

*Rhetoric of Reform and Renewal: The use of rhetoric by
Opposition party leaders elected on a mandate for
change.*

Kyle Yearwood

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree BA (Hons)
Communications

Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds

May 2013

Supervisor: Professor Stephen Coleman

Word count: 11,116

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of rhetoric from British political party leaders who have been elected to lead their parties in Opposition and into the following election. Each of the party leaders focused on in this paper were elected to their position following a single, or succession of, general election defeats; and were tasked with reforming their respective parties in order to make them electable again. The paper seeks to examine the use of rhetoric from these significant figures in modern British politics and their attempts to make their parties credible candidates in forthcoming election campaigns. The main body of the paper identifies key conventions used by Tony Blair and David Cameron to implement internal party reform and a move away from their traditional political positions, and to convince the electorate that their parties are worthy of government after lengthy spells on the Opposition benches. The latter part of the essay contrasts these conventions and techniques with Ed Miliband's current campaign to reform post-Blair/Brown Labour.

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1 Introduction

So the party is transformed. The vision is clear. And from that vision stems a modern programme of change and renewal for Britain.

(Labour Party General Election Manifesto, 1997)

Change has to happen, and to resist change – to go against modernisation – is to ally oneself with outdated modes of thinking.

(Heppell, 2012:24)

Over the past two decades, both at home in the UK and wider afield, 'change' has been cemented into the vocabulary of modern politics. Used by many political figures, leaders and commentators from positions throughout the political spectrum, the term refers to a large scale transformation and/or the taking of a new direction in political values, policies and the way in which various political organisations conduct themselves. The success of New Labour at the polls in the 1997 general election can be attributed to leader Tony Blair's mission to change the Labour Party, repositioning it against the 'historic radicalism of "Old" Labour' (Smith, 2000:457), embarking on a 'thorough and coherent realignment' of a tainted party that had been consigned to the Opposition benches for close to a generation (Jones, 1999:237), and vowing to end the days of 'Tory sleaze' (McIlroy, 2000:18; Wring, 2005:144). Blair's premise of change also tapped into the wider public sentiment of disillusionment with the government of the time after eighteen years of Conservative rule. However in the late 90s, the 'change' that was sweeping (or about to sweep) Britain transcended the traditional perimeters of party politics. Blair was in a position to take advantage of the optimism surrounding the new millennium, the technological revolution of the information age, and the era of 'Cool Britannia' in popular culture (BBC News, 1999; Labour Party, 2000:345-346; McAnulla, 2012:172).

The election of President Barack Obama in the US can, similarly, be attributed to the communication of his call for change and his ability to be representative of such change. It was during the 2008 election campaign the nominalised term 'change' (as in 'we need change', rather than 'we need *to* change' – used as a noun where the word would usually be used as a verb, reflecting a process rather than a thing; and without the definite article) became the political buzzword of the twenty-first century; growing from 'the classic appeal of the opposition party' to meaning something bigger and stronger (Machin, 2012:146; Dale, 2000:7). Drawing on his perceived inexperience and distance from previous administrations, and widespread dissatisfaction amongst the public with the current president, Obama was able to highlight the failings of the incumbent and call for a different approach. Obama's theme of change reignited the use of the term in a way which extends beyond just 'a change in government' (Jenkins, 2010:185). As a result, 'change', it could be argued has become somewhat clichéd in the sphere of political campaigning globally. In the UK, both Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, and David Cameron, leader of the Conservatives, were calling for change and claiming to be change (Heppell, 2012:36/42); whilst in France François Hollande was successful under his presidential campaign banner 'Change is Now'.

With language 'becoming an increasingly prominent element of the practices of politics and government' (Fairclough, 2000:4-6) playing a central role in all political activity (Chilton, 2002:3), it is of no surprise that political rhetoric and discourse have been well covered by Communications scholars; although still not to the extent that it warrants (Finlayson, 2008:445; Krebs, 2007:36). Similarly, there is great potential for influence through an inspired use of rhetoric and a convincing agenda for change and modernisation, 'given the fact that several elections have had relatively small margins of victory' (Benoit, 2001:28). Particular attention within the field of political communication has been paid by scholars to Blair's New Labour, Obama's 2008 presidential campaign and, to a lesser extent, David Cameron's Conservatives; although it is clear that there is little published work on the rhetoric behind the concept of political change, reform and modernisation.

In this thesis I shall use two key examples in contemporary British politics of political party leaders who were elected on a mandate to implement internal party change (with regards to positioning and policies) – Tony Blair

as leader of the Labour Party in Opposition from 1994-1997 and David Cameron as leader of the Conservative Party in Opposition from 2005-2010 – in identifying key rhetorical conventions in their discourse in applying these reforms and promoting them to the electorate. I will look in particular at how these leaders sell the need for change to their own party members and parliamentary colleagues, how they use rhetoric to make themselves and their parties seem representative of change, and how they use rhetoric directed at those within their parties who are reluctant or refuse to embrace change. I will then apply these findings to Ed Miliband, current Leader of the Opposition, and examine the extent to which he applies the identified rhetorical conventions and patterns of language as he attempts to make the Labour Party electable again following their general election defeat in 2010.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Labour Party – The road to modernisation

...political parties also need to change to keep in step with supporters and electors.

The emergence of New Labour in the 1990s is a good illustration of how a political party changes its position in order to engage with an electorate that has moved away from more socialist and radical politics...

(Shaw cited in Negrine, 2008:9)

The challenge to modernise the Labour Party began long before Blair's leadership of the party. After a 'disastrous general election defeat of June 1983' (Gouge, 2012:126) it became clear that the Labour Party needed to change. Under the leadership of Michael Foot, who's tenure as party leader and Leader of the Opposition is described by Gouge as 'a failure' faced an unpopular government but yet were unable to adapt to a 'changing electorate' and put before the voters a convincing case to lead the country (*ibid*:140). In response the party would turn to a 'youthful politician for leadership. Despite his left credentials, Neil Kinnock was destined to

oversee a wide-ranging reform programme designed to court, in his words, “floating voters” (Wring, 2005:81). As Barnes (cited in Stanyer, 2003:74) states, ‘All political parties are to a greater or lesser extent factionalized ideologically or in terms of views on a specific subject’, but intra-party factionalism and dissent proved a major obstacle during Kinnock’s spell as leader. In a bold attempt to return Labour to government and to break away from the regression of trade union domination and vocal far-left militants, he would engage in a long battle to rebrand Labour, and to reclaim the party from ‘militant tendency’ (Finlayson, 2008:459). Kinnock was of the belief that ‘Labour must convince the voters that it was not the lapdog of the unions and there was no better issue on which to be seen over-ruling the unions than one viewed by them as a matter of vital interest’ (Shaw, 1996:186-187). Despite the two election defeats suffered under his leadership, and having earned the ‘unenviable title of being the longest-serving Leader of the Opposition in the post-war period’ (Griffiths, 2012:142), the Welshman had made large strides towards making the party re-electable again, striving to ‘engage with an electorate that has moved away from more socialist and radical policies’ (Shaw cited in Negrine, 2008:9); progress his two successors would continue to build on.

Following the 1987 election loss, it was argued that while his rebranding efforts had been noticeable and had made a noticeable difference, it had fallen short of the required comprehensive party reform and was merely creating a façade by not addressing the full extent of the problems that the Labour Party faced. As Wring (2005:101) quotes, ‘You can’t sell something that people don’t want however well you package it’. The surprise poor showing at the 1992 general election provided many differing opinions by various Labour figures as to the reasons behind them snatching ‘Defeat from the jaws of victory’, in an election it was believed they ought to have won (Heffernan, 1992; Wring, 2005:116). Peter Mandelson’s, the party’s Director of Communications, post-mortem pointed towards ‘credibility problems... with the policies... [which] required a political solution. Labour itself had to be rebuilt – modernised in terms of policies and appeals’ (Wring, 2005:116), while Tony Blair, a junior shadow minister at the time, was certain ‘Labour did not lose the election because it was too moderate’ (*ibid*:116). The general consensus from modernisers within the party blamed the loss at a pace of change which ‘had been too slack, too weighed down by compromises’ (Shaw, 1996:195). John Smith was convincingly crowned his successor as leader of the Labour Party after a party-wide ballot; underpinning not just the extent to

which the party had changed, but also widespread understanding of the need to change with regards to policies and the communication of those policies (Wring, 2005:126). Just two years later Smith would die, and Blair would win the leadership election, vowing to continue the work the work of his two predecessors. As Negrine states,

It was a common belief that 'the Labour Party needed modernization if it was going to have any chance of winning power again. The Labour Party had lost four elections – in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992 – and many put forward the argument that it was still too strongly associated with its past – its links with the unions, nationalization, dissension and so on – to be trusted as a sound future government. More critically, it needed to find a new set of messages for it to connect with the changed circumstances of the 1990s.

(Negrine, 2008:57)

As a result the Labour Party turned towards the Democrats in the US who had embarked on a program of immense policy reforms after, similarly, coming to terms with the fact that it, too, was increasingly out of step with a changing electorate. Referred to by some as the 'Clintonisation' of the Labour Party (Wring, 2005:129), they emulated the reforms and communications strategy. The victory of the Bill Clinton and his "New" Democrats 'inspired Labour's new right in a way their party's fourth defeat had not' (*ibid*:127). Taking on the US Democratic Party blueprint, the Labour leadership aimed to 'downplay the importance of ideology' (*ibid*:138), rejecting the arguments of left and right, instead opting to change 'the nature of the dialogue to that of between the old and the new, and between elitism and populism' by 'abandoning its image as a "party of the poor and the past" by embracing the "working middle-classes"' (*ibid*:128).

2.2 'Clintonisation' in action – The birth of New Labour

To maximise the public impact of the new name, the contrast had to be as stark as possible and to make sense to voters long accustomed to consume from the tabloid press caricatured images of past Labour governments and of the Party itself ... demonstrating that “New Labour” had learnt its lessons and wiped the slate clean. The very vocabulary employed – “Old Labour” and “New Labour”, modernisers and traditionalists – was an essential part of the modernising project.

(Shaw, 1996:217)

Under Tony Blair’s leadership of the Labour Party came ‘New Labour’. While Blair was a supporter of Kinnock and Smith’s reforms, he was of the belief that the party needed to go further ‘to fully convince people that Labour merited returning to office’, and ran his leadership campaign on the platform of *Change and National Renewal* (Mandelson, cited in McAnulla, 2012:169; McAnulla, 2012:173). A necessary change of ideals and approaches, New Labour was seen as a genuine opportunity for the party to rebuild and maintain ‘a real and viable presence as a source of political ideas or as a potential government’, going further than Smith’s ‘cautious’ reforms which had ‘lacked verve and urgency’ (Negrine, 2008:9; Shaw, 1996:195). Not only was New Labour ‘a new politics’ (Fairclough, 2000:4; Blair, 1994), but it was to be seen as being distinct from “Old” Labour, for the leadership knew that only with rhetoric which overtly contrasted “new” with “old” ‘would the electorate believe that Labour had changed and could be trusted’ (*ibid*:vii; Atkinson, 1984:73). Blair himself would go on to state that it was imperative for his modernisation agenda to be labelled as ‘ideas need labels if they are to become popular and widely understood’, something Fairclough (2000:vii/4) identifies as an attempt at ‘manipulating language to control public perception’ and to ‘convey certain values which can powerfully enhance the political “message”’. New Labour was to be a ‘sharp break from Labour’s historic narrative’ (Smith, 2000:465), running against both the past socialist radicalism of its past as well as against the Tory government while focusing its efforts on ‘converting disenchanted Conservative voters’ through a rhetorical theme of opportunity, modernisation, ‘partnership, cooperation, unity, and moderation’ (*ibid*:457/470; Negrine, 2008:86; Finlayson, 2008:453; Wring, 2005:137; Labour Party, 2000:346). Fairclough (2000:vii) notes the particular choice of words, minimising use of

the term privatisation in favour of private partnerships and finance initiatives, and steering clear of the term *socialism*, further distancing New Labour from the rhetoric and values of the “old”.

In its attempts to reach out beyond the constituency that elected him and to establish his credentials, Blair set out to court the middle-class and aspirational sectors of the electorate (Bennister, 2008:343). Blair sought to break the mould of ‘permanent conflict’ that has marred contemporary politics by talking of how he was rejecting Labour’s ‘outdated ideology’, and ‘going beyond the traditional boundaries of left and right, breaking new ground by escaping from sterile debates that have polarized our politics for too long’, declaring ‘these conflicts [to] have no relevance whatsoever to the modern world’ by taking on board values traditionally associated with the right (Wring, 2005:145; Bastow, 2003:48-49; Labour Party, 2000:346/348; Blair, 1996). Blair also spoke of releasing Britain from the harms and dangers of ideologues, instead presenting itself as being principled with ‘pragmatism at its heart’ (Bastow, 2003:62; Labour Party, 2000:346). The language used to outline his ‘proposals for action in terms of opposition between right and wrong’ rather than between left and right portrays Blair as being radical in his pragmatism and pragmatic in his radicalism (Chilton, 2004:199).

Bastow (2003:47) accurately describes this as engaging in ‘a discourse of “modernisation” which promotes a form of ethical subjectivity’ – essentially depoliticising his politics and presenting themselves as the natural choice. As such, this message would resonate with voters who are disengaged with politics, disenchanted with party politics, and those who are morally (rather than politically) guided in the political process; as well as exercising the belief that ‘the party should spend more time communicating with the electorate rather than its own (declining) party membership (Kavanagh, 1995:92). Heppell eloquently explains that:

discourse of modernisation is related to the fact that “modernisation” depoliticises the issue of party change. Modernisation discourse serves to depoliticise the issue of party change. Modernisation discourse serves to depoliticise the wholesale transformation of [political] party policy and philosophy necessary in order to appeal to a sufficiently wide spectrum of voters to win a general election. This is because,

within a discourse of modernisation, there is no right or wrong, just or unjust; there is only that which is modern, and that which is outdated, and among that which is deemed modern, there are no incompatibilities ... Modernisation is not something we do because it is right. It is something we do because it is necessary... Change has to happen, and to resist change – to go against modernisation – is to ally oneself with outdated modes of thinking.

(Heppell, 2012:24)

In an attempt to portray to voters that New Labour was above the indoctrination of left and right, Blair had used terms generally considered to be exclusively a part of right-wing vocabulary. He spoke of 'one-nation politics', borrowing the term, according to Fairclough (2000:34), 'from the political discourse of Conservatism' (Wring, 2005:138-139). In the party's 1997 general election manifesto, it hailed itself as a 'new and revitalised' party which had been 'transforming itself for the future', and proclaimed that a New Labour government would give Britain 'a new lease of life' and a 'different political choice' for a 'new millennium' and a 'new Britain' and be the agency of 'radical change and social renewal' (Labour Party, 2000:346; BBC News, 1999; Bastow, 2003:56). He also exploited the disillusionment amongst the public and media with the Tory government of the day by blaming them for 'tainting' all politics, condemning their broken promises and referring to their lack of economic competence – an example of 'aggressive facework', ascribing his opponents negative characteristics in a way that presents him as having the relevant positive characteristics (Labour Party, 2000:346; Wring, 2005:144; Fetzer, 2012:130). Nagourney (cited in Jenkins, 2010:185) identifies the possible results of this rhetorical theme of calling for widespread as amounting to a 'national catharsis'. Blair then goes on to equate a vote for New Labour as a vote for 'enough is enough', pledging to 'not promise what we cannot deliver; and to deliver what we promise' (Labour Party, 2000:346).

Reforming Labour by moving it to the middle-ground of politics in order to appeal to the lucrative votes of 'Middle England', disillusioned Conservative voters and swing voters, and employing a rhetorical style to communicate

this was key to the success of New Labour. In the 1997 manifesto Blair writes 'Some things the Conservatives got right. We will not change them. It is where they got things wrong that we will make change. We have no intention or desire to replace one set of dogmas with another' (Labour Party, 2000:345; Blair, 1996). Blair also claimed New Labour to be:

a post-Conservative party: it takes the Thatcherite achievement to be largely irreversible, and accepts much of free-market discourse as the language of economic truth. It will not reverse privatisation; it will retain anti-trade-union laws; it is committed to "fiscal responsibility and prudence" ... it has taken the spending and taxation plans of the previous government as the basis of its own budgetary policy. In some cases, it is willing to deregulate more boldly than did the Conservatives.

(Blair quoted in Jones, 1999:235-236)

The New Labour leadership (cited in Dale, 2000:346-347) legitimised this stance by claiming it's essential 'to meet the new challenges of a different world', and stating that the parties founding values remain the same but are 'liberated... from outdated dogma or doctrine... [and that] the policies of 1997 cannot be those of 1947 or 1967' (Chilton, 2004:199).

Similar to Kinnock's angry reprimanding of Labour militants, Blair engaged in a battle with those who were reluctant to embrace his agenda for reform. In his manifesto, Blair was explicit in outlining how his party accepts Thatcherite economics as the new universally accepted standard, and outlines how Labour will 'leave intact the main changes of the 1980s in industrial relations and enterprise', and how 'public versus private, bosses versus workers, middle class versus working class' conflicts bears no relevance to the modern world (Mandelson, cited in McAnulla, 2012:169; Labour Party, cited in Dale, 2000:346/357). The Labour leader would declare capitalism and the market economy as having been 'remarkably successful' (Radice, 1992:18). Blair would redraft the Labour Party constitution by rewriting the symbolic Clause IV which had declared the party's socialist aims, relishing the furore it caused amongst traditional socialist MPs and trade-unionists (Bennister, 2008:335). This move was considerably symbolic by Blair, as Shaw (1996:198) explains, 'The fact that the move would be bitterly

fought by the hard left was all to the better, since without a fight the public would not be persuaded the change was authentic'. Describing the new relationship between trade unionists as one 'where they accept they can get fairness but no favours' and affirming that 'trade unionism must be consistent with market efficiency, any resurgence must involve the growth of a new business unionism, fiercely antagonistic to independence, conflict and militancy' combines with Blair's other rhetorical techniques to emphasise to voters and the media alike that New Labour is 'new and different' from before (McIlroy, 2000:20-22; Labour, 2000:346; Wring, 2005:2). In doing so Blair exhibits all three of Benoit's (2001:32) techniques of winning arguments: he *acclaims* – praising his reform agenda; he *attacks* – criticises those who refuse to accept change; and he *defends* – legitimising the New Labour project as a natural process of change and necessary to become a relevant political force again.

And as a result, Blair was happy to use forceful and antagonistic rhetoric to give prominence to his leadership abilities in the eyes of the media and electorate, and to accentuate his stance on modernisation and change in contrast to the old left:

Blair believed that the party had to be *seen* to be changing, rather than to merely claim that it had... He strongly believed that he should have a firm grip on the affairs of the party, and should cajole or even drag the party in the modernising direction he favoured.

(McAnulla, 2012:177)

Amongst the reasons behind this, Bennister (2008:335) states, is that 'Strong leaders are inclined to dominate using tough moralistic rhetoric, hostility towards enemies, refusing to compromise and insisting on decisive action, anything else is a sign of weakness'. This also presented a change in leadership style and ability, highlighting the leadership ability of Blair in contrast to a weak prime minister who was presiding over a disharmonious party and government.

Blair's rhetoric of hope and theme of future is effective in creating a sense of optimism around his leadership, his party, and the nation. By equating New Labour with the new millennium, a brighter future, and the cultural theme of 'Cool Britannia', he is able to create a narrative of how Blair is leading an ambitious party which leads rather than follows and is symbolic of prosperity (McAnulla, 2012:172). The use of this rhetoric is aimed to lead the electorate to share in the optimism and to believe that they will reap the rewards if they join in being 'nothing less than the model 21st century nation, a beacon to the world', with the 'strength and confidence', and the 'courage to change and use it to build a better Britain' (Fairclough, 2000:97; BBC News, 1999; Labour Party, 2000:346).

Blair's message was able to successfully resonate with the electorate and the media due to his politicisation of his private persona. Langer (2010:60) identifies Blair as being iconic in how he used the personal in his public discourse. Langer goes on to state that:

as leaders are increasingly expected not only to represent the party's views but also to embody the party brand, their personal lives can personify the party's values and policies, symbolize people's aspirations, and function as the unifying narrative that links what often seems like a set of ideologically disjointed policy proposals ... politicians (particularly Blair) have sought to make political use of the personal for strategic publicity.

(Langer, 2010:61-62)

Being able to exploit his middle-class background, he was able to appear to be a part of the middle England contingent, the votes of whom he was courting. Appearing as both husband and dad – the all-round family man – Blair skilfully constructed a public persona which exploited aspects of the personal to enhance his political persona so that voters could relate to his humanised politics, a technique he harnessed so well it is referred to by many as 'the Blair effect' (Langer, 2010:60). His ability to 'make political use of the personal for strategic publicity' (*ibid*:62) is something Finlayson (2002:599) refers to this as a successful example of the Labour leader

appearing 'one of us', and therefore able to align 'person and policy' and speaking with a "normal person" rhetorical style', making his politics palatable for the electorate (Langer, 2010:63).

Fairclough (2000:8) goes on to explain how his communicative style embodies 'a new politics' through:

his capacity to, as it were, "anchor" the public politician in the "normal person" – the necessary posturing and evasions of politics are it seems at least partially redeemed by Blair's capacity to reassert constantly his normal, decent, likeable personality ... The sort of "normal person" that comes across is very much "middle-class" and "middle-England" in values, outlook and style.

(Fairclough, 2000:7-8)

In this, Fairclough (2000:14) identifies three distinct focuses in Blair's language of New Labour: styles, discourses and genres. The most apt of these three are 'styles' and 'discourses', which refer to the 'political identities and values', and the language of political representation. Blair was able to fuse these two elements together, as stated earlier by Langer (2010) and Finlayson (2002) seamlessly, and in a way not previously seen by his predecessors in modern British politics.

All of these factors combined in successfully representing New Labour as different from the Labour Party of the past, redefining contemporary British politics in the narrative set out by Blair and his colleagues, and learning from the days of '*Southern Discomfort*' in reaching out to voters beyond their heartlands and socialist mind-set; winning the lucrative support of middle-England (Radice, 1992). In doing so, Blair 'produced a landslide of historic proportions. After 18 years of Conservative Thatcher-Major rule, Labour won a working majority for only the third time in the century', winning constituencies considered impossible, on occasions jumping from third place to first (Kettle cited in Smith, 2000:461; Wring, 2005:147). The significance of the media was clear for all to

see, Blair had been most aware throughout his leadership of Labour that the media, particularly the print media, were ultimately their 'ultimate judges', and therefore 'more than one eye' was on the media throughout the process (Coleman, 2010:143). Recognising the need to win former Conservative voters and any anxieties the electorate may have about Labour, Blair was keen to exploit his middle-class credentials,

emphasise his own role as leader of the party, and to make himself central to the party's campaign imagery. In this regard he sought to project a type of "presidential" appeal, someone who could be trusted because he was not particularly embroiled in the traditions of the party... He would not seek to dispel perceptions that he was the exclusive author of the party's direction...

(McAnulla, 2012:180)

Blair himself expands on this point, explaining his dedication to reform and his lack of willingness to allow the party to reject change:

The party had to know I was not bluffing. If they didn't want New Labour, they would get someone else. The country had to know what if I was going to be their prime minister, I would be "of the party" but removed from it.

(Blair cited in McAnulla, 2012:180)

Testament to the considerable triumph of the New Labour project in reinventing the party, Blair had 'won the votes of voters with traditionally conservative ideologies, including Andy Coulson who claimed to be "swayed by Blair, but never by Labour"' (Negrine, 2007:89). In stark contrast to the comments of a Labour MP who commented on Kinnock's party reforms in the immediate aftermath of the ill-fated 1992 election campaign, one MP proclaimed that 'New Labour is not a neat marketing ploy but an accurate description of a party reborn' (Wring, 2005:138).

2.3 'The Heir to Blair' – David Cameron and the New Labour template

Brand perceptions are very sticky: people do not change their mind about a party easily or quickly, even when a new man or woman takes over. Taking on the leadership of a political party, then, is a formidable challenge, especially when, as an organization, it is weak and, as a brand, it is tarnished or even "toxic".

(Dorey, 2007:270)

Like all other organisations, political parties need to adapt to changing circumstances. They cannot remain unchanged: that is the lesson of New Labour, just as much as it is the lesson that the Conservatives had to learn after three consecutive election defeats.

(Negrine, 2008:9)

Following New Labour's astounding electoral landslide victory the Conservatives spent three parliaments, spanning thirteen years, consigned to the Opposition benches. Having comprehensively lost the faith of the British voting public, it lost its first general election in eighteen years, winning 'fewer seats in parliament than at any time in the twentieth century; it no longer represents a single constituency in Scotland or Wales' (Jones, 1999:235). The majority of the spell was spent engaging in 'the bitterest struggles to shape the direction' of the party in anticipation of a return to government (Stanyer, 2003:79). In the immediate aftermath of the initial defeat, 'discussion seemed to turn to Europe and the single currency' which, according to Bale (2010:72), exposed the extent of how 'little it was concerned with either way the Party lost and what on earth it was going to do about New Labour'. Sliding towards its comfort zone, the immediate resignation of defeated Prime Minister John Major and the subsequent leadership election left little time for the party to conduct a post-mortem to recognise and

come to terms with the reasons behind their catastrophic loss, so resorted to calls to move further towards the right to win back the support of traditional Tory voters and a typically 'more robustly right-wing, Eurosceptic stance', rhetoric which further alienated the voters it sought to win back (*ibid*:72). During the first eight of their years in Opposition, the Tories remained a political irrelevance, 'reduced to peripheral status' in British politics while New Labour continued to dominate (Lee, 2009:vii).

The use of language of its first three leaders in Opposition displayed a lack of leadership, pandering to the right, and a failure to adapt to a changing society and a changing electorate. Prior to David Cameron's election as party leader, the party had failed to make inroads to the extent they had hoped for, failing to capitalise on the electorate's increasing disillusionment with the New Labour government in the 2005 general election campaign (Lee, 2009:3). Following his election Cameron employed a style of discourse which aimed to energetically 'reposition the Conservatives ideologically' breaking away from typical Thatcherite ideals in favour of moving towards 'the centre ground of British politics by promoting a more socially inclusive and compassionate Conservatism', and thus beginning the party's recovery following its invincibility in the 1980s and subsequent remarkable collapse soon after (Dorey, 2007).

In one of many actions comparable to that of Blair's just over a decade earlier, Cameron, during his leadership campaign, 'argued that if the Conservatives wanted to win the next election, then they would have to change and convince the electorate that they had done so', combatting the perception of them being 'the nasty party' (Evans, 2008:291-292; Lee, 2009:2). Announcing his candidacy, he outlined how 'This party has got to look and feel and talk and sound like a completely different organisation', stressing "'fundamental change" rather than a "slick rebranding exercise"' was necessary as well as moving on from the party's history (Evans, 2008:293/297). A senior party insider's assertion, in his post-mortem following the general election defeat, that the party needed to change – the party needed to wake up and *Smell the Coffee* (2005). The research financed and conducted by Lord Ashcroft explicitly laid out the concerns the new leader would have to address – that the Conservative party was:

out of touch with the attitudes to contemporary social and cultural issues of ordinary people ... less than likely than their opponents to care about ordinary people's problems ... was out of touch, had failed to learn from its mistakes, cared more about the well-off than have-nots, and did not stand for opportunity for all.

(Ashcroft cited in Lee, 2009:3)

In a speech that he would be mocked by the media for, he attempted to display and share these 'compassionate Conservative' views, using language in an attempt to appeal to a socially liberal electorate through his call 'to show a lot more love' towards those who reject 'the culture' of 'Crime, drugs [and] underage sex' (Elliott, 2007:304).

Using similar rhetoric to that of Blair in the early days of New Labour, in defending his desire to move the party away from the right and towards the centre, Cameron claimed that:

At the next election, a whole generation of people will be voting who were born after Margaret Thatcher left office. So when it comes to tackling the big challenges our society faces, I won't be the prisoner of an ideological past.

(Dorey, 2007:143)

Using New Labour as a template, he goes on to proclaim the centre ground to be 'the ground on which political success is built ... Not some bog on the fringes of debate' (*ibid*:143). This is reminiscent of Blair's rejection of the 'outdated ideology' of classical socialism (Labour Party, 2000:348). Recognising the need to win back the voters who had rejected them for New Labour if the party were to stand a credible chance of returning to government, the Conservative leader vowed not "to stick to our core comfort zone" and "repeat the mistakes of the past", but to "reach out" and "change to win the future" (Lee, 2009:6-7). He, too, would state that 'the Conservatives were the party of "working people, not rich and powerful vested interests", signalling a change from the past in a way similar to Blair's courting of middle-income professionals, engaging in a balancing act between rebranding and reassurance (Evans, 2008:294; Elliott, 2007:306).

As Evans goes on to state,

There were some similarities between Cameron's approach and that of Tony Blair after he became leader of the Labour Party in July 1994. Like New Labour, Cameron's 'project' also appeared to be based upon the assumption that the Conservative Party had little to gain from exploiting its own past, particularly its recent governing past, which was viewed as more of a liability than an asset, and should actually start afresh if it wanted to become a serious contender for office again. By establishing a wide-ranging policy review process, Cameron has accepted that each and every inherited policy position was up for renegotiation and that fundamental changes could be made (and justified) in the name of modernisation ... Cameron has shown that he was prepared to consign his party's own past to history, and he has adopted the same year zero approach as New Labour. It was, to use Cameron's own words, 'a completely new party' which he wanted to create... During his interview on *Newsnight* in November 2005, Cameron even refused to rule out the possibility of changing the Conservative Party's name in the future.

(Evans, 2008:296-297).

To his own 'visibly aghast' party members at the Tory 2006 conference Cameron outlined one aspect of his modernised policy agenda on social issues – 'marriage means something special "whether you're a man and a woman, a woman and a woman, or a man and another man"' (Dorey, 2007:143). Cameron and fellow pro-reform Conservatives have steered clear of typically right-wing issues such as 'asylum, immigration or the European Union ... along with the repeated denigration of unmarried mothers' as they reinforced perceptions of the Tories being 'the nasty party' (*ibid*:147). Bale (2008:273) says that this notion of 'de-emphasizing (although not ignoring completely) the issues it traditionally "owns", and ranging into enemy territory' was needed in order to reach out to the majority of the electorate who inhabit the centre ground'. This echoes Blair's symbolic use of Conservative

vocabulary and avoidance of “Old” Labour terminology. Examples of Cameron’s move into ‘enemy territory’ include a prioritisation of the environment and the National Health Service, the latter he referred to as his ‘overwhelming strategic priority’ (Elliott, 2007:301/305; Bale, 2008:277); and the abandonment on the party’s historical position on grammar schools and the tripartite education system – something Elliott (2007:306-310) says could be considered akin to Blair’s ‘Clause IV moment’; as could the abandonment of the Conservative blue freedom torch logo ‘in favour of a scribbled oak tree’ which ‘embodied solidity, tradition, a commitment to the environment and Britishness’ (Evans, 2008:294). As with Blair’s rewording of Clause IV, the move was met with criticism from within the party. Similarly, regarding economic policy, mirroring a similar move by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Cameron’s recognition of the need to restore the party’s economic credibility lead to his pronouncement ‘not make tax cuts a priority’, instead putting ‘economic stability first’ and pledging to ‘honour Labour’s public expenditure commitments during its first three years in office’ – rhetoric which marked a break with the traditional rhetoric of Tory economics (Evans, 2008:294-195; Bale, 2008:278; Denham, 2007:189).

While Blair used rhetoric to stir a national sentiment of hope and future prosperity through his rhetorical ability ‘to reach, to organize, and to [build up] a generation of “digital natives”’, capitalising on the digital revolution and the new millennium and the opportunities it would inspire (Palfrey & Gasser cited in McKinney, 2009:393), Cameron similarly latched on the growing widespread environmental concern as one of the cornerstones of his leadership, highlighting the dangers we face in the modern world and in the near and distant future, and the hopeful prospect of a healthier, cleaner and greener future if we were to adjust. Both used a discourse which associated their leadership and their parties with the future – Blair in a technological sense, and Cameron from an ethical perspective.

According to Bale and Webb (cited in Bale, 2012:223) ‘Cameron was in charge of a party associated in the public mind with the kind of privilege that renders it incapable of understanding how the other half lives’. And while voters continue to consider the party and its leader to be to the right of them, Cameron’s rhetorical style signifies that he is not as extreme as the rest of his party – as one Conservative colleague admitted, ‘People really like

David Cameron. They are not yet convinced that the party has changed' (Dorey, 2007:159-160). Cameron's demand that all Conservatives 'think carefully before opening their mouths' acts as an example of how he, similarly to Blair, uses forceful and antagonistic rhetoric to accentuate his leadership abilities, legitimise his claims to be representative of change and distanced from old Conservative ideologies (BBC, 2007).

This could be attributed to Cameron's ability to 'personify the party's values and policies, symbolize people's aspirations, and function as the unifying narrative that links what often seems like a set of ideologically disjointed policy proposals' (Langer, 2010:61-62). Langer (2010:67) expands, stating that he shares Blair's ability to emphasise the practical, subjective, and emotional experiences of family life but also [he] has been both eager and skilful in casually and routinely bringing the private into public discourse and in linking the personal with the political. Langer (*ibid*:63) goes on to note the significance in Cameron exploiting the personal, the effect of which 'humanized his leader persona, and simplified and gave emotional and experiential authentication to his views on education and the National Health Service', gaining political capital from regularly sharing his experience of being father to a disabled boy (*ibid*:277; Campus, 2010:220).

In fact, with his emphasis on the links between his family life and his "family friendly" policies and on his environmentally conscious lifestyle, Cameron has worked hard at using his behaviour in the private sphere for authenticating his political positions and "de-contaminating" the party brand.

(Langer, 2010:67)

Cameron uses what is referred to by Fetzer (2012:130) as 'aggressive facework through which politicians intend to deconstruct the leadership qualities of their opponent, while at the same time intending to construct the leadership qualities of self', referring to Gordon Brown as 'a very last decade' leader at a time when there were 'questions in the media about Brown's approach to publicity, political judgment, and style of governing' (Langer,

2010:67; Coleman, 2010:140), and recognising the extent to which he is able to display 'Qualities such as communication skills and charisma' in a political age where...

The expectation is now for leaders to be more informal, conversational, at ease in the confessional mode, and capable of being emotionally reflective and open. Likewise, personal "human" qualities such as being likable and in touch.

(Langer, 2010:67)

3 Method

In conducting this research I qualitatively analysed a series of political texts. Using critical discourse analysis I have examined how these Opposition party leaders create meaning through the use of particular words and phrases, and how rhetoric is used to 'persuade to people to think' in a particular way and to believe particular things (Machin, 2012:1; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough, 2010). In addition to the qualitative collated data, I have also collated some data regarding the frequency in which particular words and terms are used in order to cross-analyse whether there is consistency in the terminology in each of the party leaders' calls for and claims of change. Using critical discourse analysis I looked at the relationship between language and audience, the ways in which the politicians incite emotion, how they create a narrative which supports their agenda for change, the ways in which they personalise/humanise their politics, and the ways they equate themselves and their politics to change, how they direct language to those who are reluctant or refuse to embrace change (Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012).

I chose to examine three speeches, one from each of Tony Blair, David Cameron and Ed Miliband. Each of the speeches were performed within the early stages of their respective tenures, at a time when they were forming and laying the foundations of their party reform plans. For Blair's speech I chose to examine his 1994 leadership

acceptance speech; for David Cameron I chose his speech in April 2006, performed at the spring party forum; and of Ed Miliband's I chose the 2011 party conference speech.

In all of these speeches the leaders set out their agenda and motivations for change. They outline their intentions to re-establish their credibility, to rejuvenate the party after a period of stagnation, and seek to win back the trust of the electorate and adjust their standing on certain issues. Each speech was performed in front a largely consensual audience made up of fellow party members and were each per-arranged and delivered in an open setting where journalists were present and cameras were recording them. As such it could be argued that the primary intended audience was the electorate at home. In choosing to analyse three speeches, all of which performed in party conference and forum settings, it would sufficiently be able to the extent to which the leaders use rhetoric to 'cultivate an image and a relationship with the party in an unmediated way' (Finlayson, 2008:459). The opportunity to speak before a large, and agreeable audience, with media harmony where there is no conflict over time and agenda presents a great opportunity to party leaders to speak directly to the electorate, and for researchers to analyse. Not only does it allow them to 'exert real influence... through the media' direct to audiences at home, it also allows party leaders to take advantage of the attention, an opportunity to get sound-bites and key policies featured and discussed in the media over the following days and to create and leave a lasting positive impression on the electorate and the press (Coleman, 2010:143; Beard, 2000:37; Finlayson, 2008:448/459).

In analysing texts in the way that I have, this 'textually orientated' discourse analysis proved the most suited method of research as it sufficiently considers 'how people communicate within particular groups and societies, as well as how they communicate with other groups, and with other cultures' (Paltridge, 2012:7). It allowed the analysis of patterns of language and rhetorical conventions throughout the texts and to examine the relationship between language (and the construction of it) in order to convey a legitimate sense of change. I was able to closely examine the methods used by the Opposition party leaders, and identify any similarities and differences

between their attempts to communicate change, exploring how and why certain discourses work and are widely used in the rhetorical context of political change (Rogers, 2011:3)

4 Findings

4.1 Communicating a sense of solidarity

One of the first noticeable conventions that can be identified from the Opposition party leaders' speeches is the rhetoric of solidarity that is weaved throughout. While expected in the opening section of the performances, it is clear that this acts as an attempt to convey unity as a party, and at times as a nation. The frequent use of the pronoun 'we' – used seventy-two times throughout Blair's, twenty-one of which were in the opening section; and seventy-six times in Cameron's, eleven of which were in the opener – signifies a sense of togetherness and attachment. While the term 'we' can itself have different meanings, in these cases it emphasises togetherness and is 'virtuous, resolute and full of good intentions' (Atkinson, 1984:39). The references to solidarity and togetherness in Blair and Cameron's speeches seek to unite them to their respective parties, legitimising their attachment to their parties, expressing a shared set of convictions and sentiments, and discouraging amongst their parties that they are at conflict with their leader amid grumbles of "He's a closet Tory", or "He's not really a Conservative".

While Blair states that he speaks 'for everyone in this hall, in our party, and in our country' in remembering his late predecessor John Smith, and in celebrating 'pride in our convictions ... [and] ... our socialist values', and declaring a shared wish amongst all Labour members, in Smith's memory, that the party 'becomes the next Labour government of Britain' (Blair, 1996); Cameron tells his party spring forum of how he is 'proud of you. We're all proud of you ... I am very lucky to have such a strong and united team'. The Conservative leader goes on to welcome member of his front-bench team, one of which a former opponent in the leadership race and positioned further to the right of him politically, uniting different factions of his party; and praising the work of his

fellow Tories in local councils and at grassroots activists, who, again using the pronoun 'we' refers to as 'reconnecting with a proud part of our political heritage' (Conservative Party, 2006).

In communicating a sense of solidarity between party and country, both Blair and Cameron use rhetoric of align wider public sentiment with the values of their leadership and their parties. Blair speaks of the 'levy-payers' and voters he wishes to welcome into the Labour Party which he outlines his ambition to reform into a 'genuine mass membership party' which speaks up for ordinary people 'because it represents them and their aspirations'. He goes on to state how Labour is representative of the public at large – 'it is our values and ideas that are the battleground of politics in the 1990s' (Blair, 1996). Cameron follows this convention, describing opposing parties as 'tired and weary ... muddled and dreary', and juxtaposing that with how his party are representative of the people and their ambitions, pointing to being 'the largest party in local government' and '20,000 new members – at a time when other parties are losing support' as evidence of this (Conservative Party, 2006). He goes on to list, using alliteration and in pairs, places throughout England – some traditional Conservative areas, others traditionally Labour. In doing so he attempts to depict his party as transcending traditional political divides and instead representing and winning a unified nation through the values of Conservatism. The 'we' in Blair's assertion that 'we needed neither the politics of the old left nor new right but a new left of centre agenda' refers not to just what the Labour needed, but what the public and the country as a whole needed. In these cases we not only unifies leader with party, but equates party with country; reflecting the belief that they are one and the same, and representative of the same ideals.

Analysis of Ed Miliband's speech identifies that he conforms to this convention, although there were no uses of the word 'we' within the opening remarks of his speech, for which he instead opted to refer to 'I'. However Miliband, like Blair and Cameron before him, did, albeit very briefly, speak of his pride at being in Liverpool, contrasting this with the harsh rhetoric aimed at the Labour council there by former leaders (BBC, 2011).

Whereas Blair and Cameron spoke of their parties' aims, achievements and actions, Miliband spoke in the first person about what Labour will achieve under *his* leadership, and what *he* is determined to do. While Blair (1996)

spoke of 'our task' to 'change the method of Government, we change its standards too'; and Cameron declared 'We all have to change. We must show that the change is real, that it is lasting ... We all have a role in the change that must take place. We've made a good start'; Miliband focuses on the singular, announcing:

I'm my own man. And I'm going to do things my own way. That is what it means to lead. And I know this. Nobody ever changed things on the basis of consensus. Or wanting to be liked. Or not taking risks. Or keeping your head down. It's a lesson for me and it's a lesson for my party too.

(Miliband quoted in BBC, 2011)

4.2 Legitimising the modernisation process to party members

Legitimation is a convention in the rhetoric of political change that is used by political party leaders aimed at their own colleagues, supporters, and followers to win over doubters and those who are reluctant or refusing to accept party change. In his speech, we see Blair (1996) legitimising his process of party renewal by drawing on the recent negative past experiences of the Labour Party. Referring to 'Those dark days', he spoke of 'a time when such an election would have been watched with trepidation by our friends and glee by our enemies'. In associating the past with failure and worry, he is able to contrast that with the positive spirit of modernisation, a process his predecessors preceded over the start of. Furthermore, contrary to 'aggressive facework' as described by Fetzer (2012:130), we see Blair do the opposite – describing his modernising predecessors as having the 'required great courage and determination ... in full measure', being confident rather than doubting, and succeeding to 'make Labour electable once more', a contribution, he adds, 'we will never forget'. Blair compliments these former leaders in a way that paints himself as having those qualities too (Blair, 1996).

Cameron (quoted in Conservative Party, 2006) similarly attributes recent success to the party's new 'consistent voice of change, optimism and hope'. Declaring a historic victory in Labour territory as proof that the

modernisation process has resulted in the 'New' Conservative Party 'making progress on every front', and winning over the electorate on the arguments that matter most (*ibid*). The Tory leader (quoted in Conservative Party, 2006), mirroring Blair's reference to past 'dark days', goes on to argue that 'we'll never be in a position to make the changes the country needs until we, as a party, have shown that we have changed. We lost three elections in a row. The British people are looking to see if the Conservative Party has learned the lessons of defeat'. By putting the complacency and refusal to change into perspective, Cameron is able to equate change to electoral success. Similarly, Cameron also draws on what he and his party considers an example of its past glories, stating that 'We helped millions to buy their council houses in the 1980s. And we must become the Party of aspiration once again', referring to aspects of its recent history which they want to replicate in modern Britain in government.

To legitimise his reforms to those who are skeptical or unwilling, Blair draws attention to the natural process of change which was sweeping across society. Claiming that socialism needs to adapt for 'a changing world', and that Labour needed to respond to 'The force of change outside our country [which] is driving the need for change within it'; change which Blair denies can be ignored, but should be applied 'anew and afresh to the world today' (Blair, 1996). Cameron (quoted in Conservative Party, 2006) goes for a slightly different approach, again referring to past glories he states that his party have traditionally been at the forefront of change and as the world is changing around them, 'the direct result of our own actions', they ought to stay 'true to our traditions... [by] changing once again. Changing our priorities. Changing our attitudes', and then referring back to the sense of solidarity by calling for everyone to be a part of the new era of Conservative change (Conservative Party, 2006).

Ed Miliband focuses on communicating his agenda using different conventions in his speech, not spending much time in legitimising the renewal process to party members at the conference. He refers to a loss of trust on the economy and outlines his determination to prove that he can 'regain that trust' through a disciplined approach. Using rhetoric to highlight his pragmatic approach in legitimising his reforms as leader, Miliband (quoted in BBC, 2011) argues that, echoing Blair's rhetoric, that he has 'Put the politics aside', instead choosing to 'Look at the

facts', telling it 'straight' and 'breaking rule number one of British politics... because it was right'. Miliband focused his rhetoric on emphasising pragmatism and conveying his approach as being honest and true; as opposed to Blair and Cameron who referred to a natural progression to move towards a shifting electorate, although Blair (1996) made one reference to New Labour's 'passion allied to reason'.

4.3 Creating a narrative for the electorate that supports the need for widespread change

Each of the Opposition party leaders used rhetoric to create a narrative critical of the current government, encouraging a need for change while riding on a wave of disillusionment with the government of the time and depicting themselves as being a credible alternative and representative of necessary widespread spread. In particular, Blair (1996) criticised a Tory government who 'have lost the nation's trust', simply 'drift[ing] without direction', squandering money on substandard accommodation for families and keeping an able-bodied population idle in unemployment. Meanwhile Cameron depicted the Labour government of the time as incapable.

Using the example of ID cards, Cameron (quoted in Conservative Party, 2006) explains how 'Labour can't decide what it's for. They can't control what it costs. They can't explain why they're making it compulsory. Labour's plastic poll tax has no place in modern Britain'. Cameron (*ibid*) then uses particularly emotive and strong language in strengthening this narrative, stating Labour are implementing 'an ugly monument to the waste, chaos and vanity of intrusive, over-mighty government'. Cameron uses this technique a second time in the speech, referring to figures showing a 500% increase in house deposits, and then accusing the government of presiding over a 'housing apartheid'. This use of harsh rhetoric seeks to incite the emotions of the public, using Aristotle's (2004) concept of *pathos*, as a rhetorical technique to persuade the audience. In doing so he discredits his opponent by attempting to form a common sentiment that reflects his description of the Labour government.

Blair in creating his narrative uses repetition to drive home his point. His frequent use of the word 'wrong' to describe the actions of the Conservative government re-emphasises his point in an attempt to give credibility to

his narrative and argument from the perspective of the electorate. He refers to the government's policy on temporary housing as wrong, as well as its running of the NHS, its policy of the appointing members to the House of Lords, its record on crime, and their policy on the welfare of the elderly (Blair, 1996). In his constant repetition of the word 'wrong', Blair seeks to highlight particular issues and give prominence to examples which support his narrative, reinforcing the idea so that the electorate and the media consider his interpretation to be fact, and therefore lending itself to the idea that New Labour have the right answers – an example of what Atkinson (1984:73) refers to as 'contrastive pairs'.

Where Ed Miliband had not displayed many examples, in comparison to Blair and Cameron, of explicitly legitimising his approach to Labour party change, he creates a narrative that discredits the coalition government of the time and against the political status quo where he acknowledges the failures of the current government and the previous Labour government, lending itself to his agenda of internal party reform and attempting to highlight that he would represent a change from both. Miliband (quoted in BBC, 2011) criticises his opponents in government as having 'sold [the country] down the river', ignoring the people and 'values our economy needs for them to succeed', and painting the government as having being against young people who they have 'priced out of your future' whereas he declares Labour to be 'on your side' and against the 'betrayal' of the NHS and wider British values. He describes current times as 'dangerous' for the people and the economy, rejecting the continual failure of the government's austerity plan. He talks of the economic effects throughout the world, 'people in Britain losing their jobs' and the widespread sense of 'fear' at the prospect of a double dip recession before declaring 'Now is not the time for the same old answers' (*ibid*).

Defending aspects of the previous Labour administration he goes on to acknowledge a failure to 'do enough to change the values of our economy', repeating the phrases 'And what's happened?' to highlight the instances where they had betrayed the values of the electorate, and 'You believe...' to show an understanding of where they went wrong in relation to what Miliband believes the electorate expected, and 'But in our economy you've been told' to describe where they had gone wrong (*ibid*). In Miliband's use of the rhetorical convention of

creating such a narrative, he attempts to come clean in acknowledging his party's past mistakes while criticising the coalition government's consistent failures, leading the electorate to recognise him as the credible alternative the country needs.

4.4 Inspiring hope, optimism and future

The rhetoric of New Labour was one that centred on inspiring hope, optimism and future. Therefore it is of no surprise to see in Blair's speech (1994) he immediately speaks of 'a mission of national renewal, a mission of hope, change and opportunity'. He seeks to inspire a sense of national unity in favour of aspiration and opportunity, pointing towards the future. He outlines his intention to 'lift the spirit of the nation, drawing its people together, to re-build the bonds of common purpose that is at the heart of any country fit to be called one nation' (*ibid*). In his symbolically uplifting rhetorical style, Blair outlines 'his genuine hope of a new politics', worthy 'to take us into a new millennium [...] with the vision and confidence, to lead Britain in a changing world'. The New Labour leader champions the economic changes the world was facing, supporting 'a global market based on new technology, high skills and perpetual innovation and competition from corners of the world'. This form of rhetoric was significant to New Labour's eventual success in the polls, as it marked a change from the negative language that the electorate most associate with politics (Kamber, 2003).

Surprisingly, I noted only two occasions when Cameron resorted to using a discourse intended to inspire hope and a sense of optimism. Only in his closing remarks did he speak of the importance of 'The spirit of enterprise. The ladder of opportunity. The instinct to conserve ... Changing our party. Changing our country. The fire of hope burning bright once again' (Conservative Party, 2006). This language, although indicative of optimism, doesn't inspire in the way that Blair had succeeded in doing so in his speech. Blair embraced wider changes, harnessing the emergence of a new economy, a new millennium and new technologies and tying that into his narrative of political and national renewal. Cameron didn't stray too far from traditional Conservative rhetoric and failed to draw in wider elements of societal, national and global changes to associate with his modernisation agenda and to ride the wider wave of change and optimism amongst the public. I found identical results in Ed

Miliband's (cited in BBC 2011) speech. Only in as he concluded did he speak of Labour's chance 'to write a new chapter in our country's history', and his mission 'To fulfill the promise of each so we fulfill the promise of Britain' (*ibid*, 2011). This doesn't go as far as Blair's pledge to 'inspire' and to encourage a new generation of people to 'join us in this crusade for change'. Unlike Cameron, Miliband (*ibid*) follows Blair's lead in engaging with 'a new and confident Britain for a new and changing world' but makes no more references to this 'new chapter'. Both Miliband and Cameron missed the opportunity to tie global and wider changes into their narrative of leadership and their party's' ambitions for government.

5 Conclusion

It is clear from my findings that there are key rhetorical conventions that are adhered to by Opposition party leaders who are elected on a mandate for change when tasked with implementing internal party change and when communicating to the electorate a need for change and in representing that necessary change. It seems that Tony Blair, from his very first speech as leader of the Labour Party, set the standard, using many different techniques successfully in his quest to make the Labour Party electable again and a credible Opposition in parliament, ready to lead the country in government. Blair was able to captivate audiences with his rhetoric which persuaded colleagues, members and the electorate of his forward looking and hope-inspiring vision. Tying in natural elements of societal, global, economic and technological change to the New Labour project, Blair was able to legitimise his reforms by presenting them as both natural and of the time. Furthermore, he was successful in depicting, through the creating of narrative, his opponents as being irrelevant to the modern and changing world, out of step with public sentiment. I was particularly surprised to note the frequency in which Blair uses the terms socialism (or socialist) in a positive term, and in a way that not only described his party but his own views. It acts as a significant way in uniting himself to the wider party, by emphasising and highlighting an intuitive set of shared values and ideals.

While David Cameron attempted to emulate Tony Blair's techniques in reforming his party and employing communication techniques in order to win over an unconvinced electorate, he wasn't successful in emulating New Labour's electoral success. In his speech to the Conservative Spring Forum, he promoted a sense of solidarity, seeking to unite him with his party and to quell any thoughts or suspicions questioning his Conservative credentials, and was successful in the way he legitimised his program of reforms by tying his plans to past glories – discourse which could win over arch-traditionalists and as well as those in favour of modernisation. Although it remains evident that the Conservative leader had followed these rhetorical conventions, he faltered in not employing a credible uplifting rhetoric which inspires hope, positivity, optimism and future amongst his party, the media and the wider public in the way Blair had triumphed. This could be attributed to his failure to win an parliamentary majority in the 2010 general election as had been expected of him – as Atkinson (1984:37) states, 'positive or boastful evaluations of our hopes... stand a very good chance of being endorsed by audiences with a burst of applause'.

In analysing Miliband's conference speech (2011) it is clear that while there are instances of him conforming to the identified rhetorical conventions, although not to the same extent or with the same success as Blair and Cameron had. Miliband's frequent use of the pronoun 'I' rather than 'we' and his very limited examples of communicating a sense of solidarity identifies a lack of desire to strengthen a sense of unity between him and his party. The repetitive use of the word 'I' could be ascribed to a desire to toughen up his image as a leader, dispelling grumbles from colleagues and the media of him being weak and not prime ministerial (Bennister, 2008:335). However he was able to create an effective narrative where he undermines the government's record to date, speaking of being ordinary Britons being 'priced out', living in 'fear' and in 'dangerous' times, and being 'sold down the river', and then presenting himself as a genuine alternative.

In conducting this research I had intended to find antagonistic and aggressive rhetoric aimed at the militant left by Blair and Miliband, and of traditionalist Conservatives who refuse to embrace change by Cameron, and was surprised to find no examples of this in the speeches I analysed. There were also no instances of Cameron and

Blair using harsh language to distance them and their modernising parties from the past, denouncing their past record, although Miliband did come close to this. Having noted examples of how Blair and Kinnock had drawn out battles with union leaders and left wing party members, I was particularly to note the frequency in which Blair referred to his socialist values. This may be because the setting of a party conference for all party leaders, in post-Kinnock politics, is an occasion in which unity and harmony should be displayed in the media presence rather than infighting in public.

There were also an absence of the personalisation from Blair and Cameron where I had expected to find examples of both leaders using the personal to justify their political decisions, and to appear approachable and likeable to the public. I thought that Blair would draw more on his experience as a father and husband, using his 'middle England' persona to his advantage in depoliticising certain policies and in reaching out to swing and Conservative voters, similarly with Cameron, particularly after having explored instances where they have utilised their personal appeal and experiences in this way. I also noted the extent to which Miliband refers to 'I' in his conference speech, but other than a fleeting obligatory mention of his wife and children, a passing mention of his newborn son, and a self-deprecating joke about himself he didn't exploit his credentials as a family man in aligning person and politics, and dehumanising policies (Langer, 2010:63). This also be ascribed as a reason why Miliband, to date, has lacked personal appeal with voters.

While other scholars have identified certain instances of rhetoric which are frequently employed by party leaders, it seems that in the setting of the party gathering where media are gathered certain rhetorical themes are displayed while others the – conflictual rhetorical conventions – are not. The whole concept of change and reform, it is evident, can be undermined by public displays of disagreement, so solidarity, unity and a sense of togetherness are performed instead – with infighting and disunity being played out in front of the media to accentuate the extent of the leadership's reforms, but away from the party conference stage.

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