LABOUR LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS FROM WILSON TO BROWN: IDEOLOGICAL FACTIONS AND SUCCESSION PLANNING STRATEGIES

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This paper examines the succession planning strategies deployed by ideological factions at the level of the parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) in party leadership elections since 1963. The paper seeks to evaluate the short term tactics and long term strategies pursued by the 'socialist left' and the 'social democratic right' to enhance the prospect of their faction securing the lineage on the party leadership. The analysis will be undertaken by considering two key aspects of party leadership selection: first, ideological factions and the processes within which they determine, or fail to determine, who 'their' candidate should be; and, second, the importance of party leadership selection rules and the significance of the left's commitment to shifting from a PLP ballot to an Electoral College based on their assumption that this would aid their succession planning. Incorporating analysis of each of the leadership contests since 1963, the paper suggests that the inability of the left to pass the threshold for participation in 2007 was a reflection of their tactical and strategic miscalculations in terms of succession planning dating back to 1980.

Labour Leadership Elections from Wilson to Brown: Ideological Factions and Succession Planning Strategies

Party leadership election studies has until relatively recently been an under-developed aspect of British political science. There is now an embryonic body of academic work which has focused predominantly on two aspects of party leadership selection: first, the procedures that parties adopt to determine their party leadership succession; and, second, the influences upon voting in party leadership elections, be that competence / experience; electability or ideological acceptability; see for example, Denham and O'Hara (2008); Heppell (2007, 2010); Quinn (2004, 2005); and Stark (1996). What emerges from analysing party leadership election studies is the limited amount of attention devoted to the decision-making of elites to enter (or not to enter) succession contests, and how such decisions relate to the ideological factions to which candidates are aligned at that time. The short-term tactical calculations that candidates make to enter / not to enter have implications for the long-term strategic positioning of the ideological factions to which they may be aligned. Within Labour Party history this is a significant consideration when we consider the drive for democratisation in the 1979–1981 period initiated from within the left and opposed by the right. For the Bennite left, democratisation was designed (amongst other considerations) to aid the probability of the left securing the party leadership. The fulfilment of their objectives in the shift from a PLP ballot, assumed to be a right-wing dominated body, to an Electoral College, comprising constituency Labour Party (CLPs) and trade union blocs, which they assumed

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tended to the left, was a contributing factor to the departures on the right and the creation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). So it is clear that party leadership election procedures matter; ideological factions matter; and the relationship between candidates to those ideological factions matters, too.

Therefore, this paper seeks to consider ideology and leadership lineage within the Labour Party. It will examine the succession-planning strategies deployed by ideological factions at the level of the PLP in Labour Party leadership elections between 1963 and 1980 under a parliamentary ballot, and 1983 to 2007 via the Electoral College. The paper will evaluate the short-term tactics and long-term strategies pursued by the left and the right to enhance the prospect of their faction securing the lineage on the party leadership.

Ideological Configurations within the PLP and Party Leadership Selection

The pre-New Labour interpretation of Labour Party historical analysis in the 1960s and 1970s identified the existence of a majority right within the PLP prevailing over a minority left. (Heffernan 2000: 246) After the insurgency of the 'new' left in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the period from the late 1980s onwards would see the marginalisation and discrediting of the left. The extent of that erosion was identified by Cowley and Stuart, who observed that the intakes of 1997 and 2001 were overwhelmingly attuned to the New Labour agenda, thus bolstering the ranks of the right and depleting even further the influence of the left. (Cowley and Stuart 2003: 322)

Such an overview demonstrates that over time the ranks of the PLP have engaged in a process of ideological realignment; a process which has been reflective of the fluctuating adherence to core positions and ideas within Labour Party political thought. If this paper seeks to examine the short-term tactics and long-term strategies pursued by the left and the right to enhance the prospect of their faction securing the lineage on the party leadership, it is necessary to provide some degree of clarity on the meaning of the terms left and right. For the purposes of this paper the ideological positions identified by Plant, Beech and Hickson of the Old Left; the New Left; the Centre; the Old Right and the New Right, will apply. The Old Left, associated with Nye Bevan, bemoaned the drift from radicalism towards inertia within the Attlee administration, and advocated further nationalisation and unilateralism. The demise of the Old Left post-Bevan provided the political space for the emergence of the New Left in the 1970s. Their advocacy of industrial reform, protectionism, further public ownership through the Alternative Economic Strategy, unilateralism and withdrawal from the EEC was complemented by a commitment to constitutional reform—democratisation—within the Labour Party itself. The loyalist centre of the party was driven by the desire to achieve balance between the competing demands of the left and right. The old right, identifiable with the intellectualism of Anthony Crosland and the leadership of Hugh Gaitskell, conditioned Labour policy until the 1970s when it was discredited by the failures of the 1974 to 1979 Labour administration, whereupon it fractured, leading to the formation of the SDP in 1981. The transitions within the right in the long years of opposition saw the emergence of the New Right and the architects of modernisation, New Labour, for whom there is a greater acceptance of the market and increased tolerance of inequalities than within the Old Right. (Hickson, Beech and Plant 2004: 2–3)

How do these positions relate to the respective party leadership elections from the era of Wilson to Brown? Candidates for the party leadership can be identified along this

continuum of Labour Party political thought in two ways: first, where they are primarily ideologically located themselves; and, secondly, the ideological spread of their appeal. For example, Wilson was a candidate who acquired the endorsement of the left in the 1960 and 1963 leadership elections, even though his supporters were more to the left than he was himself. Table 1 provides an overview of respective candidates and their ideological locations / appeal, with the victors in each leadership election highlighted in bold. Emerging from Table 1 comes an awareness of the following. Despite the fact that the constitutional reform agenda initiated by the New Left in the late 1970s was driven by a desire to establish an Electoral College, it is clear that candidates identifiable with the left have had more success in PLP ballots than the Electoral College. Although Gaitskell in 1960 and 1961 defeated the candidatures of Wilson and Greenwood, who were identifiable with the Old Left, and Callaghan defeated Foot on the same basis in 1976, Wilson was able to overcome George Brown in 1963 and in controversial circumstances Michael Foot overcame Denis Healey in 1980. Both of these victories were acquired despite the assumption that the PLP was ideologically loaded against candidates identifiable with the left. The shift to an Electoral College, which diminished the influence of the rightist PLP, and incorporated trade union and Constituency Labour Party (CLP) sections with an assumed leftish bias, should theoretically have worked

TABLE 1
Ideological disposition of candidates and bases of PLP support

	Ideological disposition of candidates and / or primary source of support				
	New Left	**Old Left**	**Centre**	**Old Right**	**New Right**
PLP Ballot					
1960		Wilson	Gaitskell		
1961		Greenwood	Gaitskell		
1963			Wilson	Brown Callaghan	
1976	Benn	Foot		Callaghan Healey Crosland Jenkins	
1980		Foot Silkin		Healey Shore (1)	
Electoral College					
1983	Heffer		Kinnock	Hattersley Shore (1)	
1988	Benn		Kinnock (2)		
1992			Gould		
1994		Beckett Prescott	Smith Blair		
2007		McDonnell			Brown

Notes:
(1) Locating the ideological disposition of Shore is complicated as he does not adhere to the one-dimensional interpretations of Labour Party thought, with his pronounced hostility to the Common Market being more strongly associated with the left.
(2) Kinnock went through a process of ideological repositioning, from the old left in the 1970s towards the centre ground once he acquired the party leadership. His revisionist policy review of the late 1980s provoked condemnation on the left and support from the right.

to the advantage of the left in securing the lineage on the party leadership. However, in the five party leadership contests since its inception, it is clear that the candidate most identifiable with the left has been comfortably defeated on each occasion, with the single exception of 1983. Table 1 invites further consideration of the tactics that both the left, in the guises of the Old Left and the New Left, and the right, Old and New, have deployed in seeking the party leadership.

Social Democratic Right: Leadership Defeats and Short-term Tactical Mistakes

Since Gaitskell annexed the Labour Party leadership for the right in December 1955, the following ten Labour Party leadership elections between 1960 and 2007 have seen the candidate identified with the right emerging victorious on all but three occasions—Wilson in 1963, Foot in 1980 and Kinnock in 1983. In terms of evaluating the succession planning of the right, this suggests that their tactical and strategic approaches in these three elections require further consideration. What mistakes did they make as an ideological faction in these three contests?

It is clear that the right mismanaged the post-Gaitskell leadership election in February 1963. The incumbent deputy leader, George Brown, was of their ideological ilk, and had defeated the leading candidate of the left, Harold Wilson, for the deputy leadership in November 1962. Brown was therefore the 'candidate to beat' (Drucker 1976: 384). If ideological disposition informed voting behaviour, then to retain their lineage on the party leadership the right needed to coalesce around one agreed candidate, Brown. As Wilson was the sole candidate of the left (Anthony Greenwood having agreed to endorse him), the worst thing that the right could do was to fracture between two candidates, as this would possibly provide Wilson with a first ballot lead and, hence, momentum. However, concern about the temperament of Brown and his suitability to being prime minister prompted James Callaghan to enter the contest, as an alternative candidate for the right (Stark 1996: 87). His participation would depress Brown's first ballot vote, but Callaghan would struggle to appeal to likely Wilson first ballot voters. The Brown camp then made two significant errors. They refused to confirm that Brown would accept Wilson as his deputy, thus creating doubts about whether Brown could unify the party, whereas Wilson confirmed that he would accept Brown as his deputy. Second, the Brown camp berated Callaghan and his supporters. Antagonising Callaghan and his supporters was tactically naive. In a hypothetical second ballot, it was likely that Callaghan would be eliminated and Callaghan supporters would then have to choose between Wilson and Brown. The badmouthing of Callaghan would ultimately contribute to many switching to Wilson, rather than Brown, despite the fact that the Callaghan voting block was more ideologically aligned to Brown, than it was to Wilson. (Stark 1996: 112) The fracturing of the right meant that after Callaghan was eliminated, Wilson needed only eight of Callaghan's 41 first ballot supporters, whereas Brown needed 34. Wilson was able to attract the necessary Callaghan supporters without difficulty. However, as Ziegler commented, had the majority right remained cohesive and coalesced around one candidate, Wilson would probably have been defeated (Ziegler 1993: 136).

Over a decade and a half later, Callaghan would attempt to ensure that Denis Healey secured the party leadership after him on behalf of the right. Callaghan fought hard against the democratisation drive of the Bennite New Left. However, after the 1980 Labour Party annual conference had approved the principle of an Electoral College, but not the exact

details of how it should be comprised, Callaghan resigned. His decision was bitterly attacked by Bennites as a pre-emptive strike to install Healey as party leader as Healey was assumed to be the overwhelming favourite within the right-wing-dominated PLP (Drucker 1981: 383). The failure of Healey can be attributed the limitations of his campaign and the timing and circumstances of the contest itself. He ran what was described as a 'dreadful' campaign, characterised by complacency and tactical errors, and a belief that there was no need to try to persuade centre-right MPs, because he believed they had nowhere else to 'go' but him (Hayter 2005: 13). Indicative of this was his refusal to put forward his manifesto to *The Guardian*, which Foot, John Silkin and Peter Shore were prepared to do, and which contributed to a handful of MPs choosing not to endorse him (Pearce 2002: 477).

However, whilst Healey's campaign was open to criticism, the circumstances of the contest also contributed significantly to his defeat. A Healey victory under a PLP ballot opposed by the Bennite left would intensify the conflict. Benn would mount a challenge for the party leadership through the Electoral College, especially if the Healey victory was not of landslide proportions. Many inclined to Healey under normal circumstances calculated that unless he could win 'big', then the unity of the Party might be better served by voting for Foot (Drucker 1981: 387). The rationale here was that it would harder for Benn to 'ideologically' justify challenging Foot for the party leadership. The prospect of a 'big' victory receded, however, due to the imposition of mandatory reselection of Labour MPs, another dimension of the New Left democratisation agenda. Healey sympathisers may have felt pressurised at constituency level not to endorse Healey and may have feared the consequences if they did so (Hayter 2005: 13). The putative Electoral College and mandatory reselection were factors that eroded the Healey vote, which would not have been so pronounced had the contest been a normal PLP ballot. Had a succession contest occurred earlier and prior to the momentum being established by the Bennite left, Healey would not have suffered as much from the initial moves towards the formation of the SDP. A handful of MPs on the right had already decided that they wished to be part of a new party of the centre. They calculated that their prospects were better served by facing a Foot-led Labour Party, rather than a Healey-led one, and thus they voted 'for' Foot. Crewe and King found at least five MPs who voted tactically for Foot, and who subsequently defected to the SDP, enough to ensure a tie in the 1980 contest (Crewe and King 1995: 75). Healey himself believes these tactics were the decisive factor behind his defeat (Healey 1990: 477). Callaghan had chosen to stay on as party leader to 'ensure' a transition to Healey, which proved to a huge strategic miscalculation. It handed momentum to the democratisation agenda of the Bennite New Left, which in turn contributed to the fracturing of the right.

The assumption that the Electoral College would be more favourable terrain for candidates aligned to the left proved to be true when Neil Kinnock secured a comfortable victory over the candidate of the right, Roy Hattersley, in 1983. As in 1980, circumstances worked against the right, although they did make tactical errors in the succession contest. In terms of circumstances, it should be acknowledged that the chances of Hattersley prevailing were undermined by the outcome of the 1983 General Election. Had Benn retained his parliamentary seat, he would have been a candidate whose appeal was predominantly to the New Left, but potentially to the Old Left as well. His absence meant that Kinnock had a clearer run on the left in terms of garnering parliamentary support, but critically in terms of securing support from the CLPs, where leftish influence (and potential Bennite support) was high (Hayter 2005: 24). Kinnock had been cultivating support in the CLPs and amongst trade union leaders in anticipation for a party leadership campaign, whereas Hattersley had been

far less active. Kinnock had adjusted to the new campaigning demands of the Electoral College more effectively than Hattersley (Drucker 1984: 290). Had Kinnock not had a clearer run on the left, and his vote been fractured by the presence of Benn, and had Hattersley adapted to the national campaigning demands of the Electoral College, this would have aided the succession planning of the right. The failure of Hattersley in 1983 would be the last time the right would be outmanoeuvred in terms of the party leadership; in subsequent contests, candidates of the left (Benn in 1988, Gould in 1992, Beckett and Prescott in 1994) were overwhelmingly defeated, as the centre / right coalesced around one candidate on each occasion.

Socialist Left: Leadership Defeats and Short-term Tactical Mistakes

Wilson secured the party leadership in 1963 as the candidate most clearly identified with the left. In the other nine contests since 1960, the candidate most identifiable with the left has been successful on only two occasions—Foot in 1980, and Kinnock in 1983. The recurring failures of the left can legitimately be attributed to the numeric dominance of the right in PLP ballots prior to 1981. The ideological realignments within the Labour Party that commenced during the Kinnock era, and which led to the marginalisation of the left, meant that the Electoral College, designed to aid the selection of candidates from the left, has failed to deliver this. However, whilst these processes of ideological realignment have clearly occurred, the role of tactical and strategic mistakes on the part of the left since 1960 should also be acknowledged.

With the ideological feuding of the 1950s, the left had already established a reputation for divisiveness and disloyalty, characteristics it would retain by challenging Gaitskell in 1960 and 1961. A challenge from the left was going to be launched by Anthony Greenwood in 1960, as a response to the manner in which Gaitskell had reacted to the decision of conference to advocate a unilateralist position. If Greenwood did well, he might usurp Wilson's position as the leading alternative to Gaitskell. Retaining the allegiance of the left for a future post-Gaitskell succession contest was indeed critical for Wilson. Opting out now would lose him their future backing. So Wilson stood in 1960 (at which point Greenwood stood down and supported Wilson) not so much on the issue of unilateralism but on the sanctity of conference decisions. He was defeated 166-81. Challenging reinforced the impression of divisiveness and disloyalty. However when Greenwood challenged again, after Gaitskell successfully reversed the unilateralist position a year later, his 171-59 defeat (worse than that suffered by Wilson) confirmed that Wilson, not he, would be the 'standard bearer' of the left in any post-Gaitskell succession contest.

The left was unable to manage the 1976 party leadership contest as effectively as it had in 1963. The right failed to coalesce around a single candidate and with four candidates of that ilk—James Callaghan, Roy Jenkins, Denis Healey and Tony Crosland—electing to stand, it was clear that several ballots would be required. In the first, the left-wing candidate, Foot, came first with 90 votes, ahead of Callaghan with 84. It was assumed the freed votes of Jenkins, Crosland and later Healey would gravitate more towards Callaghan than Foot. However, had the left coalesced around Foot alone, rather than Benn who was standing as a future orientated candidate, then we can hypothecate that his first ballot return of 37 would have provided Foot with a considerable lead over Callaghan and, crucially, momentum. In 1963, Wilson as the sole candidate of the left secured a first ballot return of 115 and a first ballot lead of 27 over Brown. The size of the lead made it immensely difficult for Brown to

persuade Callaghan voters that they should endorse him and that he could win. Had the left adopted similar tactics in 1976 then Foot could have had a lead a return of 127 and a lead of 43. For Callaghan, trailing Foot on the first ballot by a mere six votes was not problematic in terms of persuading 'freed' second and third ballot voters that they should endorse him. It may have been harder to persuade them to overturn such a sizable first ballot lead and in that context whilst the ideological disposition of the PLP suggests that Callaghan was a strong candidate to win, 1963 demonstrated that the left could overcome this with astute campaigning, which included coalescing around one candidate.

In 1988 Benn challenged Kinnock. Since the inception of the Electoral College, this has been the only occasion when the incumbent Labour leader has had their right to lead the party formally challenged. The experience of Benn was humbling. Although winning was never a realistic target, his supporters had hoped that a challenge to Kinnock's leadership would galvanise the left (Quinn 2005: 795). The Benn challenge was initiated to signal the enduring significance of the left and was thus designed to enhance the possibility of the left mounting a more successful party leadership challenge at a future date. It completely failed, from both a short-term and long-term perspective. Benn was tactically and strategically inept. At the moment when Benn challenged him, Kinnock was politically very weak. However, the fear engendered amongst many within the Labour movement associated with Benn and the New Left ensured that Kinnock secured a landslide victory. Although Kinnock attempted to make the contest a referendum on the concept of the Policy Review,[1] the result was as much a condemnation of Benn and the New Left, as it was on Kinnock as a party leader and potential prime minister. Benn had merely renewed and refreshed Kinnock's mandate to lead (and initiate change) and ensured that Kinnock's position was stronger after the contest was over than before it began (Heffernan and Marqusee 1992: 103).

The Benn challenge carried with it longer-term implications that were to be equally damaging to the left. Prior to the challenge the threshold for nominations to challenge an incumbent party leader was 5% of the PLP. The negative reaction that the Benn challenge created resulted in an amendment being passed to increase the threshold for nominations from 5% to 20%. This figure applied in the post-Kinnock succession contest in 1992 when the right's candidate, John Smith, overwhelmed Bryan Gould, the candidate most identified with the left. Any momentum that Gould sought to establish in his campaign was undermined by speculation that he might struggle to reach the nomination threshold of 55 of the 271 strong PLP. The capacity of the left to retain credibility and influence was further undermined, however, by the tactics that Gould adopted. He entered both the contest for the party leadership and the deputy party leadership, believing that by disputing the party leadership with Smith it would generate a degree of publicity, and that this would enhance his chances of defeating Margaret Beckett and John Prescott, both themselves identifiable with the left, for the deputy leadership. Alderman and Carter have concluded that Gould's dual candidacy was 'something of a gamble', which came to be seen as a significant 'tactical error', as it was 'interpreted as an admission that he expected to be defeated for the leadership, thereby diminishing credibility in his campaign for that post' (Alderman and Carter 1993: 53).

The lack of agreement on which candidate should represent the views of the left was more even pronounced in 1994. After the death of John Smith, Margaret Beckett as the incumbent deputy leader had assumed the position as acting leader. Beckett was in an awkward tactical dilemma. The groundswell of support for Tony Blair, which emerged

almost instantaneously, indicated that she was highly unlikely to be able to defeat him. Moreover, she had a mandate for the deputy party leadership that was unaffected (technically) by the loss of the incumbent party leader. Given her conduct as acting party leader it would have been politically difficult for anyone to *challenge* her for the deputy leadership directly. However, she was ambitious to lead and was under strong encouragement to stand for the leadership from within the PLP. Beckett decided to 'vacate' the position of deputy party leader, and stand for the party leadership *and* deputy leadership simultaneously. It was a high-risk strategy. She was unlikely to win the party leadership. As a result of the strategy she had now adopted, the likelihood of the deputy leadership being contested was dramatically increased, as were the chances she would lose (Alderman and Carter 1995: 442–3).

There has been considerable comment on the deal between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to make sure that the modernisers on the New Right did not fracture, but less attention has been given to the non-deal on the left. Prescott offered not to stand for the leadership, which would take votes away from Beckett but not Blair, on the understanding that Beckett did not stand for the deputy leadership. When Beckett declined the offer, Prescott decided for stand for both positions (Prescott 2008: 184). Therefore, it can be argued that Beckett and Prescott undermined whatever small chance the left may have had by both electing to stand for the leadership, thereby fracturing the non-modernisers' (i.e., Blair) vote in two. Their decision to stand for both the leadership and the deputy leadership reflected the fact that, while both expected to lose in the party leadership contest, failure to stand for the top job would give the other an advantage in the contest for deputy leader.

The Electoral College: Unintended Consequences in Succession Planning

When we consider the performance of the Electoral College that the New Left had fought so hard to establish, it is clear that, as Margaret Beckett later observed, it 'has had, in a sense, almost the reverse effect of what its proponents intended' (quoted in Stark 1996: 66). We can identify three substantive ways in which as a succession planning exercise the New Left miscalculated:

(1) *Disunity Costs and Strategic Reorientation*

The process of establishing the Electoral College, and its associated constitutional reform agenda, occurred with considerable costs to the image of the Labour Party. In their pursuit of the Electoral College, the New Left made a significant contribution to the fracturing of the right, for whom disagreements about how to withstand the onslaught of the left (and the policy implications on the economy, defence and Europe) contributed to the establishment of the SDP. After the establishment of the SDP, the New Left through Benn challenged Healey for the deputy leadership in 1981—an act of such divisiveness that it acted as a catalyst for many on the Old Left, notably Kinnock, to move towards the centre and make an accommodation with the remaining Old Right. The New Left's association with extremism, division and defeat ensured that a process of ideological alignment would occur within Labour thought culminating in the increasing ascendancy of the right, the electorally expedient move towards New Labour and the (further) marginalisation of the left (both Old and New).

(2) *Legitimatising Leaders and OMOV*

In the aftermath of the 1974 to 1979 Labour administration, a betrayal thesis gathered within the left, which argued that a rightist leadership had betrayed the Labour movement, from whom they did not possess a mandate to lead. The Electoral College was thus designed to ensure that party leaders possessed a mandate from the wider Labour movement. The criticism that the Electoral College suffered from, especially in 1992 about the influence of the trade union block vote, contributed to the extension of one member, one vote for the CLP and trade union voting sections in 1993. A year later, the Electoral College gave Blair hugely enhanced authority and legitimacy to carry out the further modernisation of the party that remained incomplete following the Kinnock and Smith reforms, meaning he could move Labour further to the right in policy terms and push for the replacement of Clause IV (Labour's historical commitment to public ownership). The legitimisation of Blair in 1994 was enhanced by the knowledge that he possessed broadly similar mandates from the PLP (60.5%); CLP (58.2%) and trade unions (52.3%). Thirteen years after the left had argued for an Electoral College under the assumption that CLPs were 'hotbeds' of New Left support (a justified assumption in light of Benn's return in the deputy leadership contest against Healey), suggested that the process of ideological realignment at PLP level was replicated at CLP level as many CLPs loosened their alignment to the New Left (Thorpe 2008: 221). The Electoral College has not increased the accountability of the party leader to the wider Labour movement; rather by strengthening his 'democratic' mandate it has enhanced the leader's autonomy. Between 1981 and 1992 the existence of the trade union block vote meant that union leaders could determine the trajectory of succession contests: the curtailing of that power gave a degree of power and influence back to the PLP (Quinn 2004:333).

(3) *Nominations and Security of Tenure*

Having seen the Old Left candidate Kinnock become party leader via the Electoral College, and then re-orientate the party to the right, the left has suffered three successive defeats in party leadership elections (1988, 1992, 1994) and one (2007) in which its candidate (McDonnell) could not attain the nomination threshold for entry to the Electoral College. Their attempt to use the Electoral College to stall the revisionist trajectory of the Kinnock leadership backfired. The increasing of the threshold for nominations (from 5% to 20% in 1988) was a contributing factor to two problems that the left would face in the age of New Labour. First, it prevented the left from mobilising enough support to challenge Tony Blair at the height of the Iraq crisis in 2003–2004 and, secondly, it ensured that it was unable to field a candidate for the succession in 2007 (Quinn 2005: 799–801). Designed to ensure that elected party leaders were accountable to the wider Labour movement, it has had the reverse effect of intensifying the security of tenure of incumbents (Quinn 2004: 333).

Conclusion

The Electoral College was designed to enhance the succession planning of the left. At the time of its inception, it was seen as evidence of the strategic outmanoeuvring of the right (Kavanagh 1998: 34). However, this paper concludes that the inability of the left to pass

the threshold for participation in 2007 was a manifestation of their recurring tactical and strategic miscalculations in terms of succession planning since then, through which a clearer appreciation of how the Electoral College produced intended consequences for the left emerges. Therefore, with the benefit of hindsight it can be argued that the Electoral College rules for party democracy were not as tailor-made for the left as had initially been assumed. The New Left's campaign for democratisation created such disunity costs that it indirectly contributed to the strategic reorientation to the right; and to the enhanced authority and legitimacy of right-wing leaders with increased security of tenure. As a succession planning strategy, Thorpe offers a damning conclusion. The 'imprimatur' of the Electoral College, he argues, 'designed as a guarantor for the left, was ultimately to be the weapon with which to beat it' (Thorpe 2008: 221)

NOTES

1. A process culminating in the publication of *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* (The Labour Party 1989) which ended Labour's commitment to unilateralism and distanced them from high taxation and old style nationalisation.

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