

Kinnock- social policy

Introduction

As the proud son of a miner who as an MP represented a South Wales mining community, Neil Kinnock's solidly working-class origins were pivotal in shaping his core beliefs and political outlook. Indeed, he would regularly highlight his very ordinary and humble origins in various public speeches, once notably asking why he was "*the first Kinnock in a thousand generations to get to university*"¹. As for many figures of the political left in particular, the post-war welfare state and its associated features was a cherished legacy and became central to Kinnock's policy narrative as Labour Leader, with him being described as '*part of the Welsh working class who had made good thanks to the welfare state*'². From this personal perspective, the formulation of social policy and the way it was practically implemented was viewed by Kinnock as a critical mechanism for generating more equality, providing a ladder of opportunity to raise people from his own social class out of hardship and poverty, and to subsequently improve their quality of life and opportunities. However, the ongoing cost of funding such specific and often expensive areas of social policy would recurringly come back to haunt his proposals and damage his party's electoral prospects during the course of his chequered leadership, particularly in the context of the damaging legacy of the economic troubles of past Labour governments. This chapter seeks to examine Kinnock's approach to social policy during his nine-year stint as Labour Leader, incorporating two general elections, his own personal values, specific aspects and areas within this policy sphere, as well as analysing the party's broader messaging, image and narrative associated with it.

Social policy within Kinnock's ascent to leadership

During his rise to political prominence as a robust left-winger in the 1970s, Neil Kinnock developed a rousing rhetorical style and a powerful oratorical delivery that became a distinct hallmark of his political image (although critics would dismiss him as a 'windbag'). This was often displayed at its most passionate when he spoke about issues and values that were personally close to his heart and arose from his own socio-economic origins. As his frontline political career progressed in terms of both his Shadow Cabinet and then leadership role, such oratory was often utilised to steer his party's focus towards issues that it was ideologically attached to, traditionally strong on in terms of public perception, and which were also often inherently associated with core social policy matters (NHS, pensions, welfare benefits, etc.). On this premise, Kinnock's evocative language impacted effectively on the political frontline during Labour's largely disastrous 1983 general election campaign, which saw him raise his profile to a further sufficient degree to enable him to successfully run for the leadership following the party's worst electoral defeat since the 1930s.

Despite such a such a problematic campaign for Labour overall, at Bridgend on the 7th June (two days before polling day) Kinnock delivered a memorable speech which one political commentator has described as '*arguably the finest..... he ever made*'³. In it he advised the country (albeit to no avail) that "*If Margaret Thatcher wins on Thursday- I warn you not to be ordinary; I warn you not to be young; I warn you not to fall ill; I warn you not to get old*"⁴. Within the context of Kinnock's strong emphasis on a vibrant and enabling social policy agenda, the speech's inherent implications highlighted specific social groups whom he envisaged would benefit from Labour's alternative approach to this policy sphere, entailing

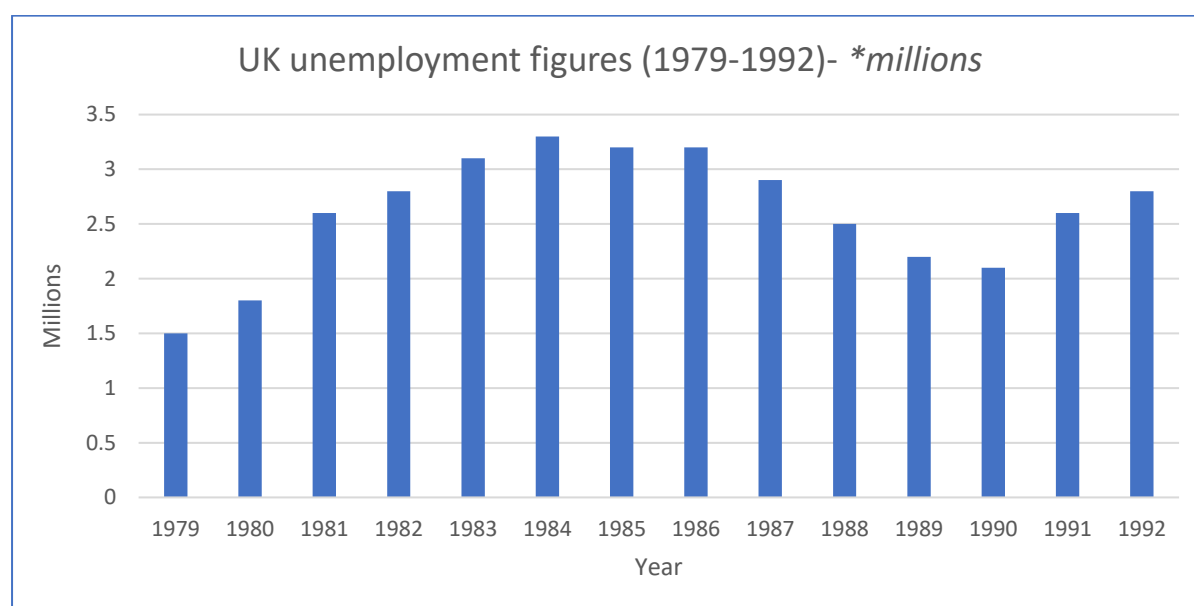
more effective ostensible solutions to the various socio-economic problems he highlighted. Taken to its logical if ultimately hypothetical conclusion (given the election's outcome), Kinnock's words in 1983 offered a solid (if at times vague) promise that Labour advocated a more generous social policy programme to address escalating social problems such as rising unemployment, poverty and inequality, which in practical terms would entail more extensive state-funded welfare support, healthcare, housing, pensions, etc.

While these can be viewed as principled and even idealistic policy sentiments, they would ultimately need to be funded by a significant chunk of taxation; an approach seemingly rejected by the wider electorate in 1983, with an evidently greater number of voters being more aligned with Thatcher's initiatives towards individualism and a lower tax and spend agenda. Yet Kinnock's language and social policy narrative was popular with Labour's membership and core support, which perhaps reflects his rising political trajectory at the time. This scenario was therefore an early taster of Kinnock's difficult policy inheritance, and particularly how putting such social policy goals into a practical, affordable and credible format would prove to be one of his biggest leadership challenges between 1983 and 1992. In his subsequent 1983 Leader-Elect's speech he continued with his previous electioneering narrative on 'protecting' the core elements of social policy from the clutches of Thatcherism, further raising the stakes by accusing the Thatcher government of "*contriving the termination of the welfare state*".⁵ Having looked at such contextual background, this chapter will now address key aspects of social policy in turn in order to fully assess and analyse how Neil Kinnock specifically dealt with them during his leadership.

Unemployment and associated welfare benefits

The 1980s was a decade of mass unemployment, with jobless levels steadily rising from 1979 to peak at over 3 million by the mid-1980s (see Table 1), with many contemporary figures (including Kinnock) arguing that the actual level was much higher due to various changes in how the government calculated the data. Under Kinnock's leadership from 1983 onwards, Labour had to respond to some of the worst unemployment the country had experienced since the 1930s; fuelled within the context of a sustained recession, deindustrialisation and emerging privatisation of key industries.

Table 1



Source: ONS cited in *The Thatcher years in statistics*, BBC News, (9th April 2013), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22070491>

In practical terms, this meant that for much of this socially turbulent era, larger than usual numbers of families were reliant on state support for life's basics, yet the level of

unemployment and associated supplementary benefit was generally considered insufficient to protect them from harsh conditions of poverty. Kinnock's deeply-held views on the human damage caused by such high levels of unemployment were made clear in his 1984 annual conference speech in Blackpool, when he referred to *"the drudgery, poverty, despair, and insecurity of..... unemployment"*⁶. In his speech the following year (1985), he continued with this theme, alleging that £400 million (as a weekly amount) was being spent on *"paying the bills of unemployment"*⁷, while highlighting the debilitating impact of increased numbers relying on supplementary benefits (almost 9 million people per year by 1988 according to Kinnock), alongside cuts to both child benefit and housing benefit.

Yet while such criticism was to be expected from the mainstream political left, the phenomenon of mass unemployment represented both a moral and economic challenge to the Labour opposition and its more historically benevolent approach to addressing such matters, and it faced difficulties in formulating practical policy alternatives to address such human misery. By the time of his 1986 annual conference speech, Kinnock was advocating a Keynesian-type approach for stimulating jobs, in the form of a:

*"two-year programme to bring unemployment down by one million..... by generating jobs that need to be done..... in construction.....in cleansing our environment.....training people, caring for people"*⁸.

Kinnock also spoke of a longer-term *"five-year, medium-term employment strategy"*⁹, and as the decade progressed, his leadership would rightly highlight the futility of ongoing Conservative public spending cuts that were seemingly cancelled out by paying increased

unemployment benefits, and he argued that many of Labour's key social policy pledges formulated in approximately 1986-87 would be funded by more people being employed and fewer claiming welfare benefits. In both 1987 and 1992 the party also proposed a minimum wage for the low paid (which Conservative critics claimed would increase unemployment), yet the political traction of such longer-term unemployment and welfare strategies among 'swing' voters was limited. Indeed, there were various beneficiaries of Thatcherism who were personally prospering during this polarising era, and who didn't fully engage with such a critique that primarily impacted on those less fortunate within the society around them. Labour therefore struggled to fully exploit the political benefits from this scenario of high unemployment and rising poverty (affecting some), and was instead often negatively viewed as being 'soft' and weak on associated welfare issues, with the party's polling feedback highlighting key groups of voters *'hostile to the principle of paying taxes which they felt did not benefit them directly'*¹⁰, while perceiving those in receipt of benefits as 'scroungers'. During the post-1987 policy review (see later in chapter), Labour's ongoing commitment to relatively generous levels of child benefit, while arguably logical in social policy terms amidst rising child poverty, would continue to cost it dearly in electoral terms.

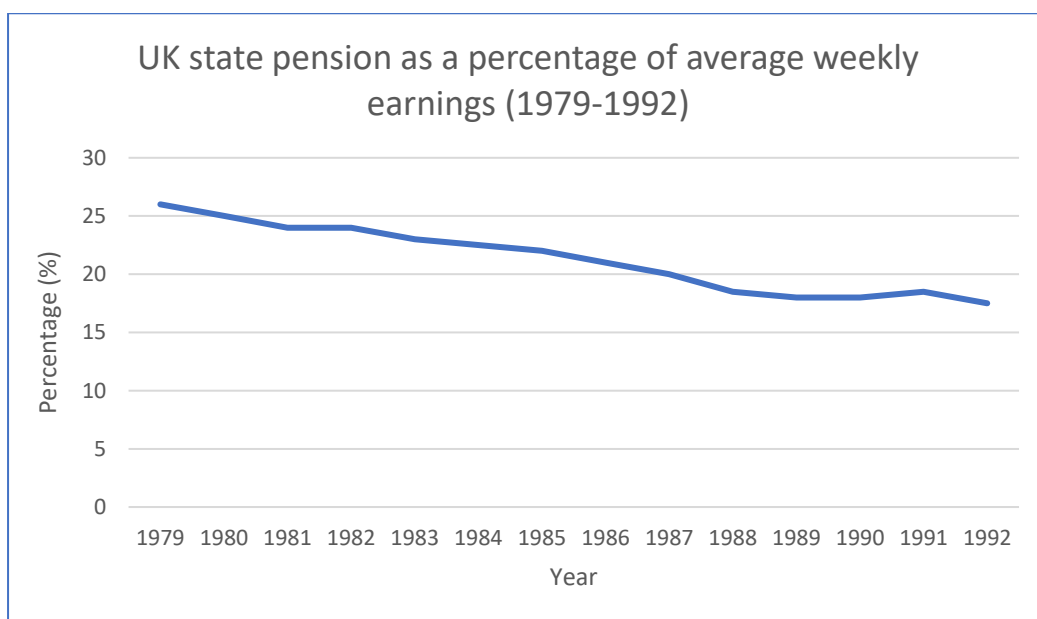
In addition to such entrenched and socio-economic trends and severe tensions, the decade also witnessed major industrial disputes like the 1984-85 Miners' Strike which caused further variants of long-term unemployment, concentrated regional poverty and family hardship, with voluntary charitable donations largely supporting the striking miners and their families (who didn't qualify for state welfare support, both during, and in some cases, after the strike). Overall therefore, while obviously concerned about such deep-rooted and somewhat unprecedented social policy challenges, Kinnock's response to addressing

unemployment occurred within variable electoral circumstances. This was because unemployment was falling in 1987 but rising again in 1992, yet Labour still failed to maximise political capital from the issue in the latter case in particular. Kinnock was ultimately hindered on both occasions by proposing relatively expensive longer-term social policy solutions with somewhat unclear outcomes and questionable funding sources, as well as Labour being negatively associated as being 'on the side' of welfare claimants.

Pensions policy

From the moment that the Thatcher government passed the 1980 Social Security Act that broke the link between the state pension and average earnings, the value of the UK's government-provided pension began a steady fall into relative decline.

Table 2



Source: Lucy Warwick-Ching, *Chart that tells a story — pensions and earnings*, Financial Times, (10th April 2015), <https://www.ft.com/content/6f8531d6-ddfd-11e4-8d14-00144feab7de>

This was essentially an early cost-cutting measure as part of Thatcherism's determined attempts to drive down public spending and 'roll back' the frontiers and size of the state, with the government arguing that an ageing population meant that the existing standards of the state pension were financially unsustainable.

Consequently, as the 1980s progressed, the Thatcher mantras of individualism and self-reliance saw increasing numbers of employees encouraged to take out private pensions to top up and bolster their relatively meagre state provision. As an outline response in terms of his own stance on the issue, in his 1984 annual conference speech Neil Kinnock spoke enthusiastically if somewhat vaguely about Labour offering *"liberty, choice, comfort and society in old age..... (with) the provision of proper pensions"*¹¹, and two years later in 1986 was still publicly committed to promising to *"pay better pensions"*¹² on a universal basis. Consequently, in its 1987 manifesto Labour pledged to:

*'immediately increase the single pension by £5 a week and the pension for a married couple by £8, as the first step in re-establishing a link between pensions and average earnings or living costs'*¹³.

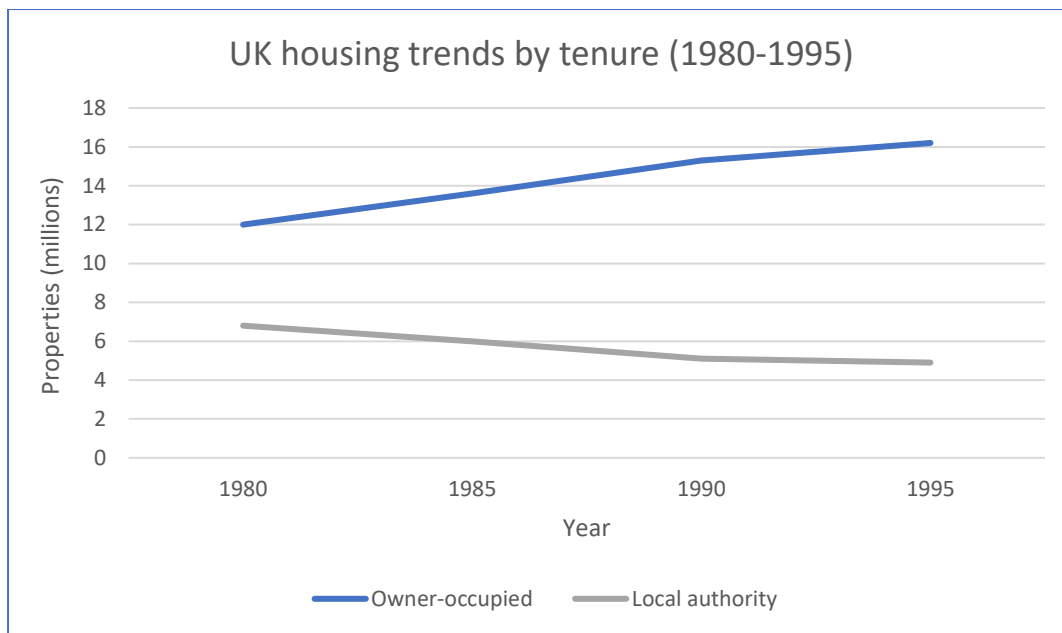
Kinnock was also particularly critical of the 1986 Social Security Act which reduced the relative value of the supplementary (SERPS) pension, originally introduced by Callaghan's Labour government in 1978. However, as later alluded to in this chapter regarding the 1987-89 policy review's recommendations, Kinnock's somewhat nostalgic and idealistic instincts to maintain

a more generous model of the state pension than the Thatcher government (particularly to benefit poorer pensioners without private pensions), became another aspect of social policy that created problems in terms of the policy's credibility and the party's broader image. Labour under Kinnock subsequently had to gradually (and begrudgingly) accept the changing landscape involving more private pensions, alongside both political and economic restrictions that limited its capacity to increase and even maintain the state pension's value, although the retained pensions manifesto commitments between 1987 and 1992 indicate some notable resistance within the party, including at senior levels. Party policy eventually came to engage with 'conditionality' in terms of targeting the poorest and most needy pensioners, but this did not fully materialise until the transition from Kinnock's leadership into the New Labour era in the early to mid-1990s.

Housing policy

In terms of housing policy, Kinnock inherited from Michael Foot the ongoing fall-out from Thatcher's populist 'right to buy' policy that was rolled out from 1980 onwards. During the next decade, an estimated million and a quarter of council house tenants purchased their properties at significantly discounted rates, with the UK's rate of home-ownership rising from 55% to 67% during the 1980s¹⁴, in line with Thatcher's vision of a reduced state and a 'property-owning democracy'. This trend was further bolstered by a rise in newly-built private housing to meet growing 'consumerist' demands for more owner-occupation.

Table 3



Source: ONS, *Housing and home ownership in the UK* (22nd January 2015), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/housingandhomeownershipintheuk/2015-01-22>

This created a social policy dilemma for Kinnock, as Labour was historically committed to the state provision of sufficient high-quality social housing dating back to the ground-breaking legislation of the inter-war and immediate post-war eras (particularly associated with earlier Labour governments)¹⁵. On an electoral dimension, Labour had also historically enjoyed greater support from council tenants than private owner-occupiers. Therefore, while the policy of enhanced home-ownership opportunities was evidently popular among aspirational voters, and has been said by various sources to have been a factor in converting former Labour supporters to the Conservative cause¹⁶, Labour's ideological roots and commitment to social housing placed it in instinctive opposition to the policy, and also seemingly out of sync with broader public opinion.

Indeed, as various Labour councils challenged the policy in the courts to no avail, this further gave the impression (as exploited by Conservative ministers) that Kinnock's Labour opposed 'opportunity' and home-ownership. Labour councils were also frustrated by the fact that such radical Conservative housing legislation prohibited them from spending the 'capital receipts' of council housing sales on building replacements (ostensibly justified as a means of suppressing inflation), even though some Labour-run authorities like Liverpool disobeyed this remit and illegally built them anyway during the middle of the decade. Such radical and indeed law-breaking activities at council level put Kinnock in a difficult position in terms of positioning Labour as a responsible party ready for national government, and he was critical of what he saw as the *'futility of law-breaking by local councils'*¹⁷. However, such actions were symptomatic of bubbling frustrations within Labour and specifically how it managed its social policy commitments from opposition.

The availability of council housing stock was further depleted by the 1988 Housing Act, which established Housing Action Trusts (HATs) in mainly Labour-controlled local authorities, and which hived off further swathes of municipal housing to smaller-scale housing associations and co-operatives. Nevertheless, a more astute line of housing policy attack emerged which focused on the rising homelessness figures as the 1980s progressed; an apparent negative side-effect of the 'right to buy' policy due to the reduction in affordable homes available to rent, with the previously rare sight of homeless beggars becoming *'a fixture on city streets'*¹⁸. While hard political gains from this stance were initially limited amidst an ongoing economic boom for some, it would gain further momentum over time. Kinnock also made some successful housing policy capital amidst the misery of escalating

housing repossessions during the early 1990s, a consequence of unaffordable mortgages secured during the recklessly unsustainable 'Lawson boom' of the late 1980s.

Consequently, given such radical and wide-ranging policy changes in this sphere during the 1980s, housing was consolidated as a core area of social policy, yet Labour's evolving position often struggled to adapt. Indeed, the 1987 Labour Manifesto sought to significantly challenge the prevailing housing narrative arising from government economic retrenchment:

'Public funding for housing has fallen by 60 per centFar fewer homes are being built. Millions of dwellings are in serious disrepair..... (with) record unemployment among building workers. This policy is immoral and grossly inefficient. Labour will reverse it'¹⁹.

Yet after a third consecutive electoral defeat, housing policy was further revised within the party's post-1987 policy review, and by 1992, Labour under Kinnock had broadly and pragmatically accepted 'right to buy' and its restrictive implications for the scale of investment in public housing, in the short-term at least. An appropriately modified social policy programme (incorporating housing) had to appeal to the growing numbers of middle-class owner-occupiers whose votes the party needed to win power, with Kinnock arguing by 1987 that *"there is no collision between affluence and socialism"*²⁰. Despite this, in 1992 Kinnock's Labour continued to commit to *'investing in house-building and repairs..... (and) to rehouse homeless people..... (and) generate jobs'*²¹, which again gave the Conservatives ample scope to make further political capital about the specific costing of Labour's various social policy expenditure.

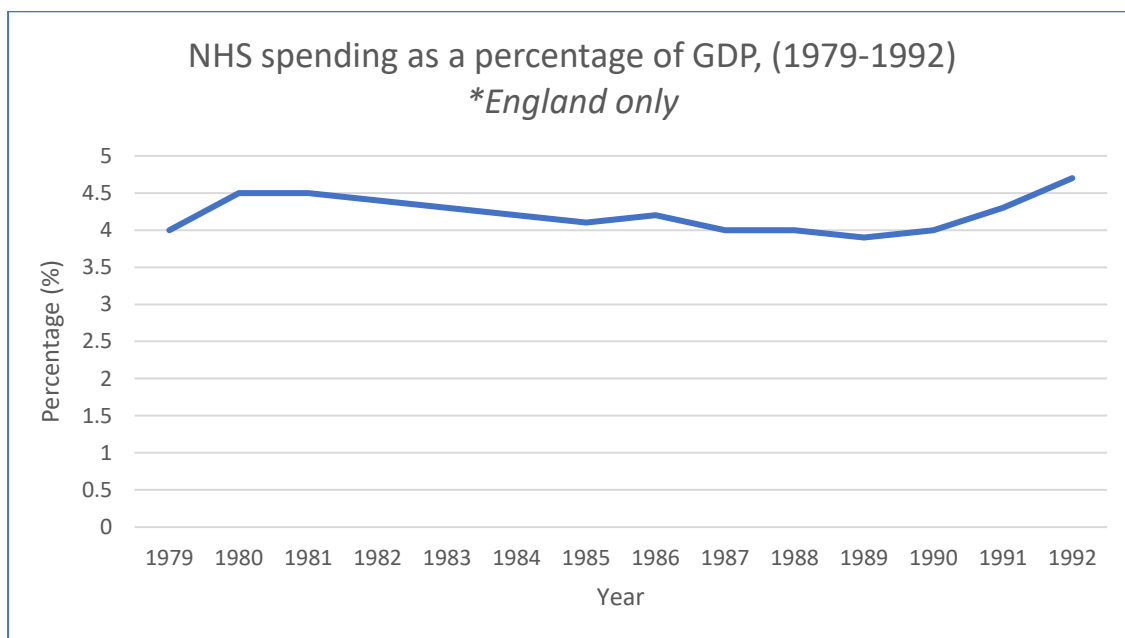
NHS Policy

Given his political heritage, it is not surprising that Kinnock was devoutly committed to the NHS, which was the landmark socialist legacy of another South Wales Labour politician, Aneurin Bevan. In his Leader-Elect's Speech at Labour's 1983 annual conference, Kinnock warned of what he viewed as the very real threat to the future of the NHS from a further term of Conservative fiscal retrenchment, committing Labour to the *"defence of a basic, fundamental, essential health service without which this country ceases to be civilised"*²², while two years later he warned of Thatcher's government *"cutting funds in the health and social services"*²³. The NHS has historically been a policy area where Labour tends to poll well on, but such persistent warnings from the Kinnock leadership about threats to its future viability made relatively limited impact in the 1987 general election, particularly because a thriving (if somewhat unstable) economy and the growth of 'popular capitalism' appeared to trump it as a critical issue for many voters. However, Labour's ongoing concerns about the NHS seemed to resonate more deeply with the public mood in the wake of the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act, which had more obviously 'marketized' tones, and which heightened fears that the NHS was under threat from possible (albeit gradual) privatisation via the introduction of autonomous NHS trusts, private companies taking over in-house hospital services, and GP fund-holding. Kinnock sought to reflect this at his 1991 annual conference speech, warning of people being treated like *"consumers instead of just being patients"*²⁴.

Kinnock's renewed attacks on such NHS legalisation coincided with a boost in Labour's opinion poll ratings from mid-1989 to late 1990 (although other factors were also significant), and this period also featured parliamentary by-election gains from the Conservatives in the

Vale of Glamorgan (May 1989 on a 12% swing) and Mid-Staffordshire (March 1990 on a 21% swing), and culminated in Thatcher's dramatic resignation (November 1990). Yet John Major's re-branded Conservative premiership from late 1990 eroded Labour's previous ascendancy on this specific issue, most notably because Major expressed more explicit enthusiasm and commitment towards the NHS (in comparison to Thatcher)²⁵, while NHS spending as a percentage of GDP started to slowly climb again (see table 4).

Table 4



Source: John Appleby, *70 years of NHS spending*, The Nuffield Trust, (21st March 2018), <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/70-years-of-nhs-spending#then-and-now>

Labour consequently failed to fully maximise public fears about NHS cuts and possible privatisation at the 1992 general election, which became evident during the so-called 'war of Jennifer's ear', where the party found itself *'wrong-footed on the NHS, when its party-political broadcast about a little girl whose ear surgery had been delayed by spending cuts was shown*

*by gleeful Tory campaigners to be at odds with some of the facts*²⁶. This generated an unhelpful and damaging scenario within this critical policy area during the 1992 campaign, described by one contemporary observer as a *'disaster'* and *'messy beyond words'*²⁷ from Labour's perspective. It culminated in allegations that Kinnock's Labour was dishonestly scaremongering, and was largely perceived as having a negative impact on the party's broader electoral prospects; supported by other contemporary observations that Labour was *'shroud-waving'*²⁸ and that the episode *'alienated floating voters'*²⁹, with each party's NHS credentials *'lost in the dispute over the broadcast's truthfulness'*³⁰. Despite this distracting and ill-timed political row in 1992, Neil Kinnock's consistent position in both general elections he fought as leader was that the NHS was not being adequately funded to meet its considerable and inexorable demands (heightened by an ageing population). This was despite it averaging a 2% expenditure growth in 'real terms' (including inflation) during the 1980s, yet nevertheless a low rate by comparative historical standards³¹. A Kinnock-led Labour Party was certainly committed to spending more on the longer-term 'modernisation' of the NHS compared to amounts proposed by both Thatcher in 1987 and Major in 1992, but public doubts about the economic viability of such proposals meant that he never got the opportunity to implement such investment in office.

Post-1987 policy review

Within the broader context of such individual specific social policies, in the aftermath of a demoralising third successive general election defeat in the summer of 1987, a chastened Kinnock leadership instigated a comprehensive policy review at that year's autumn annual conference. It sought to fundamentally address Labour's various policy and spending

commitments, with everything seemingly up for discussion in terms of future viability, with Kinnock himself declaring that it would *“spread across the whole field of policy, leaving nothing out”*³². The 1987 electoral outcome again indicated that too many voters continued to reject and disbelieve the credibility of Labour’s expansive and socialist-inclined policy programme in comparison to the dominant (and evidently popular), fiscally-streamlined Thatcherite narrative (as was the case in 1983). As justification for this fairly radical policy review, despite the emerging public appearance of Kinnockite modernisation and moderation, it was observed that *‘there had been few substantial changes to party policy’*, with the 1987 manifesto³³ *‘not substantially different’*³⁴ to the more electorally calamitous 1983 version in terms of policy content, if not presentation. It was also noted by prominent Labour pollster Philip Gould that during the 1987 campaign, Labour was *‘still fighting on (its) own ground, not taking back Conservative territory, or even reclaiming neutral ground’*³⁵. On this basis, Gould highlighted how one of the first specific policy areas for review saw the party commission polling *‘research on tax and benefits’*³⁶ between late 1987 and Spring 1988, which exposed ongoing hostility to Labour’s proposals in this area. The policy review also incorporated the somewhat cosmetic exercise of ‘Labour Listens’, whereby frontbench spokespersons toured the country engaging with voters to varying degrees. The review came to an initial conclusion in 1989, and it appeared to represent a significant overhaul and dilution of Labour’s previous relatively generous programme of policy commitments, with obvious potential to curtail the party’s high-spending social policy agenda that had been largely maintained between 1983-87.

By early 1989 the policy review had evolved into a coherent document called *‘Meet the Challenge, Make the Change’*, and this indicated that *‘only two clear spending*

*commitments remained*³⁷ from Labour's 1987 manifesto and its relatively expansive range of policy proposals, namely ongoing commitments to increase both the state pension and child benefit. These were emblematic social policies traditionally aligned with the political left and its commitment to the welfare state, and they were particularly fought for by left-leaning members of the Shadow Cabinet such as Robin Cook, amidst an environment of notable tightening of spending proposals and a growing desire within the Kinnock leadership for Labour to be seen as more fiscally responsible in the eyes of key voters. This more rigorous scrutiny of expenditure was primarily overseen by Margaret Beckett, who between 1989-92 served as Shadow Chancellor John Smith's effective deputy as a stern Shadow Chief Secretary of the Treasury, and whose remit in this sphere was unofficially referred to as 'Beckett's Law'³⁸. This more disciplined approach to spending pledges reflected the increasing tendency of Kinnock's leadership to pragmatically review and discard aspects of the 1987 manifesto it deemed either unaffordable or unpopular, which notably impacted on social policy. There was also an increased willingness to debate and at least consider some degree of marketisation and conditionality in the provision of welfare services, as had been instigated by the Thatcher government, and which would be further rolled out in policy terms by the Major government into the 1990s.

Impact of policy review on social policy and electoral fortunes

Nevertheless, there were ongoing negative side-effects of Labour's remaining social policy commitments, with former Labour press officer Andy McSmith acknowledging that the welfare benefit pledges that survived the policy review were expensive and served to continue to associate Labour with a profligate 'tax and spend' image. In a similar vein,

although Philip Gould has claimed the *'ditching of unpopular policies through the policy review'* was one of Kinnock's *'two great modernising achievements'*³⁹ (the other being the purging of Militant), problems continued regarding the party's broader image, its economic reputation, and its social policy programme into the 1990s. Indeed, Gould negatively concluded that the post-1987 policy review *'was fundamentally a missed opportunity for which..... (Labour) paid a heavy price in 1992'*, based on the premise that the party was *'changing too little and too slowly'*⁴⁰ (a view notably shared by arch-modernisers like Tony Blair). Labour's 1992 manifesto nevertheless somewhat boldly proclaimed that the *'most effective way to reduce poverty quickly is to increase child benefit and pensions'*⁴¹, with child benefit accordingly proposed to be increased up to £9.95 week for all children, (equating to a £127.40 annual increase for a family with two children), with pensions (as in 1987) to be increased by £5 a week for a single person, and £8 a week for a married couple⁴². This negative interpretation of the maintenance of some relatively generous social policy pledges stemmed from how they would be funded; namely by proposed increases in National Insurance payments *'by a very substantial amount for people earning over £21,000 to pay for child benefits and pensions'*⁴³, and which ultimately served as a ticking timebomb under Labour's future electoral prospects.

Such social policies, alongside a proposed statutory minimum wage that had been specified at £3.40 an hour⁴⁴, were subsequently exploited *'effectively and tirelessly by the Conservatives during the 1992 election to convince the public that Labour was still the party of high tax'*⁴⁵, as evident in John Major's successful 'tax bombshell' campaign⁴⁶ that tore into John Smith's ill-fated 'Shadow Budget'. The potency of such likely assaults on Labour's taxation plans as the basis of funding its social policy agenda had already been detected by

Labour's own private polling, which acknowledged that in 1992 *'around 70 per cent of voters expected to pay more taxes under a Labour government'*,⁴⁷ which was evidently linked to manifesto commitments that continued to advocate a markedly more generous programme (compared to the Conservatives) of funding for the NHS and various other social policy measures and welfare benefits⁴⁸ to tackle unemployment, poverty and failing public services. This was a lesson that Kinnock's rising stars within his Shadow Cabinet (and the party's future leadership axis), Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, took careful note of in terms of framing their own electoral strategy for New Labour up to 1997 and beyond⁴⁹.

Conclusion and overview

Subsequently, and despite significant policy refinements, the 1992 electoral outcome indicated that Neil Kinnock's often emotional commitment towards addressing rising inequality and protecting vulnerable groups within an expansive social policy programme, had again been thwarted by broader public scepticism. Even though the post-1987 policy review had culminated in a scenario whereby the party's revised *'programme in 1992 (bore) little similarity to the manifesto on which it lost the 1983 general election'*⁵⁰, the party's fourth consecutive defeat once again highlighted the unerring political dilemma at the heart of Kinnock's progressively modernising agenda. This stemmed from how he sought to 'square the circle' of offering more compassionate and generous social policy options in response to the various failings of Thatcherism (derived from his egalitarian and social democratic principles), yet while also pursuing economic credibility and fiscal responsibility. Such ongoing modifications to social policy also generated criticisms from the left of the Labour Party that Kinnock was flippantly abandoning his formerly much-vaunted principles within this policy

area, which such critics highlighted as a sign of him being untrustworthy and unprincipled; therefore reducing rather than enhancing his electability. The left and right of Labour have continued to debate this specific perception of Kinnock in the ensuing years, but despite his vigorous efforts in instigating such a deep-rooted policy review, Labour's capacity to convince the electorate of the affordability of its social policy goals was evidently never convincingly achieved until after Kinnock's leadership expired; most notably in the aftermath of Black Wednesday (September 1992), and in turn following the advent of the Blair leadership era from mid-1994 onwards.

In one of her wilder claims at the end of her premiership, Margaret Thatcher accused Neil Kinnock of being a "crypto Communist"⁵¹, but his policy agenda (both social and economic) didn't really justify such an allegation. While he maintained his inherent faith in social justice, greater equality, and the apparent remedy of relatively expansive social policies to achieve such aspirations, as the 1990s dawned the former left-wing firebrand was modernizing Labour while pragmatically moving it in a more moderate social democratic direction, and subsequently having difficulty in still classifying himself as socialist⁵². In hindsight, social policy formulation as part of the enabling welfare state was pivotal to the modernising evolution of Labour under Kinnock, primarily because it formed a large chunk of Labour's traditional policy expenditure that came under intense scrutiny by both the media and political opponents under his leadership from 1983 onwards. Consequently, Labour's social policy agenda proved to be one of the most frustrating areas of Kinnock's nine-year tenure as leader, because regardless of his apparently sincere intentions in responding to evident failings in welfare provision under the Conservatives, questions lingered about the cost and feasibility of his proposals. This was despite the ongoing streamlining of the volume

and scope of Labour's various commitments across pensions, NHS, housing, etc., in response to successive general election defeats and the dominant Thatcherite agenda which advocated a smaller state, and which effectively attacked the perceived profligacy and impracticality of such alternative policies from the political left. Kinnock's social policy programme was therefore eroded by longer-term public doubts about the party's broader economic competence (which pre-dated his leadership), and notably stemmed back to negative memories of previous Labour governments during the 1960s and 70s. This ultimately meant that Kinnock's determined attempts to cultivate an appealing, virtuous and compassionate Labour narrative for social policy, aligned with his own personal heartfelt aspirations, was increasingly overshadowed and diluted by his prevailing pragmatism, fiscal strategizing, and (particularly to his critics) sometimes even an image of cynical political manoeuvring in response to successive electoral setbacks.

¹ Neil Kinnock's speech to the Welsh Labour Party conference in Llandudno, 15th May 1987, <https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/neil-kinnock>

² Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, (Little, Brown and Company, London, 1998), Ch.2, p.41-42

³ Andy McSmith, *Faces of Labour: the inside story*, (Verso, London/New York, 1996), Ch.2, p.98

⁴ Neil Kinnock, speech in Bridgend, 7th June 1983, cited in *Thorns and Roses: Neil Kinnock- speeches 1983-1991*, Introduced by Peter Kellner, (Hutchinson, London, 1992), Introduction, p.7

⁵ Neil Kinnock, Leader-Elect's speech, 2nd October 1983, Annual Labour Party Conference, Brighton, cited in *ibid.*, p.43

⁶ *ibid.*, p.59

⁷ Neil Kinnock, Leader's speech, 1st October 1985, Annual Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth, cited in *ibid.*, p.76

⁸ Neil Kinnock, Leader's speech, 30th September 1986, Annual Labour Party Conference, Blackpool, cited in *ibid.*, p.111

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, (Little, Brown and Company, London, 1998), Ch.4, p.121

¹¹ Neil Kinnock, Leader's speech, 2nd October 1984, Annual Labour Party Conference, Blackpool, cited in *Thorns and Roses: Neil Kinnock- speeches 1983-1991*, Introduced by Peter Kellner, (Hutchinson, London, 1992), p.67-68

¹² Neil Kinnock, Leader's speech, 30th September 1986, Annual Labour Party Conference, Blackpool, cited in *ibid.*, p.112

¹³ 1987 Labour Party Manifesto, <http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1987/1987-labour-manifesto.shtml>

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- ¹⁴ See Andy McSmith, *No Such Thing As Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s*, (Constable, London, 2010), Ch.10, p.203 & Ch.14, p.264-5
- ¹⁵ See Wheatley Housing Act (1924), Greenwood Housing Act (1930), New Towns Act (1946).
- ¹⁶ Andrew Gimson, *How Thatcher sold council houses – and created a new generation of property owners*, Conservative Home website, 21st March 2014, <http://www.conservativehome.com/thetorydiary/2014/03/how-thatcher-sold-council-houses-and-created-a-new-generation-of-property-owners.html>
- ¹⁷ Peter Kellner, cited in *Thorns and Roses: Neil Kinnock- speeches 1983-1991*, Introduced by Peter Kellner, (Hutchinson, London, 1992), p.57
- ¹⁸ Andy McSmith, *No Such Thing As Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s*, (Constable, London, 2010), Ch.14, p.265
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