with the difference “that, judged by subsequent actions, Paul’s conversion was sincere”.³¹ Yet in a study of the Foreign Office (FO), John Dickie claims that Wilson privately had “come to the conclusion before he won the 1964 election that Britain’s future lay inevitably with the European Community”, though without enthusiasm.³²

Building on this understanding, Wolfram Kaiser suggests that Wilson’s objectives for launching the 1967 application were in part tactical, denying the Conservatives “one important policy platform on which to attack the government”, appeasing the pro-Europeans within the government and the Labour Party and conveying “the impression of activity and decisiveness to the electorate”.³³ Oliver Daddow has put forward similar arguments. He claims that the bid can be seen “as a ‘successful failure’ for the Prime Minister”, soothing both the pro- and anti-European factions in the Labour Party and the government and demonstrating Britain’s willingness to seek a European solution to its problems, “smoothing the way for the UK’s accession to the Community in 1973”.³⁴ If there was a “fundamental reason” why Labour turned towards EEC/EC membership, John Young claims, it was “probably the fact that there seemed no viable alternative”, thus implying, in line with Reynolds, there was “never any doubt that Edward Heath would press for membership with greater vigour than Wilson”.³⁵ Of late, Gowland, Turner and Wright have emphasised that Wilson “possessed none of the European interests ... and none of the pro-EEC convictions of Edward Heath”, confirming that this still is a prevalent perception of Wilson’s European credentials.³⁶

Following the general election defeat in June 1970, Wilson apparently soon reverted to his former reluctance vis-à-vis entanglement with core Europe. Conventional wisdom also suggests that from 1971 onwards the Labour Party moved from a position of support for joining to one of scepticism of the EC.³⁷ Thus, the Labour government’s 1967 application, which was left on the table and picked up again at

28 Beloff 1996: 71.

29 Young 1993: 88–89, 93, Young 2003: 142–60, Delaney 2002: 128–29.

30 Morgan 1992: 295, Parr 2006: 62–64, 185, 190–94 and 2002: 23, 334, see also Furby 2010: 19.

31 Wigg 1972: 338–39.

32 Dickie 1992: 98.

33 Kaiser 2001: 71–72.

34 Daddow 2003: 17–18.

35 Young 1993: 102, 107, Reynolds 1991: 241.

36 Gowland, Turner and Wright 2010: 63–64.

37 Mullen 2007: 7, 97, Morgan 1992: 404.

the end of the decade, has been interpreted largely in terms of party-political considerations, its position vis-à-vis the electorate and the lack of alternatives. In this literature Wilson, like Gaitskell, is portrayed as largely unenthusiastic about British membership. His turning to Europe has been interpreted in terms of tactics: hold on to power, fend off internal challenges, keep the Labour Party united, outwit Heath and the Conservatives and, importantly, win elections.³⁸

The conventional wisdom arguing that the Labour Party elite only reluctantly turned to Europe in the mid-sixties has been challenged. Pine has put forward an argument that Wilson pursued a long-term strategy of joining core Europe during the veto years, and, contrary to most scholars, portraying Wilson as genuinely interested in European policy and claiming that he wholeheartedly tried to take Britain into the Community.³⁹ In keeping with Kitzinger, she maintains there was a high degree of continuity between Wilson's application and its success.⁴⁰ Kitzinger suggests that Wilson "is almost certainly one of those few men for whom Britain could not have entered the Community", thus to a far extent attributing him the credit of obtaining British membership of the EC.⁴¹ While emphasizing the 'huge complex of issues and factors with which all political leaders have to juggle', Stephen Wall suggests that Wilson, 'once persuaded of the advantages of membership ... held to that view, both in Government and in Opposition'.⁴² Along such lines, Newman also indicates that Wilson resisted the increasing pressure from early 1971 to abandon support for the policy of entry, although being more circumspect in his attitudes. When the bulk of the negotiated terms became known and the Heath government launched a major propaganda effort in favour of entry, Wilson, following the July 1971 special party conference on the issue, apparently distanced himself from the pro-membership faction.⁴³

A close review of the existing literature on the Labour Party's relations with core Europe unearths three deficiencies. First, archive-based historical studies of the Wilson government's application to join the Community chiefly operate within the chronological frames of the 1964–70 Labour governments. These works are defined by and confined to the period when the party was in power. Consequently, they are inappropriate when assessing continuity and change in the party leadership's relations with core Europe. Implicitly this approach suggests that the policy formulated before taking office was of limited importance while in government and vice versa. The inherent corollary is that little or no continuity existed in the party's 1960–63 attitudes to the EEC and the Wilson government's 1967 application, and between attitudes in the late sixties and the opposition years from 1970 onwards.⁴⁴

38 Pimlott 1992: 435–37, Heath 1998: 355, Wrigley 1993: 123–35, Morgan 1997: 254, Birch 1998, Lieber 1987: 184–85, Featherstone 1988: 57, Robins 1979: 72–74, Young 1993: 102–03, Kitzinger 1968: 13 and Gowland and Turner 2000: 180–97.

39 Pine 2007: 182 and 2003: 298, Parr 2006: 186. See also Furby 2010: 122–155.

40 Pine 2007: 1, 175–82 and Kitzinger 1968: xi. See O'Neill 2000: 9.

41 Kitzinger 1973: 276.

42 Wall 2013: 2.

43 Newman 1983: 220–21. See also Robins 1979: 118–31.

44 See for instance Deighton 2001, 2003, Daddow 2003, Young 2003, Parr 2006 and Dorey 2006.

Second, existing accounts have made only marginal use of material from non-British archives, thus largely overlook and underestimate sources produced by the Labour elite's party contacts and collaboration across national borders. Third, the present historiography takes account of many national and intergovernmental processes and contexts within which Labour's attitude to membership of core Europe developed, while transnational features that often overlap with and complement national and intergovernmental cooperation are largely missing.

Relying to a great extent on governmental and diplomatic material located at the British National Archives (NA) and released according to restrictions imposed on them by the authorities, studies defined by Labour's years in government have in decisive ways directed the selection of material on which these works are based. Non-British material is largely missing, and they lack the chronological and empirical foundation to assess continuity and change in the party's European policy. Studies that do focus on Labour and the EEC covering more than the 1964–70 period, notably Robins' study of Labour and the EEC during 1961–75, but also the work of Featherstone, Newman and Lieber on British socialism and European unity, were unable to access primary sources located at the Public Record Office (PRO) at the National Archives. In addition, they did not make use of non-British sources. Consequently, the foundation for these studies is contemporary British official and accessible material (Hansard, speeches, newspapers and reports), secondary sources, party material and interviews.⁴⁵ Mullen's work on the British Left's debate on Europe, which does not deal exclusively with the Labour Party, relies on similar material.⁴⁶ To the present author, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the historiography of the Labour Party's relations with core Europe is the striking absence of studies combining a close examination of the leadership's perceptions of joining core Europe during 1960–73, the many transnational processes and contexts in which attitudes to core Europe developed, and the application of non-British sources.

As a result, the book is based on the assumption that ambivalence and ambiguities apparent in the current understanding of Labour's relations with the European integration process need to be complemented by bringing in perspectives covering the whole period 1960–73, exploring transnational processes and contexts, and incorporating non-British material to supplement British archives and official documents. Consequently, the key undertaking in this work is to analyse the British Labour Party's European policy during 1960–73 in the light of these observations. European policy is in this study defined as the question of British membership of the EEC/EC. The connection between the European policy formulated during the 1960–62 opposition years and the one pursued in government from 1964 onwards, in particular the one leading to the 1967 application, is, as demonstrated by reviewing the existing archive-based historiography, often underestimated or even overlooked. This also is the case for studies focussing on the 1967–69 veto period and the early seventies. Analyses covering longer periods have been carried out without

45 Robins 1979, Newman 1983, Lieber 1987 and Featherstone 1988.

46 Mullen 2007. Secondary sources, party publications and interviews.

having access to relevant archive-based material. Neither approaches bring in non-British sources, nor do they explore the significance of the Labour Party elite's transnational relations for the party's European policy in these years.

Based on these observations, the analyses of the British Labour Party's European policy are operationalised by addressing two issues of a more general character. These issues relate to the current deficiencies in the historiography: the confinement of archive-based historical studies to the years when Labour was in government and the limited use of transnational approaches and non-British sources. The first questions arise from concerns dealing with continuity and change in the party elite's attitudes to British involvement with the European integration process. To what extent was there continuity in Labour's European policy between the early sixties, the second membership application, the veto years, and the policy ultimately leading to renegotiations and referendum in the early seventies? What was the Labour leadership's position on, and in particular the party leaders' attitude to, British membership of the EEC during the crucial years of 1960–73? Was Gaitskell undecided and ambivalent prior to his 1962 annual conference appearance, or did he reject only the particular terms secured by Macmillan in his bid for entry rather than membership in principle? Did Wilson only reluctantly turn to Europe in the mid-sixties, as suggested by conventional wisdom, or did he access power in 1964 with a pro-active ambition? Did he pursue a policy aiming at EC membership in the wake of de Gaulle's second "non" as suggested by Pine, indicating consistency and continuity, or did he prepare for membership negotiations out of tactical reasons or in order to maximise vital British interests, please the electorate and soothe the factions in the party? What does the analysis of the party leaders' position on the issue tell us about the party's dilemmas vis-à-vis the European integration process?

The second set of questions relates to transnational processes and contexts. Dealing with the party elite's motives and actions concerning British participation in European integration, not only national and intergovernmental but also transnational perspectives have to be integrated into the research. Exploring transnational socialist networks also brings in non-British and thus largely unexploited sources. What was the significance of the Labour elite's transnational socialist network for the membership issue? Did the Macmillan government's re-evaluation of British European policy from 1960 onwards influence the structure and nature of transnational socialist networks and agendas? What was the implication of socialisation and utility maximisation within the networks? And what do non-British sources add to the understanding of the British Labour Party's European policy during 1960–73? Socialist party networks were ideational aiming at similar political objectives that also raise the question of ideology. To what extent did assessments of the party's ability to carry out socialist policies as an integral part of a wider European framework influence the party leadership's attitude to core Europe membership?

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

While this work is motivated by a wish to understand the British Labour Party's European policy during 1960–73, it is undertaken with the awareness that it is impossible to grasp all aspects of policy formulation. Policy formulation in a political party is a complex process. It is affected by the party's position within the polity and consists of an array of inputs and contexts emerging at different times and as responses to different challenges. However, the sum of these impulses constitutes the prevailing climate within which party policies are modeled.

This study is based on the observation that the party leadership, in particular its leaders, was crucial to the party's European policy formulation process during these years.⁴⁷ It focuses on the party elite, and it is thus not a broad examination of the party and its structure. As a result, the focus throughout the study is on motives and actions of the Labour Party elite, on the reasons for these and how they were pursued and influenced in national, intergovernmental and transnational arenas. Although the main focus is on the party elite's role when defining a European policy, it should not be interpreted as an ignorance of other actors and aspects of the party's policy-making process. Indeed, a focus on the elite has limited explanatory power for motives and actions in other parts of the party. However, the strength of this approach is that it offers insight into the motives and actions of agenda-setting individuals of the party during the period with the power to shape policies. It was the party leaders, in close cooperation with their aides, who conducted and substantially influenced policy formulation and ultimately decided on tactics, strategies and policies on whether to join core Europe. As demonstrated in the following chapters, the leadership was dominated by the revisionist centre-right of the party during 1960–73, and it was substantially stronger networked than the fundamentalist left. These individuals were the ones involved in transnational networks and thus met with other socialist leaders in transnational arenas.

Yet by bringing in transnational contacts and thus material produced by these networks, the work does not fail to notice the importance of the domestic context for policy formation. General elections and by-elections are called and fought in a domestic arena. The election of parties and politicians thus takes place in a national framework. Political power is anchored in national parliaments and to a great extent moored to national structures. Politics are carried out in a national context. Consequently, analyses of motives and actions by politicians and parties pay attention to the domestic context, and expressions and activities are gauged against the presence of a domestic audience. The same applies to challenges produced by intra-party tensions and factional conflicts. Hence, an important part of the study deals with policy formation in a domestic context. Yet a main proposition in this work is that analyses of Labour's European policy during 1960–73 cannot provide satisfactory explanations by focussing either on a national, intergovernmental or transnational

47 This is in keeping with observations made by other studies of Labour's policy towards the European integration process. See Featherstone 1988: 53, Ripplingale 1996: 214–16, Robins 1979: 1, 3, 27–28, Lieber 1970: 175–76, Young 1993: 87–89, Young 2003: 142–48 and Beloff 1996: 71.