The period between 1979 and 1997 saw fundamental changes in the structure, ideology and electoral appeal of the Labour Party. This process, the ‘modernisation’ of the party, led to the formation of ‘New Labour’, a movement in sharp contrast with the party’s left-wing position of the early 1980s. This modernisation altered Labour’s policies, internal structures and constitution. Across these years, the party moved away from calls for widespread nationalisation, unilateralism and European withdrawal, towards an embrace of supply-side economics and a closer relationship with the market. Through organisational reform, Labour’s structures were also modernised. At the beginning of this period, Labour gave a 90 per cent share of its conference vote to the trade union movement, granted constituency and conference votes to ‘delegates’ only, allowed MPs alone a vote in leadership elections, and had a left-leaning manifesto that was out of touch with the median voter. By the 1997 general election, Labour had a 50/50 split between unions and constituencies at conference, One Member, One Vote (OMOV) within conference, candidate selection and leadership ballots, and a manifesto far more in tune with the views of the British public. These changes, alongside the reformulation of Labour’s policy-making avenues (and redirection of policy outputs), through the Policy Review and the creation of the National Policy Forum (NPF),
substantially changed the constitution, organisation, and electoral fortunes of the Labour Party.

Labour’s modernisation had three principle strands: policy, organisation and presentation. The presentational reforms in these years have been highlighted in some depth by Peter Mandelson, Alastair Campbell and Philip Gould, whilst the effects of Labour’s policy changes have been widely debated by Stephen Driver and Luke Martell, Colin Hay, Richard Heffernan and Tudor Jones, amongst others. The organisational reform of the Labour Party, however, outside analyses by Meg Russell and Lewis Minkin which focus largely on Tony Blair’s revolution and not the organisational reform undertaken before 1994; Thomas Quinn who provides a theoretical analysis of the major changes, using a rational choice model, though occasionally at the expense of some detail; and Gerald Taylor whose work focuses mainly on the 1987–92 Policy Review, has largely been overlooked. A thorough evaluation of Labour’s organisational modernisation from 1979 to 1997, which was the necessary pre-requisite for changes to policy, presentation and strategy made in the latter part of this period, has not been researched in full. This monograph provides a reappraisal of Labour’s internal modernisation during the party’s eighteen years out of office, between 1979 and 1997, using entirely new source material, exhaustive archival research and interviews with Labour leaders, politicians, party staff and other major protagonists. The reform of Labour’s constitutional and organisational structures in this period marked the first major change to the party’s internal arrangements since 1918. Significantly, the settlement achieved by 1997 remained unaltered during New Labour’s entire period of office until 2010.

Labour’s modernisation was also catalysed by a variety of external factors which influenced the party’s internal struggles. These enabling events involved challenges to Labour’s electability, principally the party’s four election defeats in 1979,
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1983, 1987 and 1992 and the impact of Thatcherism. A further factor in the 1983 and 1987 contests was the danger posed to Labour’s base by the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Although this work does not seek to engage directly with the policies of the Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997, it would be imprudent to negate the impact of Margaret Thatcher’s and (to a much lesser extent) John Major’s administrations on the fortunes of the Labour Party in this period. Whilst Labour in this period ‘did not become Thatcherite or SDP mark II’, the Conservative ascendency clearly influenced changes within the Labour Party. Labour’s 1979 defeat enshrined the party’s turn to the left, not only in policy terms but also in the party constitution. This era resulted in changes to Labour’s system for leadership elections and mandatory reselection, alongside the election of Michael Foot in 1980 and the left-leaning 1983 election manifesto. Nevertheless, it must be noted that in policy terms The New Hope for Britain in 1983 had much in common with Labour’s Programme 1973. The crushing 1983 defeat led to a change in direction, culminating in Neil Kinnock’s leadership victory and his attempts to build a consensus for change in 1983–86. Defeat in 1987 instigated Labour’s Policy Review, which drastically changed the party’s policy outputs. Indeed, some academics view this exercise as an attempt to ‘catch up’ with Thatcher, although this viewpoint is disputed in Chapter 3 of this book. Finally, the 1992 defeat led to a change in Labour’s leadership and a reassessment of the party’s links with the trade unions under John Smith. The Labour Party’s organisational change in this period was a direct response to both Conservative electoral success (1979–92) and the 1980s ascendancy of Labour’s left. This response did not amount to an accommodation with the Conservative Party, rather Labour’s policy changes were rooted firmly within its own history, whilst organisational change created a party with a ‘New’ identity, constitution and internal structure.
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The structure of the monograph

Labour’s modernisation can only be explained by a full investigation of the major internal changes implemented across the party’s years in opposition between 1979 and 1997. The cumulative impact of the organisational reforms of Kinnock, Smith and Blair are discussed across the following six chapters. The progress of Labour’s modernisation, across the entirety of the party’s period in opposition, is crucial to the understanding of the different approaches taken by Labour leaders on organisational reform. Early analyses of the party’s transformation, particularly those of Colin Hughes and Patrick Wintour, and Martin Smith, highlight the seminal importance of the 1987 election defeat and the party’s subsequent Policy Review in changing Labour’s direction. Yet, to some extent, these analyses neglect the period between 1981 and 1986. Conversely, contemporary histories of Labour’s modernisation, such as Lewis Minkin’s *Blair Supremacy*, and the equally valuable *Building New Labour* by Meg Russell, only briefly discuss – and thus, in this author’s view, incorrectly devalue – the 1980s reforms by focusing largely on the renewal of the party under Blair. On these lines, Adam Lent has argued convincingly that the period before 1987 has not been adequately covered in the historiography of Labour’s modernisation. But his search for the ‘point of origin’ in Labour’s transformation in these years overlooks the multi-faceted reality of Labour’s modernisation. Labour’s modernisation had a variety of strands and a multitude of authors. Consequently, in this work, Labour’s modernisation is broken down into six key areas which form the basis of the following six chapters:

1 Halting the advance of the left, 1979–83
2 The realignment of the left, 1983–87
4 One Member, One Vote, 1992–94
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5 Clause IV, 1994–95
6 Partnership in Power, 1995–97

Although the six chapters of this monograph are in chronological order, they have been carefully selected as the six major organisational events of Labour’s modernisation between 1979 and 1997. This work does not seek to cover every event across Labour’s eighteen years out of power, but instead investigates the six key areas of Labour’s modernisation in this period: the advance and realignment of the left, the Policy Review, OMOV, Clause IV, and Partnership in Power.

Chapter 1 investigates the high-water mark of Labour’s left in the early 1980s and describes the inheritance of Labour’s modernisers at the beginning of their fightback. In 1979–81 the Labour Party was dominated by the trade unions and, to some extent within the constituencies and the conference, the hard-left. In this period, the move towards the mandatory reselection of MPs and an electoral college for leadership selection, split 40/30/30 between the unions, Constituency Labour Party’s (CLPs), and MPs respectively, highlighted the party’s shift to the left. The election of Michael Foot as Labour leader in 1980 further showcased the change in the party’s ideological outlook. In addition, Labour’s policies also began to reflect this viewpoint. The party’s 1983 election manifesto included commitments to left-wing tenets such as unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from the European Economic Community, the repeal of Conservative trade union laws, and widespread nationalisation. Each of these policies were to be reversed over the next eighteen years, principally through the Policy Review, but the organisational changes of the left were unpicked far more gradually.

The ascendancy of the ‘hard’ or ‘outside’ left in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the constitutional changes sponsored by these groups led directly to the formation of the SDP and the defection of twenty-eight Labour MPs in 1981. The story of Labour’s
modernisation begins with the centre-right MPs who remained within the party, alongside the trade unions, to agree the ‘Peace of Bishop’s Stortford’ which prevented any further constitutional changes that would benefit the left. The reversal of the left’s organisational victories in 1979–81 and policy victories before 1983, began under Kinnock’s leadership. During his tenure, Labour radically reformed both party organisation and party policy. Chapter 2 highlights how Kinnock’s alliance with soft-left members Tom Sawyer, David Blunkett, Eddie Haigh and Michael Meacher on Labour’s National Executive Committee (NEC) was forged in the aftermath of the miners’ strike and the Militant Tendency’s insurgency in Liverpool. This coalition paved the way for fundamental changes to party policy to pass through the NEC. Chapter 3 details Kinnock’s major reform project, the Policy Review, led by Tom Sawyer, which saw Labour abandon its commitments to unilateralism, European withdrawal and widespread nationalisation. Yet, Kinnock stalled in his attempts to introduce widespread reform to Labour’s internal structures following his defeat on OMOV in 1984. However, the seeds of Labour’s modernisation were firmly sown in the Kinnock era.

Chapter 4 investigates the organisational reform enacted by Smith through the campaign for OMOV and the reduction of the trade union bloc vote, from 90 to 70 per cent of the conference share. Labour’s traditional organisational structures had been only slightly modernised during Kinnock’s period of office. Before Smith’s tenure, Labour still operated a system of delegatory democracy that gave great power within CLPs to elected delegates and disenfranchised the lay party member from decision-making. This system of delegatory democracy also extended to the trade unions, where elected executive committees made decisions on behalf of thousands of members. Within the union movement, power was invested in union general secretaries who controlled the ‘bloc vote’ of their individual unions at Labour Party conference. Until 1993 this bloc vote amounted to 90 per
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cent of the conference, with only 9 per cent being held by constituency parties on a non-OMOV basis. The fierce battle for OMOV, whilst successful, stalled further talk of modernisation within Smith’s camp, much to the dismay of Blair, Mandelson and Gordon Brown. The Smith era also saw the introduction of the NPF, first suggested under Kinnock in 1990, which continues to function as Labour’s major policy organ in 2019.

Tony Blair’s early leadership of the Labour Party was characterised by his accelerated pursuit of modernisation. This monograph examines the impact of Blair’s organisational modernisation in the period before Labour’s general election victory in 1997. Chapter 5 investigates Blair’s campaign to reform Clause IV, part 4 of Labour’s constitution, which brought Labour closer to the electorate and distanced the party from an anachronistic milestone. Chapter 6 details Blair’s quest to modernise the party’s internal organs through the Partnership in Power reforms, largely neglected in the historiography of the period. These reforms aimed to create a partnership between Labour’s leaders and lay members, but in reality, shifted power within the party further to the centre. The changes also heavily involved Sawyer who, after Blair’s election to the leadership, became the party’s General Secretary (1994–98). Partnership in Power fundamentally altered the composition and powers of Labour’s once mighty NEC, which was divested of its policy-making role within the party apparatus. In addition, the reforms also removed the ability of Labour constituencies to submit unlimited resolutions to the party conference. In their place, a revamped NPF, with representatives from every section of the party, became Labour’s chief policy-making organ.

Historiography

A wealth of books and monographs have been published on Labour in the 1980s and 1990s, and equally abundant are the tomes of biographies published about the main actors in
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Labour’s modernisation. Furthermore, following the end of the Blair project, there has seemingly been a rush to publish autobiographies and diaries by former Labour leaders, cabinet members, backbenchers and staff members, who have all sought to establish their place in the history, and to stake their claim on the successes of these Labour governments. Although the modernisation of the Labour Party has been touched upon in these studies, the majority of works focus on the party’s policy changes and not the substantial organisational reforms made in these years, despite the salience attached to the politics of organisation by Labour’s leaders. Labour’s deputy leader (1994–2007), John Prescott, claims that ‘organisation is as important as the policy’, whilst Blair believed that if Labour had ‘not changed’ internally then the party would not have been able to ‘change the country’. Yet, no single monograph has focused on the entirety of the Labour’s organisational changes which took place between 1979 and 1997. Whilst a number of volumes consider elements of the changes introduced during Labour’s modernisation (for instance, the realignment of the left, the Policy Review, OMOV, Clause IV and Partnership in Power) such areas are examined either individually, or in isolation. Consequently, no academic study has traced Labour’s modernisation and organisational reform throughout the party’s eighteen years in opposition.

General works which cover the majority of the period in question – James Cronin’s New Labour’s Pasts; Steven Fielding’s Labour: Decline and Renewal; Tudor Jones’s Remaking the Labour Party; and Leo Panitch and Colin Leys’s The End of Parliamentary Socialism – trace the precursors to Labour’s organisational modernisation very effectively. Yet, although these are four undoubtedly detailed studies, Cronin devotes only four of eleven chapters, Fielding three of ten, Jones two of seven, and Panitch and Leys one of twelve, to specifically cover Labour’s modernisation of 1979–97. It is fully recognised that modernisation itself is not the complete scope of the aforementioned works, but their lack of focus on this topic
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allows these authors only to skim the surface of the Policy Review and OMOV, whilst very few references are made to *Partnership in Power*. On the other hand, Philip Gould’s *The Unfinished Revolution* does provide a comprehensive assessment of the whole period, although from a somewhat partisan viewpoint as a former senior advisor to the Labour Party. Yet, Gould makes only passing reference to the Policy Review and Kinnock’s organisational changes and neglects to mention *Partnership in Power*, despite a deep analysis of the Blair era. Thus, the following chapters seek to fill a clear historiographical gap in the literature of the modern Labour Party by examining Labour’s modernisation in the period between 1979 and 1997.

A number of studies have examined the foundations of Labour’s modernisation in the late 1970s and 1980s but none of these have investigated the impact of the 1979–83 period on Labour’s later organisational changes. Dianne Hayter’s *Fightback* attaches great weight to the initial struggle of Labour’s centre-right to keep the party afloat following defections to the SDP, but her analysis ends in 1988, bar a brief epilogue, and even in the years assessed does not focus on the equally important, in this author’s view, contribution of the ‘soft’ left from the mid-1980s.16 Likewise, David and Maurice Kogan, Austin Mitchell, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley have all produced detailed studies on the immediate antecedents to Labour’s modernisation but none of these, largely owing to their dates of publication, cover the period after the mid-1980s.17 Beginning with a study of the left’s 1979–81 pursuit of constitutional changes in Chapter 1, this monograph provides a complete picture of Labour’s modernisation from this point through to Labour’s 1997 general election victory.

With regard to the Kinnock era, a number of texts have investigated the impact of the Policy Review, but few include a reference to either Labour’s prior issues or its future development. The most authoritative study of this period, Taylor’s *Labour’s Renewal*, provides a detailed overview of the party’s Policy Review
and Blair’s reform to Clause IV, but only lightly touches upon the atmosphere within the party before the Review took place, neglecting to investigate Kinnock’s cultivation of and reliance on the soft-left, or the impact of the Militant Inquiry, and ends before the *Partnership in Power* reforms and Labour’s ultimate renewal in 1997. Similarly, Hughes and Wintour’s *Labour Rebuilt*, whilst providing a detailed study of the Policy Review and a passing mention to Kinnock’s work with the soft-left, due to its publication date, does not include an analysis of the Review’s later years, or the modernisation undertaken by Smith and Blair. Richard Heffernan and Mike Marqusee cover both the realignment of the left and the Policy Review in a negative analysis of the Kinnock years but, again, their study ends in 1992. These works, whilst providing some depth on the Policy Review itself, do not sufficiently highlight the prominent role of the soft-left in Labour’s modernisation, particularly in the mid-1980s when the most fundamental changes to party policy and party organisation took place, as argued in Chapter 2 of this work. Kinnock has emphasised the decisive role of the soft-left throughout his leadership of the party: ‘I couldn’t have done it, in the way that we did it without Tom Sawyer, or Eddie Haigh, or Charles Clarke.’ Whilst the emergence of the soft-left has found a place in some, but by no means all, accounts on Labour’s modernisation, a debate surrounds the date of their break with the Bennite hard-left. Hughes and Wintour, Bob Fryer and Stephen Williams, and James Cronin claim the realignment of the left took place as early as 1984, whilst Heffernan and Marqusee, and Andy McSmith date the split to the following year. Chapter 2 strongly argues that these works overlook a number of soft-left members’ positions, especially Sawyer’s, and that the breakaway cannot be said to have occurred before 1986. Once complete, the alliance between the soft-left and Kinnock allowed Labour to proceed with fundamental policy and organisational changes under the Policy Review from 1987.
A significant historiographical debate surfaces around Labour’s organisational and policy changes in the later Kinnock years, principally the Policy Review. In the aftermath of Labour’s fourth successive general election defeat in 1992, a ‘modernisation’ thesis began to emerge amongst academics and journalists. Ivor Crewe, David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, and Martin Smith all contend that Labour ‘modernised’ in this period by moving the party away from both Old Labour and Thatcherism, towards either European social democracy, or back to Labour’s 1960s revisionism. In contrast, Colin Hay and Richard Heffernan have argued that Labour’s Policy Review was actually an accommodation with Thatcherism and not a return to the party’s roots. In Chapter 3 it is strongly argued that Kinnock’s Policy Review had neither the aim, nor the effect of accommodation with the Conservatives. Rather than playing ‘catch-up’ with the Conservative Party, Labour’s policy and organisational changes between 1987 and 1992 were broadly within the parameters of the party’s history but were not a conscious attempt to turn the clock back to the 1960s. Stephen Driver and Luke Martell have described this as ‘post-Thatcherite’ politics. Whilst the key changes assessed in this period, particularly the move towards multilateralism and the watering down of public ownership, were returns to previous Labour policy, the party’s move towards a full embrace of the market alongside an interventionist, enabling state, rather than being an accommodation with Thatcher, marked the beginning of a ‘new’ Labour Party with an updated economic outlook for the 1990s. In addition, the organisational changes pursued in this period had neither a previous parallel within Labour history, nor a direct equivalent within the Conservative Party under Thatcher.

John Smith’s pursuit of OMOV has been covered in passing by a number of works, but few detailed analyses of his leadership exist within Labour’s historiography. Mark Stuart’s John Smith: A Life and McSmith’s John Smith: A Life, 1938–1994 remain the only two biographical studies published, and these works devote only
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five of twenty-six and three of twenty-one chapters, respectively, to Smith’s leadership of the Labour Party. Furthermore, both works dedicate only one short chapter to Smith’s crowning achievement as Labour leader, the passage of OMOV. Separately, Keith Alderman and Neil Carter, and, in particular, Mark Wickham-Jones have advanced the OMOV debate across a number of journal articles, but the understandable focus of these pieces is on the Smith era itself and not the entirety of Labour’s modernisation. As pointed out by Wickham-Jones, historians have given little attention to the work of the 1992–93 Trade Union Links Review Group in preparing the ground for OMOV. Besides Wickham-Jones, the only authoritative study on the group’s work is provided by Lewis Minkin, a member of the Review Group itself. Chapter 4 engages with this debate by examining the minutes of the Trade Union Links Review Group alongside interviews with major protagonists. In this area, a scholarly debate emerges around OMOV’s eventual impact in transferring power away from the unions with Fielding, James Naughtie, Quinn and Stuart asserting that the change weakened the unions. In contrast, Russell and Wickham-Jones have argued that the 1993 change to OMOV did not reduce the role of the trade unions in Labour’s internal affairs. Chapter 4 argues that Smith’s change was more symbolic than revolutionary with the trade unions trading a reduction in their bloc vote (from 90 to 70 per cent) along with a small decrease in their electoral college vote (from 40 to 33 per cent), for an increased role in candidate selection as individual trade unionists, if not as a collective movement. This gradual, but symbolically significant, reform led to charges that Smith was not a true moderniser and catalysed Blair to pursue immediate organisational and constitutional changes under his own leadership after Smith’s untimely death.

Under Blair’s leadership, the rewriting of Clause IV placed an identifiable ideological, organisational and constitutional gap between old Labour and New, building on and cementing
the changes made by Kinnock and Smith. Rather than being merely a symbolic change, as advanced by Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann, and Jennifer Lees-Marchment, or an unnecessary one, as described by Prescott, Chris Mullin and Clare Short, the reform of Clause IV was central to breaking with Labour’s past. As detailed in Chapter 5, the change to Labour’s constitution secured in 1995 was a watershed moment and provides a key example of the significance of organisational change, as advanced throughout this monograph. Whilst Labour policy has alternated between left and right throughout the party’s existence, the constitutional change secured by the revision of Clause IV made an indelible mark on Labour’s future outlook, firmly distancing the party from its past.

Finally, whilst some works exist on most of the topics covered in this text – although as expressed previously, these studies often focus on single issues presented in isolation – very few books on the modern Labour Party investigate the impact of the Partnership in Power reforms covered in Chapter 6. These changes fundamentally altered Labour’s constitution, policy formation avenues and the composition of the party’s NEC. The vast majority of these rule alterations have survived through to Corbyn’s leadership. Yet, within the wealth of history written on New Labour, only Minkin and Russell cover the Partnership in Power reforms in an academic monograph, but both Minkin, as a member of party staff, and Russell, as a member of the NPF, played some role in the very groups they analyse. In addition, Minkin’s respected work, The Blair Supremacy, provides a thorough analysis of party management in the Blair era, but does not trace back the story into the immediate past; likewise, Russell’s detailed study pays little attention to the Kinnock era in ‘building New Labour’. Patrick Seyd has also published a number of articles on Partnership in Power but, understandably, these analyses do not link, in any great depth, to the organisational changes preceding the 1997 reforms. Outside these three analyses, academics have devoted little attention to the
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*Partnership in Power* reforms. Fielding, Panitch and Leys, and Quinn have criticised the project, citing the diminution of conference sovereignty, but they do not provide a holistic analysis of the complete package of reforms, chiefly, the renewed NPF and the reformulated NEC.\(^3\) As such, Chapter 6 provides a uniquely detailed study of *Partnership in Power*, utilising the previously undocumented papers of the Cranfield School of Management NEC sessions, alongside the minutes of four NEC Task Forces, supplemented by interviews with those involved: Sawyer, Blair, Jon Cruddas, Maggie Jones, Sally Morgan and Margaret McDonagh, and critics such as Dennis Skinner.

**Tom Sawyer**

This monograph reassesses Labour’s modernisation between 1979 and 1997, alongside an emphasis upon the undocumented and vital contribution made by Tom Sawyer. The former Labour General Secretary (1994–98), NEC member (1982–94; 1999–2001), and NUPE/UNISON Deputy General Secretary (1982–94) played a central role in many of Labour’s major internal organisational projects throughout this period. Sawyer, moved the amendment establishing the NEC’s Inquiry into the Militant-dominated Liverpool District Labour Party (1985) alongside serving on the Inquiry team itself; chaired Labour’s Home Policy Committee (1986–94); authored and chaired Labour’s Policy Review (1987–92); was the Chairman of the Labour Party (1990–91); moved that the Executive should examine the link between the Labour Party and the trade unions (1992) and consequently, served on the Trade Union Review Group which discussed the move to OMOV (1992–94); served as Labour’s General Secretary (1994–98); convinced Blair to consult and ballot party members on Clause IV (1995); and authored the *Partnership in Power* reforms which substantially changed the role of the party conference, NEC and NPF (1997). Yet, despite his role at the forefront of
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Labour’s modernisation, Sawyer has been relegated to a footnote in the historiography of this period.

Although most histories of the modern Labour Party make reference to Sawyer, few expand on his crucial role at the vanguard of Labour’s modernisation under both Kinnock and Blair. Beyond a two-line quotation in a three-page biographical entry on Sawyer by Greg Rosen stating that: ‘Next to the triumvirate of Kinnock, Blair and Brown, Tom Sawyer played probably the greatest individual part in the birth of New Labour’, Sawyer’s full contribution is not accurately recorded in any major text. Sawyer’s impact in shaping the modern Labour Party, although often unseen and uncredited, was rarely unappreciated or unnoticed by a succession of Labour leaders and senior politicians. During the interviews undertaken for this project, although one opponent of Labour’s modernisation, Dennis Skinner, believed Sawyer to be insignificant, the majority of participants including Blair, Kinnock, Charles Clarke, Anji Hunter, Mandelson, Margaret McDonagh and Sally Morgan have all emphasised the absolute importance of Sawyer’s role in the party’s reformation from the mid-1980s through to 1997. The two former Labour leaders within this group make the most profound statements about Sawyer’s contribution. Blair reflects that: ‘Tom Sawyer was extremely important because he pushed the modernisation agenda and he could explain it in the right way’, whilst Kinnock emphasises that he ‘couldn’t have done it’ without Sawyer.

Intriguingly, Sawyer began his political career firmly on the left, working on Benn’s deputy leadership campaign in 1981 and opposing the expulsion of the Militant editorial board in 1983. From this point, Seyd states that Sawyer’s ‘career closely mirrors the transformation of the Labour Party’. This is undoubtedly true. Sawyer, and other members of the soft-left (detailed in Chapter 2), gradually moved towards Kinnock in 1985–86, after their dismay at the left’s conduct during the Militant Inquiry and the miners’ strike, alongside Labour’s continued struggles in
the polls. Sawyer’s ‘Damascene conversion’\textsuperscript{41} led him working ever closer with Kinnock, as the author of the Policy Review, and chair of the Home Policy Committee. Due to his history of modernisation under Kinnock and his standing within the union movement, Sawyer was hand-picked by Blair, upon becoming leader, to serve as Labour’s next General Secretary, despite the reluctance of the incumbent, Larry Whitty, to depart. From this position, Sawyer completed both his and the party’s journey to modernisation: organising the operation to change Clause IV, moving the party’s campaign unit to Millbank Tower, delivering Investors in People status and, crucially, devising New Labour’s major organisational reform project, \textit{Partnership in Power}.

Tom Sawyer was one of the modern Labour Party’s chief architects. As a trade union NEC member and later as Labour’s General Secretary, Sawyer did not formulate policy, but crucially provided the scaffolding for the party’s organisational reform from which Labour leaders established far-reaching changes in Labour’s direction. Whilst many actors can lay claim to a role in Labour’s modernisation, none share Sawyer’s continuity at the very top of Labour’s organisational structures between 1982 and 1998. Sawyer’s leadership on seminal party organisational reforms, coupled with the appraisals of senior politicians and colleagues, make the absence of a comprehensive assessment of his achievements from the historiography of this period staggering. Significantly, Sawyer’s authorship of the two major organisational reviews in this period: the Policy Review and \textit{Partnership in Power}, fundamentally changed the direction, organisation and electoral fortunes of the Labour Party and make the history of this period worthy of reappraisal. These reforms made substantial changes to Labour’s policies and internal organisation and have survived for over twenty years. The party still uses the NPF, as suggested by Sawyer, to formulate policy, and conference remains, despite criticisms, a stage-managed showcase, rather than an arena for confrontational debate.
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Using previously untapped source material: the handwritten Sawyer Journals\(^4\) (1982–98) and Archive\(^3\) (1970–2016), alongside interviews with key protagonists from this period across the Labour Party’s ideological spectrum, this work reassesses Labour’s modernisation by emphasising the vital role played by Sawyer. The monograph, however, extends far beyond Sawyer’s own contributions to the party’s changes. This includes extensive archival research into the Labour Party Archives, held at the Labour History Archive (LHASC), Manchester; the Neil Kinnock Papers and the Charles Clarke Papers, held at Churchill College, Cambridge; the records of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, held at the Bishopsgate Institute, London; the archives of John Prescott, Chris Mullin and Roy Hattersley, held at Hull History Centre; and the records of the National Union of Public Employees, UNISON, Rodney Bickerstaffe and the Militant Tendency, all held at Warwick University. This variety of material, alongside Sawyer’s Journals and Archive, has been accessed to present an academically balanced account of Labour’s modernisation. Using these archival works, alongside oral testimonies, and the previously unreleased Sawyer Journals, this monograph redefines the modernisation of the Labour Party in the period between 1979 and 1997.

Conclusion

The Labour Party radically altered its organisational structures and policy outlook between 1979 and 1997, with many commentators, alongside Blair himself, describing the party’s eventual terminus as a new creation: New Labour.\(^4\) However, Labour’s modernisation was an accumulation of different organisational initiatives, from different authors, across the party’s period in opposition. The following chapters trace the beginnings of this modernisation from the fightback against the hard-left’s ascendancy in the early 1980s, through the Kinnock era, ending with Blair’s constitutional
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and organisational reforms, and election victory, in 1997. Labour’s eighteen years in the wilderness brought about the greatest degree of organisational reform in the party’s history. The settlement conceived by Kinnock, cautiously nurtured by Smith, and birthed by Blair, survived Labour’s entire period of office (1997–2010). Yet, the salience of organisational reform and organisational control within the party has acquired greater importance since the Collins Review and Corbyn’s election in 2015. Indeed, Corbyn’s leadership has seen the unpicking of some of the Blair era reforms, through changes to the composition of the NEC and suggested alterations to Labour’s policy formulation routes, alongside calls for the return of the original Clause IV and mandatory reselection. These moves make the reappraisal of Labour’s modernisation of the 1980s and 1990s both timely and apposite.